



# Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria

## *Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40*

Mercy Uwaezuoke CHUKWUEDO

Trinity Theological College, Umuahia, Nigeria  
*mercychukwuedo@gmail.com*

### Abstract

Paul's injunction in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 has often been used to restrict women from holding certain leadership positions in the Church. This paper examines 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 in light of the female ordination debate in the Anglican Church in Nigeria. Through an exegetical study of the text, Paul's perspective on women is demystified. To understand the place of women in the Church using scriptural texts, this article examines the perspectives of egalitarian theory, complementarian theory, and liberation theology. The latter is included because it aims at interpreting biblical texts in a liberational way — Scripture is meant to deliver humans from all kinds of bondage and not to enslave. Exegesis is accompanied by an examination of leadership roles of women in Igbo Traditional Religion, in which women are recognized as priestesses. The place of women in leadership in Igbo Traditional religion is pertinent to this work. Biblical texts are necessarily interpreted from the perspectives of human experience — including African women's experiences. This article discovers through exegetical study of 1 Corinthians 14:26–40 that Paul was correcting a problem in the Corinthian church rather than hindering women from participating in the worship service or serving as leaders in the church. The Church should thus stop using the text to silence women or restrict them from holding certain leadership positions.

### Résumé

L'injonction de Paul dans 1 Corinthiens 14 :26–40 a souvent été utilisée pour empêcher les femmes d'occuper certains postes de direction dans l'Église. Cet article examine 1 Corinthiens 14 :26–40 à la lumière du débat sur l'ordination des femmes dans l'Église anglicane du Nigeria. Une étude exégétique du texte permet de démystifier le point de vue de Paul sur les femmes. Pour comprendre la place des femmes dans l'Église

**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

à partir des textes bibliques, cet article examine les perspectives de la théorie égalitaire, de la théorie complémentariste et de la théologie de la libération. Cette dernière est incluse parce qu'elle vise à interpréter les textes bibliques d'une manière libératrice — l'Écriture est destinée à libérer les humains de toutes sortes d'esclavages et non à les asservir. L'exégèse s'accompagne d'une analyse des rôles de leadership des femmes dans la religion traditionnelle Igbo, dans laquelle les femmes sont reconnues comme prêtresses. La place des femmes dans le leadership de la religion traditionnelle Igbo est pertinente pour ce travail. Les textes bibliques sont nécessairement interprétés dans la perspective de l'expérience humaine — y inclus l'expérience des femmes africaines. Cet article conclut, à travers l'étude exégétique de 1 Corinthiens 14 :26–40, que Paul corrigeait un problème dans l'église de Corinthe et n'empêchait pas les femmes de participer au culte ou de servir en tant que responsables dans l'église. L'Église doit donc cesser d'utiliser ce texte pour réduire les femmes au silence ou les empêcher d'occuper certaines fonctions dirigeantes.

**Resumo**

Para compreender o lugar das mulheres na Igreja utilizando os textos bíblicos, este documento examina as perspectivas da teoria igualitária, da teoria complementarista e da teologia da libertação. Esta última é incluída porque tem como objetivo interpretar os textos bíblicos de uma forma — as Escrituras destinam-se a libertar os seres humanos de todos os tipos de escravidão e não a escravizar. Para compreender o lugar das mulheres na Igreja a partir dos textos bíblicos, este documento examina as perspectivas da teoria igualitária, da teoria complementarista e da teologia da libertação. Esta última é incluída porque tem como objetivo interpretar os textos bíblicos de uma forma libertadora — as Escrituras destinam-se a libertar os seres humanos de todos os tipos de escravatura, e não a escravizá-los. A exegese é acompanhada de uma análise dos papéis de liderança das mulheres na religião tradicional Igbo, na qual as mulheres são reconhecidas como sacerdotisas. O lugar das mulheres na liderança na religião tradicional Igbo é pertinente para este trabalho. Os textos bíblicos são necessariamente interpretados a partir das perspectivas da experiência humana — incluindo as experiências das mulheres africanas. Este artigo conclui, através do estudo exegético de 1 Coríntios 14:26–40, que Paulo estava a corrigir um problema na igreja de Corinto e não a impedir as mulheres de participarem no culto de adoração ou de servirem como líderes na igreja. A Igreja deve, portanto, parar de usar o texto para silenciar as mulheres ou restringi-las de ocupar certas posições de liderança.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuedo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

**Keywords**

ordination, women in leadership, egalitarian theory, complementarian theory, liberation theology, priestess

**Mots-clés**

ordination, femmes dirigeantes, théorie égalitaire, théorie complémentariste, théologie de la libération, prêtresse

**Palavras-chave**

ordenação, mulheres na liderança, teoria igualitária, teoria complementarista, teologia da libertação, sacerdotisa

**Introduction**

There are various views concerning Paul's writings on women. He is seen both as a misogynist and a philogynist. When we look at Pauline texts on women, we are left with the notion that Paul was not against women leadership because he walked closely with some women. However, we can still not deny the fact that at some point his Jewish patriarchal culture may have affected him. Paul encouraged women to use their spiritual gifts for the edification of the Church. Pauline texts abound that describe women as active participants in ministry such as Romans 16:1-16, 1 Cor. 11: 4–16 and at the same time texts that advocate the silence of women such as 1 Timothy 2:11 and 1 Cor. 14:33–35. It is needful to enquire, does 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 advocate for complete silence of women? This text is used to subordinate women in some parts of Africa, including in the Anglican Communion. Various perspectives exist on how the text is being interpreted and applied. However, this paper seeks to exegete the text and find out Paul's intention for giving the order to the Corinthian Church.

This paper is focused on the Anglican Communion especially the Church of Nigeria because the Anglican Communion is divided on the debate on women ordination based on scriptural texts, tradition and reason. The Anglican Communion is a religious body of national, independent and autonomous Churches throughout the world that adhere to the teachings of Anglicanism and that evolved from the Church of England. In the Anglican Communion, a province is comprised of dioceses being headed by an Archbishop. It can be described as the smallest complete unit of the Anglican Church because it exists under a college of Bishops, each of whom with his clergy and laity is autonomous within a diocese. Many provinces ordain women to the three holy orders, viz; deacon, priest, and bishop. In some dioceses and provinces, women are ordained as deacons and priests and not as Bishops. Individual dioceses within provinces are left to decide into which order — the diaconate (deacons), the

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

presbytery (presbyters or priests), or the episcopacy (bishops) — women in the pastorate should be ordained.<sup>1</sup>

In the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), women's ordination is yet to be accepted, except as deacons with limited responsibility. Ordination is the rite by which the Church sets apart ministers, people whom it believes are qualified for the ministry of the word and sacrament.<sup>2</sup> Sacraments are only administered by those who are ordained. Ordination is made through discernment by the Church that one is called. God's call and training for the ministry are prerequisites for ordination. In the course of my doctoral research on "The Place of Women in the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)"<sup>3</sup> from 2014–2017, I carried out oral interviews to discover opinions of people concerning the ordination of women in the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion). I interviewed fifteen women and fifteen men. Only two persons supported the ordination of women. One is a priest and a lecturer, the other is a Lay Reader<sup>4</sup> and also a University lecturer. None of the women I interviewed support women ordination. This is a clear indication that ordination of women in the Church of Nigeria is not in the church's agenda now.<sup>5</sup> I discovered from my interactions with most of my respondents that the Bible and culture are tools used to exclude women from ordination. Most of my respondents are of the opinion that it is neither culturally nor biblically acceptable for a woman to lead men.<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:33–34 is one of such texts quoted to defend the exclusion of women from ordination.

### Research Tools

Different approaches have been used in studying matters relating to women such as different feminism theories, egalitarian and complementarianism theories. Complementarianism and egalitarianism theories are examined in this

---

<sup>1</sup> Esther Mombo, "The Ordination of Women in Africa: A Historical Perspective," 124.

