

The Opportunity to be Both: A Look at Christianity and Feminism in Ghana

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the affinity between Pentecostal Christianity and feminism in Ghana. Feminism has been a topic of debate in Ghana for many years because it is viewed as disruptive ideology. The role of women is often overlooked within Ghanaian Pentecostal Christian circles. Women are often not allowed leadership positions in the absence of male leaders, and this is often backed by literal androcentric biblical interpretations. Such interpretations put feminism and Ghanaian Pentecostal Christianity as opposing ideologies. However, the biblical passages in Numbers 27:1-11 regarding the daughters of Zelophehad and that of the women mentioned in Acts 16: 1-7 when analysed through womanist hermeneutics offer an interpretation that recognises equality in Ghana's (Pentecostal) Christianity. The role these women played made biblical history and the beginning of women's recognition in Christianity. This thesis examines the affinity between Ghanaian (Pentecostal) Christianity and feminism using womanist hermeneutical interpretation.

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Chapter One: Ghana

“Feminism... You know how we feel about that humiliating Western thinking? The slayer of homes.... introduced mainly by America to ruin African women” ... (Ama Ata Aidoo, 1986).

The word “feminism” evokes a variety of sentiments across Africa. In Ghana, it is viewed as a problematic label, with which even some feminist advocates and activists prefer not to self-identify (Oduyoye, 1994; Manuh, 2007). Gender equality is at the heart of Ghana’s 1992 constitution (The Women’s Manifesto of Ghana, 2004), however, progress along the principle of gender equality has been slow, and the feminist movement is still regarded with caution in the public sphere (Mohammed, 2018). In the Ghanaian sociocultural context, feminism has been depicted through popular conversations as an ideology that encourages women to hate men, and interrogating gender stereotypes is often frowned upon. For example, Nana Ama Agyemang Asante, a Ghanaian writer, and journalist, in a 2019 interview with Development and Corporations (an online news portal dedicated to international development and policy making), said: “I did not identify as a feminist for a really long time and did not come across words like feminism and patriarchy until I was in the university. Feminist was what men called you if they wanted to insult you” (Asante, 2019, para.1). Asante’s remarks tell of the perception of how feminism is viewed in Ghana.

In recent times, social media has opened doors to more conversations around feminism and gender stereotype. However, as many young people engage with forms of social criticism, Ghanaian Christian feminists who seek to reconcile their ideology with their faith will face a challenge in the fact that biblical scriptures are often interpreted from patriarchal perspectives (Gerstein, 2012; Reuther, 1985). I made this observation based on my experience: as a member

of a Pentecostal church and a woman, it has been difficult for me to take a stand against some of the church's practices that are clearly pro-patriarchal because the church taught me to believe that these practices were ordained by God and therefore sacrosanct.

In a country where Christianity is appreciated and feminism is yet to be completely understood and accepted, and where educational attainment and occupation contributes to class stratification, as not everyone can afford tuition, Ghanaian feminists, who typically have a graduate or post-graduate level of education (PhD holders, lawyers, journalists, and medical doctors), are perceived to be from the upper middle class. They speak on critical issues without fear of consequences because of the privileged social status they enjoy by virtue of their education or family background. They often have social media platforms with large audiences (of about ten thousand) like-minded followers with whom they engage on various topics such as sexual abuse, domestic violence, widowhood rights, flipping the narrative in oversimplified gender roles women are expected to play, and the oppression of women in the name of Christianity.

According to the 2010 census, 71.2 percent of Ghana's population identify as Christians (Ghana Statistical Service). Western Christianity was introduced into the territory that is now Ghana as a by-product of trade with Europeans, beginning in the late fifteenth century. By 1838, Thomas Birch Freeman had expanded the Methodist church throughout the pre-colonial Gold Coast territory (as the littoral regions of Ghana were known then). This significantly transformed the social life of indigenous people, as "Ghana's traditional religious practice (African Traditional Religion (ATR)) became inferior to the God of colonialists" (Bawa, 2017, p. 4). Over

time, Ghana essentially developed its own form of Christianity, infused with indigenous traditional practices and cultural beliefs (Bediako,1988).

