

Cultural Hierarchies and Freedom of the Spirit: Reimaging of Pentecostal Women in Nigeria

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Abstract: *There are cultural hierarchies which militate against the freedom of the Spirit in a particular cultural milieu. This makes it difficult to negotiate between cultural boundaries and the empowerment of the women by the Holy Spirit in a Pentecostal context. To exercise the empowerment of the Spirit by the women often implies disruption of gender based cultural hierarchies. Hence there is a problem of streamlining the Spirit-empowerment of women and cultural imaging of women as wives and mothers which has been domesticated in the hierarchy of values in Nigerian communities. It is, therefore, problematic for many women to accept their cultural image of womanhood and be faithful to their Pentecostal experience. This paper adopted multidimensional approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research via, phenomenological and survey instruments in studying the cultural hierarchies of the Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria and the experience of Pentecostal women ministers. The study discovered that Pentecostal freedom of the Spirit is disruptive of cultural hierarchies and could be significant in constructing a metagenderized culture.*

The cultural and gender-based imaging of women is not in harmony with Pentecostal freedom of the Spirit. There is need to reconstruct image of spirit-empowered women capable of reconciling cultural stereotypes with Pentecostal empowerment. The paper, therefore, calls for a restructuring of cultural hierarchies to include spiritual empowerment of women, and a creation of theological parameters for measuring Pentecostal experience in African societies.

Keywords: Culture, Hierarchy, Image, Empowerment, Gender.

Introduction

The emergence of modern Pentecostal movements is affecting the face of Christianity and had shifted the centre of Christianity to the southern hemisphere. Pentecostalism is vibrant in Nigeria, affecting both social and political settings with tremendous economic consequences. Pentecostal movements have opened space for women to serve and minister in Christian communities in ways not available in missionary churches and African Initiated Churches (AIC) in Nigeria.

The role of women as ministers of the gospel is acceptable in Nigerian Pentecostalism, making it possible for the women to exercise similar ministry with the men. A woman minister has the same power with her male counterpart, and a woman is accepted as the pastor of the men. To some extent, this had created a new image of women in Christian communities, where the female pastor occupies higher hierarchical position than other women. The foundation of the call of the

women to pastoral ministry in Pentecostal community is the empowerment by the Holy Spirit.

The engine of empowerment for service and ministry is baptism in the Holy Spirit. This is very significant for women as the poured-out Spirit breaks barriers and eliminates biases as the Spirit does not discriminate between male and female. The Spirit creates a new community and establishes new cultural hierarchy rooted in the abundance of spiritual gifts. The capacity to witness to the fruits of the Spirit in one's daily activities in noticeable manner by the others is fundamental in Pentecostal communities. According to the Menzies the empowerment that is initiated by the Spirit progressively transforms the old nature, inaugurating new ethical patterns (Menzies, 2000). This implies that baptism in the Holy Spirit is capable of transforming cultures and bringing into existence new ways of evaluating human experience and situating hierarchies. The power of the Holy Spirit to transform culture is often not given adequate attention by scholars. How the experience of the Holy Spirit can modify cultural values and open new dimension of activities for the women in contemporary Christianity should be examined theologically because "contemporary society demands that voice be given to disadvantaged populations in theological discourses especially in Africa" (Ukpong, 2020, p. 137).

This paper examines the hierarchy of values in African communities to underscore whether baptism in the Holy Spirit or empowerment by the Spirit is recognized in cultural hierarchy. The study is aimed at examining whether a spirit-empowered woman is recognized in African societies and accorded equal respect and privileges as their male counterparts or

whether baptism in the Holy Spirit gives equal opportunity to all who have the experience. From another perspective, the empowerment of the Spirit in Pentecostalism is disruptive of the social and religious structures as the Spirit blows wherever it will, and is not subject to personal or institutional control (Synan, 2001, pp. 1-13). Is this experience strong enough to disrupt cultural hierarchy in African communities? The main objective of this paper is to determine whether baptism in the Holy Spirit is capable of giving women differential recognition in cultural hierarchy in African communities, using Ibibio culture of Akwa Ibom State as a case study.

The Idea of Cultural Hierarchy

Culture is an enigmatic term that often means different things to different people. There is no single description that captures the total essence of what culture implies. The word culture is used to embrace the whole spectrum of what it means to be human and to live in an environment as human beings (Stewart, 2014 pp. 43-44). It is often said to be the total way of life of the people in a particular place and time. Hence everything about human beings living together, their modes of understanding and approaching human existence is cultural.

The basic issue of culture is common understanding and grounding of meaning of what is acceptable or not, the correct interpretation of stimuli from the environment and the grounding of common sense. Culture, therefore, implies that which makes sense to the collective that which majority consider to being normal and acceptable across various strata of their being together in a society (Udok, 2020 p. 270).

Therefore, there is cultural universal which make sense for human beings, and cultural particular which are meaningful in specific place or environment at a particular time. The cultural universal and particular interact to modify culture, thereby sustaining the dynamism of culture. The dynamic nature of culture is driven by education and mobility. Education in this context is understood as a process of systematically and consistently imparting information capable of modifying behaviour and purifying expectations, while mobility is a process of giving an individual access to resources and opportunities in a particular society. Education and mobility interact to create cultural hierarchy streamlining the interplay of duties and privileges. Hence cultural hierarchy is collective grading of duties and privileges, measurement of offices and rewards in relation to the wellbeing of the society. Cultural hierarchy implies that which is fundamental and essential for a proper ordering of the society to guarantee happiness and freedom of its members.