<sup>2</sup> A. C. Krass, *Applied Theology 1: 'Go and Make Disciples'*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Mercy U. Chukwuodo, "The Place of Women in the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion): Perspectives from 1 Corinthians 14:26–40."

<sup>4</sup> A Lay Reader in the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) is a lay person licensed to preach, read Bible lessons, and conduct some religious services, but not licensed to celebrate the Eucharist. He or she is authorized by the bishop to lead certain services of worship. Lay Readers are formerly trained and admitted to the office but not ordained as priests. Within the Akoko Anglican Diocese of the Church of Nigeria, "most of the churches have only women lay readers." Sade Oluwakemi Ayeni, "Women in the Nigerian Church: A Study of the Akoko Anglican Diocese," 443.

<sup>5</sup> Mercy U. Chukwuodo, *African Women in Ministry, the Nigerian Experience: Perspectives from 1 Corinthians 14:26–40*, 96–106; Timothy Agbo, *Women Ordination in Nigeria: An Ecclesiological Analysis*, 54–77.

<sup>6</sup> Chukwuodo, *African Women in Ministry*, 108–111.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

paper to interpret the views surrounding women’s ordination. They give an understanding of different ways by which scholars and Christians generally view ordination of women. To have a better understanding of ordination and women leadership in Nigeria, the study also brings to light the place of women in spiritual leadership among the Igbos of Nigeria, such as female gods (goddesses) and priests (priestesses).

Complementarianism — a euphemism for what is actually *hierarchicalism* — affirms that women are allowed to teach other women and children. Some complementarians (but not all) further affirm that women can engage in certain forms of public ministry, such as teaching and evangelizing unbelievers in a public setting. However, women may talk with Christian men about the Bible and Christian doctrine only in a private context (see Acts 18:26).<sup>7</sup> Within complementarianism, women are frequently considered to be less rational, more gullible, and more susceptible to temptation, and thus are restricted not only from leadership in Church, but from any position of authority over any men in any sphere.<sup>8</sup> Contrary to these views, Christian egalitarianism considers that men and women are equally created in God’s image, equally responsible for sin, equally redeemed by Christ, and equally gifted by God’s Spirit for service to be key biblical principles.<sup>9</sup> Egalitarians do not believe that “gender differences have been abolished” but only that, building equally on the Creation narratives in Genesis and on New Testament passages such as Galatians 3:28, “being male or female does not bring any disadvantage.”<sup>10</sup>

Liberation theologians claim that the truth of the Bible is manifested in its liberating potential and that this truth is to be enacted by Christians through political and social praxis (action). The end goal of liberation theology is the realization of full economic and social equality and participation of all peoples in a utopian, harmonic and peaceful society.<sup>11</sup> Liberation theology focuses on the biblical message of God’s mission to set humans free from bondage. In the light of oppression experienced by women and third world people, it seeks to

---

<sup>7</sup> William G. Witts, *Icons of Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Theology for Women’s Ordination*, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Witts, *Icons of Christ*, 146.

<sup>9</sup> Bob Edwards, *Let My People Go: A Call to End the Oppression of Women in the Church*, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Oluwatosin Okanlawon, “Galatians 3:28: a Vision for Partnership,” 39. Okanlawon continues to note that “Paul’s declaration that there is ‘neither male and female’ stands in marked contrast to commonly accepted patterns of privilege and prejudice in the ancient world. Women were considered inferior within both Jewish and Greek culture. . . . Hence, Paul is emphasizing in Galatians 3:26–28 that men and women enjoy a new, equal and exalted status before God,” 40.

<sup>11</sup> Mary A. Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism with the Church*, 53.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

communicate the good news of liberation. Liberation theology also includes the call for the emancipation of women in all spheres of life, including Church leadership.

Paul's intent in writing 1 Corinthians 14:26–40 is uncovered through exegesis. Scholars have noted that the worldview of Africans play a major role in the understanding of the scripture. Religion is practiced within a culture. This shows that both religion and culture go hand in glove. Because we recognize that Africans have a religion before the inception of Christianity, I will also examine Igbo Traditional Religious belief and practice regarding female priests in order to draw an analogy and correlations between ordination of women in Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion.

### **Women's Ordination Debate**

Churches in Africa are divided on the debate of ordination of women. The issue of women's ordination has posed a problem in different denominations because of divergent interpretations of biblical texts.<sup>12</sup> Women are ordained in some of the African Indigenous Churches and Pentecostal Churches. Women are not restricted from ordination in the Methodist Church in Nigeria. A good number of women serve as deacons or priests and occupy other leadership positions. In the Church, every human person should be seen as an instrument for the accomplishment of the divine will no matter the gender.<sup>13</sup> This is the essence of the human creation. Much has been written on matters relating to gender inequality, social injustice, and marginalization of women in Church leadership.

The Anglican Communion is divided into forty-two different autonomous provinces. Globally, as of January 2021, seven Anglican provinces (approximately 3% of global Anglicanism) ordained only men to all three of the orders, two ordained both men and women as deacons, sixteen ordained both men and women as deacons and presbyters but not as bishops, and twenty-two (approximately two thirds of global Anglicanism) ordain both men and women into all three of the orders.<sup>14</sup> African provinces of the Anglican Communion

---

<sup>12</sup> E.g., see Frank B. Chirwa, *Mission in Progress: The Developing Role of Women in the Church: an SDA Perspective from Malawi*; Nancy Carol James, *The Developing Schism within the Episcopal Church: 1960–2010: Social Justice, Ordination of Women Charismatics, Homosexuality, Extra-territorial Bishops; etc.*; Hilfah F. Thomas and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds., *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*.

<sup>13</sup> Anuli B. Okoli and Lawrence Okwuosa, "The Role of Christianity in Gender Issues and development in Nigeria," 8.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Knoll, "Women's Ordination in the Anglican Communion: the Importance of Religious, Economic, and Political Contexts."

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuedo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

which currently permit consecration of women as bishops include the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, the Episcopal Church of South Sudan, the Anglican Church of Angola and Mozambique, and the Anglican Church of Kenya.<sup>15</sup> As of November 2023, all Anglican provinces in Africa ordained women as deacons, and “many of Anglicanism’s most theologically conservative provinces now ordain women to the priesthood, including Uganda, Kenya, South Sudan, Rwanda, Tanzania,” and the ‘Province of West Africa’ (covering Cameroon, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Senegal, and Sierra Leone).

Although an increasing number of women have been ordained in a number of Churches in various countries in the Western world and in Southern Africa, the case of the Church of Nigeria is still a subject under debate. The (Anglican) Church of Nigeria *does* ordain women as deacons, but reserves service in the diaconate and episcopacy to men.<sup>16</sup> The restriction of women from ordination in the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) is premised on: Scripture, Church Tradition and Reason. On Church tradition, the ordination of women is seen as a deliberate violation of the tradition of the Church. Paul’s teaching forbids women from exercising authority over men, it is argued, especially to be subordinate in things pertaining to liturgical teachings and expression of doctrine.

In 1992, a bishop from the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), Herbert Haruna, ordained three women as deacons — Mrs Beatrice Aciwunaya, Mrs Hannah Bello and Mrs Abigail Akinwade. The Right Rev. Joseph Abiodun Adetiloye, second Primate of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) reacted to sharply, deeming the ordinations as irregular and nullifying them. Bishop Haruna faced disciplinary action and was retired compulsorily.<sup>17</sup> In 2003, female graduates from Immanuel College of Theology wrote to the Provincial standing committee of the Church of Nigeria challenging the refusal to ordain women “whether the unjust state of affairs in which women are denied ordination, simply because they are women, should be allowed to continue.” They presented the criteria for ordination that the Church should consider: faith in the Triune God, confession of personal salvation, moral probity and integrity, maintenance of a stable Christian home, active membership of the Church, adequate theological training and evidence of God’s call.<sup>18</sup> In 2010, Archbishop Nicholas Dikeriehi Orogodo Okoh, fourth Primate of the Church of Nigeria, “endorsed the ordination of women as deacons” but strictly limited their ecclesial service as deacons to “specific purposes like hospital work and school

---

<sup>15</sup> See Fredrick Nzwili, “Africa’s six Anglican women bishops meet and issue call to combat Africa’s ‘triple threat’.”