Notwithstanding the multiplicity of denominations of Christianity in Ghana, this research defines the term Christianity as a non-discriminatory reference to the Pentecostal denomination, and less broadly to all the ways in which Pentecostal Christianity is practiced in Ghanaian communities. Ghanaian Pentecostal Christians place emphasis on direct experience of God through baptism of the Holy Spirit (Quayesi-Amakye,2017). The Ghanaian practice of Pentecostal Christianity is often syncretised with a pre-Christian animist mode of worship, featuring respect for communal living arrangements, providing support for members, and preparing them for religious life. Additionally, my use of the term feminism connotes equal recognition and regard for women's participation in the society as opposed to the intersectional use of the term feminism.

Christianity in Ghana (Gold Coast)

Christianity was introduced in Ghana, formerly known as the Gold Coast, at the end of the fifteenth century with the arrival of Europeans (Acheampong, 2018). Their main aim for arriving to the Gold Coast was trade; however, these traders were accompanied by chaplains whose main aim was expedition, as well as proselytization and conversion (Koduah, 2004). These chaplains came with the Bible written in their language, so reading and practicing what they read to indigenous Ghanaians was not a difficult thing to do. By the twentieth century, Christianity had taken over the entire Gold Coast due to the influx of missionaries and western church missions, including those led by the Presbyterian Church, Methodist Church, Evangelical

Presbyterian Church, Roman Catholic, and the Salvation Army (Koduah, 2004; Asare, 1990). All of these churches were very different in their approach and how they read the Bible.

As observed by Mbiti (1990) and Koduah (2004), Christianity flourished throughout the Gold Coast (and Africa) through the twentieth century because Ghanaians and the rest of Africa were notoriously religious. Therefore, it was easy to add on another form of belief or religion. However, Wade Harris (a Liberian itinerant preacher) started what became known as the African Independent Churches (Spiritual Churches) in 1913. This started a syncretisation of Christianity in Ghana, which contextualised the message of the gospel with traditional African religious practices. This kind of Christianity was hailed and accepted by many, and it set the stage for the emergence of Pentecostal churches (Kodua, 2004). Currently, Pentecostal churches are the fastest growing Christian movement in Ghana (28.3% according to the 2010 Ghana Statical Service Census). According to Koduah (2004), this form of syncretisation provided the lost ingredients in Ghana's Christianity. By lost ingredients Kodua (2004), explains that Pentecostal churches (in Ghana) offered healing, social fellowship, emotional experiences, and security against evil forces which missionary churches did not offer. Pentecostal churches were also successful at preaching what can be called a "balanced message of salvation because their sermons were geared towards reward(s) for the believer and the punishment for the evildoer, which is in line with the desires and aspirations of African life and characteristics of its society which punishes offenders" (Debrunner 1967, p.50).

As Adu-Boahene (1990) observes, the introduction of Christianity in Ghana greatly impacted the social lives of Ghanaians. It is almost impossible to delineate Christianity from the daily lives of Ghanaians. Christianity is embedded in everyday life activities. A typical example

of this is seen in how Ghanaians will pray to start a board meeting (Anyidoho, 2018) and the everyday market sphere where reference to God is made in every interaction. Therefore, in Ghana, it is not surprising to see many tele-evangelists. Additionally, large congregations are comprised of mostly women.

Male leadership is seen as natural, with deeply held beliefs about women's inferiority often supported through selective and misinterpreted biblical scriptures. This makes many believe that the Bible provides a basis for discrimination and patriarchy. However, the Bible has also been used by many women as a source of inspiration and as a source of authority to challenge conservative notions of inequality. Churches in Ghana and Africa have played paradoxical roles in women's rights and empowerment. They do this through organizing small women's groups, which offer empowerment and a place for women to map out strands of their faith, as well as perform their diverse roles to uplift the church (Kasomo and Clayton 2013).

