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Modern Day Slavery and the African Girl-Child: Toward A Liberation Theology of the African Woman

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Abstract

This Paper critically assessed Modern Day Slavery and the African Girl-Child: Towards a Liberation Theology of the African Woman using the cultural atrocity such as human trafficking, that reflects a Modern-Day Slavery. Victims of this human trafficking are subjected to forced-labor, sexual exploitation, and Child labor. In some continents, especially parts of Asia, it appears in the form of child marriage and traditional dowry/bride price. In Africa, particularly Nigeria, trafficking of young girls and women abetted by some religious and cultural practices, present women with unequal rights to the Male Child of the family and as slaves to their husbands when married. It further x-rayed the Pauline Writings to the Corinthians on the Church as the Body of Christ and uses it to articulate the theology of Liberation for women. It posits the church as the Body of Christ with each individual member of the church as part of this body of Christ and as such, their actions are informed by love which binds the Church and remains a duty that neither discriminate nor oppress people. Jesus Christ chose to appear first to a Woman "Mary Magdalene" who demonstrated steadfast love as a member of Christ's body even after the death of Christ. It became imperative to know that Mary's doggedness in Faith and Love that binds the members of the Church even after the apostles of Christ took to their heels, serves as a key to the Liberation of Women. Jesus chose to appear to Mary Magdalene, though a woman, but found worthy to receive the first message of the risen Christ. It therefore concludes that Modern Day Slavery has truly taken the form of human trafficking especially in Africa and since all the suffering women and Girl-Child trafficked at different levels are members of the body of Christ, their cries should be of immense concern to the Church. It recommends that education is the key to resisting maleness suffered by the girl-child because it aids to improve the cognitive horizon of the girl-child and helps her to face the modern world. Again, the Church should emulate the Santa Marta group of England by working with National and International agencies to curb the rampart trafficking in Africa especially in Nigeria.

Keywords: Modern Day, Slavery, Trafficking, Patriarchal attitude, Doggedness, African Girl—Child

Introduction

Slavery is one of the obnoxious practices in human history. Although it was abolished about 154 years ago, slavery is back in a very surreptitious and sophisticated way that has become a threat to human flourishing globally. In many places around the world today, people are made to live in inhuman conditions that mirror a modern-day slavery. From the global north to the global south, indications of human trafficking persist in different forms. Victims of human trafficking are subjected to slavery in the form of forced labor, sexual exploitation, and bonded labor/child labor.

Instances of human trafficking abound globally. In these instances, many young and older women are deceived into doing things and or adopting a lifestyle that is never suitable for them. In some parts of Africa especially Nigeria, trafficking of young girls and women abetted by some religious and cultural practices, present women with unequal rights with male Child in the family and as a slave to their husbands when married.

Modern Day Slavery in General

In Nigeria, many young women are trafficked within the country and many others beyond borders. Many young people have been subjected into street hawkers and have become vulnerable to the dangers emanating from street hawking. Most of these young girls are gang

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raped, kidnapped and many others are lured into prostitution by family members. In the major cities of Nigeria and most other African countries, one witnesses a high level of decadence among young girls of whom most have dropped out of school for financial reasons, hawking goods in order to meet up with the economic challenges of their families. After struggling to raise funds, they report and account to the person who charges them with this duty. In most cases victims of trafficking are being coerced to these by male figures who monitor their activities and make sure there is no way for them to escape. In other situations, it could be the parents of the young woman who force her to do this terrible act for their family.

What Is Human Trafficking?

In international law, human trafficking has been defined as: “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments and benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”¹ This definition articulated by United Nations brings into play the intensity of the ills that human trafficking is all about. Human trafficking is slavery and human beings are taken for profit. Most people who are trafficked end up losing everything which they work for while the traffickers make a lot of money from them.

Globally, people are moved beyond borders for financial gain and the statistics on how many people are moved are not really clear. The organization *Act to Prevent Trafficking*, records that: “An estimated 27 million people are trafficked globally each year, with women and girls accounting for 75% of victims. In the EU, 76% of victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation. This form of trafficking makes almost \$100 billion each year for traffickers globally.”² In the APT website, the estimates regarding trafficking are overwhelming and the majority of people trafficked are women and children.

In the United States, the government claimed that a staggering number of about 50,000 women and children are trafficked into the United States every year but, to some, that seems over exaggerated as it is believed that about 14,500 to 17,500 are trafficked yearly.³ Among them,

women and children are the greater percentage. During times of conflict, women and their young children are the immediate targets and those most affected, and this leads to migration, which makes women and children further vulnerable to traffickers. Causes of human trafficking in Nigeria and Africa are attributed to: the marginal social location of women, who have little or no say in major decisions concerning them; ignorance and the low education level of the victims; poverty and the desire of the parents to make money from the payment of bride price; inaccessibility to justice by the victims, especially given the complexity of the offences, which often include chain actors.