On a surface level, a particular culture with its embedded cultural hierarchy can be antithetical of the Christian faith. Uchem argues that “culture or tradition cannot subordinate the Good News. The criterion suggested for deciding what aspect of a culture or tradition corresponds to Jesus’ liberating Good News is a consideration of what is liberating for women as well as men and not just for men alone. Custom that are in harmony with the Good News are to be retained and those that are not to be done away with or transformed” (Uchem, 2000 p. 244). Niebuhr in his classic *Christ and Culture* attempts to delineate various interactions between Christian faith and the prevailing consciousness in a particular context. From this perspective, he

discussed Christ and culture from the viewpoint of Christ for culture, above culture, in culture, against culture, and Christ as transformer of culture. From Niebuhr investigation, Christ is announced and perceived in a cultural setting from different antinomies. There could be a question of co-relation, correspondence and antagonism when Christian faith penetrates a particular cultural context. Uchem's approach presents a conciliatory relation between Christ and culture, subjecting cultural hierarchy to the ideals of the Christian faith. To this extent, culture corresponds to the Christian understanding of being human and interpretation of socio-political realities.

Cultural hierarchy also implies what is preferable and sacrosanct in a particular culture. It indicates scale of preference, or hierarchy of dos and dons of a people. What is conventionally accepted as important, the ordering of values and responsibilities, and imaging of the aesthetical and the meaningful constitute the core of cultural hierarchy. Cultural hierarchy is constructed by the predominant class in a society.

In many African communities, there is established hierarchy in ordering of the society, consciously or unconsciously transmitted from generation to generations through mythology, folk wisdom, proverbs, taboos, etc. These constitute the heart of ethnography, which could be described as geographical anthropology. The main drivers of geographical anthropology include religion, politics, commerce and education. A significant driver of geographical anthropology in many African communities is religion. The sense of supernatural and the consequent interpretation of life from supernatural

(religious) perspective marked human existence from cradle to grave.

Religion provides the key for understanding maleness and femaleness in African communities. To this end, the question of cultural hierarchy in Africa is primarily a religious question, and by implication theological question. Cultural hierarchy embodies religiously assigned roles and functions to sexes, and religiously sanctioned values. These roles, functions, or values are considered important because they are pleasing to God or ordered by God. To this end, to understand cultural hierarchy, it is pertinent to understand the dominant public theology of the ruling class of the past, or the whims and fancies of the contemporary religious leaders in alliance with the political class. Cultural hierarchy is fostered by the consensus of the religious and political leaders' aesthetical imagination of right and wrong, duties and privileges, punishment and reward. Cultural hierarchy is sustained by socio-political theology of those who exercise authority and power in the society.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit in Pentecostalism

For William Menzies, the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit is fundamental in Pentecostalism (cf. Acts 1:4, 8; 2:4). The core of Pentecostal teachings on baptism in the Holy Spirit varies along history, where it was initially seen as a gateway to spiritual gifts (Menzies, 2000 pp. 189-190). Hollenweger discussed the roots of Pentecostalism as black oral tradition, evangelical return to holiness, Catholic embrace of charismatic-renewal, and critical evaluation of countercultural identities and ecumenical openness to variegated Christian religious outlooks (Yong, 2005). The focal attention of

Pentecostalism is the centrality of the Holy Spirit in leading men and women to deeper knowledge and love of God, empowering them for service and witness. To this end, the presence of the Spirit of God empowering men and women for ministry is the hallmark of Pentecostalism.

Pentecostal practices permeated Christianity in Africa because the reality of spirits is central in African religious worldview. According to Allan Anderson: “A major reason for the attraction of Pentecostalism for people oriented to popular African religiosity is a sympathetic and serious approach by its preachers to African life and culture, to fears and uncertainties, and to the religious world of spirits, magic, and witchcraft” (Anderson, 2016 p. .316). There is mutual interaction between spirits and human beings in religious worldview of many Africans. This explains why an abundance of the gifts of the Spirit in a person confers certain responsibilities and privileges upon the person. The possession of the Spirit, therefore, places someone in a privileged position in cultural hierarchy, as the spiritual is preferred and dreaded to the merely material. This is why the cult of *Mami Water* and other forms of esoteric exploitation of the body is appealing in many African societies.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit as personal appropriation of the Spirit and cultural witnessing to the abundance of the gifts of the Spirit in a person should open an *axis of privilege* for the person in the cultural hierarchy. The question is whether baptism in the Holy Spirit is conferring privileges upon all those with the experience – male and female –equally in Africa. African popular religiosity gives space for religious expression which affirms the feminine body as malleable epiphany

of the Spirit. The feminine body is a perfect conduit of the Holy Spirit even in the New Testament narratives (cf. Acts 16:16-18). Through the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit it is possible to create the historicity and actuality of encounter with the Holy Spirit. The idea of baptism in the Holy Spirit makes sense to many Christian women in Africa, but the relevance of this experience to transform their cultural value eludes the attention of scholars.

