



An Appraisal of the Role of Women in the Birth and Growth of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), Nigeria

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Abstract

The role of women in the church is amazing and laudable. Since the inception of the church, women have been active protagonists in the narrative of the church. Their roles cover several aspects of church growth. They have been the pacesetters in terms of demography, evangelistic programs, monetary contributions, and the establishment of developmental projects. Such is evident in the birth of the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) in Nigeria. The growth of ECWA is dependent on the enormous contributions made by women. Despite the fascinating contributions of women, they are still being marginalized in terms of ordination and respective leadership structures at the local, regional, and national levels. Their leadership is limited to women's group, children's church, and other elementary responsibilities. They serve as subordinates to men's leadership. A descriptive approach is adopted as the basic methodology for this study. Historical records, diaries, archival materials, and calendars were accessed to bring the narrative of women's significant roles in ECWA to light. Womanistic theory was also explored as a way of unveiling African women's submission regarding the treatment they receive from their male counterparts and how to properly sustain their humanistic status. The study recommended that women should be allowed to engage in every stratum of the church as they continue to contribute to the growth of ECWA in Nigeria.

Keywords: ECWA, Growth, Leadership, Nigeria, Women.

Introduction

The role of women cannot be downplayed in church history. They were active in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Despite the patriarchal society they found themselves in, they struggled to make headway in the ministry of Jesus Christ. They were resilient enough to know and learn secret things about the Kingdom of God. They were always found around Jesus. They ministered to him and learned under his feet, along with the male disciples. The gospel of Mark made several allusions to relationships that transpired between Jesus and women. The androgenic society



barred women from associating with him. Meanwhile, the ministry of Jesus encompasses humanity without discrimination or prejudice.

Jesus, in the same manner, was open to both males and females, adults and children, the freed and the slaves. His ministry is void of segregation. Global salvation was his mission. This universal gospel embraces the involvement of women who have been marginalized. Women were privileged to serve as his disciples, although not listed among the twelve, but as followers of Jesus. The gospels recorded how he ministered to women amidst critical situations and in a toxic society (Matthew 27:56; Mark. 15:40; John 19:25).

The effects of Jesus ministry on everyone resulted in the birth of Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA). Mrs. Margaret Gowon had the vision of sending her son to come to Africa and minister the gospel to the lost. The role of this woman has resulted in the salvation of a multitude. A multitude of men and women are members of ECWA. Women could be regarded today as the backbone of this church. The demography of the church is anchored on them. The major agencies of the church are shouldered by them. The financial status of ECWA is determined by the contributions of women. The evangelistic arm of the church is sponsored and grown by women (Haye, 1980).

Meanwhile, the above involvements of women in ECWA have only resulted into male leadership and female subjugation. They are still under the control of men. Their potential, spiritual gifts, and theological calling and training did not guarantee their ordination into the priesthood service, pastorate, or eldership. There is no female representation at the local church, local church council, district church council and ECWA executive levels. This socio-religious denial of women led to the appraisal of women in the birth and growth of ECWA in Nigeria. (ECWA Constitution, 2019).

Conceptual and Theoretical Discourse

In order to give credence to the study the following concepts are discussed:

Women

Women are important and indispensable individuals in every human society. Biologically, they contribute immensely to human existence and growth. African society recognizes the woman's role as a mother, wife, educator, and nurturer. It is the woman who bears and carries a child in her womb and gives birth to a new life. She is the first teacher of her children, right from the womb. She teaches them how to eat, drink, reason, walk, talk, and the like. Akintunde (2010) asserts that women play roles such as career women, mothers, teachers, and also significant roles in developing spiritual awareness and self-knowledge of humanity in the world. Women do have significant roles to play in everyone's life. Napoleon once said, "Give me good mothers, and I will give you a good nation." This implies that women can determine the progress of a nation because of the way they bring up their children. If the mothers are virtuous, society is likely to make tremendous progress.