In Nigeria, and generally in Africa, girl child trafficking takes varied forms and it is important to take a brief look at these trends in the business of trafficking. They include bonded/child labor, kidnap by fraud or enticement, sexual exploitation (sex workers/baby manufacturers), early marriages (forced or ignorant of the marriage conditions) and abusive bride price.

Forced Labor

A greater percentage of trafficked people worldwide are trapped in forced labor. Writing on trafficking, Daniel Groody notes that: “According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), for every ten persons forced into prostitution, nine are trapped in situations of involuntary servitude.”⁴ They work against their wishes, in inhuman conditions and are punished at the slightest chance by their traffickers. Their work encompasses agricultural settings, service industries, begging, and domestic slavery. Groody continues to note that: “The US State Department estimates that globally there are more than 8 million victims of forced labor, who are denied more than \$20 billion in wages.”⁵ In Nigeria, there are many young people who find themselves in forced labor.

Sexual Exploitation

In Africa, trafficking is a big continental challenge. Women and young people are trafficked from different parts of Africa beyond borders. Economic and political instability remain key to the rise of trafficking in the continent. Maura O'Donohue tells the nasty story of Amina who was abducted at the age of fourteen with her classmates from a boarding school. She was dashed 200 lashes because she tried to escape from the inhumane act against her. In her eight years of captivity she gave birth to two children consequent to incessant rapes by the military man who held her hostage as she served him with twenty other young girls.⁶ This remains the plight of many African young women who are trapped by traffickers, exploited, and reduced to sex machines. These traffickers have lost any

¹ Letitia M. Campbell and Yvonne C. Zimmerman, “Christian Ethics and Human Trafficking Activism,” in Mary Jo Iozzio and Patricia Beattie Jung, eds., *Sex and Gender: Christian Ethical Reflections* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 173-201, at 176. The authors quote: United Nations, *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime* (2000), Article 3, www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/deatoc/final_documents_2/convention_traff_eng.pdf

² Act to Prevent Trafficking, “Human Trafficking: An Introduction,” (2015) 2, <https://www.aptireland.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Human-Trafficking-An-Introduction.pdf>

³ See Campbell and Zimmerman, “Christian Ethics and Human Trafficking Activism,” 176.

⁴ Daniel Groody, “Moving Targets: Migrants, Globalization, and Human Trafficking,” in HilleHaker, Lisa Sowle Cahill and Elaine Wainwright, eds., *Concilium: Human Trafficking* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 18.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Maura O’ Donohue, “Sex Trafficking, The Vulnerability of Women and Children—an Urgent Call to the Church,” in HilleHaker, Lisa Sowle Cahill and Elaine Wainwright, eds., *Concilium: Human Trafficking* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 46.

sense of value and morals and can go to any extent to make sure they do not lose the services of these young women.

A good number of young people are trafficked every year from Nigeria and other West African countries through the Sahara Desert to Libya and from there through the Mediterranean to Europe. Most of these young women are raped multiple times by their traffickers, maltreated and even abandoned to die when they are unable to continue for lack of strength. The social media present graphic images of young women who are trafficked by boat toward Europe. In my younger years, I remember travelling with a man and his young girl friend who told me they were travelling to Libya and then Europe by road. Little did I know about trafficking to understand what the man was doing with the young girl? They came to Nigeria from Cameroon and explained that they would travel to Niger and continue till they reach Libya. What has become of that young woman today? After being exploited by the traffickers, and even after detention, most of these victims are sent back to their home countries. Minors too are trafficked from land-locked countries of Africa to the ports.⁷ What is the future of these young African children trafficked every day to Europe and even within Nigeria?

Adolescent prostitution is neither hidden in Nigeria nor in many other countries in the world. It is out on the streets and in the open after decades of what amounted to a cross-cultural conspiracy of silence.⁸ In the world today, prostitution has become a multibillion criminal enterprise; many young people are enticed and are embracing the sex industry. In the African continent, and Nigeria in particular, prostitution has been traced to be a consequence of colonialism, especially because of the sexual habits of the colonists.⁹ The attitude of the Nigerian man toward the commercialization of sex is notable in the attitudes of the colonists toward sex and women in general. Olujemisi Bamgbose notes that the tragedy of prostitution is that, in most cases, "parents and guardians of the young girls involved in this illicit trade are quite aware of this problem."¹⁰ These parents and guardians engage these young people into this harmful business and make profits from them.

