Patriarchal Ideologies on Women’s Menstrual Cycle: an Infringement on the Rights of Women

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Abstract

This study explores ways in which women are being unfairly treated in some selected religions as a result of menstrual flow. The work showed that in spite of scientific explanation on menstrual flow, some religions still see it as a curse and consequently tagged women unclean during this period. Therefore, for the purpose of clarity, the work specifically focused on Celestial church of Christ and Cherubim and Seraphim church position. For women, menstrual blood is accepted as a fact of womanhood and God given, but our society has seen it as an obstacle to spiritual growth, causing disdain for church practices, which to the present day is seen as a way of emphasizing patriarchal ideologies. Also it was noted that since Jesus Christ was not rendered impure by the woman with the issue of blood, it therefore means that menstrual blood could not have been the cause of unanswered prayers in churches that believed otherwise. After all, men too have periods of ritual impurity and it had never been on record that they were asked to go for spiritual cleansing less being the one responsible for unanswered prayers. Therefore depriving women of space in religious activities as a result of menstrual flow is seen as infringements on women rights and it creates a range of restrictions on her physical mobility that limited her space for action. The work concludes by imploring religious groups particularly Christians to always give correct interpretations and application of the scripture and at the same time to taken into consideration the geographical, cultural and historical situations of that time before any meaningful interpretation can be done.

Keywords: Menstruation, Women, Rights, Cycle, Scripture.
Introduction

The discrimination against female child is not a phenomenon only of the African Countries. In several parts of the world, women experience gender apartheid of varying degrees. Writing on the state of female sexuality, Bishop Orebanjo echoed in his sixth lecture entitled “Women in the woe” that:

God made Eve to be helpmate, and now a helper becomes an obstacle. But spiritualist should have ways of dealing with women… Spiritual development is like pumped ball situated in the chest of humanity. Sexual intercourse is like pin to pinch ball. A womanizer can never be successful in spiritual development. In the days of your special prayers, consecrate yourself and avoid women entirely. Menstruating and fornication are deadly enemies to the angels, who fly away at the highest smell of them. When you are inclined to think of women to instigate your private nerves, read Psalm 53 three times and you will be free. (Marglin, F. Wives)

The above lecture portrays the extent to which women suffer from social disadvantages. However, one expects that by now the patriarchal ideologies about women ought to have changed, but unfortunately these have not been the case. The usual old practices of seeing women unclean are still prevalent among some religious leaders who ought to have known better. A large number of myths and misinterpretations that centre around anatomy of women, menstrual cycle, sex and fertility, pregnancy and childbirth are perpetuated under the name of religion and traditions. Only through a scientific description of all aspects of womanhood can one dispel explicitly some of the myths. In order to be more specific, this paper will take a look at some set of statements commonly made about menstruation which are:

*women are impure during menstruations and thought to be evil
*women lose impure blood during menstruation
*women who participate in religious functions cause prayers not to be answered. (Turner, 1972: 20).

The questions now are what crime have females committed for being naturally created by God with menstrual flow? Then, is there any scientific basis for any of the above statements? The focus of this paper will therefore be on the following issues:

1. Scientific explanation of menstrual cycle.
2. Positions toward menstruation in Christianity, Islam and Yoruba (Traditional Religion in the past and now).
3. How do above stated positions constitute an infringement of women’s rights or what are the immediate consequences of the positions taken on women?
4. What should be the responses of religious bodies to these traditions? (Particularly Christians).
Methodology

Though the study was to rely primarily on secondary sources in order to obtain insights into present prevalent cultural practices, the writers were able to conduct a series of focus group discussions with women representing different ethnic and religious groups as well as to meet women from upper income groups to clarify views and to obtain personal opinions on particular issues relating to menstrual cycle and pollution. This study provided an opportunity to update knowledge and to re-examine the significance of menstrual cycle and how it has always been used against women and girls and eventually constitute violence against them. Though the final observations may still be regarded as tentative, it is believed that the study will contribute to an understanding of most people about the biological nature of women and the need to work towards eradicating the harmful cultural practices of discrimination against women as measured in terms of the existing international standards on human rights and violence against women.