It is believed that man is incomplete without a woman, for man would be half a human. In modern times, women in Africa remain powerful figures. She is the essence of being and existence. A man is not considered a man in Africa unless he has a woman's support. A home without a woman is looked down upon and often an object of ridicule by society (Daniel, 2010). Being a woman is an honor, and being a mother adds to a woman's prestige.



Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA)

ECWA is an offshoot of SIM, meaning “Sudan Interior Mission.” Sudan is an Aramaic word that simply means “black.” Literally, it means “Land of the Blacks, while it can be used as an explanatory term as mission in the interior parts of the Land of the Blacks” (Turaki, 1999). The early beginnings of the SIM originated from the evangelical mission movements of European and North American societies, especially the Toronto area of Canada in the 18th and 19th centuries. After the great revivals in Europe and North America in the 18th and 19th centuries, many evangelical mission movements, which formed the roots of the SIM and many other mission societies, were established. These mission societies provided the SIM with both spiritual and social factors from which to build a faith mission that would become non-denominational and international (Tumak & Gaiya, 2006).

According to Gilbert (1967:67), “These two centuries, the 18th and 19th, were characterized by extra establishment religious movements, religious pluralism, toleration, voluntarism, dissent, chapel-based religious movements, evangelical non-conformity, and popular religious and revivals. It was out of these religious and social phenomena that missionary and Christian society arose.”

Theoretical Discourse: Womanist theory

Womanist theory developed partly from the critiques of feminist criticism. It focused on racism, sexism, and classism. African women have not always been appreciated by black male colleagues involved in liberation discourse. As a result, black women in Africa are facing the challenges of sexism and classism.

Weems (2003) says womanists’ criticism within the theological academy emerged as a way to correct the myopia of both feminist and black liberation scholarship, believing that every marginalized group has its right and duty to name its own reality and to find a language for mapping out its own vision of liberation. Women’s will to survive and thrive as human beings. As black women, we could elect either to reject totally those portions of the Bible we considered misogynistic, to elevate some portions over others depending upon one’s interests, to offer alternative readings in order to counter the dominant discourse, or to embrace traditions that offered a fuller, more just vision of the way things ought to be. Because of their fundamental belief in their rights as human beings created in the image of God, they rejected antagonistic readings that denied them any subjectivity.

There is a need to change consciousness and transform reality because many women tend to feel marginalized. To showcase real flesh-and-blood people. Women are to be treated as human beings that possess the tripartite nature of mankind. Weems (2003: 26) adds that:

women have to reclaim their right to read and interpret sacred texts for themselves and should not have to be subjects to the misogynistic, patriarchal interests of powerful male readers; and women of color have to insist upon their right to read and interpret sacred texts for themselves and should not have to defend or apologize for their interpretations to privileged women in the culture who remain ignorant to how class, race and colonialism shape and divide us as women.

The Holy Bible is not the only source of liberation; it is also a source of inspiration in women’s struggles for survival. This theory is also suitable for this work. The place of women in the ECWA



ministry should be equal to that of men. Discriminating against women in the ecclesiastical hierarchy will not help women fully participate in the church. As a result, the church will lack drastic growth. Women are equally created by God and are likewise endowed with the gifts of the holy spirit (Romans 12:6; 1 Corinthians 12:4–11), which are a license to partake in Christian ministries. They have really contributed to the founding and growth of ECWA. On this note, they should be allowed to serve God in the church. Their gender should not be used as a barrier to their involvement in all church ministries.

Women's Involvement in the Birth of ECWA

SIM gave birth to ECWA in the year 1893. Dr. Rowald V. Bingham is the founder and leader of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM). The SIM (and later ECWA's offshoot) came into being because of the vision of a godly mother, Mrs. Gowans, mother of Mr. Walter Gowans. Mr. Gowans was the leader of the three pioneer missionaries of the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM). Turaki (1999) records that the two other missionary companions were Messer Thomas Kent and Rowland Bingham. However, a woman of honor whose name cannot be forgotten in the history of SIM/ECWA is Mrs. Gowans. Olatayo (1993:1) asserts that:

Mrs. Gowans presented the need in the Sudan so vividly to Dr. Bingham that he (Bingham) wrote in his book, "seven sevens of years and a jubilee" that as the immense panorama unrolled before me, she filled in the teeming masses of people to her son, Walter Gowans, was called to serve so much that by the time I closed the interview in her house she had placed upon me the body of the Sudan. And so, on that memorable day, as I listened to that godly mother the story of the Sudan, I felt God's hand on me for the Sudan.