There are cases of young people who have been exploited sexually by making them baby making machines. These babies are sold by the traffickers who give nothing to the young girls. These exploited girls are not able to escape as they live under harsh surveillance and are trapped in their environs. Years back, *The Guardian* newspaper reported of young girls who were trapped in a two-storey building in Enugu, Nigeria. These are young people were seek abortion from a doctor, but he lured them to his clinic and compelled them to keep the pregnancy. After giving birth, he paid

them a token equivalent to \$170.¹¹ This is one of the hundreds of unreported cases in Nigeria that was unraveled. The Global Slavery Index records that in West Africa Nigeria has a population of 181,181,744 million people. Of them, it is estimated that 1,386,000 live in a situation of modern-day slavery.¹² These statistics are actually from the few recorded trafficking cases in Nigeria. Most times, trafficking related cases are not documented as victims are coerced and compelled to be quiet, less they will be victimized all the more.

Bonded Labor/Child Labor

There are many abuses against the girl-child in Nigeria. Many young girls are given away by families in transactional ways for economic reasons. Bonded labor is more prevalent in Asia but pockets of it are noted in certain family settings in Nigeria. Bonded child labor makes the girl-child vulnerable. Many young girls are subjected to very harsh conditions in order to pay off their debt. It could be transportation debt or money given to her parents without her knowledge. Traffickers demand labor for payment.¹³ These young girls are subjected to such labors. Besides these financial reasons, patriarchy is a menace and has fueled a lot of oppression of the girl-child.

Human trafficking has no respect for the dignity of the girl-child. Child labor disrespects the dignity of every young girl especially between the ages of 5 and 17. There are lots of young boys who are trafficked too but the majority are girls. Countries differ and the management of young people is completely different. The International Labor Organization estimates that children exploited globally are about 246 million. Some of these young people are child soldiers, while others are involved in debt bondage, pornography, illegal arms bearing, and prostitution.¹⁴ This is child abuse. Coercion and even torture compel these young people to perform what they are trafficked for. Child labor has become merchandize in Nigeria and lots of people of the privileged class are building their strong financial security as a result of exploiting these young children.

These children are recruited through fraudulent means, sometimes by enticement and kidnap. They are giving away for financial returns and are forced to work as maids, spies, cleaners, car washers, shoe polishers, restaurant attendants, and the likes. They have no access to the finances or remunerations of their labor. All the finances are controlled by their traffickers. In the pages of Nigerian newspapers there are many verifiable stories where young girls who served as maids in families were raped. In August 2018, Mr. Andrew Ogbuja raped 13 year-old Miss Abah who lived and worked with him as a maid. Mr. Andrew and his son sodomized Miss Abah, she became ill, reported to her mother, and the case was finally reported to the

⁷ See *ibid*.

⁸ See Olujemisi Bamgbose, "Teenage Prostitution and the Future of the Female Adolescent in Nigeria," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 46, no. 5 (2002): 571.

⁹ See Bamgbose, "Teenage Prostitution and the Future of the Female Adolescent in Nigeria," 571.

¹⁰ Bamgbose, "Teenage Prostitution and the Future of the Female Adolescent in Nigeria," 571.

¹¹ See Staff Reporter, "Babies Bred for Sale in Nigeria," (2008), <https://mg.co.za/article/2008-11-09-babies-bred-for-sale-in-nigeria>.

¹² See Global Slavery Index.

<https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/data/maps/#prevalence>

¹³ See Groody, "Moving Targets: Migrants, Globalization, and Human Trafficking," 19.

¹⁴ See Groody, "Moving Targets: Migrants, Globalization, and Human Trafficking," 19.

police.¹⁵ Many Nigerian activists including female lawyers mounted pressure on the government of Benue State in Nigeria and eventually Andrew was incarcerated. There are other incidents where women maligned their young maid servants. Nigeria has a culture of abuse of minors through forced labor. Rape cases and abuse of minors in Nigeria are staggering so that one wonders what will become of the future of our children. Statistically, "Every three minutes a woman is being raped. Every eighteen seconds a woman is being beaten in the world."¹⁶ Young women trafficked in different parts of the world and women in general continue to be victims of sexual predation.

Child Marriage.

Child marriage is one of the prevalent traditional evils against the girl-child in Nigeria. Africa in general has a history of child marriage because of entrenched religious, cultural, and ethnic beliefs of the African nation. Nigeria is among the top 20 countries in Africa where child marriage blossoms.¹⁷ Child marriage is any marriage where one of the parties is not eighteen years of age; in Nigeria, in most cases, girls are married before they are eighteen. In the mid-eighties, there was an uproar because of the deaths of some young girls who were married early. IfiAmadiume narrates the terrible experience of a Chief Medical Officer who witnessed "The mounting deaths resulting from the delinquency and recklessness of our privileged men, who impregnate unripe and biologically underdeveloped girls."¹⁸ He cites the case of Fatima who got engaged at nine and eventually married at twelve. Fatima's early marriage turned for the worst as she suffered vesico-vaginal fistulae (VVF). This is a perforation of the bladder into the vagina, causing an uncontrollable drainage of urine into the open space. This medical officer insisted that he knew about 5,000 such cases in the northern Nigerian town of Kano.¹⁹ From the mid-eighties till now, much has not changed especially in the northern part of Nigeria where child marriage is customary.