<sup>16</sup> Kirk Petersen, “Province of Central Africa Approves Ordination of Women.”

<sup>17</sup> Agbo, *Women Ordination in Nigeria*, 47.

<sup>18</sup> Agbo, *Women Ordination in Nigeria*, 57.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

services.”<sup>19</sup> The Church in Africa has frequently been characterized as ‘a church of women,’<sup>20</sup> because women not only provide the majority of church members but also do the most of the work. In the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), today women serve as “wardens, evangelists, lay readers, choir directors, . . . among other leadership roles.”<sup>21</sup> Yet the Church of Nigeria has not as yet reconsidered its stand on the ordination of women.

***The Female Ordination Debate: Theories and Theological Reflections***

Different theories have been adopted in the study of women especially on the debate of female leadership. Two main opposing sides in the women ordination debate are complementarianism (i.e., hierarchicalism) and egalitarianism. Each present arguments from Theology, Religion, Sociology, Psychology, Philosophy, History, and Anthropology to elucidate their propositions.<sup>22</sup>

***Complementarianism and Women’s Ordination Debate***

Complementarians are opposed to the notion of ordination of women.<sup>23</sup> Some Protestant Churches such as the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) and others object the ordination of women on the grounds of biblical exegesis, Church tradition, culture, and/or reason. Complementarians use Scripture to exclude women from ordination and occupying some leadership positions in the Church. Complementarian theory holds that male and female were created by God as equal in dignity, value, essence, and human nature, but also distinct in role whereby the male was given leadership

---

<sup>19</sup> Odogwu Emeka Odogu, “Anglican Archbishop Okays Women’s Ordination to the Diaconate.”

<sup>20</sup> E.g., see Dorothy L. Hodgson, *The Church of Women*.

<sup>21</sup> Ayeni, “Women in the Nigerian Church,” 428.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Dei and Robert Osei-Bonsu, “The Female Ordination Debate: Theological Reflections,” 31.

<sup>23</sup> In the debate of women’s ordination and women in leadership, the leading voices among complementarians are all white men from the United States. E.g., see Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of 118 Disputed Questions*; James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*; George W. Knight III, *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*. Evangelical theologian and biblical scholar Kevin Giles, an Anglican minister Australia, has cogently demonstrated that Grudem’s book, which is representative of complementarian thought, is full of “erroneous arguments” and fails to engage with the evidence produced by long list of biblical scholars such as Gordon Fee, Phillip Payne, and Eldon Jay Epp. Giles further notes that Grudem (falsely) accuses a long list of “some of the most respected and godly evangelical leaders in the world” of denying the authority of Scripture when they are only denying the supposed authority of human interpreters of Scripture who share Grudem’s complementarian commitment. Giles, “Book Review: Wayne Grudem’s *Evangelical Feminism*.”



Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

responsibility of loving authority over the female, and the female was to offer willing, glad-hearted, and submissive assistance to the man. Genesis 1:26-27 makes clear that male and female are equally created as God's image, and are, by God's design, equally and fully human. But, as Genesis 2 bears out, their humanity would find expression differently in a relationship of complementarity, with female functioning in a submissive role under the leadership and authority of the male.<sup>24</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church and Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) are still not considering the ordination of women into priesthood.<sup>25</sup> On grounds of Church tradition, the contemporary Church cannot, it is argued, ordain women because there is a universal tradition against it. The argument from tradition is primarily a Catholic argument. They link ordination to a sacramental understanding of orders and sacraments that is connected to a particular understanding of apostolic succession. Contemporary ordinations are valid only if they can be traced through an unbroken chain all the way to the time of the apostles. Hence, an unbroken tradition is necessarily important because if someone is ordained invalidly, the chain of apostolic tradition is broken.<sup>26</sup>

The Catholic objections of the ordination of women is because to them “only a male priest can represent Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist. Specifically, presiding at the Eucharist, the priest acts ‘in the person of Christ.’ Since Jesus is male, only a male can play this representation role.”<sup>27</sup> It is frequently argued that there is a strong connection between ordination of women and affirmation of male-male and female-female sexual practice. It is believed that one leads to the other and the Church should be cautious, never to give room to such. This ‘slippery slope’ argument, however, has little logical cogency and less evidence. As noted above, many of the Anglican Communion's most theologically conservative and evangelical provinces are Africa provinces which ordain women as presbyters.

The Seventh Day Adventists (SDAs) have “debated the issue of the ordination of women to the gospel ministry for over a hundred years.” In time past, “the decision has not been in favor of women ordination.” Throughout most of the 1990s, leadership of the SDA was of the opinion that there is no

---

<sup>24</sup> Chukwuodo, *African Women in Ministry*, 14–15.

<sup>25</sup> See Agbo, *Women Ordination in Nigeria*; Chukwuodo, *African Women in Ministry*, 14-15; Anthony B.C. Chiegboka, *Women Status and Dignity in the Society and the Church: A Perspective from Galatians 3: 26-29*, 112-11; Sara Butler, “Women's Ordination: Is it Still an Issue?”

<sup>26</sup> Witts, *Icons of Christ*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> Witts, *Icons of Christ*, 203.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

“clear biblical basis” for the “support of the ordination of women.”<sup>28</sup> They asserted that

- The Bible is the standard for the practice of Christian faith both in the past, present and will continue to be our guide.
- There is a clear indication in both Old Testament and New Testament that no women were ordained.
- Christ’s model in the choosing the apostles provides the fundamental framework for ministry and its practice in the Christian Church within multicultural context of the expanding Church without introducing women’s ordination. This serves as a good example to the present day Church.<sup>29</sup>

SDA leadership recommended that since there is no biblical support for the ordination of women pastors, then the ordination of women elders should also not be considered. That implies that as from the action date, women shall no longer serve as elders. This position is held by many churches which are opposed to women’s ordination. In recent times, the Seventh Day Adventists have given room for the ministry of women, including within leadership positions. Several women have been ordained in the SDA since 2012 after the Columbia Union Conference approved the ordination of women.<sup>30</sup> The Anglican Communion, on the other hand, is still divided on this. However, all hope is not lost. The Methodist Church in Nigeria has given women acceptance in all spheres of Church leadership. The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion) may give consideration to the ordination of women in the near future.

*Egalitarianism and Women’s Ordination Debate*

In practice, the hierarchical practice described above positions women as inherently inferior to men, contrary to scriptural teaching. Within Christianity, egalitarianism is a position based on the theological view that not only are all people equal before God in their personhood but there is no gender based limitations of what functions or roles each can fulfill in the home, the Church,

---

<sup>28</sup> “The Summary of SID BRC Position on the Ordination of Women.”

<sup>29</sup> George W. Reid, “The Ordination of Women: A Review of the Principal Arguments for and against the Ordination of Women to the Gospel Ministry” (1985), 20–24. The SDA has made some adjustments to their stance on the ordination of women. The policies of the General Conference from 1990 and onwards allowed for ordination of women as church elders, employment of women as associates in pastoral care (if they were ordained as local elders), and also commissioning of women in pastoral types of ministry. In recent times, the SDA generally is not opposed to women’s ordination. The General Conference has given room for the ordination of women as they affirm being part of the global Church and needing to listen to and be in harmony with the decision of the Church at large.