In the same vein Turaki (1999:41) documents that:

The mother of Walter Gowans deserves the first place in the history of SIM and should be mentioned and credited for her substantial contribution to the birth of the SIM. As an active leader within the woman folk of St. James Square church, she was also given to missions. She spent years praying for the most neglected mission field in the whole: The Sudan in Africa. It was said that she passed on both vision and the Sudan to her son, Walter.

However, the great woman Mrs. Gowan was so personable about her burden for the Sudan in Africa to the extent that she personally narrated her burden to Rowland Bingham in their first encounter. Thus, Bingham was said to have been so deeply touched by the passionate burden he saw in her (Mrs. Gowan) that he himself became consumed by the burden (Turaki, 1999). In the long run, Dr. Bingham, having caught the vision for Africa from Mrs. Gowan and felt the hand of God on him for the Sudan, decided to join Mrs. Gowan's son Walter Gowan in his missionary enterprise to Africa. Bingham felt he must join Walter Gowan, who was in Britain, trying to see what could be done to reach the Africans with the gospel (Haye, 1980).

Contributions of Some Selected Women to the Growth of ECWA

Mrs. Gowon

As noted above, ECWA was born out of the passion and vision of Mrs. Gowon, who craved the salvation of Africans. Her impact on the life of her son, Walter Gowon, made him succumb to the call of God to come to Nigeria with his two friends. In addition to her efforts through prayers,



encouragements, and counsel, Dr. Bingham, who took up the challenge, cannot be overemphasized.

Mrs. Ethel Titcombe

The life of Miss Ethel Tucker McIntosh from Gospel Tabernacle, Hamilton, Canada, was another landmark contribution towards the growth of ECWA. She volunteered to come to Africa as a missionary based on the report of a missionary who came from West Africa during a midweek service in the Gospel Tabernacle in Hamilton. The record has it that 'Ethel caught a vision of the need, and she responded. After the meeting, she prayed, "Lord, I believe you're calling me to Africa. If I'm wrong, then stop me. But if I'm right, then open the way and show me what to do." (Haye, 1980: 66). Despite her health challenge and discouragement from her pastor and elders that she would not last for three months in Africa, she was resilient as she prayed, and Haye (1980:66) asserted that "when she met with the elders again, she said, "Gentlemen, it may be that I will only live three months out in Africa. Nevertheless, I believe God has called me. If He wants me there for only three months, I am willing to go." The church then agreed to support her financially.

Ethel arrived in Nigeria in the year 1914, and she served as a missionary at Minna. On November 22, 1915, she was married to Tommy Titcombe, which made her relocate to Egbe in the present Kogi State. Haye (1980) further noted the statement of Tommy that we both spent our honeymoon at Paiko, a new station about 16 miles from Minna, then made preparations for our long trip to Egbe. Ethel journeyed from Patigi on a horse, but the horse gave up after several miles, and she completed the remaining trip on a hammock, which she said was more comfortable for her.

Ethel's contribution is notable in the sparing of twins among Yagba people, just as Mary Slessor stopped the killing of twins in Calabar. It was believed by the Yagba people that any woman who gave birth to twins must be driven to the bush, and the twins must be killed. "At that time, the Yagbas believed that a woman who gave birth to twins was something less than human, and they wouldn't let her live any longer in the village. Believing one of the twins must be an evil spirit, the medicine man killed both to make sure the community was not affected." (Haye, 1980:75). Ethel was able to save the twins amidst the dangers of the medicine man and the people. She was able to save the lives of the twins and put an end to such practices. She was able to convince mothers to breastfeed their babies. The people believed that the first breast milk contained worms. So, for the first nine days, the baby is fed concoctions, which kill 85 percent of babies treated that way. Ethel was able to correct this prevailing wrong practice.