In the world, reproductive health hazards remain a leading cause of morbidity and mortality among women in reproductive age. In Nigeria where the healthcare system is porous, the situation is worsened. Many young girls lose their lives because of early marriage as it exposes them to sexually transmitted diseases and other dangers associated with becoming pregnant. Child marriage should be refuted at all levels. The Catholic Church and the other churches in

Nigeria vocalized openly the devaluation such marriages place on the young girls. The Islamic community seems not poised to dwell on conversations restricting child marriage as they claim child marriage is part of Islamic laws. Senator Yerima, a member of the parliament claimed Sharia Law to hold on to his marriage to a thirteen-year-old girl in Abuja in 2010.²⁰

The politics of Sharia Law leaves most young girls at the northern part of Nigeria in a disadvantaged situation as their parents continue to force them into child marriage for economic reasons. In the past some girls resisted their husbands and the result of such was brutalization and battering of the young girls. In the mid-eighties, Hauwa of Sokoto was an eye opener to every Nigerian on the ills of child marriage.²¹ She was married at nine, but tried to escape many times. She was beaten, her fingers were cut off and she was maltreated, but her parents kept sending her back to her husband. Finally, she became sick. At the end she died after amputation resulted in an untreatable infection. Hauwa's story is still a talking point among feminists and womanists in Nigeria. The Church continues to cite her as an example that should lead to refute the ugliness of child marriage.

Bride Price

The negative effects of bride price are another example of what leads to pervasive clandestine trafficking against the African girl child. In Nigeria and most other African countries, the bridegroom gives a token to the family of the bride before a marriage agreement is reached. In other parts of the world like in India, the dowry is the opposite of the bride price. In India, dowry is the wealth from a bride's family to the family of the groom. In Nigeria, the tradition accepts that the man who wishes to marry a woman showcases his readiness to care for the new home by making a monetary gift/donation to the family of the woman he will marry. Historically, Mary Basil Nwoke, writing from the University of Nigeria Nsukka, notes that: "the issue of bride price is a value system in the marriage institution."²² Bride price is done in harmony with the customs and traditions of the people where the bride comes from.

In recent times, many womanist and feminist scholars are criticizing bride price. This criticism anchors on the perceived masculinity that surrounds the payment of bride price. In Nigeria, like in most other African countries, patriarchy is a big social issue. There is a strong androcentric mentality in most African men, which subjugates women and oppresses their womanhood. Bride price is seen by critics as a deliberate and malicious act meant to demean, derogate, and belittle the status of a woman to a mere "purchasable" commodity.²³ This is more noticeable in the family setting where most men would want to make their wives understand that they bought them

¹⁵ See "Peter Duru, Senior Lecturer, Son, Raped 13 year-old maid," *Vanguard Nigeria*, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/08/senior-lecturer-son-rape-13-year-old-maid/>

¹⁶ Andrea Dworkin, "I want a Twenty-Four-Hour Truce during Which There is No Rape," in *Transforming A Rape Culture*, Emile Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, Martha Roth, eds., (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 14.

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Q&A: Child Marriage and Violation of the Girl's Right," <https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/14/q-child-marriage-and-violations-girls-rights#>

¹⁸ IfiAmadiume, *Daughters of the Goddess, Daughters of Imperialism: African Women, Culture, Power & Democracy* (New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2000), 124.

¹⁹ See Amadiume, *Daughters of the Goddess*, 124.

²⁰ See "Nigerian Senator marries girl of 13," <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2010/05/2010518858453672.html>

²¹ See Amadiume, *Daughters of the Goddess*, 124.

²² Mary Basil Nwoke, "Bride Price and Implications for Women's rights in Nigeria: Psychological Perspective," *Gender and Behavior* 7, no. 1 (June 2009): 2081.

²³ See Nwoke, "Bride Price and Implications for Women's Rights in Nigeria," 2081.

with their money. Bride price continues to contribute to domestic violence in Nigeria, though by implication it is supposed to seal the marriage by giving the woman the rights to the man's property and vice versa. There is an ongoing inflation of the bride price especially in the eastern part of Nigeria. IfiAmadiume, one of the foremost Nigerian feminist writes: "The high growing cost of bride-price has been the subject of intense and heated public debate in male-dominated modern institutions such as churches, town unions and the government."²⁴ This debate has been lively since 1986 and it still continues today. In disguise, many families seem to commercialize their daughters by extorting high bride price from the men. In the eighties, the Methodist Church of Nigeria in Imo State raised alarm and decided to fix a stipulated amount of 500 naira (\$2) as bride price, but some men became reluctant to marry.²⁵ Bride price is still very widespread in most places today while some cultures are gradually scrapping it to prove that the woman is not for sale.