What Does Science say about Menstrual Cycle?

In scientific explanation, when a baby is born, she has all eggs in her body, many more, perhaps as up to 450,000. They are stored in her ovaries, each inside its sac called a follicle. As she matures into puberty, her body begins producing various hormones that cause the eggs to mature. This is the beginning of first cycle; it is a cycle that will repeat throughout her life until the end of menopause. Therefore, the menstrual cycle is the scientific term for the physiological changes that occur in fertile women for the purposes of sexual reproduction. The menstrual cycle under the control of the endocrine system, is necessary for reproduction. It is commonly divided into three phases, the follicular phases, ovulation and the luteal phase. (Losos Jonathan et.al 2002: 1207-09).

Phases

The menstrual cycle can be divided into several different phases. The average length of each phase is shown below; the first three are related to changes in the lining of the uterus whereas the final three are related to the processes occurring in the ovary:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of phase</th>
<th>Average start day assuming a 28-day cycle</th>
<th>Average end day</th>
<th>Average duration number of days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Menstrual phase (Menstruation)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proliferative phase (Some sources include Menstruation in this phase)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ovulatory phase (Ovulation)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luteal phase (also known as Secretory phase)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>Ischemic phase</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proliferative phase</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
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The menstrual cycle is therefore noted to be a recurring monthly series of physiological changes in women and other female primates in which an egg is produced in the process known as ovulation. During this period, the uterine lining thickens to allow for implantation if fertilization occurs. If the egg is not fertilized and pregnancy does not occur, the uterine lining is shed and it exits the body through the vagina as a mixture of blood and tissue over a course of 3 to 7 days. This is called menstruation (pronounced mens-troo- A-shun) or a period. The cycle starts over again with an egg that begins to mature in one of ovaries. This cycle is called menstrual cycle and is generally 25 to 35 days.

On the relevance of menstrual blood, scientists noted that the most significance of the menstrual cycle is that, it is responsible for female fertility, the making of God for conception and fruitfulness. In other words, it is part of the life cycle of pregnancy. Therefore, every woman is expected to menstruate every month. Still on the significance of menstrual cycle, research scientist working with menstrual skin stem cells described how he used menstrual blood stem cells, “he felt like he had been reborn” an unfit man in his late fifties, he’d had to run around the block because he had so much energy. Another research scientist in his sixties working with stem cells was reported to have experienced his hair change for grey to the black of youth in a matter of months. These experiments were noted to have happened in China, Russia and India. (www.folic.org)

From the above, it could be deduced that menstrual cycle, apart from being a natural phenomenon created by God to enhance female productivity, it also has healing power as proved by the scientists. Now, the question is how something that brings about life could turn out to be a curse, pollution and evil. It is quite unfortunate that some women today are granting their power away to patriarchal ideologies by taking drugs to stop their menstrual flow, using cancer-causing chemical bleached tampons to stem the flow. Not only that, some are seeing the menses as a “curse”, they are ashamed of it as well. Is it not time for women to reclaim the rights being deprived of as a result of menstrual cycle. This will lead us to take a look at positions taken towards menstrual cycle in Judaeo-Christianity, Islam and Yoruba traditional Religion respectively.

**Judaean-Christianity and Menstrual Cycle**

In Judaean-Christian tradition as stated in the Journal of Religion and Health, ancient people had a number of reasons for regarding menstruation as dangerous and evil. In the first place, it was associated with reproduction, so long with semen discharge; it was regarded as potent and mysterious. Secondly, the flow of menses (from the Latin menses, meaning moon) coincided approximately with the lunar cycle. So, causal links were made with fearsome cosmic energies. Third, pathological anxieties were triggered by menstruation.

