

WOMEN, SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE BIBLE IN NKHOMA SYNOD (MALAWI)¹

Part II

Winston R Kawale
Bible Society of Malawi, Blantyre
Department of Old and New Testament
Stellenbosch University

Abstract

This second article investigates the biblical evidence on women participation in religio-social transformation in ancient Israel. This research shows that there is overwhelming Biblical evidence that women fully participated in religio-social transformation in Ancient Israel and in the early Church. After critical analysis of the Biblical concept of gender, it has been established that Biblical gender theology is not one of equality but rather of participation or partnership.

1. Introduction

In our discussion in the first article we looked at both sides of the question, i.e. women participation and women non-participation in social transformation in Nkhoma Synod. In this article we will do the same with our biblical investigation. In Sections 2-3 we will see whether or not the Biblical texts show that women participated in social transformation in the ancient Israelite society. Section 4 discusses the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35 and 1 Timothy 2: 11-14. Section 5 discusses the Biblical theology of Gender.

2. Biblical evidence on women participation in social transformation

2.1 No women participation

There are a number of texts which seem to endorse the exclusion of women from taking active roles in social transformation activities. In this section we shall highlight some of these.

Biblical texts which are negative towards women

Nkhoma Synod uses biblical texts to justify their decisions to bar women from participating in some social and religious services. A decision to bar women from preaching is said to be validated by 1 Tim 2:11-14, which says, "A woman should learn in quietness... I do not permit a woman to teach.... She must be silent" and 1 Cor 14:34-35, which says "women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak.... If they should want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."

In 1 Cor 14 and 1 Tim 2, women are barred from holding leadership positions in the church. 1 Cor 14:3-4 says: "Women should be in submission". 1 Tim 2:12 says: "I do not permit a woman to have authority over a man ... For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived, it was the woman who was deceived".

1. The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation: Social Sciences and Humanities towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the National Research Foundation.

Furthermore, the Biblical texts are said to be male-centered. Schneider (1989) says, "There can no longer be any doubt the Bible is androcentric". Agreeing with this view, Masenya (1995:194) adds: "... in studying any biblical texts ... be watchful ... of more subtle androcentrism ...". One may not reject these views outright in view of many texts where God is depicted a male figure. For example the Hebrew divine names אל and אלהי are grammatically masculine. The verbs, pronouns and adjectives that are constructed together with these divine names are also grammatically masculine (Gen 1:27, Is 19:4; Kawale 1998a:200; Sarna 1989:5; Sperling 1987:12; Ringgren 1974:272). In almost all biblical texts the divine names are constructed with the pronoun "He" and not "She".

There are these androcentric divine names of God because the Bible was written by male authors (Masenya 1995:194). However, this androcentric language has resulted in a situation where women have either been demonised or marginalized or rendered invisible (Masenya 1995:193; Schneider 1989:4). Therefore, some scholars regard the Bible as not only being androcentric, it is also regarded as patriarchal in the sense that it stresses male dominance and female subordination (Buckner 1997:367,447; Masenya 1994:66). They say that women are at the bottom of the patriarchal pyramid and are marginalized (Masenya 1997:440, 445).

These sentiments are expressed because the Bible is said to be a male dominated or "male centered" book (Schneider 1989:4). This fact may not be denied. The majority of the main characters of the Biblical stories are men. The majority of the Kings and prophets were men.

2.2. Full women participation

2.2.1 Biblical texts which vindicate the dignity of women

Although there are some texts in the Bible which dehumanise women, there are also texts, which ascribe honour and dignity towards women. Prov 12:4 praises women as "good wives". Prov 11:6 speaks of women as the crown of their husbands. The adjective rendered "gracious" is based on the Hebrew יָרַח term, which implies a sense of dignity (Domeris 1995:95).

In the book of Proverbs, woman imagery reflects the actual life experiences of women in ancient Israel (Efthimiadis 1999:47). In Prov 29:5 the word "mother" is used as a generic term for parents. Ps 45 portrays various categories of women that include kings daughters, virgins, and queens. These women are referred to as "honourable women" (Ps 45:9). In an attempt to protect the dignity of women in Pss 68, 94, 113, 146 we read statements which encourage people to defend the widows and barren women. All this suggests that in ancient Israel women were regarded very highly.

Female imagery also occurs in relation to cities, towns, and nations in that they nurture their inhabitants like mothers. The cities of Zion (Pss 9:14; 48:11; 97:8; 50:2), Tyre (Ps 45:12) and Babylon (Ps 137:8-9) are described in feminine terms. The important and powerful nation of Egypt is identified as the woman Rahab (Ps 87:4; 89:10). As Efthimiades (1999:44) notes, the identification of Zion as woman is positive in the sense that the female figure is defined as an object of God's love. All these female imageries affirm that Ancient Israel viewed women in high regard.