One thing that is peculiar to bride price and dowry is that, in both cases, the woman remains at the receiving end. Both bride price and dowry led to battering and death of women. In India, women have been murdered by their husbands and the husbands' family because the future wives were not able to provide more dowry. In the United States, there are multiple stories on the internet of Nigerian men gunning their wives down. This seem to occur because in many cases, the men are not able to put up with the gender equality demanded by this society. Far away from a hegemonic culture that protects men in Africa, they prefer to gun their wives down. It has become a big issue among Nigerians living in the United States. The Church should create more awareness on social and structural sin especially those causing mayhem to African women. The Church is the body of Christ and should protect all God's people.

The Church as the Body of Christ: Jesus and the Liberation of African Women

The Church is a home for all. A home for all God's children. Paul the Apostle stresses the importance of the Church as the body of Christ. He was the first person to use the language of the Church as the body of Christ. Biblical scholars agree on this, though they do not agree on precisely what inspired him.²⁶ Paul's inspiration comes from his special encounter with Jesus Christ and the commitment to bring together all God's people. Paul spoke of the church as the body of Christ with emphasis to promote the unity and strength of the Church.²⁷ In his writing to the church in Corinth, a struggling community of believers, he reminds them that they are the body of Christ: "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor 12:27). This is a call for inclusivity. The

Christian community is reminded of the need to continue the mission of Christ by holding onto the good news, which they have received.

Together, the Christian community makes up one undivided body of Christ. Each member becomes part and parcel of the same body. Paul's focus was to reunite the Christian community again by making them understand the necessity to depend on one another in matters of faith and morals. Interdependence becomes the watch word to indicate how the Christian community dwells and lives in unity: "United We Stand." There was no need for conflicts and segregation among the believers; they needed to support one another through Christ Jesus. Paul encouraged them to lift up their gifts because the Church has a need for a multiplicity of gifts. Each person brings his/her gifts to the community as members of the same body of Christ. According to Paul, the human body has many members, different but each has a function. The eye is different from the mouth, the hand is different from the leg, but in the body they all need each other to be a complete whole. In 1 Cor 12:22, Paul says: "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you,' nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you."

There is need for teachers, scholars, prophets, healers and so on. Each human being is unique and has something to offer to humanity because we are one in Christ. Writing to the Romans, Paul reiterates: "For as in one body we have members, and not all members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ" (Rom 12:4-5). Paul did not hesitate to remind the Christian community in Corinth that their actions should be informed by love. It is in love that they can be of service to one another. Love becomes a duty, which they owe one another. Love is kind, patient, and tolerant; it neither discriminate nor oppress people. It is love that brings them together to share in the one loaf and one cup. Paul makes them understand the importance of sharing the Eucharistic meal as, though many, they share in the same bread (1 Cor 10:17-18).

Each sharing of the Eucharistic meal plays out the communality of the human race who comes together to share a spiritual meal at the table of the Lord. Each Eucharistic meal reminds me of the oneness of the human race and how connected we are in Christ who calls everyone to share in his body. In the letter to the Ephesians, the authors introduced a more spiritual dimension, presenting Christ as the "Head of the Church that is his Body." The letters to the Ephesians and Colossians emphasize the universal church's relation to Christ. The spiritual connection between Christ—the head—and his body—the church—stresses the need for the members of the church to knit together in order to promote the growth of the Church.

Fundamentally, all the suffering women and children trafficked at different levels are all members of the body of Christ. Christ's mission was one aimed at setting humanity free. Two thousand years after, there is still slavery and the poor African girl-child's life is put on edge. It is important to note that women make up 50% of the Church's population,²⁸ the cries of women who are suffering should be of immense concern to the Church as the Body of Christ.

²⁴ Amadiume, *Daughters of the Goddess*, 136.

²⁵ See Amadiume, *Daughters of the Goddess*, 136.

²⁶ For a summary of the different theories of the origin of the term the Body of Christ in Paul, see, Gosnell L.O.R. Yorke, *The Church as the Body of Christ in Pauline Corpus: A Re-examination* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 1-7.

²⁷ See Mary Elizabeth Walsh, "Ave Verum Corpus: A Feminist Ecclesiology of the Body of Christ" (Ph.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1998), 22.

²⁸ See Teresia MbariHinga, *African, Christian, Feminist: The Enduring Search for What Matters* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 180.

After looking at the Church as the body of Christ in which all Christians are members, I focus on the implications of Mary Magdalene's witness to the resurrected Jesus after his crucifixion, death, burial and resurrection. Mary's witness reminds patriarchy that Christ's first revelation of himself after his resurrection was to a woman.