The letter from Ethel to Hamilton church in Canada about her work among women is notable. According to Haye (1980:82):

the work amongst the women is most encouraging. But so much I'd like to do is something left undone because there is too much for one woman. We have a splendid women's meeting every Monday afternoon and the numbers are steadily increasing. Many took part, either reading scripture, giving a testimony or leading in prayer. And they are growing in grace; some who a short time ago were cold and dead spiritually, now are coming out into the Light and living near God. We have quite a few sick children brought in daily.... We can reach more women through the sick children than in any other way. This gives us an opportunity to invite them to the church and most respond. Some stay on the compound awhile, so we have a better chance to reach them. Right now, we have three orphans with us. Their mothers died when they were born, and they would all have died with them if we had not taken them in. We have become very attached to them.



The oldest, Mack, is nearly six; a fine little boy, and our children think a great deal of him. He and Clarence are great pals. The other two orphans are small, having been brought to us since I returned. They are both bottle-fed. I prepare the food and we have a Christian woman caring for each child. We surely are pressed on every side, and seldom get a minute to ourselves. We often long for a little time of quiet without interruptions. But Africa is not the place to expect that. It is a comfort to know that it is for Jesus' sake and it is a pleasure to minister to these people for whom our Lord died. I am often alone, for Mr. Titcombe goes somewhere nearly every week, and I never know what just to expect while he is away. A short time ago, when he went to attend a conference, he had not been gone two hours when a fire broke out in the kitchen roof, and it was completely destroyed in a few minutes. I was so thankful that the flame did not reach the main house. Truly the Lord delivers us from dangers seen and unseen. What do you think I am doing now? I have started a sewing class for young women. Why? We are anxious to reach these young girls and win them for Christ. I am pleased to say a good number are already Christians and attend regularly.... The time has come when we must do something to free them from the influence of the superstitious old women, for our hope is in the coming generation. We are praying that the Lord will pour out his spirit upon these dear people, that they may be quickened in their spiritual life. there seems to be the same tendency out here as there is at home-coldness of heart. We surely are in the last days, and it is the same all over the world.

The ministry of Ethel led to the establishment of ECWA Hospital Egbe. Ethel had no medical training, but her heart was full of compassion for the mothers and babies of Yagba land. So, she worked gladly, but with no facilities. Hays (1980:83,97,98) explained how Tommy disclosed the beginning of a maternity hospital to a government doctor who came from Ilorin to inspect it that:

...this little place is built on love and the Word of God. The gospel is preached and many mothers become Christians through my wife's ministry. In all our work we have but on purpose- to tell these people about God's love for them in Jesus Christ... In October 1924, as the word was preached, the spirit of God convicted souls of sinners; multitudes believed and were added to the churches. A new, 40-bed maternity hospital was being built, and took many hours, as I did the bricklaying. Ethel continued to help mothers and babies. In the old, outgrown center babies were born at all hours. Ethel instructed mothers in the care of their babies, and made sure each patient heard the gospel. As news of the work spread, many women came from distant villages. Some of them had lost two, three, four or more babies. When they left Egbe with healthy happy babies on their backs, their joy was boundless. Other mothers, who had delivered in the villages, would bring their infants who had been fed according to the traditional way, in a dying condition. Only the strongest survived. When women came to Ethel for help, she required that they obey her rules. After years of patient teaching and sacrificial work, the baby 'scene around Egbe was changed. In fact, a government official credited her, when he found that the population in our area had doubled in ten years! Ethel prepared the formula for the babies. Then there was our growing family of orphans. Under her supervision, older women carried them on their backs and lived on the compound. In addition to the maternity work, about 70 outpatients a daily received treatment. Serious cases had to be sent to the government doctor 80 miles from Egbe. It was time Egbe had a doctor and nurse, so we prayed.