Furthermore, in the Book of Proverbs, two women have been symbolically portrayed. Woman Wisdom is depicted as a good woman and Woman Folly as the bad woman (Gous 1996:39). Woman Wisdom is depicted as a teacher of wisdom (Prov 7:21; 31:26) who speaks and acts wisely or with wisdom (Prov 31:10-31). The Book of Proverbs describes Woman Wisdom as trustworthy and God fearing. This woman is depicted as an

example for other women to follow as well as a role model for men (Gous 1996:39). Whereas generally it was men who were expected to be revered in the gatherings at the city gates, in Proverbs it is Woman Wisdom who is praised at the city gates where she cares for the poor and speaks with wisdom (Prov 20:26, 31:31). Her husband plays no active part in any of her achievements but he sits at the city gates praising her and being praised because of her (Prov 31:10-31, Gous 1996:35,37).

By contrast, Woman Folly is outgoing and shrewd in that she is a misleading, harmful and an adulterous woman (Prov 31:20,26,31). The Book of Proverbs has a negative description of Woman Folly. However, Woman Folly is not condemned. Rather, Woman Folly is religious in the sense that she paid her vows and that she is honest in that she reveals the absence of her husband (Domeris 1995:98). As Domeris (1995:98) observes, Woman Folly is a temptress but not a demon, she is seducer but not Satan. She is described negatively to teach the reader that women are diligent. They can be wiser than some men. Do not take women for granted, they need to be carefully evaluated because they can be cleverer than some men. Some men can act foolishly. It is the foolish young man who is condemned because he falls into her trap (Domeris 1995:98).

Two more great women need to be mentioned. In many societies the general perception is that men are always expected to be wise. However, in the Book of Ruth, we have a contrast between dynamic women and frail men (Gous 1996:48). Men are depicted as apathetic and inactive. They are sickly and unable to withstand the freshness of life so that all men die leaving women to cope with life all alone. Even the man Boaz is just a supporting actor who recedes after having played his role. But the woman Ruth, by whose name the Book is known, is described as the *אִשְׁתּוֹ חַיִּל* (virtuous woman) par excellence (Gous 1996:48). She is a dynamic and strong woman. She is depicted as an active protagonist. Ruth is strong and able to withstand the freshness of life so that while all men die, she survives all the ordeals to cope with life all alone. It is not surprising that Ruth is listed third among the five women in the genealogy of Jesus (Mat 1:1-16).

Similarly, in the Book of Esther, Esther is a heroine. When no man could do anything to save the Jews it was Esther who did it. She was brave and even willing to sacrifice her life saying "... if I perish I perish" (Est 4:17). This was a very remarkable event which made the Israelites decide to hold the annual celebrations known as Purim. At the celebration of Purim the Book of Esther is read with the purpose of assuring the people about the ultimate deliverance and service of a woman who kept nationalistic hopes alive (Baldwin 1970:414).

The fact that these two books, which bear the names of women, Ruth and Esther, entered the canon of the Jewish Holy Book, signifies that women were regarded highly in ancient Israel.

2.2.2 Divine feminine traits and the dignity of women

Apart from describing women in a positive manner in order to portray the dignity of women the Bible also describes God in a feminine manner in order to uplift the dignity of women. It was observed above that in many cases the Bible portrays God as a Male Figure. However, notwithstanding the androcentricity of the Bible, a closer look at some biblical texts reveals that God is also depicted as a Female Being.

There are traditionally female traits that are metaphorically attributed or ascribed to God. For example, in some texts the divine name Yahweh is described in female anatomical forms (Efthimiades 1999:38-49). Yahweh is depicted as a "Midwife" who gave birth to the psalmist (Ps 22:9; 71:6) and as a "Mother" who nurtured or raised the psalmist (Pss 131; 139). In Isaiah 66:13 Yahweh is portrayed as a "Mother" who

comforts Her children. Unlike human mothers who may forsake their children, Yahweh is described as a Mother who will never forget Her children (Is 49:15). Yahweh is also depicted as a “Mother-hen” who protects the chickens from danger and comforts them (Ps 17:3; 36:7; 7:16; 3:7; 91:4; Mt 23:37; Lk 13:34; Efthimiades 1999:39).

2.2.3 Women participation in secular matters

The Biblical texts show that women took part in many social activities. In ancient Israel (e.g. 1 Kgs 21:1-16 and Prov. 7:17; 16:31; 22; 31), as well as in the early church (e.g. Acts 9:36-39; 16:14 and Lk 8:1-3), women were involved in business. Women are sometimes called social pillars (Ps 144:12) because of the various roles they play in secular leadership. Women acted as king-makers (e.g. 1 Kgs 1 and 2 Kgs 11) and as queens (e.g. 1 Kgs 16 and 2 Kgs 9).

Most important for our topic is, however, to focus on the role women played in religious services and leadership positions in biblical times.

2.2.4 Women in religious services and leadership positions

Women in ancient Israel played important religious roles. In ancient Israel women were never quiet, they were not stopped to do religious things. There is only one role which they did not do, namely to become priests. The reason for this ban was not religious but cultural. The prohibition of women to serve as priests was due to the ritual rules which prohibited unclean people from serving as priests. Among those unclean people were men and women who had bodily discharges. Lev 15 has a detailed account of rules concerning people with bodily discharges. Since women experience regular flow of blood every month, thereby making them unclean every month (Lev 15:19), this accounted for their failure to become priests in Ancient Israel.