The ritual Impurity Laws were first written in the book of Leviticus, the third book of Moses found in the Old Testament canon (Lev 12: 1 ff). A woman, during her regular monthly
period, is unclean for seven days and everything including everyone that comes in contact with her is unclean until evening (sunset). A woman, however, who is experiencing a flow of blood which exceeds the seven days allotted for her regular monthly period or who experiences a hemorrhage which is not a monthly period or at a time when she does not expect her period (that is, any anomaly to her cycle) is not considered clean until seven additional days have passed.

A woman had to purify herself after she finished menstruating until then anything that she touched would be unclean (as would anyone who had touched her, or had been touched by a person who had been in contact with her). Also, the Bible recorded that on the eighth day after her affliction, she is required to take two turtle doves or two young pigeons, and bring them to the priest (like a woman after her delivery) to the door of the tent of meeting. The priest will offer one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, as a woman having an issue of blood greater than her regular circle considered to be ill and thus sinful in need of atonements. Thus, we note, in the Old Testament, there is a strong connection between physical uncleanness, sickness and sin.

The Jewish practice later crept into the New Testament world, and can be found in the canons of the early church fathers. However, no explanation is given. Two questions need to be asked here: 1) Did the women of that period hesitate to attend the holies when experiencing their monthly because of the poor hygiene of their time? 2) Were these women greatly influenced by the Judaizers of whom Paul had written, who desired to keep the law? Probably, poor hygiene practices made women uncomfortable in entering church buildings and receiving the sacraments as given by Dionysious. Women living in that historical period were bound to their bed or seat until their periods were over. For example, when Rachael father, Laban was searching for his gods thought to have been stolen by his daughter, when he asked her, (though she had sat on the gods), she claimed to have been menstruating which was not true, her response was that the custom of women is upon her (meaning she is menstruating) (Genesis: 31-35). The direct implication of this is that their hygiene practices required them to stay in one place for seven days to avoid physically defiling areas with which they could be in contact with.

It suffices to say here that had it not been for improved modern hygiene practices, women of today would also have been hesitating to leave their homes and attend church services. Lack of sanitary hygiene would seem to be the most probable reason for women in any society to hesitate approaching the holies. If the reasoning in the Old Testament period is due to hygiene practices, then its reasoning would no longer be valid today, and the church will need to re-examine its position dealing with ritual impurity. If however his reasoning is due to the Leviticus law, then the church has to seriously examine the theological implications especially in the areas of salvation by grace (Uta Ranke, 1990: 12).

In the New Testament period too, women are not allowed to speak to men in public, let alone touch their flesh. But Christ broke the barriers between males and females. Jesus recognized women as fellow human beings because they were created in the image of God. He
showed acceptance, respect and compassion for women. He opened the privileges of religious faith equally to both women and men. On this, Hurley notes that:

The foundation stone of Jesus attitude towards women was his vision of them as persons to whom and for whom he had come. He did not perceive them primarily in terms of their sex, age or marital status, he seems to have considered them in terms of their relation (or lack of one) to God (James B. Hurley, 1981:83).

Therefore, it must be noted that the woman with an issue of blood was bound by the Old Testament law, and everything she touched became unclean. The fact that she touched the garment of Christ was enough to render her “ritually impure” until evening. (Lev. 15:19-30). However, the question is: could a ritually impure person heal the woman, and then proceed to go to raise the daughters from the death (Matthew 9: 18-25). Christ in this context was not defiled by all standards raised in Leviticus, nor did he send the woman away scolding her for not upholding the purification laws. She was accepted as “Daughter”. Also, of great interest is that, Jesus made no mention of her condition being sinful. He made no comment to her to go and provide atonement for her sin to the priests, as the Leviticus law prescribed. Then, the question is, why should some churches reason differently if actually Christ is their model? Besides, churches that believed it is menstruation that hinder prayers need to search for another cause of unanswered prayers among the men folk which could be adultery, stealing, corruption and the likes.