It is supposed in Christian theology that an encounter with the Holy Spirit gives new power and freedom (cf. Romans 8:2). A woman who has an encounter with the Holy Spirit is on a special mission, and could be described as *handmaid of the Spirit*. This can be deduced from the *Magnificat of Mary* (cf. Luke 2:46-56). A South-African Pentecostal biblical scholar, Madopoane Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) considers Spirit baptism to lead to the operation and manifestation of the lordship of Jesus in a person. The lordship of Jesus is not an abstract affirmation but experiential one which makes biblical teachings to find resonance in daily concerns and struggle for a just and equitable world for the oppressed and downtrodden. The experience of the Spirit leads to the deconstruction of structures that "perpetuate patriarchy under the guise of God's Word" (Masenya, 2016, p.92). Baptism in the Holy Spirit enables women to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches and empowers them to respond accordingly. This could break the monster of patriarchy, transforming vulnerability of disadvantaged women (Masenya, 2016). According to Masenya, spirit-empowered women are destined by God to bring to an end the disadvantaged position of women in cultural hierarchy, and they can break patriarchal hegemony

which empties women of their humanity. “Men and women need to question traditional practices that discriminate against women” (Essien and Ukpog, 2012 p.289), and seek way of properly placing women’s issues in cultural hierarchy. Traditionalism and retrogressive hermeneutics should not be used to legitimate disadvantageous position of a sex in cultural hierarchy.

The experience of baptism in Holy Spirit drives a religious consciousness of women for personal empowerment and collective transformation. Rose Uchem argues for the need to overcome women’s subordination and calls for paradigm shift in theology to embrace what she describes as inclusive theology. An inclusive theology disentangles theological discourses from mythical narratives of the scriptures and opens space for women and men to be equal partners in leadership at all ramifications (Uchem, 2000). It is the Holy Spirit that gives fertilization to the freedom of person and brings about germination of justice and equity across civilizations.

From the experience of the Corinthian problems arising from baptism of the Holy Spirit, Paul cautioned against unnecessary sense of exaltation in cultural hierarchy because of the Holy Spirit. “By virtue of their special spiritual experience and knowledge, these people believed they had entered into a “deeper” or “higher” level of spiritual existence. They formed a spiritual elite and their spiritual gifts, especially their ability to speak in tongues, confirmed their special status” (Menzies, 2000 p. 202). For the Corinthians, the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit was spiritual empowerment that places them in higher positions culturally.

Menzies (2000) argues negatively in this direction. Even though the baptism in the Holy Spirit

could signal a turning point in the experience of faith and lead to Christian maturity, it should not generate into elitism but be seen simply as “the source of power and boldness in Christian service and witness” (Menzie, 2000 p.203). From this perspective, it may be difficult to see baptism in the Holy Spirit as empowering women to break cultural boundaries, creating division between the baptized-in-spirit and the non-baptized-in-spirit women. Can Pentecostal experience transform the image of women culturally? I, therefore, proceed to examine the image of Pentecostal women in Africa.

Pentecostal Imaging of Women and Ibibio Culture

There are differences in imaging of women in ecclesiastical hierarchy across Christian denominations. The missionary churches, Africans initiated churches (AIC) and Pentecostal communities have variegated image and understanding of women in their cultural hierarchy. For instance, there is a significant difference in imaging of Pentecostal woman and a Catholic nun. The criteria for cultural appropriateness are different in these communities. To this end, there is differential cultural hierarchy in Christianity. I am examining imaging of a Pentecostal woman as Spirit-empowered person in Ibibio cultural context.

Susan Hyatt observes that “women have played leading and pivotal roles in the growth and development” (Hyatt, 2001 p. 233) of Pentecostalism. After evaluating the contributions of women in Pentecostal movements for a century, she maintains that God “has called countless women and empowered them to fulfil both humble and high profiles assignments” (Hyatt, 2001 p. 262). This positive assessment is not

universal and should not be taken for granted especially in Ibibio context.

Essien and Ukpung observe that: “Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) has a liberal attitude towards women. In most of their conglomeration, women have equal rights as men and can be ordained as deacons, priests, evangelists, bishops, archbishops, etc” (2012 p. 288). In this context, women can perform the same ecclesiastical offices as their men counterpart, and there is no discrimination in access to ministerial functioning by both men and women. The imaging of Pentecostal woman is rooted in equal opportunity as made accessible through the Holy Spirit who bestows gifts on all without discrimination (cf. 1 Cor.12:1-11). This is a liberal approach to identity and function in Ibibio context, where hierarchical structure is the foundational of patriarchy. How the Spirit can empower both male and female equally does not fit into Ibibio cultural imagination.