However, priesthood was not an issue in the early church. Jesus' death was interpreted as the perfect and final sacrifice (Heb 4:14-5:10; 10:1-18). Although they did not participate in priesthood, women in ancient Israel and the early church served in public service of worship, and served in various leadership roles such as being prophetesses, evangelists, apostles, deacons, and as teachers as we shall see below.

Women in public service of worship

In the Bible there are texts which depict women taking part in public worship. In Pss 68 and 148, virgins and maidens participate in cultic praise and procession (Efthimiadis 1999:47). In Ps 148:12 the young bethroned women are encouraged to take part in worshipping Yahweh. Psalm 68:25 reports that the virgins took part in the triumphal procession into the temple. They played tambourines and formed part of the rear phalanx in a procession of celebrants headed by singers (Efthimiadis 1999:42). As Efthimiadis (1999:42) observes, these images of young women who took part in the cultic celebrations of Yahweh are positive in that they recognise women participation in public worship. Women are not silent but are active.

Women in other religious services

Women in the Bible are not only depicted as taking part in public service of worship. Rather they also took part in other religious services. In the Old Testament, Ex 35:25-26 report that whereas the Israelite men were making the Tent for the Lord, the women got together and used their skills to serve the Lord (I Phiri 1992:142). There are also several women who offered hospitality to men of God. These include the Widow of Zareph who supplied the Prophet Elijah with food (1 Kgs 17:7-16). In the New Testament, Luke 8:3

reports that women helped to support Jesus and his disciples with their own means. Martha "was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made" for her guest Jesus (Luk 10:40). In Philip 4:3 two ladies, Euodia and Syntyche are said to have laboured with Paul in spreading the Gospel. Paul speaks about these women as his "fellow labourers" implying that they were doing leadership roles similarly to what he was doing. Rom 16:3-15 gives a list of women who included Priscilla and Aquilla, Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Persis, mother of Rufus, and sister of Nereus. These women are described as fellow workers in Christ who worked very hard, who risked their lives and who had been in prison with him. In the Christian world Mary of Nazareth features high in the sense that it was through her that Christ was conceived by the divine power of the Holy Spirit (Luk 1:26-38). God inspired the early Church to include the name of Mary in the important Apostles Creed which has been accepted by all Christians.

Women evangelists

Evangelism means preaching or announcing or propagating the good news (Booth 1960:200-201; Lindsell 1960:359-360). The Bible does not limit this programme to men only. Rather it also involves women who are depicted propagating good news about God or what God had said or done. The birth of Samson was not revealed to his father Manoah, but to his mother, the wife of Manoah who did not keep it to herself but she told her husband (Jdg 13:1-25). When Manoah was afraid of the angel of the Lord, it was his wife who encouraged him not to be afraid. Furthermore, it became impossible for Hannah to be silent, when God said that He had heard her prayer for a son. She praised God in her prayer and told her husband (1 Sam1:1-11). When Mary received the message from the angel of God that she would conceive a son (Luke 1:26-38) she hurried to meet Elizabeth (Luk 1:39-45) and sung the song of praise to God in which she praises God for what she had heard (Luk 1:46-56). In other words, Mary, like Hannah, was not silent when she heard the message from the angel, she told Elizabeth and all people through the song.

The Samaritan woman would not keep to herself what she heard from Jesus. She told her kinsmen and the whole village was brought to Jesus (Jn 8:28-29,39). The first woman to proclaim the message of the resurrection of Jesus was Mary of Magdalene (Mat 28:8; Jn 20:1). Whereas the Samaritan woman brought the whole village to Jesus, Mary of Magdalene has brought the whole world to Jesus. Her message of the resurrection of Jesus was verified by Jesus' appearances to the disciples. Women did not keep quiet. God did not blame them for propagating the good news. God inspired the authors of the Scriptures to include the stories of women as evangelists.

Prophetesses

Like evangelism prophecy was not the occupation of men only. God also called women to be prophetesses. Exodus 15:20-21 describes Miriam, the sister of Moses, as a Prophetess (Mahoney and Osborn 1993:7). Huldah was the prophetess during the reign of King Josiah. She gave specifics of a coming judgement for the sins committed by the nation of Israel. Her prophecies resulted in the most sweeping reforms ever recorded in Judah (2 Kgs 22; 2 Chr 34; Mahoney and Osborn 1973:9). Isaiah's wife is said to have been a prophetess (Is 8:3). It is not explicitly stated in the OT about her roles but she may have contributed to Isaiah's writings (Mahoney and Osborn 1983:9).

In the New Testament it is said that Anna was the prophetess who was the first to declare that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah (Luk 2:36-37). The Old Testament

prophesy in Joel 2:28 (“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh... and your daughters shall prophesy”) is believed to have been fulfilled on the day of Pentecost where all those who were in the upper room, including women, received the Spirit and began prophesying (Acts 2:1-18). Acts 21:8,9 report about four daughters of Philip who were prophetesses.

We also read about false prophetesses in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, Noadiah was a false prophetess who opposed Nehemiah's project of rebuilding Jerusalem (Neh 6:14, Heddle 1988:29). Jezebel was the Baal prophetess who established Baal worship in ancient Israel (1 Kgs 16:30-33; 18:19; 19:1-23; 2 Kgs 9:30-37). In the New Testament, Rev 2:20 rebukes the false prophetess named Jezebel in the church of Thyatira. The prophetess seduced some Christians to commit sins of immorality and idolatry (Mahoney and Osborn 1993:14). The presence of false prophetesses in the Old and New Testaments suggests that women prophesy was a well established phenomenon in ancient Israel and the early church.