During the first 500 years of Christianity, it was noted that, menstruation was not considered a curse and there were no restrictions placed on it; however after that some Christian leaders started to see anything to do with sex as bad, including menstruation and pregnancy. In many churches, menstruating women were no longer permitted to enter the church or to take communion. This menstrual taboo was continued by theologians into the middle Ages.

Menstruating women were not allowed to have sex with their husbands – it was believed that menstrual blood was noxious and would corrupt semen, resulting in the conception of disabled children. Physicians in the 16th century (such as Thomas Sanchez and Cardinal Cajetan) began to reject this fear of menstrual blood, and started to view it as harmless. Until quite recently, however, most Christian’s theologians continued to view sex during menstruation as a sin. In Christianity, the ‘ritual uncleanness’ of menstruating women soon gave way to the idea that all women (whether menstruating or not) were ‘ritually unclean’.

In 1140 AD The Law Book of Gratian forbade all women from distributing communion, touching sacred objects, touching or wearing sacred vestments, teaching in church, baptizing people, and from becoming priests or deacons. It also asserted that women were ‘weak of mind’ and not made in the image of God. The Corpus Iuris Canonici (1234 – 1916 AD) prohibited menstruating women from receiving communion. In 1917 the Codex Iuris Canonici still placed heavy restrictions on women (however a specific menstrual restriction was not mentioned).
Women could not serve Mass or distribute communion, women could not preach or read sacred scripture aloud in church, and women had to be the last choice of minister for baptism. In 1983, many of these prohibitions against women were lifted by the Catholic church (the new Code of Canon Law states that women may preach, lead Mass, and distribute communion). In modern Christianity, there are no restrictions around menstruation except in conservative Orthodox parts of the Catholic church. Menstruating women are still not allowed to take communion in conservative Orthodox Catholic churches (sometimes they are not even allowed to enter church). The idea still exists that menstruation makes women ‘unclean’ and this has been used as a reason why women shouldn’t be ordained as priests (they would make the altar ‘unclean’ (Uta Ranke, 1990: 12-17).

Yoruba People and their views about Menstrual Period

Before discussing the issue of menstrual cycle among the Yorubas, we would like to give a brief background of the Yoruba. The Yoruba occupies the South-Western part of Nigeria. The people predominantly belong to the Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti and Lagos States. They equally form parts of Edo, Kwara and Kogi states; and some parts of Republic of Benin and Togo (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979: 3). The question of their origin is debatable and in the present state of knowledge, not much is categorically known about it (Idowu, 1996: 4). However, two different answers are found in oral traditions. The first holds that their founding fathers were immigrants from a northern source variously identified as Egypt, Meroe, Yemen or Arabia while it is claimed in the second body of traditions that Ile-Ife was the first habitable place created on earth, from which all earthly creation began. For this reason, Ile-Ife is referred to as the cradle of the Yoruba race (Ubrurhe, J.O, 1999: 82).

The Yoruba nation like many other African societies is essentially patriarchal and predominantly male-dominated. According to Awolalu and Dopamu, traditions seem to emphasize the fact that women are to play subordinate roles; they are to be seen and not heard, hence men are understood to be more privileged than women. Such a society is described as one which is characterized by male super ordination and female subordination (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979: 288). Men show superiority over their women counterparts, who are usually relegated to the background. Therefore, socially, politically, economically and religiously women are to a very large extent, disadvantaged. This has consistently been manifested in various ways as shall be established in this section. According to Adetunji, the cultural and gender problems, which African women have been facing, dates back to their births. As in many homes, the birth of a baby girl does not receive the kind of enthusiastic reception that is usually given to that of a baby boy (Adetunji, 2001: 106). This traditional view expressed above is still being held about women in Yoruba land in the 21st century. The male children are called “arole” (the heir apparel), while it is believed that female children would be married sooner or later and leave the parental homes. In fact, it is a major setback for women education those days. However, scientists have explained that the issue of having female children should not be seen woman’s fault. Rather, both male and female partners are responsible for the sex of the child.
Unfortunately, people that are still educated not accept recent scientific assumptions. Some would still go ahead to re-marry hoping that the new wife will give them a male child.