ECWA Hospital Egbe is one of the leading hospitals in Nigeria, where many lives have been treated and saved. The said hospital has led to the establishment of the ECWA Nursing School and Midwifery Egbe. ECWA is proud of such a heritage today, and it has grown to the extent that the former Senator Smart Adeyemi, representing Kogi West constituency, proposed that a university of medicine be established in Egbe since it will leverage the ECWA hospital in Egbe for facilities and manpower. The proposal has passed a second reading in the house of the senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.



Miss Merle Watson, Josephine C. Bullifant and Marguerite Blumhagen

In 1921, another woman came to assist in the schoolwork, Miss Merle Watson. She, along with a young African, taught about fifty students (Haye, 1980:81). Another female missionary who contributed immensely to the educational and moral development of young people was Josephine C. Bullifant. She was an American who served in Nigeria from 1929 to 1966. She was described by her students in those days as a dynamic, loving, and disciplined teacher. And she was a great teacher and a rare gem (Olumotanmi, n.d.). Marguerite Blumhagen was a solid companion to her husband, Blumhagen Dale, who served as the pioneer principal of Titcombe College from 1949 to 1957.

Despite the marginalization of women in ECWA, the women's ministry expands ECWA's source of income. For instance, the women in ECWA thought it wise that ECWA should not continue to print her national uniforms from non-Christian textile industries. They discovered that the company is also printing the same uniform for other faiths, which could mar the image of ECWA. The Women Fellowship International has started contributing a certain amount in order to establish their own textile industry where women fellowship international uniforms, men fellowship international uniforms, and youth fellowship international uniforms can be produced. According to Mrs. Miriam Philips, the present ECWA women fellowship leader internationally, "the textile industry is to be named 'Kenttex', which is to be named after one of the first three missionaries that established ECWA... The textile industry is on the verge of takeoff. ECWA has set up a powerful committee to look at the nitty-gritty of the industry."

Women Fellowship International also built a guest house at ECWA headquarters for the purpose of generating funds for ECWA. Mrs. Philips further noted that "the women in ECWA erected twenty-six rooms for the guest house and two suits, which have been serving as a generating medium for ECWA... Many women's fellowship groups at the local church also have some buildings for rent."

Also, Women Fellowship International has been paying the monthly salaries of many missionaries both in Nigeria and across borders. "ECWA has over one thousand missionaries, and the women's fellowship of ECWA has been sponsoring over five hundred of them." This means ECWA women are taking care of half of the mission responsibilities.

Some missionaries' children are enjoying scholarships through the ECWA women's fellowship. This has motivated the commitment of many missionaries as they carry out their missionary endeavors. "This is notable in the establishment of three different missionary schools located in Kaduna, Jos, and Gombe solely for missionary children as a way of relieving their parents' burden of not sending their children to school and to save them from financial incapacitation."

They also engage in evangelism as a way of reaching unbelievers for Christ. Most women fellowships in their respective district churches (90 DCCs) procured 18-seater vehicles for the purpose of evangelism. Almost all the ninety-district church council women's fellowships of ECWA have vehicles for evangelism and other ecclesiastical activities. They contributed on their own to procure and maintain those vehicles.

ECWA women annually assist the needy, sick, orphans, widows, and widowers. The ECWA Women Fellowship International is dedicated to taking care of the needy annually. The most notable one is the ECWA Women's Week of Prayer, in which a day is dedicated to the giving of gifts to widows and orphans in the church. Mrs. Aina opined that "they engaged in giving food to



all the widows during their conferences.” Women Fellowship has gone to the extent of establishing and financing rehabilitation centers to cater for those suffering from drug addiction and other social vices.

Mrs. Saratu Daudu

Mrs. Saratu Daudu was the first woman leader in the then-Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA), but now the Evangelical Church Winning All is in Gbagyi district. The Gbagyi people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Central Nigeria. They are found in at least five states: Kaduna, Nasarawa, Niger, Kebbi, and the capital territory of Abuja. She was the wife of Pastor Daudu, who served at Dutsepe in Abuja as a pastor. Before they moved to Dutsepe, Saratu taught at the Girl's Bible School for one year (Tumak & Gaiya, 2006). At Dutsepe, she established an extramural school, which was held in the local church in the evenings. She taught in Hausa and Gbagyi, the local languages. Saratu played a major role in contributing to the development of the Evangelical Church of West Africa's (ECWA) Women's Fellowship in Nigeria. Her association with lady missionaries in Dikko led to the formation of the Women's Fellowship, of which she became the leader. Training women and shaping the ECWA's Women Fellowship took a large amount of Saratu's time. She taught the women self-sufficiency and began domestic and home management training. She also taught them how to show respect to their husbands as the Bible commands and how to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord. As there was no maternity clinic in Dikko, Saratu served as a midwife and was also given the name *Ngozuna* (which means “women birth attendant”).