The imaging of women in Pentecostalism tends to follow the whims and fancies of those exercising power in a particular community. Therefore, there is no distinctive image of women across Pentecostal congregations due to the lack of central authority in Pentecostal movements. Essien and Ukpung argue that the privileged position of women in certain Pentecostal congregations is mainly due to the recognition of the pastor’s wife or because such congregations are founded by women. In Akwa Ibom State, Josephine Eggah who is the founder of New Birth Church has no qualm in making herself the bishop of the congregation, bringing about cultural disruption in a patriarchal Ibibio society. This is why it is not common to see a woman becoming a bishop in a congregation not founded by her or owned

previously by her husband. To this end, a distinctive image of Pentecostal woman in Ibibio culture is still in the making (Essien and Ukpog, 2012 p. 288). Therefore, the image of Pentecostal women in Ibibio culture is not significantly different from the prevailing image of women in the society, irrespective of their anointing by the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostal Women and Cultural Hierarchy in Akwa Ibom State

The cultural perception of women in contemporary societies is rooted in ambivalence and ambiguity. The quest for gender equality and sensibility of women to human rights and dignity are opening new narratives for Christian women in many African societies. The narratives are founded on natural rights in democratic culture vis-à-vis religious and biblical narratives founded on alien cultural hierarchy. Therefore, the ambivalence is a question of the continuity of traditional and cultural antecedences with democratic values, especially freedom and non-discrimination of persons. Scholars are confronted with the possibility of negotiating between hermeneutics of continuity and hermeneutics of transformation. To continue with “culturally givens of yesterday” or to transform it with the findings of modern sciences rooted in hermeneutics of progress. This is the problematic of restructuring cultural hierarchy for re-imaging of women in contemporary societies, including Akwa Ibom State communities.

Akwa Ibom State is a geopolitical creation of differing cultural innuendoes of Ibibio, Annang and Oro peoples of Lower Niger Basin brought together by the forces of geopolitics of colonial and post-colonial Africa.

These ethnics' nationalities have certain common cultural indexes which enable scholars to classify them together as peoples of homogenous culture, sharing in a similar worldview, ritual habits, religious festivities and rites of passage. Therefore, Akwa Ibom cultural hierarchy is a synthesis of common elements of Ibibio, Annang and Oro peoples (Udoidem, 2007 pp. 13-19).

Silvanus Udoidem, a Catholic philosopher argues that Akwa Ibom culture is derived from the philosophy of the people, maintaining that a people's culture is contingent on their philosophy (Udoidem, 2007 p. 7). Philosophical perception of women in Akwa Ibom culture is rooted in theological imaging of women in indigenous religious belief system. There are basic beliefs of Akwa Ibom peoples that are foundational for structuring of cultural hierarchy. One of such beliefs is the permeation of the spirit in human affairs. The role of the spirit in material and spiritual aspects of human existence is taken for granted in Ibibio culture.

Some scholars attribute the success of Pentecostalism in Akwa Ibom State to the Spirit Movement in Ibibio at the beginning of the nineteen century (Ukpong, 2008; Abasiattai, 1989). Therefore, we have to assess the role of the Spirit in Pentecostal women in Akwa Ibom State.

Abasiattai (1989) gives synopsis of the history of Christianity in Akwa Ibom State thus:

The pioneer Christian missions in Ibibioland were the Presbyterian, Qua Iboe, Primitive Methodist and Roman Catholic missions, which came in 1846, 1887, and 1903 respectively and operated, up to 1905, mostly in coastal communities like Calabar, Ibeno, Oron and Eket. By 1927, when what was termed the Spirit Movement broke out,

the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Mission (AMEZ), the United Native African Church (UNAC), the Salvation Army and the Anglican Mission (and its African subsidiary, the Niger Delta Pastorate Church – NDPC), had joined the pioneer missions in pushing Christianity up from the coastal enclaves, to spread to the length and breadth of Ibibioland. All the missions in Ibibioland by 1927, excepting the UNAC which had broken off from the Anglican, were American or European-based. Between 1927 and 1950 other foreign-based missions came to Ibibioland, notably the Lutheran and Apostolic churches, and Assemblies of God, which arrived in the 1930s (p. 497).

The Spirit Movement broke out in July 1927 in Ibibioland. The revival was led by the teachers from Qua Iboe Church who was not in touch with the spark from Azusa Street Revival. It was a Christian phenomenon founded on Ibibio cultural perception of the spirit. The classic of this revival included public confession of sins like witchcraft, adultery, and public burning of family idols (*ndem*) artefacts. The Spirit Movement developed a new alphabet and numerical system said to be products of the Spirit. There were few women who joined the *spirit men* group. There is no evidence that the women who participated in the Movement between 1927 and 1933 were given any prominent role. They were not allowed to rise above the cultural expectation of women, the gift of the Spirit did not add value to them culturally and their relation with spirit men was suspicious morally from the finding of Monday Abasiattai, a prominent historian of Akwa Ibom's culture. It is deducible that the gifts of the Spirit at the beginning of

the Spirit Movement in Ibibioland did not elevate the women in cultural hierarchy. Therefore, Pentecostalism in Akwa Ibom State has not succeeded in reimagining women, and baptism in the Holy Spirit cannot disrupt of cultural hierarchy. The empowerment of the Holy Spirit is not enough to transform cultural hierarchy or break gender-based stereotype.