However, according to Olajubu, menstrual blood associated as it is with notions of mystery awe, and pollution has been a bone of contention limiting women’s roles in religion across cultures in history. In different culture, blood has been conceived in different ways, in different settings. Whereas some view blood as a source of life to be revered, others consider it as a contaminant, and avoid any contact between it and sacred elements. Some traditions blend these two positions focusing on what is auspicious (Olajubu Oyeronke, 2003:10-11).

However, in Yoruba culture so to say, negative tag, has been placed on menstrual blood. One of the effects of the negative tag placed on menstrual blood in the religious space is the prohibition of women from power structure either permanently or temporarily. Menstruating women are barred from the sacred space for fear of contamination or in order to avoid a power clash. Traditional priests in Yoruba land often prevent their wives from sleeping with them or visiting others. The women are seen as impure and it is believed that if they are permitted to touch certain medicine, it would lose its potency and effectiveness. Equally, “a man would not eat the food of a menstruating woman or that of a woman who has just given birth to a child”. In addition, Familusi in his work observed that a menstruating woman must not participate in the sacrifice to Obatala, Yoruba divinity of fertility and other religious activities. Obatala is renowned for whiteness and this symbolizes purity (as menstrual period is believed to be a time of impurity or defilement). Also, they are forbidden from entering into any sacred places because they could render all objects ineffective. (Familusi O. O, 2012: 303).

**African Independent churches attitude to menstrual cycle**

The second phase of Christianity in Nigeria was the emergence of African Independent Churches. They emerged after the First World War in 1918 in Yoruba land. Ayebgoyin and Ishola and some other scholars have given some reasons for the establishment of the Churches (Deji Ayegboyin and S. Ademola Ishola, 1997: 22-26). These include among others economic recession and epidemic influenza. However, as noted by Olajubu Christian tradition in Nigeria exhibits different specific features and they are divided into three broad groups’ namely Orthodox mission, African Independent Church and the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. But our concern here is to examine the main features of A. I. C in relation to menstrual blood. A. I. C is otherwise referred to as Aladura churches and they include Celestial Church of Christ, Cherubim and Seraphim church (in Nigeria and Abroad). The Church of the Lord International (in Nigeria and Abroad) the Musama Disco Christo Church (in Ghana) and the Lumpa Church (in Zambia) (Olajubu Oyeronke 1992: 232). However, in the context of this paper, attention will be focused on Celestial Church of Christ and Cherubim and Seraphim churches. The A.I. C focuses on African cultural perspectives in the propagation of the Christian message. Hence, they
employ African languages, orientations and elements in liturgy and rituals. On the issue of women’s menstrual cycle which is the subject of concern, Celestial Church of Christ which was established by Pastor Samuel Oshoffa does not allow their female members in their period to enter the church. After eight days she shall go to the Church for sanctification in the prescribed manner before entering the Church. The process of sanctification in this regard shall be as follows:

The female members concerned shall come to the Church premises with a pail of water, candle, sponge and soap. She shall kneel at the western entrance outside the Church building facing the altar before the Pastor’s Representative or his appointee shall light the candle, and after singing appropriate spiritual songs, he shall say a prayer of forgiveness and sanctification. After this, he shall put the candle in the pail of water and the female member shall go and have a bath with the water, sponger and soap she is now free to enter the Church (A .A Bada).