<sup>30</sup> Alberto R. Timm, “Seventh Day Adventists on Women’s Ordination: A Brief Historical Overview,” 30.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

and society. Most egalitarians affirm ordination of women.<sup>31</sup> There is no valid biblical, theological, or traditional endorsement of the position to exclude women from the Gospel Ministry as ordained ministers.<sup>32</sup>

The Methodist Church and Baptist Church in Nigeria uphold this theory as women are not excluded from priestly office and ordination. They argue that God calls people to leadership roles in the Church without regard to class, gender or race and all have equal responsibility to use their gifts to obey their calling. It is very astounding the giant strides and achievements that have been recorded over the years by women in the Church and secular world. In the New Testament, not only were women the recipients of Jesus' ministry (Matt. 15:21-28; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 7:36-50; 13:10-17; John 4:7-30), but they also served Him and the disciples (Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:1-3). Some have argued that the ordination of women is not rooted in the Scripture since Jesus did not call any female among the twelve apostles. He did not ordain any man either if we are to judge based on today's understanding of ordination.

From the various definitions of ordination, one could see that those who are called by God into the pastoral ministry have the right to be ordained. Women who have the personal knowledge and evidence of the call of God on their lives have the right to get ordained after passing through the Church's discernment and ordination process. Ordination should be open to all regardless of gender as can be seen from Galatians 3:28.

### **Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

It is important at this point to uncover the reasons behind Paul's injunction to the women of Corinth to be silent. Seeing that the understanding of this passage has posed a problem to some Christians and scholars, it is necessary to investigate the meaning and message of 1 Corinthians 14:26–40 to the present Church. Is this text meant to subordinate women universally or was Paul trying to correct an error in the Corinthian assembly?

This text introduces something that not only seems unlike Paul elsewhere but also seems to contradict what he assumed in 11:4–5 — that women prayed and prophesied in the assembly. Paul may have been influenced at one point or another as a Jew born into a patriarchal society. But 1 Corinthians 14 basically deals with confusion within the Corinthian assemblies. This confusion arose

---

<sup>31</sup> Notable egalitarian biblical scholars include Linda Belleville, Michael Bird, F. F. Bruce, Gordon D. Fee, Craig S. Keener, Howard I. Marshall, Scott McKnight, Leon Morris, Carol D. Osburn, Ben Witherington III, and N. T. Wright. John Stott was broadly egalitarian and encouraged women to serve in ministry positions, but opposed women serving in certain ministry leadership positions in some contexts.

<sup>32</sup> Dei and Osei-Bonsu, "The Female Ordination Debate," 31.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuedo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

from chaotic exercise of the gift of tongues and prophecy. Paul offered guidelines for order in the worship meeting. 1 Corinthians 14:26–36 lists three groups of people who are disturbing the worship. These are as follows:

1. The prophets;
2. The speakers-in-tongues;
3. Married women who have Christian husbands in the Church. These are told: don't ask questions during the worship; don't chat during worship; ask your husbands questions at home and be silent in the church.

The bone of contention is found in verse 34. The Greek texts of this reads as follows:

αἱ γυναικερ ἐν ἡαῖρ ἐκκληζίαρ ζιγάηυζαν·  
οὐ γὰρ ἐπιηπέπειαι ἀυῆαῖρ λαεῖν, ἀλλὰ ὑποαζζέζθυζαν,  
καθῶρ καὶ ὁ νόμορ λέγει.

In English, a word-for-word gloss gives

*the women in the churches let them be silent: not indeed it is  
allowed to them to speak, but to be in submission, as also the  
law says.*

Commenting on contemporary interpreters of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 (both complementarian and egalitarian), Anna Sui Hluan has demonstrated that “it is clear that their presuppositions have influenced their interpretations.” She then argues that it is necessary for all of us to allow “the gospel to challenge one’s presuppositions” and that interpreters of Scripture “must allow the gospel to challenge those influences that shape our understanding of Scripture.”<sup>33</sup> The modern cultural readings which see in this text a biblical basis for woman’s inferiority fit well with the prevailing culture. In patriarchal cultures, women are not seen as men’s equal. The common belief in such cultures is that men are the peak of humanity, while women fall short. Today, those statements seem distasteful. This puts today’s readers in a radically different place for interpreting passages like 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. There are many ways to read 1 Corinthians 14:26–40. However, the Church should not use any text of Scripture either to affirm or negate a position on any matter, unless it explicitly speaks to the proposed position. Implicit passages and those that do not clearly silence women should not be used to formulate doctrines. There are various arguments and interpretations on 1 Corinthians 14. Some of these arguments are really subordinating to women in the ministry of the Church. Other arguments speak a refreshing word of good news to women. This section examines these various interpretations.

---

<sup>33</sup> Anna Sui Hluan, “Silence” in *Translation: 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 in Myanmar and the Development of a Critical Contextual Hermeneutic*, 203, 204, 318.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

### **1. Scribal Insertion**

In Galatians 3:28, we see the yearning of Paul for all to be free from slavery and sexism. Paul cannot call for the liberation of all in that text and suddenly shift to enslaving and subordinating women in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. Because this passage, taken at face value, seems to contradict so much of Paul's thought elsewhere in his corpus, a number of scholars have argued this passage was inserted by another writer later than Paul, possibly to conform to more conservative norms, such as might be expected in a Jewish synagogue. They also observe that in some manuscripts, verses 34–35 appear after verse 40. As a matter of fact, if verses 33b–36 are omitted (and even more so if 33b–38 are omitted), the thought moves smoothly from verse 33a to the conclusion in verses 39–40.<sup>34</sup>

### **2. Correction of Disorderliness**

It is not unreasonable to think that this passage was written to combat some kind of disorder or a particular type of speaking; if original to Paul, this could refer to a local Corinthian problem in the first century or if a later insertion could be in response to a disturbance such as Montanism, in which women had a prominent role. However, a major objection to this assumption is that the troublesome passage occurs in all the manuscripts, even in those where it is displaced; and in the more reliable manuscripts, the order is what we have in the text above. Moreover, the passage is unlike that in 1 Timothy 2:11–15, which seemingly forbids women to teach in the Church.<sup>35</sup> It is more likely that Paul himself wrote or dictated this passage, perhaps after receiving a report of the disorderly and chaotic situation in Corinth. When we reconcile his statement that women should keep silent in the churches, for they are not allowed to speak, with 1 Corinthians 11:4–5, where they pray and prophesy, we understand it

---

<sup>34</sup> George T. Montague, *First Corinthians*, 255–256; Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, one in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 217–267; Payne, "Vaticanus Distigme-obelos Symbols Marking Added Text, Including 1 Corinthians 14.34–5." Kirk R. MacGregor specifically refutes Payne in "1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 as a Pauline Quotation-Refutation Device." See also Payne's response to MacGregor, "Is 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 a Marginal Comment or a Quotation? A Response to Kirk MacGregor." Jerome Murphy-O'Connor offers an excellent review of the issues, "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians," 90–92.

<sup>35</sup> A discussion of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 is beyond the scope of this article, but I say "seemingly forbids" because the clarity of most English translations is misleading. E.g., see Linda L. Belleville, "Exegetical Fallacies in Interpreting 1 Timothy 2:11–15: Evaluating the text with contextual, lexical, grammatical, and cultural information"; Belleville, "Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11–15"; Jamin Hübner, "Revisiting the Clarity of Scripture in 1 Timothy 2:12"; Craig S. Keener, "Interpreting 1 Timothy 2:8–15"; Cynthia Long Westfall, "The Meaning of *αὐθεντέω* in 1 Timothy 2.12."