With the success of the Women Fellowship in Dikko, she engaged in educating her people; her effort led to her being appointed to teach Bible knowledge in the primary schools by the local government authorities. She also tried her hand at sewing. With the support of the missionaries, she made clothes for orphans; that is why she was called the “Dorcas of Gbagyi Land.” She adopted some of the orphans and raised them to become important people in society. The success of the women's fellowship in Dikko led to the formation of women's fellowships in all churches in the district. Since Saratu's district was one of the largest in ECWA, today this district has been split into ten districts. She was then invited to attend the ECWA General Church Council meetings in Jos as an observer. This opportunity was a great privilege as the council was composed entirely of men. Saratu was elected to be relieved as leader of the ECWA Women's Fellowship, Gbagyi District, in 1970 after serving in that capacity for fourteen years. (Tumak, S.I., & Gaiya, M.A.B., 2006).

Mrs. Rosette Kayser

Rosette Kayser is a native of Uganda who came from Uganda to study at ECWA Theological Seminary Igbaja. There she met her husband, Ted Kayser, who was a missionary from the United States of America and a lecturer at the school. They later got married, and the marriage was blessed with two children, namely Stephen and Sanyu.

According to ETSI archive, Mrs. Rosette Kayser was the founder of the Youngstar Ministry, named ECWA Theological Seminary Youngstar Ministry, Igbaja, Kwara State. She founded the ministry as a way to cater to and nurture teenagers and children in the way of the Lord. The activities of the ministry include the following: library materials where children could find books and bible stories in written and visual form that could aid their meta narratives of the bible events and stories; weekly bible study; vacation bible school; scholarship for indigent children of the seminarians; Fulani evangelism and educational scholarship for the new converts; training of



children teachers; writing of children ministry manuals; annual end-of-year party programs where she used the festive period to preach Christ to the young people; children program outreaches within Kwara State and other states like Kogi, Kaduna, Oyo, Osun, Lagos, Ekiti, and so on. Although she is late, the ministry is still thriving.

In short, the benefits of women's ministry as it focuses on ECWA development cannot be overemphasized. As of today, ECWA Women Fellowship International Leader Mrs. Philips attested that "women are the backbone of ECWA". In the same manner, Reverend Boyede (an interviewee) disclosed that "a formal ECWA president (Rev. Prof. C. Olowola) once reported to have said, "ECWA is near being ever without women". The population of women most often doubles that of men. They are always present in all the church activities and ministries except those in which they are not allowed to partake. ECWA women make things work in the church. They always show dedication and devotion in church matters.

One of the interviewees Mrs. C. Kadiri likewise opined that "the present ECWA president (Rev. Panyan Baba) gives special recognition to women. There are more or less no women in ECWA. They are so significant that whatever women say is final." ECWA recognizes women's powerful influence on every church matter. The church leaders always sought them before making some critical decisions. This is because if women are against the decision they make, it may result in futility. But once women are in support of the church decision, there will be great achievement and success. Women are highly active in everything they desire to do, and they always complete whatever project they do, unlike men, who are reluctant and hardly complete their projects. They are so committed to church attendance and activities, offering and donations, church meetings, church projects, giving, evangelism, and visitation. ECWA women have been the church mobilizers. Their place and role in the church cannot be underrated. ECWA women are as important as the church. Their place in the church cannot be ignored. If ECWA neglects women and their roles, she is likely to go into extinction. Women fuel the growth of ECWA.