Witnessing of Mary Magdalene

It is important to acknowledge Mary Magdalene as the first apostle of the gospel of Christ by stressing the fact that a woman remains the first person to encounter Christ after his resurrection. Though the church refers to her as the apostle to the apostles, patriarchy has limited the discourse on Mary Magdalene, but it is unable to counteract the truth of her being the first apostle of the gospel. Mary was dogged in her followership of Jesus, and never lost sight of him even when the twelve took to their heels at the foot of the cross. Kyndall Renfro, a Covenant Baptist Pastor writes: "Along with Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, Mary accompanies Jesus's body to the grave long after the prominent disciples have fled the scene. She goes further than Joseph and Nicodemus, however, and returns to the graveside, even after the burial."²⁹ Mary goes to keep watch at the tomb while the twelve apostles are nowhere to be found apart from John. Mary, Kyndall continues to point out: "is the only known disciple whose faithfulness to Jesus does not waver. She follows him in his life (Matt 27: 55-56), his death and burial."³⁰ Mary was always close to Jesus from the moment she was healed from being possessed by seven demons in Luke 8:2. This remains the only known fact of her history³¹ and her integrity should be protected.

Mary's role in the fourth gospel (John 20) cannot be de-emphasized. Scholarly attention has always been conferred to Peter, John, and to the doubt of Thomas. Mary's case focuses on faith. She remained at the graveside until she saw the risen lord though she mistook him to be a gardener. This is because Mary has no prior knowledge that Jesus was risen. It would have been questionable if Mary grasped immediately that the purported gardener whom she saw was Jesus. This is never symbolic of lack of faith rather it is because she was in pain and grief, mourning the death of Jesus and Jesus decided to appear to her instead of the male apostles. Why would Jesus decide to appear to a woman?

Women at the time of Jesus were oppressed and nobody expected the risen Lord to appear to a woman. No wonder there is doubt in the narrative considering the response of the apostles. Maybe, God would have appeared to a man and not to a woman? By Mosaic Law women were not even allowed to be witnesses.³² Jesus did not choose to reveal himself to Mary because she was a woman. Jesus chose Mary Magdalene because she was worthy to receive the first message of the risen Christ. Because of the patriarchal attitudes entrenched in the culture of the time

and even now, it becomes imperative to know that Mary's role is key to the liberation of women. It is clear that a woman can encounter God to the dismay of masculine powers. Jesus uses his choice of Mary Magdalene to challenge patriarchy and its effects on women. During his ministry, Jesus did not segregate women. He listened to Mary and Martha and supported them at the death of Lazarus. In the life of the Church, Mary's story is important to dismantle patriarchal structures which subjugate women. She was the most devoted of all the disciples. She went to the graveside of Jesus and was weeping (John 20:11). Her tears were of love and memories of losing a loved one. Mary had a personal and intimate interaction with Jesus after the resurrection. Jesus tells her not to cling onto him (John 20:17) rather to let him go and find the brothers and tell them: "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17-18). Do not cling to me, as Jesus said, is not a rebuttal but rather a commissioning of Mary Magdalene as the first post resurrection disciple. This is to say: "Go and proclaim the gospel, tell the brethren that I am risen." Go and preach the necessity of holding onto one another as brothers and sisters. This message was given to the Christian community, and they lived in harmony and supported one another (Acts 2:43-46; 4:32-37). Patriarchy was never in the plan of Christ. It was a cultural device by the male dominated society aimed at oppressing women. As Christians who are brothers and sisters, we need to truly live out this gospel mandate as handed over to Mary Magdalene. We need to retreat, make amends, and then become truly whom we ought to be, brothers and sisters just like the earliest Christian community. It continues to be imperative to note that Mary's involvement in the mission of Christ is consequent to her absolute, committed, and unalloyed love for Jesus Christ. This love Teresa Okure, a Nigerian biblical exegete notes, is stronger than death. This love made her a fitting bearer of this key Easter message, which is about love and lasting relationship between Christ and his followers.³³

Church's role in diminishing Modern Day Slavery

In its set up, the Church is patriarchal but always speaks out regarding the social ills in the society. The modern-day slavery of the girl-child continues to be of concern to the Church. At this point I will draw attention to the teachings of the Catholic Church to address this ill.

The Catholic Church has done a lot to support those who find themselves at the margins for one reason or the other. It is an institution that has managed offices and services in different parts of the world geared toward the support and emancipation of people, beginning from works in social justice, pastoral care, hospital apostolate, and so on. The Church continues to provide volunteers all over the world who reach out to the most vulnerable in the society to help in restoring their dignity. In the face of modern slavery and its numerous attacks on the African girl-child, what can the Church do to diminish this ordeal?

²⁹Kyndall Renfro, "Faithful Disciple, Feminine Witness: Mary Magdalene Revisited," *Review and Expositor* 110, no. 1 (2010): 132.