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

better. Thus, he must be referring to speaking other than praying or prophesying. It is needful to ask; what kind of speaking would that be? The sequence about asking in their meeting gives a hint — several people speaking at once, speaking words that no one could understand.<sup>36</sup>

### **3. Addressing Insubordination**

Why did Paul write to the Corinthians that women should keep silent in the Churches when he had just informed them that women prayed and prophesied in public (11:5)? What did he mean when he used the word ‘to speak’ (λαλεῖν / *laleîn*)? What relationship is there between the word ‘to speak’ and the enquiries which they were to direct to their husbands at home? The verb σιγάω (*sigáō*, ‘to keep silence’ or ‘to be silent’) was not only meant for the women but was also used with reference to tongue speakers and others in exercising their spiritual gifts. Paul’s usage of λαλέω (*laleō*), usually glossed simply as ‘speak’ in contemporary English, in context would mean disruptive chattering to the original readers (or listeners, as most of the recipients would have experienced Paul’s letters by listening to them being read aloud). This approach is also given by Hurley, who suggests that since Paul commanded the prophets to evaluate their messages to make sure no false doctrine was present, and since women were among the prophets, then a problem of subordination to men arose.<sup>37</sup> Witt explains that women are the third group of people whom Paul told to keep silent within the short space between 14:28 and 14:34.<sup>38</sup> Paul makes use of the same word he used on tongue speakers as he does about women.<sup>39</sup>

### **4. Inappropriate Evaluation of Prophetic Utterance**

Seemingly after the prophets spoke; other prophets would judge the utterance. If this position is correct, then women were disallowed this opportunity, for this would put them over the male prophets. One might counter that this would be in contradiction to 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, where Paul allowed women to pray and prophesy as long as their heads were covered. But in that passage the women were speaking divine utterances, whereas in 14:33b–36 they were not. Hurley opines that those who spoke under divine control were not expressing their own authority and so were not in violation of the Law. So then any public speaking other than a divine utterance would be in violation of Paul’s prohibition in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36.<sup>40</sup> From the various interpretations and arguments on the Pauline injunction to the Church and women, one

---

<sup>36</sup> Montague, *First Corinthians*, 255–256.

<sup>37</sup> Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspectives*, 112–113.

<sup>38</sup> Witt, *Icons of Christ*, 149–150.

<sup>39</sup> Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspectives*, 201.

<sup>40</sup> Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspectives*, 127–128.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

could say that Paul never intended to silence women but to caution those who were disorderly in the Church.

### **5. Quotation-Refutation Device**

Alternatively, perhaps Paul is quoting and correcting a Corinthian approach to women. It is well-established that Paul at times will quote something his interlocutors have previously written and then give a refutation of their claim. In at least five other passages of 1 Corinthians (6:12–13; 7:1–2; 8:1, 8; 10:23), “Paul quotes a position from the Corinthians’ letter with which he disagrees and then refutes it.”<sup>41</sup> Peppiatt and MacGregor have independently argued that verses 14:33b–35 represent the incorrect position of the Corinthians and verses 36–38 are Paul’s rebuke of their error.<sup>42</sup> If, as they have argued, this is another example of Paul correcting the faulty views of the recipients of his letter, then this

reveals a great sense of harmony and coherence in this section, as well as demonstrating how it fits in with the letter as a whole. Not only does it rescue Paul from either gross misogyny or just strange and contradictory thinking, but it also gives us the key to understanding how 1 Corinthians 11–14 is entirely consistent with Paul’s theology, with his views on the mutuality of relations between men and women expressed elsewhere, with his concern to look after the poor and the marginalized, and with his desire that all should be done decently and in order, which for Paul means with due consideration and care for the entire congregation.<sup>43</sup>

### **6. New Interpretations**

In recent times, no longer does everything revolve around men. Coinciding with this shift, new interpretations of 1 Corinthians 14:26–40 have emerged. The best interpretations should make sense to both current readers and provide insight into how the original audience would have understood it. It’s possible that Paul was addressing a specific local issue or applying a timeless principle to a local context in his writing to the Corinthians. Since many specific details about the Church in Corinth are no longer known, it is important to consider how Paul’s original audience would have perceived his message, even if it seems confusing to later readers. Perhaps the words silencing women were not

---

<sup>41</sup> MacGregor, “1 Corinthians 14:33b–38,” 25.

<sup>42</sup> MacGregor, “1 Corinthians 14:33b–38;” Peppiatt, *Women and Worship at Corinth*. Peppiatt argues throughout the book that “Paul was using a strategy throughout 1 Corinthians 11–14 where he cites his opponents views from their letter . . . in order to refute them” and does so “more than had previously been acknowledged,” 4.

<sup>43</sup> Peppiatt, *Women and Worship at Corinth*, 135.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

originally part of the letter.<sup>44</sup> Alternatively, as noted above, the Corinthians were silencing women and Paul was correcting that practice. Again, either of these makes Paul's actual letter intelligible to the Corinthians, and the cultural bias against women explains why a scribe felt the need to add words commanding their silence or why it was forgotten that Paul was arguing against the silencing of women.

Hence, proper exegesis and liberation theology play significant roles in the text to liberate the Church from misinterpretation of Bible text and re-interpreting to reflect God's plan of liberating humanity. "Theology of liberation attempts to reflect on the experience and meaning of faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and to build a new society."<sup>45</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:26–40 is centred on orderliness. Paul enjoins the Corinthian Church to be orderly in the use of spiritual gifts. The gifts of the Spirit are not meant for public show but to edify the body of Christ. Based on this, he set out rules that should govern worshippers when they gather for worship which this study paraphrased thus:

*Paul expected those exercising their spiritual gifts to be orderly.*

*Do not all speak at once.*

*Utterances should be one at a time.*

*As one speaks, the other should keep silent.*

*One should interpret.*

*If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet.*

*Two or three prophets should speak, and let others judge.*

*If anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.*

*The gifts of the Spirit are not for show off or personal aggrandizement but for the edification of the Church.*

1 Corinthians 14:26–40 speaks volumes about Paul's intention for women when compared to other texts such as: Galatians 3:28 which says there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female; for you are all one in Christ, Romans 16:1–15 gives a list of women whom Paul commended and referred to as co-workers, and in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, Paul advised the women to cover their head when praying or prophesying. These texts give us a clue that Paul was only trying to correct anomalies in the Corinthian Church. Examining the entire corpus of Paul's writings reveals that "Paul was a proponent of women in ministries, spreading the good news of equality throughout the Empire. He

---

<sup>44</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul*, 74.

<sup>45</sup> Letty M. Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective — A Theology*, 20.



Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

modelled and supported equitable practices. He led the way for establishing a new kind of community where all were empowered to lead in God's Church.<sup>46</sup>

### **Background and Review of 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

A brief background of Corinth helps us to understand Paul and the Church in Corinth better. Contrarily to popular opinion, Paul's adherence to gender equity aligns with the gospel of freedom that he champions and preaches. The apostle is seen by many feminists as one who hates women, or at least as one who accepts their supposed inferiority. Others have perceived him to have been one attracted to women.