Arguments for Non-Inclusion of ECWA Women in Ecclesiastical Ministries

Mrs. Gowan was the brain behind the founding of ECWA in Nigeria. This means ECWA is the product of a woman. Despite the initiation of women to establish the present ECWA denomination, this denomination has been denying women the church pastorate and leadership. This is clear from the submission of Oderinde (2012): women in some churches today cannot exercise the functions of church leaders. This is because they are denied the right to do so. The church limits the potential and function of women to women's fellowship alone and possibly the children's church, but not as the pastor or elder in the church. Not that they cannot function as pastors over the church board, just as Akintunde (2003:175) succumbs; those women are not passive in church activities; rather, they contribute to the renewal of the church, combining their experiences with commitment to new ecclesial structures in Christendom.

However, ECWA based its argument on the following as drawn from ECWA Theological commission (2016):

1. *Man's headship*: man is the head over a woman: Genesis 2:18; 3:16; 5:2; 1 Corinthians 11:3, 8:10; 14:33-38; Ephesians 4:8; 5:22-23; 1 Timothy 2:4). Based on these texts, women can only serve in some sections of the church but cannot serve as the overseer of the church.
2. *Old Testament priesthood*: Only men were the priests in the Old Testament.



3. *Biblical Leadership*: according to Titus 2:3-5 the office of a pastor is accorded with authority flows in the descending order from God the father to the son, from Christ to man and from man to the wife who is to be subjected to her husband.
4. *Jesus' choice of Apostles*: there was no single woman in the apostles of Jesus (Matt 10:1-5; Acts 1:12-16).
5. *Paul's injunction*: women are to be silent in the church (1 Corinthians 14:34 cf. 1 Timothy 2:1-12). It is believed that this injunction is still applicable today. Oduyoye (1995) opines that the New Testament has often been used against women referring to Paul's injunction in 1 Timothy 2: 12 "I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man, she is to keep silent."
6. *Pastoral Qualifications*: all the pastoral qualifications in 1 Timothy and Titus refer to man and not women.
7. *System of transfer in ECWA*: the transfer of ECWA system will work against the licensing and ordination of women in ECWA.
8. *Natural hinderances*: menstruation period, pregnancy, breast feeding, child upbringing and home responsibilities are natural factors that can hinder the pastoral ministry of a woman. The body structure of a swinging hips and heaving bosom of the woman could be a downfall to many men in the church. Because of the aforementioned points women have no right to lead in ECWA except among the women fellowship.

It is recent that ECWA is thinking of creating ministries for women. According to the Bye-Laws of ECWA (2019), women's ministry is one of the ministries that ECWA shall establish. ECWA women in ministry shall be developed and structured to meet the needs of ECWA women. ECWA shall train women in various ministries in both the church and society. The ministry shall include teaching, evangelism, preaching, church planting, and counseling. ECWA shall empower women to do any church ministry in ECWA, except pastoring or heading churches. This embargo still limits women's ministry in ECWA. Meanwhile, the constitution of ECWA (2019:9) states that "ECWA is an invisible entity and shall be governed in accordance with biblical principles of love and unity." But the denial of women from some ministries contradicts the unity of the church. Likewise, on page 11, it is written that "All ECWA members are equal before God in Christ Jesus and shall be entitled to equal rights in the body of Christ (Galatians 3:28), except where, otherwise, the Holy Bible is definitive about leadership and headship in the church." There is no equity in the denial of a woman God has called and who has been trained to engage in pastoral ministry compared to a man who, in the same manner, is called and trained and is allowed to engage in pastoral ministry simply because he is a man. This showcases the level of gender discrimination in ECWA.

Insights for Contemporary ECWA

Women were prominent in the Old Testament (e.g. Sarah, Mariam, Esther, Deborah and the like) even though Jewish history and society were not favorable to women being seen but not heard in public. As a result, the ECWA organization can learn from the practices. Women were among the church's first members and played an important role, especially Mary the mother of Jesus. They were exceptional in their talents to give hospitality, assist in providing for the destitute, and express serving and caring, which distinguishes the church as God's family.