Women apostles

Although the twelve disciples who formed an inner circle of Jesus' followers were men, there were also women who occasionally followed and served Jesus (Mat 27:55,56; Lk 8:1-3). Paul was not one of the twelve but became known as an “apostle” after his repentance and submitting his life to Jesus. Although no woman was among the twelve, Paul the Apostle, refers to a woman known as Junias and calls her an apostle. He says “Greet Andronicus and Junias ... They are outstanding among the apostles and were in Christ before I was” (Rom 16:7; Mahoney and Osborn 1993:13).

Furthermore, 2 Jn 1:1 refers to a woman who is designated as “the elect lady”. The word “lady” is from the Greek term *κυρια* or *κυριου* which means “supreme in authority”. In 2 Jn 1:1 the Greek term *κυρια* is grammatically feminine, and that is why it has been translated as “lady”. This suggests that this “elect lady” was a senior pastor of the church and that she was charged with the responsibility of guarding the doctrinal integrity of her church (2 John 1:10).

Deaconesses

The term deacon means a servant (Morris 1960:156). The services of a deacon were established in Acts 6 where the early church found it necessary to have deacons. The duties of a deacon were administrative, pastoral and liturgical. Administrative duties involved collecting and distributing alms; pastoral duties included visiting the sick; and the liturgical services involved keeping order during the service of worship (Davies 1969:87). The first deacons were men only, seven of them. However, later women were appointed deacons or deaconesses. In Rom 16:2 Paul refers to Phoebe as a deacon who was a helper of many in the Cenchræa Church.

3. Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-37 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14

As noted above, Nkhoma Synod has used 1 Cor 14:34-37 and 1 Tim 2:11-14 as biblical basis to bar women from taking part in leadership roles. In view of what has been discussed above concerning the religious background of the Pauline theology where women were allowed to participate in the religio-social transformation, three interpretations of these texts have been suggested.

The first is that since Paul was a Jew who came from a society that allowed women to participate in social and religious services, these texts are non-Pauline. It is said that it is unlikely that Paul who encouraged women to teach, pray, prophesy and who declared that

there is no male or female in Christ, can contradict himself and say the opposite. Furthermore, 1 Cor 14:34 refers to the law positively. This is contrary to Pauline theology where Paul refers to the law negatively (1 Cor 9:9; 14:21; 15:56). This implies that 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-14 should be regarded as interpolations, written by later editors (Arichea 1995:106; Edwards 1988:1095, Hugenberger 1988:1100). This editor may have been a Corinthian Christian who was conversant with the Corinthian culture. Corinth was a Greek city and according to the Greek culture, women were considered inferior to men. Wives led lives of seclusion and practical slavery (Edwards 1988: 1089; Ryrie 1985:556). Furthermore, the female biology (i.e. childbirth and menstruation) was considered to be polluting to males. As a result the dominant male guarded the women with chaperones or confined them in their homes so that women lived in privacy, seclusion, submission and passivity (Domeris 1995:87-90).

In contradistinction, as noted above, the position of women in Judaism was markedly better than in ancient Greece. Women enjoyed relative freedom and could participate in social and religious services (Ryrie 1985:556). Some of the women in Corinth may have desired to appropriate the Jewish culture from the Jews in Diaspora. But the conservative Corinthian male Christians would not allow that. Therefore, they included these verses in the Pauline letters in order to authenticate their view to look as if it was Paul who gave the orders.

This interpretation has some problems. First, there is no empirical evidence that interpolation took place. Secondly, the notion of interpretation may have a negative bearing in that the authorship and canonicity of the letter may be questioned (Hugenberger 1988:1098).

The second interpretation is that these texts were written by Paul to challenge people who bar women from speaking and taking leadership roles in the Church. This implies that 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-14 are to be considered as Paul's quotations of what some people had been saying concerning women participation in church services (Arichea 1995:108; Mahoney and Osborn 1993:19). These people used the Jewish law which forbids women from becoming priests and referred to the sin of Eve in Gen 3 (Arichea 1995:110). It is said that Paul used to quote other people and commented on what they said (cf. 1 Cor 6:12-13; 8:1; 10:23-24,29b; Arichea 1995:108). After quoting the people who barred women from speaking in 1 Cor 14:34-35 Paul admonished them in verse 36 by saying: "Did the word of God originate from you? Or are you the only people it has reached?" The assertion here is that Paul rebukes the people who may have opposed Paul's declaration in Gal 3:28 that there is no male or female in Christ and his urging women to teach (Tit 2:3-5). Paul argues that those who bar women from teaching have no right to do so because the Gospel did not originate from them, nor were they the first people to receive the Gospel. The proposition here is that Paul may have in mind the notion that the Gospel originated in the Jewish society which allowed women to be involved in social and religious services as noted above. In 1 Cor 14:37, Paul orders the people to obey his commands on women participation in religious services (Mahoney and Osborn 1993:19).