The city of Corinth was located on a narrow strip of land, called an isthmus. This isthmus connected Peloponnesus with Greece. Corinth was about 40 miles (64 kilometers) west of Athens; it was the capital of the province of Achaia with a population of 500,000. In the first century, Corinth was the crossroads of the commercial world. It had two seaports, one on each side of the narrow isthmus. Frequently, instead of sailing all the way around the landmass, ships would have their cargo carried overland from the Aegean Sea to the Gulf of Corinth.<sup>47</sup> The importance of Corinth as a city was its geography. It was situated between the harbours of Lechaion on the North and Cenchreae on the South-East. The location provided Corinth with a busy emporium. Corinth had numerous temples, shrines and theatres.<sup>48</sup>

Because of the commercial aspect of the city, Corinth had a lot of money and low morals. The city was known for its sensual pleasure. Even to the pagan world, Corinth was known for its moral corruption, so much so that in classical Greek κορινθιάζω (*korinthiázō* — literally, 'to behave like a Corinthian') came to represent gross immorality and drunken debauchery; in the middle voice (κορινθιάζομαι / *korinthiázomai*) the verb meant "to visit prostitutes."<sup>49</sup> On the highest hill of the city stood the temple of the Greek goddess Aphrodite. A thousand sacred prostitutes worked from this temple satisfying the sensual needs of the devotees. This background reveals why the Corinthian Church was faced with a lot of issues bordering on moral values to battle with which also informed the purpose of the letters the apostle Paul wrote to them. The inhabitants of Corinth with their Corinthian lifestyle came into the Church and were displaying their permissive lifestyles.

---

<sup>46</sup> Grace May, "Appreciating how the Apostle Paul Champions Women and Men in Church Leadership," 94.

<sup>47</sup> Danny McCain, *Notes on New Testament Introduction*, 217.

<sup>48</sup> Matthew R. Malcom, *The World of 1 Corinthians: An Annotated, Visual and Literary Source-Commentary*, xix.

<sup>49</sup> BrillDAG, s.v. "κορινθιάζω."

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

Paul addresses the problem of disorderliness in the worship assembly by saying in verse 35, “If they want to inquire about something, let them ask their own husbands at home” (NIV-1984). This implies that the problem in Corinth is concerning the asking of questions with a desire to learn something says Blomberg. The word translated as “inquire” in this verse (in the NIV) is *μανθάνω* (*manthánō*), which is usually translated as *learn*. Blomberg suggests that “perhaps the largely uneducated women of that day” who had a legitimate desire to *learn* “were interrupting proceedings with irrelevant questions that would be better dealt with in their homes.”<sup>50</sup> Similarly Belleville states that the “their fault was not in the asking per se but in the inappropriate setting for their questions.”<sup>51</sup> Keener advocates this as the primary problem — the women were speaking up, asking questions to learn what was going on during the prophecies or the Scripture exposition in church. They were also interrupting the Scripture exposition with questions. This would have caused an affront to more conservative men or visitors to the church, and it would have also caused a disturbance to the service due to the nature of the questions.<sup>52</sup> The major concern of Paul was to discourage both men and women from using their freedom in Christ as a license to behave indecently in the Church. This is the reason he rebuked the women who probably were calling out their questions across the Christian assembly.

### **Female Leadership Debate: Goddesses and Priestesses in Igbo Traditional Religion**

It is relevant to state that in the traditional African society, women are not expected to play the roles of men. Generally, there are societal expectations associated with being male or female. Women are expected, traditionally in the African society to handle household chores and care giving. Based on this, one would have assumed that women cannot fit into the position of becoming priests. Women play the role of priestess in some parts of Africa, including in my Igbo tribe. The Igbo are found in the southeastern part of Nigeria.<sup>53</sup> In the

---

<sup>50</sup> Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 280.

<sup>51</sup> Linda L. Belleville, *Women Leaders and the Church: Three Crucial Questions*, 161.

<sup>52</sup> Keener, *Paul, Women and Wives*, 71–72.

<sup>53</sup> The Igbo speaking people share the same belief system no matter their location. The Igbos believe strongly in the Supreme Being — *Chi Ukwu* or *Chukwu*, both of which can be translated as ‘God Almighty.’ *Chi Ukwu* is also called *Chineke* (the Creator). John Mbiti reports that *Chukwu* (though he gives the spelling *Chuku*) “is derived from words (*Chi* and *uku*) that mean ‘the Great Spirit’” and that “the Igbo believe God to be ‘the Great First Cause’, who continues to create more people and without whom they cannot be formed (born).” Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 50, 57. Many Igbos are Christians, but before the introduction of Christianity, they practiced *Odinala* (Igbo Traditional Religion).

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

Igbo context, priestesses are authorized to perform sacred religious rites, especially as a mediatory agent between humans and deities. They also have the authority or power to administer religious rites; in particular, rites of sacrifice to, and propitiation of, a deity or deities. Their office or position is the priesthood, a term which also may apply to such persons collectively.<sup>54</sup> Historically, women served in these capacities as diviner, healer and priestess comfortably in the precolonial era before the inception of Christianity. However, these practices were challenged by the Church and seen as paganism, thereby producing a negative stereotype.

The goddesses are believed to exert great influence in the affairs of human beings.

In African societies, deities, the most powerful of whom is the Great Creator God, serve as the true political heads or spiritual monarchs of their communities. Next in rank to God are the lesser gods and goddesses. Personifications of natural phenomena, the most influential are gendered females, deities in charge of the waters and the land. These deities are the moral judges of conduct and wield power indiscriminately. I center the leadership of (fe)male gendered spiritual forces such as goddesses, oracles, female medicines, and their human helpers (e.g., priestesses, diviners, spirit mediums, and prophetesses)—the real rulers of African kingdoms, paramount, towns, and communities.

In Igbo culture, women play a vital role in religious worship but are traditionally not permitted to enter the shrine. However, they can serve as priestesses for minor deities, such as the Ogbanje priestess, who represents the *chi* or personal spirit for women.

On 15 August 2023, in the Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu State, I was privileged to meet a beautiful woman who serves as *Eze-nwanyi* ('Priestess' or 'Queen mother'). She was not ashamed to identify herself as such, not minding how society and Christians look at the vocation. By Christians and Muslims, those who occupy the position of *Eze-nwanyi* are seen as idol worshippers and pagans. She bragged about her position as a worshipper and servant of the water goddess. According to her, she was chosen by the water goddess "mamiwater" (water spirit) to serve. In my interaction with her, she disclosed to me that she is serving God through the smaller deities he created. Those who have ailments, hard luck, and different challenges come to her to consult spirits and get quick answers to their problems. Not only do the spirits tell her the cause of the problems of her clients, she says, but they also give her a solution to the problem.

---

<sup>54</sup> Gladys I. Udechukwu, "Position of Women in Igbo Traditional Religion," 88.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

This is a confirmation to Achebe's assertion that spirit mediums are believed to be embodiments of the spirits or the ancestors. It is a form of possession in which a person serves as an intermediary between the gods and the society.<sup>55</sup> This affirms that women occupy high ranking leadership positions even concerning spiritual matters. According to Achebe, "spirit medium societies provide women with the most direct avenues for active participation in politics and religious life. Spirit mediums can achieve measures of power that place them above men and mortals."<sup>56</sup>

We have complementarian (i.e., hierarchical) views among Igbo regarding the roles of priestesses in Igboland. Of this complementarian view, Udechukwu cites an informant who asserted that

a woman cannot handle or be the chief priestess of a family or village deity. It is said in Igbo "Agwu anaghi ama nwaanyi" (a woman cannot be a deity) which means that an oracle cannot suggest a woman as a legitimate person to handle "Isi Agwu" (the head deity). A woman cannot lead public worship in the presence of men. The "Isi Mmoo" (the spirit head) is meant for a man.<sup>57</sup>

When we compare the views concerning women as ministers in Christianity and women occupying spiritual positions in Igboland, we can see a correlation. Women occupy the position of *Eze-nwanyi* ('priestess'), which is a spiritual leadership position. They are recognized in most Igbo communities. There are still pockets of resistance against women taking up leadership positions in Igbo Traditional Religion and in the Church. Women are restricted from being in charge of the *ofo* ('staff') which stands for peace and justice. They cannot be in charge of the *obi* ('a space at the entrance of a compound where guests are welcomed').<sup>58</sup>

Significantly, the existence of goddesses and priestesses show that women are recognized in Igbo Traditional Religion. This could be a potential correlation with current-day policies and practices supporting gender balance, and Christian ethical standards. More teachings and enlightenment ought to be carried out because my observation as a leader in the Church shows that women are more in number in the Church and contribute more in the development of the Church and so their ordination and full participation in leadership should be encouraged.