³⁰ Renfro, "Faithful Disciple, Feminine Witness: Mary Magdalene Revisited," 132.

³¹ See Renfro, "Faithful Disciple, Feminine Witness: Mary Magdalene Revisited," 132.

³² See Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 9.

³³See Teresa Okure, "The Significance Today of Jesus' Commission to Mary Magdalene" in Elizabeth A. Johnson ed. *The Strength of her Witness: Jesus Christ in the Global Voices of Women* (New York: Orbis Books, 2016) 17-30. For more reading on this topic, kindly visit this edited work by Elizabeth Johnson.

In the heart of the Church's teaching on countering menaces like trafficking lies the golden rule, which is the love of God and love of neighbor. The gospel of Matthew 25 comes to mind: whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters that you do unto me. Feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, caring for the oppressed, burying the dead, visiting prisoners, clothing the naked and sheltering the homeless. This is the core of the corporal works of mercy and the epitome of the love of neighbor as the church teaches. At the basis of Matthew 25 is the respect of the dignity of every human person. The Church directs humanity to this dignity by constantly reminding all God's children that we are all created in God's image and likeness. Both the victim of trafficking and the trafficker bear God's identity. It is sinful then, to take advantage of a fellow creature.

In the Second Vatican's document on the Constitution of the Church in the modern world, the Church outrightly condemns any kind of trafficking of the girl-child: "Whatever insults human dignity such as arbitrary imprisonment, deportation, slavery, prostitution, the selling of women and children; as well as disgraceful working conditions where men are treated as mere tools for profit, rather than as free and responsible persons; all these things and others of their like are infamies indeed."³⁴ These are terrible ills and the Catholic Church continues to condemn them. The Church in Nigeria through the bishops' conference has continued to promote seminarians aspiring to priesthood, as well as female postulants to religious congregations, and lay people who long to become catechists should embrace the social teachings of the Church. This has become part of the curriculum of studies to educate them and create awareness of the necessity of implementing the social teachings of the Church.

The Santa Marta group, which is set up by the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales to work with the government to combat modern day slavery and trafficking of different kinds, had its first African conference in Abuja, Nigeria. The Cardinal Archbishop of Abuja John Onaiyekan addressed the group on 4th November 2018 and asked the Catholic Church to rise to the challenges of modern-day slavery. He told the attendees that: "the phenomenon of human trafficking needed to be put into the context of faster transport and communication, and globalization."³⁵ He called the Church to emulate the Santa Marta group by working with national and international agencies to curb the rampant trafficking in Nigeria. The Church's attention is drawn to many young people who have become refugees in different places because of conflicts and wars to provide support for their rehabilitation. Edo State in Nigeria is high ranking in the trafficking business. About eight out of every ten trafficked

people in Nigeria come from one state alone, Edo.³⁶ Trafficking is a major concern at the State level and, hopefully, the Church and the State government will collaborate to diminish trafficking.

Toward a Society focused on the Common Good

The promotion of the common good is a foundational concept in the social teaching of the Church. Patriarchy is at the basis of the maltreatment of the African/Nigerian girl-child/woman. It is important to see every person as our neighbor in order that all will flourish in the community for the common good of all. According to Elizabeth Collier, who is an associate professor of business ethics, the concept of the common good asserts that: "life within a community is absolutely fundamental to one's physical, material, emotional and spiritual life. Life is not about each and every individual human being."³⁷ Life in the community should promote the whole person. The community plays an important role in the makeup of what one becomes in the society. Collier goes on to say that: "Scripture reveals that it is the faithfulness, life and destiny of the community that mediates an individual's experience of God."³⁸ In matters of faith in God, without the community, there is a lacuna which stifles the faith experience of the individual. The good of the community comes first.

The community of faith strives to live up to the dictates of the covenant with God. In striving for the common good, the dignity of the individual requires that all in the community live a life worthy of their dignity.³⁹ The common good is geared toward genuine human development in the community where there is no exclusion. It is not simply the good of the greater number. The common good seeks the good of all in the society. The common good aims at the good of all above the good of a single individual. In *Mater et Magistra*, Pope John XXIII's 1961 encyclical, he explained that: "the common good embraces the sum total of those conditions of social living, whereby men are enabled more fully and more readily to achieve their own perfection" (no. 65). The common good aims toward achieving a perfect society, a society where humans make effort to better the lives of all in the society. The oppression of women in the African society is an impediment to achieving the goals of the common good in the society. Traffickers, as emphasized by *Gaudium et spes*, paragraph 27, harm themselves and others. Considering the trafficking of the girl child, is it possible for the church in Nigeria and for the world to fulfil the common good? This is still far-fetched. The church needs to de-emphasize patriarchy and sexism to mitigate trafficking. Moreover, the Church in Africa, in collaboration with the local governments, should provide

³⁴ Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: *Gaudium et spes*, (December 7, 1965), § 27, at The Holy See,

www.vatican.va

³⁵ Ruth Gledhil, "Cardinal pleads for action to stamp out 'rampant' human trafficking,"

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/11004/cardinal-pleads-for-action-to-stamp-out-rampant-human-trafficking#.W-4JVACfrLE.gmail>. Posted November 14, 2018.