Also in Cherubim and Seraphim which is one of the A. I.C founded by Apostle Moses Orimolade, women are barred from entering the Church premises during the monthly menstrual period for fear of contamination. In fact, the process is perceived as “unclean” as rightly observed by one of the church member. It could be said at this juncture that the whole issue has been turned to gender phenomenon. One of our informants says, even women are not allowed to enter the chancel because it represents holiness or a holy place that is forbidden to women in their monthly circle. Additionally, it was believed that prayers will not be answered with such women presence and Prophetess. Prophesying may not achieve much desired results because of women. Also, menstruation period proved particularly disastrous to women wishing to hold ecclesiastical office. The blood of women in childbirth is regarded as even more noxious as menstruating blood. Women who have recently given birth must initially stand or even kneel outside the church door until she has been cleansed with holy water; the priest will now conduct her into church.

However, it needs be noted that such rules should give way in the spirit of the equality before God irrespective of the individual’s sex. After all, men also have periods of ritual impurity, and unlike women who have purification rites. Most young girls are told of the uncleanliness law at puberty, most boys reaching puberty are not told anything. A survey showed that, none of the men had been told such a thing by their fathers. The canons dealing with male ritual impurity were not strictly followed while those ones dealing with female ritual impurity were kept alive through mothers quietly passing it down to daughters.

Biologically, there is nothing contaminating in the menstrual cycle and we think if prayers are actually hindered as perceived by Cherubim and Seraphim and Celestial Church of Christ, then other churches like Redeemed Christian Church of God and the likes would have cried out. Then the issue here is, what the spiritual state of the said Prophet is, could it be that they are the actual culprit or other people in the prayer group with them. Meanwhile, the women had been made to believe that while in the state of menstruation, no progress can be made in the place of prayers. In fact, one of the members of the said church says, she doesn’t like the
teaching, but she has no power to break the rule being a pastor wife. She argues that, she feels guilty when she cannot go to church at this period. The whole argument in a way is illogical.

**What then are the consequences of this Deprivation?**

Gender and development discussion paper series records that, the perception of pollution associated with the psychological menstruation functions of women’s body create a range of restrictions on her physical mobility that limited her space for action. Further, it was observed that the consequences of achieving these practices have been the reinforcement of gender inequalities and violation of the rights of girls and women. Corroborating this assertion, Oluwatoyin confirms that, the spiritual perspective of woman and monthly cycle achieves the aim of providing a concept of power in the religious space (Oluwatoyin O Oluwaniyi, 2012: 128-135).

Psychologically, the control of menstruating in women goes beyond the body and also extends to the social sphere. It symbolizes a social order that women are under male control. It places women in weak positions in both the church and society. It is through her full involvement that she gains many things such as knowledge. Thus, if a woman is less active, she may lose her chance to develop her spiritual ability in the church. In short, menstrual blood is designed to maintain a patriarchal society keeping women subordinated.

Low self- esteem, guilt, shame and depression may come up especially in some cultures where women are strictly banned from both religious and social activities. It may lead to feelings of being unjustly treated and being helpless. They may be accompanied by feelings of hatred and the desire for revenge.

Spiritually, women experience a hunger for human and spiritual understanding and care, a Christ- like acceptance and support. They feel unappreciated in the society and unrecognized in the church; but they are rather exploited. Naturally, since women were continuously told that they are unclean during menses, and are categorized among the unrighteous, during that period, the zeal to pray, read Bible or practice any aspect of their faith would go down. This is because they have been made to realize that they are unworthy to approach God and if they desire to do that, their prayers would not be answered.

Also, menstrual blood which is associated with pollution is only a symbol of the present order based on patriarchy. According to Douglass, the idea of pollution in social life has two levels. At the first level, the more obvious ones will find people trying to influence one another’s behavior. At the second level, one sex is believed to be more dangerous than the other (Douglass 1980). In this case, menstruating women are assuming to be dangerous to others. The segregation also constitutes infringements on the rights of women. Women suffer from an unfair or unfavorable treatment on the basis of blood. It deprived women of developing their innate talents and abilities in religious sphere. It reduces their relevance in religious activities. The
consequences of adhering to these practices have been the reinforcement of gender inequalities and the violation of the rights of girls and women that are underscored in international spheres, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and in the Constitution.