Negotiating Cultural Hierarchy and Gender Based Stereotype

Hollenweger (1999) argues that the New Testament does not know the word *hyperphysikos*. It is quite difficult to translate the word supernatural into Hebrew. We have to examine whether the experience of the Holy Spirit is natural or supernatural. This is clear point of understanding the relationship between baptism in Holy Spirit and culture. Hollenweger maintaining that the New Testament is not familiar with the expression “supernatural” sees the operations of the Spirit as natural human functioning in the society. To this end, baptism in the Holy Spirit is a conscientious assuming of functions in the society, motivated by religious conviction. What is considered as supernatural is specific gifting for functionality makes visible through natural endowments. He underlines that this type of thinking will lead to the end of dichotomy between natural and supernatural, for a better understanding of the operations of the Holy Spirit as human capacities working for the common good.

In the same vein, Massey (1999) responding to the position of Hollenweger distinguishes different ways of understanding baptism in the Holy Spirit in the Bible. There is no unique format of understanding the phenomenon of baptism in Holy Spirit and its influence

on believers. Massey listed three classic views of baptism in the Holy Spirit which can be deduced from the scriptures, and came to a conclusion that spiritual gifts are relevant within the context of normal human operations, making the dichotomy between natural and supernatural unnecessary

In the view of Anderson (2016 p. 315), “there is no clear-cut division between spiritual and secular” in Pentecostal spiritualities. The tendency for the natural to go for supernatural and vice versa is the hazard of Pentecostalism. Anderson argues that *experience* is a distinctive mark of Pentecostal spiritualities. From the experience of the people, spirituality is not something alien or foreign but something practical, pragmatic and focused on this world. There is no dichotomy between natural and supernatural in real lived-experience, as what matter is the coming to be here and now of what Harvey Cox scholarly designated as *primal spiritualities* (Anderson, 2016 p. 316).

There are certain cultural stereotypes in Akwa Ibom’s culture resisting the influence of Christianity in general and Pentecostalism in particular. These cultural stereotypes continue to militate against gender-free theological discourse and cultural value of women despite the out pouring of the Holy Spirit on humanity, and invariably on Ibibio people. The limited space provided for women in cultural perspective should be subjected to critical evaluation in the light of contemporary sensibility and findings of both human and physical sciences. It is expected that the Pentecostal spirit brings significant cultural transformation, as the early Pentecostals believed that the blood of Jesus had washed away colour of racism and broken down the barrier of sexism.

For instance, Udo (2014) argues that the feminine naming of God is not tenable in African Ibibio culture precisely because the concept of *Eka Abasi* (Mother of God) is negative in Ibibio culture. *Eka Abasi* embodies torture, misfortune, barrenness, impotency and madness. These connotations imply that God cannot be conceived of from feminine sensibility, or anything feminine cannot be godly. In this context, the subjugation of women in cultural hierarchy is sanctioned in the revelation. It is, therefore, a taboo to apply feminine attributes or pronouns to God. To sustain this hermeneutics, Udo fails to make an in-depth distinction between the pre-Christian idea of *Eka Abasi*, and its Christian understanding especially in Catholicism. *Eka Abasi* literally means Mother of God, *theotokos* as taught by the Council of Ephesus in 431. It is a highest honour given to Mary in order to defend the divinity of Jesus, as born of the Virgin. In traditional Ibibio, *ekammi* (my mother) commands respect and love. *Eka* is a source of life and an engine for nurturing of life. *Eka* is the bowel of compassion and care, capable of defending life from cradle to grave. *Eka Abasi*, better *Abasi Eka* (Mother God) is a positive idea of God as provider, sustainer and defender of life.

This calls for new hermeneutics of traditional practices and popular devotions in Christianity, in order to transform discriminatory cultural hierarchy and enthrone the freedom of the Spirit across cultures. Mary gave birth to the Saviour of the world through the power of the Spirit (Luke 1:35). The Spirit generates salvation for humankind. The goal of salvation is progressive betterment of human existence from time to eternity in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the essence of baptism in the Holy Spirit.

The women have been disadvantaged and tagged negatively due to conservative hermeneutics of traditional practices and biblical narratives. Vincent Eyoh examining the prevalence of domestic violence against women in Ibibio land affirms that there are cultural practices which alienate and subjugate women in cultural hierarchies. These include: patriarchal family structure, unacceptable illiteracy and widespread poverty. Some cultural practices and customs are inimical to women welfare and dehumanize them, namely, widowhood practices, inheritance right and access to the products of their body. Eyoh concludes that women are culturally and socially disadvantaged in Ibioland (Eyoh, 2014 p. 134). We have to study the relevance of baptism in the Holy Spirit for reimagining of women in Ibibio cultural hierarchy.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

To achieve the objectives of this study, I adopted qualitative and quantitative types of research, using purposive interview as instrument and survey method through questionnaire to study baptism in Holy Spirit and women in Ibibio cultural hierarchy. The questionnaire was presented to 50 respondents purposively chosen because of their familiarity with the issues of cultural hierarchy and Pentecostal phenomenon in Akwa Ibom State. They were mostly from the Department of Religious and Cultural Studies – Faculty members, and M.A. and PhD students. This make up 70% of the respondents, while the remaining 30% were Christians ministers both male and female who are familiar with baptism in the Holy Spirit and gender issues.