---

<sup>55</sup> Achebe, *Female Monarchs and Merchant Queens in Africa*, 35.

<sup>56</sup> Achebe, *Female Monarchs and Merchant Queens in Africa*, 36.

<sup>57</sup> Udechukwu, "Position of Women," 89; citing p. 20 of an interview with U. Ikeokwu.

<sup>58</sup> The *obi* is a connection point in every Igbo home.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

## **Conclusion**

Women are enjoined in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 to be orderly in the Church and not participate in a way that leads to confusion and disruption. Exegesis of the text shows that it is not a blanket ban on their active participation in the worship assembly. Women's contributions to Church growth and development in different denominations through the women's ministry is an affirmation that the ordination of women will bring about more records of progress. Paul's injunction to women in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 should not be used to silence women since Paul had earlier said women prayed and prophesied in 1 Corinthians 11. It is clear looking at the pericope that the church in 1 Corinthians 14 was disorderly. Paul cautioned both men and women to exercise their spiritual gifts in such a way that promotes decorum. Liberation theology is a call to all despite gender, ethnicity, or nationality to serve God with an open mind and use the gifts bestowed by God to serve the people. God has liberated all through the death and resurrection of his son Jesus.

Paul was addressing a specific situation rather than making a general prohibition on women speaking in the Church. He intended to prohibit disruptive and disrespectful questions and comments that were observed in Corinthian meetings. These particular practices were coming from the women. Just as Paul told the disorderly tongue speakers and prophets to control themselves because God is not a God of disorder, he also told the women to control themselves because the law teaches self-control. If they want to learn anything, they can ask questions somewhere else. Only one person should speak at a time. Everyone else, whether male or female should be quiet for it is disgraceful for people in the audience to be talking while another is speaking to the group. Taking stance with the egalitarians, women can serve in all forms of Church leadership. As Cynthia Long Westfall has demonstrated,

women should interpret and apply instructions to all believers with the same hermeneutics as men. The passages about determining the function of each believer in the church and the call to ministry are general instructions for all believers. The priesthood of the believer applies to all believers, so that the function, race, social status, physical condition, and gender of priests in the Old Testament are not requirements or prerequisites for any ministry in the Christian community. The Holy Spirit determines who gets what gift; a theological system that filters and restricts the gifts for a given group compromises the authority of the Holy Spirit.<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ*, 242.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

Men and women are to diligently and whole heartedly develop their spiritual gifts for the edification of the Church and societal development.

***Recommendations***

As Paul advised, there should be orderliness in the Church. The local assembly should not be chaotic in the exercise of spiritual gifts. Women called to serve or allowed to serve should bring out their best and make an impact. The Church and society need more women to contribute to societal development and building of lives.

Ordination of women will enhance Church growth and enable women clergy to lead change in the society. It will also allow female voices to be heard concerning the challenges women face in different cultures.

Women are resilient and highly productive in any project they undertake. Therefore, the ordination of women is crucial in the Church based on the significant contributions they have made as educators, caregivers, counselors, prayer leaders, and more. This indicates that when given the opportunity, they can achieve even more.

Providing women with opportunities in leadership would offer additional personnel, especially in areas experiencing a shortage of ministers. In some parts of the country where there are few or no men in the Church, women can take on leadership roles. Therefore, there should be more openness to having women serve as pastors.

**Bibliography**

- ACHEBE, Nwando. "Igbo Goddesses and the Priests and Male Priestesses who serve them." Chapter 2 in *Igbo in the Atlantic World: Origins and Diasporic Destinations*, edited by Toyin Falola and Raphael Chijioko Njoku, 28–45. Bloomington, Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 2016.
- . *Female Monarchs and Merchant Queens in Africa*. Ohio Short Histories of Africa. Athens, Ohio, USA: Ohio University Press, 2020.
- AGBO, Timothy. *Women Ordination in Nigeria: An Ecclesiological Analysis*. Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press, 2003.
- AYENI, Sade Oluwakemi. "Women in the Nigerian Church: A Study of the Akoko Anglican Diocese." *Anglican and Episcopal History* 92, no. 3 (2023): 427–244. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27241155>
- BELLEVILLE, Linda L. "Exegetical Fallacies in Interpreting 1 Timothy 2:11–15: Evaluating the text with contextual, lexical, grammatical, and cultural information." *Priscilla Papers* 17, no. 3 (2003): 3–11. PDF link to entire issue: [https://www.cbeinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Silence\\_Summer-2003-Volume-17-Number-](https://www.cbeinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Silence_Summer-2003-Volume-17-Number-)

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

- 3\_PP17.3.pdf; link to article in html format:  
<https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/exegetical-fallacies-interpreting-1-timothy-211-15/>
- . “Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11-15.” Chapter 12 in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, edited by Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, with Gordon D. Fee, 205–223. 2nd edition. Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: IVP Academic, 2005.
- . “Teaching and Usurping Authority: 1 Timothy 2:11-15.” Chapter 11 in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural & Practical Perspectives*, edited by Ronald W. Pierce and Cynthia Long Westfall, with Christa L. McKirland, 205–227. 3rd edition. Downers Grove, Illinois, USA: IVP Academic, 2021.
- . *Women Leaders and the Church: Three Crucial Questions*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Books, 1999.
- BLOMBERG, Craig L. *1 Corinthians*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, 1994.
- BUTLER, Sara. “Women’s Ordination: Is it Still an Issue?” Arch Diocese of New York.<sup>60</sup> 7 March 2007. Archived at Pontificio Consiglio per i Laici [Italian: ‘Pontifical Council for the Laity’], <https://www.laici.va/content/dam/laici/documenti/donna/teologia/english/womens-ordination-still-an-issue.pdf>
- CHIEGBOKA, Anthony B. C. *Women Status and Dignity in the Society and the Church: A Perspective from Galatians 3:26–29*. Enugu, Nigeria: Pearl Functions Limited, 1997.
- CHIRWA, Frank B. *Mission in Progress: The Developing Role of Women in the Church: An SDA Perspective from Malawi*. Mzuzu, Malawi: Mzuni Press, 2020.
- CHUKWUODO, Mercy U. *African Women in Ministry, The Nigerian Experience: Perspectives from 1 Corinthians 14:26–40*. Enugu, Nigeria: Rabboni Publishers, 2019.
- . “The Place of Women in the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion): Perspectives from 1 Corinthians 14:26-40.” PhD Dissertation, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria, 2018. <https://phd-dissertations.unizik.edu.ng/onepaper.php?p=459>
- DEI, Daniel, and Robert OSEI-BONSU. “The Female Ordination Debate: Theological Reflections.” *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry* 11, no. 1 (2015): 31–62. <https://dx.doi.org/10.21806/aamm.2015.11.02>

---

<sup>60</sup> As of 20 August 2023, this paper was still available at the Arch Diocese’s website at [www.archny.org/seminary/st-josephs-seminary-dunwoodie/administration/sister-sara-butler/](http://www.archny.org/seminary/st-josephs-seminary-dunwoodie/administration/sister-sara-butler/), but that link is now defunct.