**Conclusion**

A point has been made in this paper that menses is God-given for natural reproductive purposes as proved by science. Hence, this is the time when women need God most of all, as this is the time when they experience pre-menstrual syndrome, physical pain, panic attacks, crying and other hormonal anomalies. This is the period when the soul needs to be doctored by the healing powers of Christ. To punish a woman in need of spiritual healing and nourishment at the time when she needs it most for daring to approach or to touch Christ by banishing her for an additional forty days, is not only an act devoid of any Christian compassion, but goes contrary to the teachings of Christ (see Matthew: 28, John 6:37).

Furthermore, a theme running throughout the scripture beginning with Genesis is that women and men are created in God’s image. As Pope John Paul II had said, ‘both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree’. (John Paul II). In the New Testament, Jesus continually reached out to those on the fringes of society, those without power or authority, and those with no one to speak on their behalf. He taught that all women and men are individuals worthy of respect and dignity, Jesus unfailingly respected the human dignity of women. He went out of his way to help the most vulnerable women. Think of the woman with the issue of blood earlier on mention (Mark 5: 25-34) or the woman caught in adultery (John 8: 1-11). By these examples Jesus set the example to follow when dealing with women menstrual cycle.

Therefore, the interpretation and the application of the Bible must take into account the geographical, cultural and historical aspects of the scripture (ECA- WIDNET1997). This is very important because using religion to dominate women is foreign to the function of religion in human society. Any religion that teaches the superiority of men and devalues women has human origin and patriarchal par excellence. No wonder, Sheila Collins submitted that, patriarchy prescribed hierarchy of sexual roles but the whole complex of sentiment, the patterns of recognition and behavior, the assumption about human nature and the nature of the cosmos have grown out of culture in which men have dominated women. The sentiments, patterns of recognition and behaviors that have grown out of a culture of domination do not in any way receive the sanction of the original intentions of God when He created males and females in His likeness (Collins Sheila, 1974: 51).

However, the church has a role to play. The church should lay emphasis on the fact that men and women are created alike in God’s image. Hence, the final word of Pope John Paul II and David Alabi will be relevant here. Pope says
I appeal to men in the church to undergo where necessary a change of heart and to implement as a demand of their faith a positive vision of women. I ask them to become more and more aware of the disadvantage to which women, and especially girls have been exposed and to see where the attitude of men, their lack of sensitivity or lack of responsibility may be at the root of feminism (John Paul 11).

Alabi also asserted that:

Religion is to serve as a link between the divine and human on equal standing before the Deity. Any religion that teaches the superiority of men and devalues women has human origin and patriarchal arrogance. The personhood of women goes beyond “silence” doctrine, second role play, ritually unclean nature of women and child bearing roles they are allotted to Play at home alone by our patriarchal society. (David O. Alabi no date: 156)

To us, there is no difference between religious people who place restrictions on all women, and those who place restrictions only on menstruating (‘unclean’) women. We think that both views portray men quite negatively: women are seen as more separated from God and the spiritual world than men are. Women are viewed as less perfect/holy than men because they are more strongly tied to their bodies (menstruation, sexual impurity/sex, pregnancy, childbirth, being a mother). Because women are seen as so strongly tied to their bodies (and therefore to the physical earth), Christianity and other religions have tended to see this as a barrier that prevents women from fully entering the spiritual and the holy realm.

We see God as genderless (equally male and female) because He created both women and men in ‘His’ image. We don’t see why God would make a woman in his image, make her menstruate every month, and then reject her in any way during that time because she was suddenly ‘religiously unclean’. It reminds us of a comment made by a female in the church who pleaded anonymity, if men could menstruate “menstruation would become an enviable, boast-worthy, masculine event.” We think that if men could menstruate, menstruation would no longer be considered something ‘unclean’ that kept certain people at a greater distance from God.
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