This interpretation has the advantage that it attributes authorship to Paul and depicts Paul not contradicting himself in 1 Cor 11:5 and 14:34-35. However, this interpretation may be applicable to 1 Cor 14:34-35, but not to 1 Tim 2:11-14 where Paul explicitly gives a definite instruction that women should be silent.

The third interpretation is that in 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-14 Paul deals with discipline issues which concerned women in the congregations of Corinth and Ephesus. Of all the churches Paul established, Corinth was the most notorious in as far as

discipline was concerned. The indiscipline cases included personality divisions (1 Cor 3:1-15), sexual immorality (1 Cor 6:12-20), and drunkenness during the observance of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:20-26). In 1 Cor 14:26-39 Paul deals with the problem of discipline or order during the service of worship. The women are ordered not to "speak" (1 Cor 14:34). The text uses the Greek term *λαλειν* which means "chatter" or "babble" (Arndt and Gingrich 1957:464), or "extended or random harangue, calling out to someone across the room without proper decorum or respect for others" (Mahoney and Osborn 1993:19). This is as opposed to the Greek word *λεγω* which means "to say forth an idea or doctrine or set discourse, usually systematically" (Arndt and Gingrich 1957:468).

In 1 Cor 14:34 Paul tells women not to "speak" *λαλειν* in the church. This means that they should not interrupt the service in the church by calling someone across without respect for others. If they want to know more they should ask their own husbands at home (1 Cor 14:35). The Greek term for "woman" is *θηλυ* but the text uses the term *γυναικι* which means "wives". This implies that some wives were interrupting the service of worship by either making comments about their husband's statements or they were contradicting their husbands publicly or they were asking questions for clarification (Arichea 1995:104- 105). Here we have a situation in which there was total chaos. Paul was attempting to bring civility to an indisciplined situation which was potently offensive (Mahoney and Osborn 1993:19). Paul ordered the women to keep silent while the service is on and that they should ask their husbands at home if they want clarification.

1 Tim 2:11-14 also deals with another discipline case, but of another kind. Here, the women are not allowed to "teach" (*διδασκειν*). The Greek term *διδασκειν* means "to instruct or give a doctrine" (Arndt and Gingrich 1957:190). In the early church, it was only the apostles who established a doctrine (Acts 2:42; 15:1-40). It seems that some women were establishing some new and heretical teachings in some churches. In Re 2:20 there is a reference to a woman in Thyatira known as Jezebel who was teaching a misleading doctrine which encouraged immorality and idolatry. Thyatira was very near Ephesus and it is likely that this erroneous teaching may have spread to Ephesus. Paul is therefore warning the Christian women in Ephesus not to teach or establish any doctrine or listen to any doctrine propagated by a woman. To stop this completely, Paul ordered all women not to introduce any new doctrines, but to submit to the doctrines set out by the apostles who were all men.

Although there are three different interpretations of 1 Cor 14:34-36 and 1 Tim 2:11-14 three issues seem to be very clear in these texts. First, the texts deal with specific and isolated contexts. The Corinthian and Ephesus congregations had specific indiscipline problems which Paul dealt with. The second issue is that the admonitions in both texts refer to the women in Corinth and Ephesus and not to all congregations. Thirdly, the fact that the texts refer to specific contexts and persons signifies that the issues raised in these texts should not be taken as general principles or generic and timeless rules. (Arichea 1995:103). It is, therefore, not correct to apply the issues raised in these texts as if they are general principles of the universal church.

4. Biblical gender theology

The discussion on whether women should participate in religio-social transformation is a gender issue. We have noted above some Biblical texts have a negative attitude towards women. Some texts were noted to be male centered or androcentric. However, it has also been observed that there are texts which have a positive attitude towards women and are women-centred. The problem with this scenario is that some people have used these texts

to legitimise the domination of their sex. This has resulted into dangerous radical patriarchy and radical feminism.

4.1 The dangers of radical patriarchy

There is no doubt that the Scriptures are presented in irredeemably patriarchal images. God is portrayed in terms of male imagery. Jesus Christ is His Son, another male imagery (Clark 1996 : 293; Oden 1996:320). There is no problem in using patriarchal images as such. The danger comes when the patriarchal imagery becomes an ideology in which it is used to maintain male domination over women. Patriarchy becomes an ideology when it is used as an instrument for maintaining domination (Buchner 1997:369; Horrel 1993:87). The feminists have accused men of using patriarchy to marginalise, dehumanise, demonise and exploit women (Buchner 1997:367; Masenya 1997 441; 1995:191,193). According to feminist theologians, patriarchy as an ideology encourages male dominance and female subordination, thereby forming a sort of a pyramid where the men are on top and women are at the bottom (Masenya 1997:445).