The research questions were structured around the repertoires of freedom of the Spirit as a consequence of baptism in the Holy Spirit, and cultural imaging of women in Akwa Ibom State which is predominantly classified anthropologically and ethnographically as Ibibio culture. I also conducted purposive interview with Pentecostal couples involved in ecclesiastical ministry and para-ministry in the research area. These interviews were opportunities for critical discussions of the research questions in order to deepen the knowledge of the problematic of women and cultural hierarchy in Ibibioland.

The questionnaire was structured in Likert scale which assumes that “the strength/intensity of an attitude is linear” and could easily be presented in the scale of one to five: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), undecided (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5). A simple percentage formula was used to calculate the positions of the respondents on the variables of the research questions. The summary of the findings is presented in the table below. The number in each box indicates the total percentage of the respondents.

S / N	ITEM	S D 1	D 2	I 3	A 4	SA 5	TOTAL %
1.	Spirit-empowered women are significant in African culture.	70	10	3	4	13	100

2.	African culture recognizes the baptism of the Holy Spirit.	8	3	5	31	53	100
3.	Freedom of the Spirit is conditioned by cultural boundaries.	10	22	9	25	34	100
4.	Baptism of the Spirit permits women to transcend cultural stereotype.	1	4	0	35	60	100
5.	Spiritual empowerment adds value to women culturally.	2	8	30	38	22	100

Table 1: Researcher Fieldwork March 2022

Discussion of Data: Baptism in the Holy Spirit Repertoire

From the findings of the research, the majority of the respondents disagree that the Spirit empowered women are significant in African culture (70%). The

majority also disagree that African culture recognizes baptism in the Holy Spirit, and they likewise maintain that freedom of the Spirit is conditioned by cultural boundaries (59%).

From the above findings, the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit does not change the status quo of women in Africa, and the culture does not permit the spirit-baptised women to transcend their cultural boundaries because African culture does not recognize the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit (84%). Baptism in the Holy Spirit is disruptive of cultural hierarchy but not strong enough to lead to cultural transformation. Baptism in the Holy Spirit simply cannot modify gender issues. It is significant only in a metagenderized culture, a cultural context which transcends and re-elaborates fixations of societal roles of maleness and femaleness. Therefore, we have to develop a theology of baptism in the Holy Spirit, and how it can add significant cultural value to Pentecostal women in Christianity, thereby contributing towards reimagining of women in Africa.

Discussion of Data: Cultural Imaging Repertoire

The research questions aimed at discovering whether women's placement in cultural hierarchy is acceptable, and how the Christian's freedom of the Spirit is operative in African culture. 80% of the respondents sustain that women are not properly placed in African culture, and that baptism in the Holy Spirit cannot modify cultural hierarchy in favour of women. We discovered that 30% of the respondents were not able to decide whether spiritual empowerment can add value to women culturally, while 60% accepted that spiritual empowerment can influence women's value culturally.

95% of respondents maintain that baptism in the Holy Spirit cannot exonerate Christian women from cultural imperatives or permit them to transcend cultural boundaries without facing negative consequences. To this end, conformity to cultural demands and respectful approach to cultural hierarchy is the way of freedom for women.

We have to reevaluate the data from both repertoires qualitatively. Angel, a Pentecostal woman and leader of an international network group for mothers maintains that women are always subjected to the ministry of their husband irrespective of their “personal anointing” and that headship of a woman in a church is not culturally acceptable. She suspects that there is an inherent hatred for the women who are more powerful than their husbands. Even when a woman is the founder of a Christian community, the real power is exercised by a man but the woman is only pretending to be in-charge. This position may not be shared by many but it goes to buttress the disadvantaged position of the women generally in Ibibio culture.

There are certain religious rituals that baptism in the Holy Spirit, even with ecclesiastical office of pastorate that culture will not allow women to perform. Culturally, baptism in the Holy Spirit cannot make a woman to officiate at any significant rites of passage religiously and culturally. Davidson, founder and pastor of Pentecostal community include blessing of marriage, child dedication, interment, and ordination of a person among the rites that women are not expected to perform culturally. He sustains that women receive empowerment from the same Spirit but the operations of the Spirit are differential in male and female. He concludes by maintaining that God uses women to

supply for the lack of men, and it will be difficult to reimage women in Pentecostalism exclusively from baptism in the Holy Spirit.

In order to improve the perception or imaging of spirit-filled women in Nigeria, many respondents indicate righteousness, holiness, marriage and education as fundamentals. The women can be integrated into cultural hierarchy, if the churches offer them ecclesiastical offices with stability, and thus giving them access to ministerial leadership. There is need for attitudinal change, campaign for equal opportunity and cultural dialogue for transformation of patriarchal hegemony as opined by many respondents.

Reimaging of Pentecostal Women

From the data of the fieldwork, we have to attempt a deconstruction of spirit-filled women in Ibibio land in order to reconstruct the image of Pentecostal women today. There are certain theological tools and hermeneutic that should be adopted in this project. I apply what I describe as dynamic theological anthropology and hermeneutic of continuity to deconstruct and reimage African women generally and Pentecostal women in particular. From dynamic theological anthropology, a human person is created in the image and likeness of God but the emergence of the likeness of God is an open system that will be completely visible in the eschatological fullness of history. Human beings are not close systems and what a person is destined to become transcends temporality. In the *process of becoming more like God* by human beings, identity and function are fundamental.