There are numerous examples of women leaders. Miriam was sent by God to lead Israel and to support Moses: "I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam."(Micah 6:4) Deborah was a powerful woman leader, and a prophetess, and judge over Israel: "Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel



in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided." (Judges 4:4-5). In the New Testament we also find inter- alia Phoebe who was a deacon of the church. St. Paul states in Romans (16:1): "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon, of the church in Cenchreae." The word deacon refers here to her as a Christian leader who serves with the overseers/elders of the church.

Of course, the prime example of a woman of the greatest repute in human history is the Virgin Mary. Mary is the model of perfect agape love and obedience to Jesus Christ. God kept Mary unblemished from sin, and she conceived Jesus Christ Our Lord, by the power of the *Paraclete* (Holy Spirit), bringing Christ into the physical world. We need to remember that in Genesis 1:27, after God has already created so much, he opted to reflect his very own image through his creation by making human beings: "in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." The man alone did not reflect the image of God, but male and female together. There was no male dominance or any type of female subordination.

Jesus Christ also accepted women as his followers on the same basis as men, although they were not appointed as one of the apostles. However, they played a prominent role in the ministries of Jesus, and the meaningful role continued even after his death (see examples of Mary Magdalene, Eunice, Pricilla, etc.). The church of today can derive examples from old practices.

Church authorities, such as ECWA leadership and ministries, should return to the scriptures and adhere to Jesus Christ's teachings and practices. Especially in regards to what the Bible says regarding the position of women, regardless of what contemporary day demands or what other beliefs teach and practice. This should be done with caution, not going against what our laws adhere to, particularly the legal instruments pertaining to women's rights in Nigeria (Alemika, 2016: 175–178).

Men and women are equal in God's eyes because God appreciates both equally. However, God has given specific responsibilities in the church to men that women should not accept; this does not make women inferior to men, nor does it give males superiority over women. Such distinctions are merely created by God's divine plan. This is an excellent lesson for all of humanity, particularly men and the universal church. As a result, church leaders in modern times, such as the ECWA Organization, should strive to create an environment in which women can freely give their quota to the development and growth of ministries. Women who are exposed to all forms of theological training should be given equal opportunities to achieve the pinnacle of their careers, such as serving as provosts of theological colleges, and such women should be permitted to exhibit their God-given potential and skills. They should be awarded ecclesiastical titles like their counterparts, such as pastors or reverends. Even better, they can serve as women's fellowship organizers, pastors of children's churches, and Christian education coordinators at various levels.

Conclusion

Women's contributions have been fundamental and pivotal to ECWA as a full-fledged denomination. This study has made it clear that ECWA is indebted to women in many ways. Right from the conception of the vision of ECWA and its eventual birth, women were instrumental all through. Mrs. Gowan was the agent God used to ignite her son and launch him into a missionary enterprise in Nigeria. Ethel Titcombe was another undaunting and resilient figure that labored so hard to bring about the present ECWA Hospital in Egbe, Kogi State. She labored among the rural women despite her lack of skills in medical care. She stopped killing twins in Yagbaland. During the flowering period of ECWA, women served as companions, teachers, health care givers, and the like. Today, ECWA has tremendous women who are forcefully committed to various ministries



despite the denial of being part of ECWA leadership at different levels (Local Church, District Church Council, General Church Council). ECWA needs to look inward, review its historical antecedents, reflect on the present contributions of women, and chart a new course for the emerging leadership in ECWA. Women are great assets and indispensable. Women have toiled and labored sacrificially on ECWA, and to every reasonable mind, they deserve reputable space in ECWA ecclesiastical leadership.

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Interviewees



Mrs. Miriam Philips, ECWA Women Fellowship International Leader, Jos, 29-09-2023.

Mrs. C. Kadiri, LCC women leader ECWA Igbaja DCC, 8-12-2021.

Rev. D.O. Boyede, Minister and DCC CEO, ECWA Omu-Aran DCC, 24-09-2023

Mrs. B.S. Aina, LCC Treasurer, ECWA Egbe DCC, 29-09-2023.