Therefore, radical patriarchy has the danger of calling for male supremacy and dominance over women (Bloesch 1996:313; Clark 1996:293). It stresses total submission of women (Bloesch 1996 312). Patriarchy as an ideology becomes a natural hierarchy of man over woman (Clark 1996:295). The danger of radical patriarchy is that it is intolerant and fanatical. It brooks no opposition from the opposite sex. Its rigidity masks a basic insecurity and desperation on the part of women (Bloesch 1996:314). Radical patriarchy is an evil force which mars all relationships between people of opposite sex. It encourages misogyny (hatred for women) (Bloesch 1996:293). This is because patriarchy stresses male independence of the females (Clark 1996:298). This may result in having a family tyranny in which the husband uses his power to hold his wife in servile dependence on the husband and having total submission to him (Bloesch 1996:313). In this respect, patriarchy connotes male leadership which preserves male prerogatives (Bloesch 1996:315). A husband becomes a despot and his wife virtually is a slave (Bloesch 1996:315). In this regard, the female profile is said to be more submissive, easily influenced, excitable in minor crises, more emotional and easily hurt. At the same time, women are seen to be less independent, less adventurous, less aggressive and less competitive (Leeuwen 1996:302).

There are a number of Biblical texts which show that some men used the patriarchal notion to suppress or oppress women. There are some texts where women have deliberately been sidelined or completely ignored as if they did not exist. For example, in some biblical texts male leaders or victors are mentioned to the exclusion of their female counterparts contrary to the evidence as provided by the other biblical texts. Psalm 83:9 mentions the victory over Sisera but nothing is said about the role of Deborah and Jael, the women who were the principle characters in the story as described in Judges 4 and 5. The book of Exodus describes the significant role Miriam played together with her brothers Moses and Aaron, but Psalm 99:6 and 105:26 omit Miriam's name when the Exodus events are described. As Efthimiades (1999:46-47) says, this deliberate obstructions or omission of the names of these great women were attempts to vitiate women's authority and leadership in ancient Israel.

In spite of these negative effects of radical patriarchy, God revealed Himself in this patriarchal cultural community of Israel. There may be many reasons why God decided to do so. Here we will consider two. First, God's revelations had to be understood by the people - whether they are in patriarchal or matrilineal society. What was important was not the patriarchal imageries but the messages which were carried by the imageries. As

long as the patriarchal images can adequately convey the message of the love of God, that He cares, that He is a saviour, and all other attributes of God, it was fine to use the patriarchal images. God's revelation could have been difficult to understand if they came in a manner not familiar with the people of Israel (Oden 1996:325).

The second reason is that God was aware of the negative effects of radical patriarchy. However, by revealing Himself in the patriarchal society, God intended to overcome and transform this oppressive ideology (Bloesch 1996:315). God did this by elevating the status of women in the ancient Israelite society. Since God inspired the authors of the Bible, He made sure that the authors included stories which gave high regard to women. God Himself had to appoint some women to do very special services in the ancient Israelite society. As a result we read many stories where women took very active roles in religious and secular services as we shall see below.

4.2 The dangers of radical feminism

In the forgoing discussion, we have established that women in both the Old and the New Testaments took part in religio-social transformation. They were involved in secular and religious leadership roles. We also noted texts which show that ancient Israel and the early church had high regard of women. These included divine feminine traits and texts which vindicate the dignity of women. This may be regarded as the vindication of feminism. Feminism in itself is not a problem as long as it is advocated within the context of women serving God. However, it is dangerous when feminism becomes an ideology in which women use the idea of feminism to sustain domination over men. Radical feminism as an ideology emphasises and highlights independence of women from men as expressed in the notion of autonomy (Clark 1996:298; Bloesch 1996:313). Radical feminism regards female submission as anathema (Bloesch 1996:314). In this regard, women seek self-sufficiency, and as a result, women become rivals to men.

If radical feminism is tolerated as an ideology the danger lurks that a natural hierarchy of woman over man will be developed. The danger of radical feminism is that it will become intolerant and fanatical. It will tolerate no opposition from the opposite sex. Radical feminism is an evil force which will mar all relationships between people of opposite sex. It will encourage hatred for men. Radical feminism understands the aim of female leadership as being the preservation of female prerogatives. This may result in having a family tyranny in which the wife uses her power to hold her husband in servile dependence on the wife and having total submission to her. A wife becomes a despot and her husband may virtually become a slave. In this regard, the male profile will be said to be more submissive, easily influenced, excitable in minor crises, more emotional and easily hurt. At the same time, the men will be seen to be less independent, less adventurous, less aggressive and less competitive.

We have a few Biblical examples illustrating the tendency towards radical feminism. Miriam (Numbers 12), Jezebel (1 Ki 18ff.), Queen Vashti (Esther 1:20) and Herodias (Matt 14:1-12) are probable Biblical examples.

4.3 Biblical gender: no gender equity

Radical patriarchy and radical feminism should be condemned in the strongest terms possible. At the same time the discussions above show that the Bible can no longer be regarded as essentially androcentric. We have noted that the Bible witnesses to both feminine and masculine divine traits. Foster (1994:96) asserts that God is depicted in Old Testament as being neither male nor female. However, the foregoing observations indicate that the ancient Israelites perceived God as being both male and female. Rather

than being regarded as asexual, the Biblical evidence figuratively portrays God to be figuratively bisexual. For example, in Psalm 123:2 Yahweh is depicted as both a master and a mistress. The purpose for God taking both male and female traits is that God should be regarded figuratively as both the FATHER and the MOTHER. The attributes of FATHER and MOTHER are ascribed or attributed to one Creator-God who created both sexes (Gen 1:26-27).