The interplay of identity and function is the engine of abundance life envisioned by the gospel (cf.

John 10:10). Human beings are dynamic creatures placed in an open system of infinity to define and recreate their world of meanings. To this end, historicity and vulnerability interact to create cultural hierarchy. There is no human that is exempted from brokenness such as sinfulness and empowerment as divinization. There is no theological appropriation of human experience that is not subjected to modification or transformation, depending on personal or collective consciousness of persons at a particular time. This historical appropriation and modification are the thrusts of gender discussion as far as cultural hierarchy is involved. There is no particular expectation from male or female socially, politically, culturally, religiously, economically, etc constructed that is immutable and perennial (Udo & Orioha, 2020 p. 108). All humanly constructed realities are subject to change, following Heraclitus's idea of change as the only permanent reality in the world. The essence of dynamic theological anthropology consists in understanding of human realities as being subject to transformation and modification. It calls for continuous purification of culture and restructuring of cultural and ecclesiastical hierarchies.

On the other hand, hermeneutics of continuity is an approach of biblical interpretation in harmony with dynamic theological anthropology. From hermeneutics of continuity, theological and biblical appropriations of *being human* are rooted in human experience across the globe. Humankind is precisely creature of God stamped with divine imprint, implying that human beings transcend historical and cultural appropriations. From the beginning of humanity to its eschatological

consummation, there is a singly humanity traversing various epochs and histories, geographies and cultures.

There is a mysterious link between the past, the present and the future of human beings made experiential through environmental interpretations, which I earlier discussed as geographical anthropology. To this end, the present cannot be disentangled from the past, and the future is not possible without a foundation in the present. The future of humanity is depended on tensions of the contemporary ideas. This hermeneutical approach implies that scholars cannot examine the present situations of humankind without reference to the yesteryears of humanity. The yesterdays are important for understanding the hope and anxiety of today. Here continuity serves as locus of meaningfulness and catalyst of transformation. From the standpoint of dynamic theological anthropology and hermeneutics of continuity as explained above, I have to articulate a theological synthesis for reimagining of women in Pentecostalism especially in Ibibio context.

According to Uchem (2001) “an inclusive theology involves a critical look at the meaning of revelation and inspiration operative in any statements attributing women’s subordination to divine ordinance” (p. 241). Uchem calls for an inclusive theology that will allow different voices especially those at the margin to find place in theology and ecclesiastical discourse. In this context, it is difficult to understand how the marginalized and the voiceless of yesterdays can move to the centre and be given a voice today. This is the goal of inclusive theology, reintegration of the other and prioritizing of the bottom. Hence any theological system that seems to deny people their dignity in *God-given hierarchy* ceases to be a “theology of God,” but cultural

manipulation of the privileged group and legitimization of the tyranny of the dominant class. From the gospel values, Jesus pronounces woes on those who use their cultural hegemony to disadvantage others (cf. Luke 11:42-47). To exclude others from privileged positions or perceived hierarchies is contradictory of the Gospel.

From a deep theology of religions and the reality of the Spirit as being poured out upon all, we can develop theological categories for reimagining women in Africa, and for authentic civilization of love. I want to attempt this theology from the biblical story of the Good Samaritan. Amos Yong reflecting on this story in Luke 10:25-37 pointed out two hermeneutical perspectives that I intend to adopt in creating a theology that is responsive to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the context of cultural hierarchy. From the study of a Chilean Pentecostal theologian, Juan Sepúlveda, Yong argues that the story of Good Samaritan indicates God's way of bringing the religiously different other into the main stream of salvation, bringing the marginalized and voiceless of the world into the dynamic of salvation and rearranging of cultural perspectives in the quest for eternal life (Yong, 2005 p. 241-247).

Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan in response to a lawyer's question for criterion for meriting eternal life. It is the service of love to a religiously different other, to a victim of human inhumanity to other that serves as model of godliness capable of generating eternal life. From the Lukan universalism, there is no culture that has monopoly of salvific power. The central driver of salvation across cultures is love. The Spirit is the love of God that is poured into human hearts, enabling persons to love and to be loving. The

climax of this love is the capacity to transcend cultural boundaries to the point of embracing human vulnerability as an affirmation of humanity. The Good Samaritan is a spirit-filled person who is capable of breaking cultural barriers to reach out in love to the oppressed, victimized, and marginalized. This is what bestows eternal life and thus paramount in Christian cultural value.

Authentic empowerment by the Holy Spirit implies capacity for service and witness, for proclamation and testimony. It implies openness to dialogic existence in an open system without which nobody can see God. Freedom of the Spirit is a possibility of breaking out of cultural boundaries to encounter God in the created world, especially where God's love is being threatened by human machination or short-sightedness. In Lukan perspective, the Spirit blows wherever it wills, giving new life to the created order (Luke 15:24). It is here that the Pauline and Lukan theology of Spirit are harmonized by seeing the Spirit as engine of freedom and newness (2Cor 5:17). All carriers of the Spirit of God are born again, there is no distinction between male and female, or Jews and Greeks (cf. Rom 10:12), for the old order has passed away and God is doing something new, establishing new parameter of being human and relating with humans, generating a new culture, where there is freedom of the Spirit.