³⁶ See Gledhil, "Cardinal pleads for action to stamp out 'rampant' human trafficking."

³⁷ Elizabeth W. Collier, "And They Fled into Egypt: Migration in the Light of Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching," in Elizabeth W. Collier and Charles R. Strain eds., *Religious and Ethical Perspectives on Global Migration* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books 2014), 152.

³⁸ Collier, "And They Fled into Egypt: Migration in the Light of Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching," 152.

³⁹ See Collier, "And They Fled into Egypt: Migration in the Light of Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching," 152.

food, shelter, good healthcare facilities, infrastructure and all other basic amenities. The primary reason why young people are enticed into trafficking is poverty. This is the root of migration in Nigeria, where people seek for better social contexts and are trafficked as a result of that. For authentic human flourishing in a world, oppression of women should stop. Through its social teaching and praxis, the Church has done a lot, but more needs to be done.

What can still be done? Conclusion and Recommendation

The Church should reject any form of patriarchy because they oppress women both in the Church and in the society. The Church needs to live her prophetic role more in order to continue being the voice of the voiceless, especially for women who suffer oppression. Local churches and dioceses need to put more structures in place to help in the rehabilitation of survivors of trafficking. With her commitment to social welfare, the Church should continue to focus on the education of survivors. In many cases, victims, bystanders, and facilitators are all members of the Church. So far, the Church has carried out campaigns to educate and deter willing victims and their families and, with its engagement to promote social welfare, it has worked to rehabilitate some victims. The Church is challenged to do more.

Education of the Girl-Child as a resistance to Modern Day Slavery

I am concluding by stressing that education is the key to resisting male power suffered by the girl-child. Education improves the cognitive horizon of the girl-child and helps her to face the modern world. An uneducated child is vulnerable and might end up on the streets unless she is able to learn some skills. Mary Aibangbe, a researcher on girl-child education in Nigeria, notes: "The ability of young people to embrace the opportunities for employment will depend to a large extent upon the type of education and training they receive."⁴⁰ If a child is educated, then the child will be able to make choices for herself. Growing up, she will be able to face the signs of the times and would not be caught up in making wrong choices unless she decides to do so. Because knowledge is power, the education of the girl-child will be a weapon to resisting patriarchy in Nigeria.

When education is negated to a girl-child, growing up, she would not be able to join the rest of the women in fighting for the rights of other defenseless women. Every girl-child deserves the opportunity of being educated because this is the only key to challenge and addressing different kinds of predation against the girl-child in Nigeria. Education in Africa is cheap but still not affordable. The Church should make education accessible and affordable for young boys and girls.

The Church needs to address the poverty problem through capacity building schemes, for example, by partnering with charity organizations to empower the girl child in several trades, and hence, reducing vulnerability and increasing self-esteem. The perpetrators of human trafficking should be reported to law enforcement for proper sanctions and punishments.

⁴⁰ Mary O. Aibangbe, "Child Trafficking: A Hinderance to the Girl-Child Education," *Planning and Changing* 46, nos. 3/4 (2015): 316.

Finally, modern-day slavery has truly taken the form of human trafficking today. Slavery as human trafficking was abolished about 154 years ago but it is back in more sophisticated ways and has become a weapon determined to destroy the African girl child. Many young and older women are deceived into accepting a lifestyle that is never suitable for them. They are forced into trafficking for financial reasons and become money making machines for their traffickers. Culture comes with its limitations for the woman in Africa and as such, trafficking varies. A woman becomes the property of her husband or may not have an equal right with the man in a family setting.

It is our common duty to protect and care for all humanity. The dignity of every girl-child should be cherished and respected for the common good of God's creation. As humans, we are the members of Christ's body. We are the Church and we are united with our head who is Christ. May the gospel message handed over to Mary Magdalene by Jesus Christ, help humanity to manifest a love that says no to any kind of oppression against women.

The dignity of the human person is a transcendent value, always recognized as such by those who sincerely search for the truth. Indeed, the whole of human history should be interpreted in the light of this certainty. Every person, created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:26-28) and therefore radically oriented towards the Creator, is constantly in relationship with those possessed of the same dignity. To promote the good of the individual is thus to serve the common good, which is that point where rights and duties converge and reinforce one another. (John Paul II "Message for the celebration of World day of Peace," 1 January 1999)

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