What should this dichotomy imply in Biblical gender theology? Some have suggested that the dichotomy implies that male and female are equal. This notion is based on the fact that God created both male and female equally in the image of God, which implies that male and female are equal in essence (Clark 1996:295; Leeuwen 1996:26-27).

Furthermore, Genesis 1:26-27 describes the creation of human beings הָאָדָם (*ha'adam*). The Hebrew term *ha'adam* has erroneously been translated as "man" in most English translations (see NIV). The Good News Bible has, however, correctly translated *ha'adam* as "human being"). Here, it is clearly stated that God created not only men but that He created human beings who were of two sexes, men and women. The creation of male and female human beings in these verses is theologically very significant. This implies that there is equality between men and women. Firstly, this is because both men and women have a common origin in that they were created by one Creator-God. Secondly, both women and men were created on the same day, the sixth day of creation (Gen 1:31). Thirdly, both men and women have a common designation, human beings, *ha'adam*. Fourthly, and most importantly, both women and men were created in the "image of God" (בְּצַלְמֵנוּ - "according to our image"). There are different interpretations of the phrase "image of God" (Jonsson 1988), but some scholars prefer the interpretation that the phrase means that human beings are "functional representatives of God" (Kawale 1998a:139; Harland 1996:184,197; Olivier 1995:1). As functional representatives of God human beings, both women and men, are commanded to subdue the earth and to rule the animals (Gen 1:27,28).

Here, we note that the command to rule the animals and to subdue the earth is not limited to male human beings only. Both female and the male human beings, as image of God, shall subdue the earth and rule the animals. Furthermore, the text does not say that human beings shall rule or subdue fellow human beings. It is never stated that certain human beings shall subordinate or be subordinated. It is never said that male human beings shall subdue and rule over women. Rather, both female and male human beings shall have the responsibility of subduing and ruling the earth and animals.

However, the theology of Genesis 1:26-28 is ideological critique in the sense that it is critical of any ideology (Kawale 1998a:152). The theology of Genesis 1: 26-28 is critical of any domination. This is because Genesis 1:26-27 puts both sexes on equal status. This implies that as far as the gender theology of Genesis 1:26-28 is concerned, full humanity is inclusive in that it includes both sexes, male and female human beings. There is equality between male and female human beings as far as their originality and responsibilities are concerned.

Nevertheless, biblical gender theology is of the view that there is no equality in as far as functional representation is concerned. No two human beings, male or female, can do things equally or in the same manner. Each human being is unique and performs uniquely. Just as we differ in our appearances we also differ in our performances. In this regard, the notion of gender should never be discussed in terms of equality. Rather the issue should be discussed in terms of interdependent participation. There is no way an individual can do everything all alone. No human being is an island. The notion of "I am because we are" applies here. It was the will of God that human beings should live in

partnership. This happened at creation. In Genesis 1:26-27 human beings were created in both sexes for the sake of partnership. In the process of procreation there is need for partnership between the two sexes. It was the intention of God that human beings should multiply. Therefore, he had to create both sexes for the purpose of partnership participation in the process of reproduction. The picture becomes clearer in Genesis 2:23 where the male human being calls the woman not a slave, but “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” forming “one flesh” (Gen 2:24), that is, a partner, someone to depend upon.

In this respect, the issue of gender should be presented in terms of mutual interdependence. There should be no notion of radicalism: neither radical patriarchy, nor radical matriarchy, but mutual interdependence. Since there is this interdependence, the two sexes are partners in that they complement one another (Leeuwen 1996:307).

With this understanding the ancient Israelites and the early church did not find it difficult to have men and women as partners in the socio-religious transformation activities. Women in ancient Israel and early church took part in various social transformation activities. As noted above, these included secular and religious activities. Their understanding of the theology of gender as outlined above became the theological basis which influenced the ancient Israelites and the early church to allow women to participate in social and religious services. This is the religious and theological background of, for example, Paul, who was a Jew himself.

5. Conclusion

The interpretation of 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-14 has proved that the texts do not prohibit all women to participate in social and religious services. The admonitions in these texts do not affect Pauline and general biblical teaching on women participation in social transformation. The Pauline and the general biblical teaching on women participation still remain valid. The theological basis of women participation in social transformation invalidates any radical patriarchal and radical matriarchal tendencies which tend to dehumanise the opposite sex. The biblical theology of gender is ideological critique. It is against sexual marginalisation, dehumanisation, demonization and exploitation.

This is because the biblical gender theology advocates sexual mutual interdependence and participatory partnership. Whereas human beings share common origins, they are interdependent in as far as their functional representation of God as image of God is concerned. Each individual, whether of the same sex or of the other sex, has specific roles to play. No individual can do everything. Each individual has some limitations. It is these limitations which will demand the assistance of the other person either from the same sex or from the other sex.