The spirit-empowered women represent an in-breaking of this newness and freedom for service in Christian communities. The empowerment to render service to the vulnerable is supreme prerequisite for eternal life (cf. Matt 25:31-46). Hence whoever is in a position to render service across boundaries like the

Good Samaritan should be higher in Christian cultural hierarchy (cf. John 12:26). Such empowerment is not an honour a person takes upon himself or herself but the gift of God best describes as grace for ministry to the down trodden, for the salvation of suffering humanity (cf. Hebrew 5:4). The spirit-filled women represent a struggle for Christian maturity and service in the world. This is the grace of God opening up a dimension of salvific activities in a hurting world.

For many scholars, there is a distinction between feminist and womanish theology, depending on the premium one is placing on engagements of women with socio-political and theologico-cultural activities. Idorenyin Abraham from linguistic studies of selected texts of women in leadership, make a case for womanish theology, as theological approach that integrates activities of women for effective witnessing in family and society. Women have responsibilities that cut across all strata of human experience. It is reasonable, therefore, to allow women to exercise their responsibilities without getting into conflict with others. The progress of women is not disadvantageous to men neither should the advancement of men folk implies subjugation of women (Abraham, 2021). To this end, the creation of maleness and femaleness of Genesis 1:27 is the authentic mark of civilization of love, which will not permit any sex to be excluded from cultural hierarchy.

Conclusion

From the available literatures and findings of this research, this study offers a theological synthesis, in furtherance of reimagining of women in cultural hierarchy in contemporary culture. From the findings gospel and culture may not be separated easily. The Christian

people are mystically united with Christ to the extent that their daily life should emanate from the imperative of the gospel. The Christian faith is not alien in any cultural context which projects the ideals of humanity and champions' freedom of persons. To this end, from the perspective of dynamic anthropology and hermeneutics of continuity, all cultural imaging of persons – male and female – should be subjected to purification and transformation. The only unchanging image of a human person is the “stamp of God” imprinted on all, making it unacceptable for anybody to be treated or valued outside God's given dignity and right, and in the manner that is alien to the gospel.

John and Etukudoh (2021) examining Pythagoras's notion of reality and the problem of gender inequality in Nigeria, argue that gender inequality as devaluation of women in cultural hierarchy can be said to be a product of ontological perception. The physical endowment of a person has nothing to do with his/her ontology which is defined in Judeo-Christian perspective as *Imago Dei*. Benedict XVI observes that ontology “inquires into what is being individual thing, marvels at the miracle of being itself, and tries to give account of the puzzling ‘is’ that we commonly predicate of all existing realities” (Ratzinger, 2005 p. 133). Authentic ontology, will not lead to gender inequality but only a “misdirected ontology” of power. Reimaging of women in Nigeria should be a return to an authentic theology of being as a mysterious epiphany of Godhead in the world. To be true to God in multidimensional manifestations of divine essence implies being true to humanity in all forms. Human dignity is not based on functionality but ontology. Therefore, competences and responsibilities of

each person are meant for the good of all, but not tyrannical tools for dominion and oppression.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on humanity is God's way of bringing to fulfillment the eschatological being of persons, and a renewing of humanity. The Spirit is poured out for freedom of person to effectively represent God in temporary and earthly matters. The one divine Spirit is given to all across the face of the earth for global cultural transformation, galvanizing the dispersed human beings together in the household of God where there is no discrimination. Emotional and biological differences are simply markers of physical identity or individuation but not of competence or premium. The ontological value of a person is non-negotiable and inalienable, and beyond human manipulation.

Since the craze for baptism in the Holy Spirit in Pentecostalism cannot significantly transform the image of women in African culture, there is need to articulate a new theology for ascendancy in cultural hierarchy especially in Ibibio context. This will be determinative of the relevant of religions in general and Christianity in particular: in-discriminatory approaches to maleness and femaleness in cultural hierarchy. Pentecostal theology of baptism in the Holy Spirit should integrate authentic inspirations of Christian anthropology in order to understand the profound essence of maleness and femaleness in contemporary culture. The best theology can identify in creation is the image of God. This image is deeply inclusive and reveals the diversity of maleness and femaleness as the as the glory of humanity in creation. The Christian baptism in the Holy Spirit re-awakes the consciousness of the indwelling of divine power in a person for the sanctification and salvation of

the world. The Church should open the window of opportunities for all to discover their destiny and find fulfillment in being of service to one another.

As a recommendation of this study, there is need to strengthen democratic structures in Nigeria in order to strengthen and promote the dignity and transcendence of all irrespective of their religious affiliation. Both male and female should find fulfillment in giving love and being witnesses to the love of God, thus assuming equality in cultural hierarchy based on what a person is capable of contributing not merely on his or her biological epiphany. In furtherance of the freedom of the Spirit, there should be a transition to *metagenderized culture*, where there is no fixation with predetermined stereotypes but each person is free to creatively define her/himself from innate and acquired capacities for the betterment of human society and the glory of God. God transcends all cultures, and all cultural hierarchies must be transited in authentic theology of divine empowerment.

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