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuodo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

- EDWARDS, Bob. *Let My People Go: A Call to End the Oppression of Women in the Church*. Charleston, South Carolina, USA: Createspace, 2011.
- GRUDEM, Wayne. *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth: An Analysis of 118 Disputed Questions*. Sisters, Oregon, USA: Multnomah, 2004; reprint: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005.
- GILES, Kevin. “Book Review: Wayne Grudem’s *Evangelical Feminism*.” CBE International, 31 July 2008, <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/book-review-wayne-grudems-evangelical-feminism/>
- HLUAN, Anna Sui. “Silence” in Translation: 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 in Myanmar and the Development of a Critical Contextual Hermeneutic. Carlisle, Cambria, UK: Langham Monographs, 2022.
- HODGSON, Dorothy L. *The Church of Women: Gendered Encounters Between Maasai and Missionaries*. Bloomington, Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- HÜBNER, Jamin. “Revisiting the Clarity of Scripture in 1 Timothy 2:12.” *Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society* 59, no. 1 (2016): 99–117.
- HURLEY, James B. *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspectives*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1981.
- JAMES, Nancy Carol. *The Developing Schism within the Episcopal Church: 1960–2010: Social Justice, Ordination of Women Charismatics, Homosexuality, Extra-territorial Bishops; etc.* Lewiston, New York, USA: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010.
- KASSIAN, Mary A. *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism with the Church*. Wheaton, Illinois, USA: Crossway Books, 1992.
- KEENER, S. Craig. “Interpreting 1 Timothy 2:8–15.” *Priscilla Papers* 12, no. 3 (1998): 11–13. PDF link to entire issue: <https://www.cbeinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Summer-1998-Volume-12-Number-3-Paul-PP12.3.pdf>; link to article in html format: <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/interpreting-1-timothy-28-15/>
- . *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women’s Ministry in the Letters of Paul*, Peabody, Massachusetts, USA: Hendrickson, 1992.
- KNIGHT, George W., III. *The New Testament Teaching on the Role Relationship of Men and Women*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker, 1977.
- KNOLL, Benjamin. “Women’s Ordination in the Anglican Communion: the Importance of Religious, Economic, and Political Contexts.” *Religion in Public*. 25 January 2021. <https://religioninpublic.blog/2021/01/25/womens-ordination-in-the-anglican-communion-the-importance-of-religious-economic-and-political-contexts/>



Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuedo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

- KRASS, A. C. *Applied Theology 1: 'Go . . . And Make Disciples.'* TEF Study Guide 9. London: SPCK, 1974.
- MALCOM, R. Matthew. *The World of 1 Corinthians: An Annotated, Visual and Literary Source-Commentary.* Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster, 2012.
- MAY, Grace. "Appreciating How the Apostle Paul Champions Women and Men in Church Leadership." Chapter 7 in *The Quest for Gender Equity in Leadership: Biblical Teachings on Gender Equity and Illustrations of Transformation in Africa*, edited by Keumju Jewel Hyun and Diphus C. Chemorion, 77–95. Foreword by Joseph D. Galgalo. House of Prisca & Aquila Series. Eugene, Oregon, USA: Wipf & Stock, 2016.
- MBITI, John S. *Concepts of God in Africa.* 2nd edition. Foreword by Jesse N. K. Mugambi. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2012.
- McCain, Danny. *Notes on New Testament Introduction.* Bukuru, Nigeria: Africa Christian Textbooks, 2005.
- MACGREGOR, Kirk R. "1 Corinthians 14:33b–38 as a Pauline Quotation-Refutation Device." *Priscilla Papers* 32, no. 1 (2018): 23–28. <https://www.cbeinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Pauline-Quotation-Refutation-Device-PP321.pdf>
- MONTANARI, Franco. *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek.* Edited by Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder. Leiden: Brill, 2015. (Abbreviated BrillDAG)
- MOMBO, Esther. "The Ordination of Women in Africa: A Historical Perspective." Chapter 9 in *Women and Ordination in the Christian Churches: International Perspectives*, edited by Ian Jones, Janet Wootton, and Kirsty Thorpe, 123–143. T& T Clark Theology. London: T&T Clark, 2008.
- MONTAGUE, George T. *First Corinthians.* Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Academic, 2011.
- MURPHY-O'CONNOR, Jerome. "Interpolations in 1 Corinthians." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1986): 81–94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43719287>
- NZWILI, Fredrick. "Africa's six Anglican women bishops meet and issue call to combat Africa's 'triple threat'." Religion News Service. 19 January 2024. <https://religionnews.com/2024/01/19/africas-six-anglican-women-bishops-meet-and-issue-call-to-combat-africas-triple-threat/>
- ODOGWU, Odogwu Emeka. "Anglican Archbishop Okays Women's Ordination to the Diaconate." *Daily Champion* (Lagos newspaper). 8 June 2010. Reprint: World-Wide Religious News, <https://wwrn.org/articles/33610/>
- OKANLAWON, Samuel Oluwatosin. "Galatians 3:28: a Vision for Partnership." In *Co-Workers and Co-Leaders: Women and Men Partnering for God's Work*, edited by Amanda Jackson and Peirong Lin, 35–46. The WEA Global Issues Series. Bonn, Germany: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2021.

**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

- OKOLL, Anuli B., and Lawrence OKWUOSA. “The Role of Christianity in Gender Issues and Development in Nigeria.” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 4 (2020): Article #6007, 8 pages.  
<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.6007>
- PAYNE, Philip B. *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Zondervan, 2009.
- . “Vaticanus Distigme-obelos Symbols Marking Added Text, Including 1 Corinthians 14.34–5.” *New Testament Studies* 63, no. 4 (2017): 604–625.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688517000121>
- PEPPIATT, Lucy. *Women and Worship at Corinth: Paul’s Rhetorical Arguments in 1 Corinthians*. Foreword by Douglas Campbell. Eugene, Oregon, USA: Cascade Books, 2015.
- PETERSEN, Kirk. “Province of Central Africa Approves Ordination of Women.” *The Living Church*. 7 November 2023. <https://livingchurch.org/news/province-of-central-africa-approves-ordination-of-women/>
- REID, W. George. “The Ordination of Women: A Review of the Principal Arguments for and against the Ordination of Women to the Gospel Ministry.” Unpublished white paper, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (Adventist Archives), January 1985. <https://www.adventistarchives.org/the-ordination-of-women-a-review-of-the-principal-arguments.pdf>
- RUSSELL, Letty M. *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective — A Theology*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974.
- “The Summary of SID BRC Position on the Ordination of Women.” Seventh Day Adventist Church, Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (Adventist Archives), n.d., <https://www.adventistarchives.org/brc-southern-africa-indian-ocean-division-presentation.pdf>
- THOMAS, Hilfah F., and Rosemary Skinner KELLER, eds. *Women in New Worlds: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition*. Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Abingdon Press, 1982.
- TIMM, Alberto R. “Seventh Day Adventists on Women’s Ordination: A Brief Historical Overview.” Unpublished paper submitted to the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, Columbia, Maryland, 21–25 January 2014. Seventh Day Adventist Church, Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (Adventist Archives), <https://www.adventistarchives.org/seventh-day-adventists-on-womens-ordination-a-brief-historical-overview.pdf>
- UDECHUKWU, Gladys I. “Position of Women in Igbo Traditional Religion.” *Journal of Linguistics, Language and Culture* 4 (2017): 86–101.  
<https://journals.ezenwaohaetorc.org/index.php/JoLLC/article/view/006-4-1-2017>

Mercy Uwaezuoke Chukwuedo  
**Women, Leadership, and Ordination in the Anglican Church in Nigeria:  
Debating 1 Corinthians 14:26–40**

- WESTFALL, Cynthia Long. “The Meaning of ἀθεντέω in 1 Timothy 2.12.”  
*Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism* 10 (2014): 138–173.  
[http://www.jgrchj.net/volume10/JGRChJ10-7\\_Westfall.pdf](http://www.jgrchj.net/volume10/JGRChJ10-7_Westfall.pdf)
- . *Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostle’s Vision for Men and Women in Christ*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA: Baker Academic, 2016.
- WITTS, William G. *Icons of Christ: A Biblical and Systematic Theology for Women’s Ordination*, Waco, Texas, USA: Baylor University, 2020.