In this respect, biblical evidence shows that both men and women can participate equally in the social transformation process. Both male and female can participate in both secular and religious leadership roles. Whoever has ability to take any leadership role should do so without anybody barring him or her. Sex should not be a determining factor for anybody to take a leadership role. Rather, the determining factor should be one's ability. Just as not all men can, because of their inability, be leaders, so too not all women will be able to take leadership roles. The opposite is of course also true. The roles to be played are not gender-dependent, but rather correspond to abilities or spiritual gifts.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arichea, DC 1993. The Silence of Women in the Church. Theology and Translation in 1 Corinthians 14: 34- 36. *The Bible Translator* 46 (1): 101- 112.
- Arndt, WF and FW Gingrich 1957. *A Greek – English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Baldwin, JG 1970. *Esther*, in Guthrie D, JA Motyer, AM Stibbs, & DJ Wiseman (eds). *The New Bible Commentary Revised*. 412- 420. London: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Bloesch, DB 1996. *Is the Bible Sexist? Beyond Feminism and Patriarchalism*, in Clark DK & RV Rakestraw (eds).
- Booth, FC 1960. Evangelist, in Harrison, EF, GW Bromley, and CFH Henry (eds). *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, 200-201. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House.
- Buchner, D 1997. Patriarchy and Justice for Women in Africa- Ruth, Tamar. *Scriptura* 62: 363- 371.
- Clark, DK & RV Rakestraw 1996. *Gender Issues*, in Clark DK & RV Rakestraw (eds). *Readings in Christian Ethics*, Vol. 2. *Issues & Applications*, 293- 298. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books House.
- Domeris, WR 1995. Shame and Honour in Proverbs: Wise Women and foolish men. *Old Testament Essays* 8 (1): 86- 102.
- Edwards, RD 1988. Woman. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* 4: 1089- 1097.
- Efthimiadis, H 1999. Is there a place for women in the theology of the Psalms? Part 1: An investigation into the female imagery of the ancient Hebrew Psalter. *Old Testament Essays* 12/1: 33-56.
- Foster, JA 1994. The Motherhood of God: The use of אֱלֹהִים as God-Language in the Hebrew Scriptures, in Hopfe, LM (ed.). *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in memory of H Neil Richardson*. Winona, Indiana: Eisenbraun, 93-101.
- Gous, IGP 1996. Proverbs 31: 10-31- The A to Z of Women Wisdom. *Old Testament Essays* 9/1: 35-51.
- Harland, PJ 1996. *The Value of Human Life: Study of the Story of the Loved*. New York: Brill.
- Hugenberger, GP 1988. Women in Church Leadership. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* 4: 1098- 1100.
- Jonsson, GA 1988. *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research*. Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell.
- Kawale, WR 1981. *Christianity and Nyau in Malawi, 1861-1981*. Unpublished. manuscripts in the author's possession.
- Kawale, WR 1990. *Hundred Years of Education in Nkhoma Synod*. Nkhoma, Malawi: Nkhoma Press.
- Kawale, WR 1998a. *God and Nature in Genesis 1: 1-2:4a and Chewa Cosmogony*. Unpublished DTh Dissertation, Stellenbosch University.
- Kawale, WR 1998b. *A Brief History of Mlanda Girls Secondary School*. Nkhoma, Malawi: Nkhoma Press.
- Kawale, WR 1999: *Education Report to Synod of Nkhoma* Unpublished. Education Office, Nkhoma, Malawi.

- Leeuwen, MS 1996. Christian Maturity in Light of Feminist Theory, in Clark DK & RV Rakestraw (eds). *Readings in Christian Ethics: Issues & Applications*, Vol. 2: 299- 310. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books.
- Lindsell, H 1960. Missions, in Harrison, EF, GW Bromley, and CFH Henry (eds). *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, 35559- 360. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House.
- Masanya, M 1994. A Feminist Perspective on Theology with Particular reference to Black Feminist Theology. *Scriptura*, 49:64- 74.
- Masanya, M 1995. The Bible and Women: Black Feminist Hermeneutics. *Scriptura*, 54: 189- 201.
- Masanya M 1997. Redefining ourselves. A Bosadi (Womanhood) approach. *OTE* 10/3: 439- 448.
- Morris, L 1960. Deacon, in Harrison, EF, GW Bromley, and CFH Henry (eds). *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, 156. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House.
- Nkhoma, *Presbytery Meeting Minutes*, 1929, 1931, 1936, 1942, 1943.
- Nkhoma Synod (NS), *Meeting Minutes*, 1966, 1967, 1970, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1991, 1997.
- Oden, TC 1996. Women in the Pastoral Office, in Clark DK & RV Rakestraw (eds). *Readings in Christian Ethics, Vol. 2. Issues & Applications*, 318-327. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books House.
- Olivier, JPJ 1995. *Man's Image in Creation Narratives*. Unpublished seminar paper. University of Stellenbosch.
- Phiri, I 1992. *African Women in Religion and Culture: Chewa Women in the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa, Presbyterian: A Critical Study from Women Perspective*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Cape Town.
- Ringgren, H 1974. in Botterweck, GJ & H Ringgren (eds). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 7:438-441. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Ryrie, CC 1985. Woman, in Harris, EF, GW Bromley, & CFH Henry (eds). *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, 556. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books House.
- Sarna, NM 1989. *The JPS Genesis Commentary*. New York: The Jewish Publication Society.
- Sperling, SD 1987. God in Hebrew Scriptures, in Eliade M (ed.). *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, 6:1-8. Vol. Xxxvii (11): 1-2.