African and Ghanaian Feminism

My use of feminism in this thesis is to partly critique Western feminism and its failures and connotations of African feminism with western feminism. I use the term African feminism to make an argument for theories and activism that are central to African context. Oyeronke Oyewumi (2003) and Chandra Mohanty (1991) have argued for the theory of feminism from the angle of identity and liberation which have been part of the struggles of African women post-independence. One of the key ideas of African feminism is based on the premise that Western feminism ignores the lived experiences of African women as a valid component within the Western idea of feminism. In African feminism, gender discrimination is not the sole or primary focus of oppression of African women, but rather one of many issues they contend with among

others such as economic exploitation (Bayu, 2018). Therefore, many feminists in Africa rely on distinct identities such as Black feminists or African feminists and postcolonial feminists.

According to Lewis (2008), “African feminists are a group of women with a continental identity and intellectual commitment to critique gender norms and imperialism” (p.78). As a matter of fact, African feminism became a much-needed space for African women to create a feminism born out of their initiative, backgrounds, and experiences. As espoused by Nkealah (2006), African feminism offers self-reliance for African woman considering the heterogenous nature of African culture and its effects on women. Additionally, African feminism addresses issues of complex experiences faced by African women from diverse cultural backgrounds. Africa’s kind of feminism is different from feminisms elsewhere. It is a postcolonial feminism aimed at involving males in the struggle of women for a just society, and at the same time standing against patriarchal sentiments which curtail women (Chambers & Watkins, 2012). This kind of feminism simultaneously bears in mind that patriarchy differs from place to place, even within Africa and the world at large because patriarchal domination manifests in race, class, ethnicity, religions (such as Christianity) and global structures (Davies and Graves, 1986). Davies and Graves (1986) described African feminism as recognizing that African feminism is not antagonistic to African men, but rather challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women’s subjugation, which differ from the generalized oppression of all African peoples. Through African feminism, it is evident that inequalities and limitations existed and continue to exist in traditional societies, and that colonialism reinforced them while introducing other forms of inequality. It recognises some affinities with international feminism, and it examines African societies of institutions which are of value to women, rejects those which work to their detriment, and does not simply import Western women’s agendas.

For those unacquainted with African feminism, history has portrayed African women as a group of lazy, backward, lewd, and dishonest people with no agency or resistance to power and as passive people (Narayan, 1997; Caren, 1987; and Smith, 1983). Another misleading assumption about African feminist struggles is that African women have always been revealed as second-class citizens to their male counterparts. However, there are stories of women with strong feminist traits, especially within the traditions of the Akan of Ghana have always portrayed women as able and capable of matching up with males and playing similar roles as their male equals. As one iconic example, Nana Yaa Asantewaa, queen of Ejisu, led the people of Asante to war against Great Britain in 1900, and Nana Hima Dekyi XIII of Ahanta ruled as the paramount Queen of Ahanta from 1964 -2002 (Mingle, 2015). Ghanaian women, like their fellow African women, have enjoyed a considerable amount of society's reverence and respect. Amongst the Akans, women are leaders and matriarchs who held decision making power for king selection and tenure. Although still practiced, Akan women now serve their society by proxy. As an example, they act as advisors to a reigning traditional leader and serve as the unifying force within traditional societies. Currently, issues around biology, such as childbirth have been used as arguments against women's ability to completely lead society or offer support to people within society because, motherhood is viewed as an important characteristic, just as biology is used against women around the world (Adewale,1990). This partly reflects the slow participation of Ghanaian women even in politics throughout history (Arhin,1990).

Njoki Wane (2011) in an article titled *African Indigenous Governance from a Spiritual Lens* asserts that, "feminism is part and parcel of African women's lived experiences and about African indigenous ways of knowing. It is about decolonization in every facet of life" (p.7). Wane further explains that the process of decolonizing African women encompasses a

spontaneity which does not address the issues of African identity in western educational thought and activism, which often does not address or advocate for African women's experiences.

Therefore, this involves a conscious effort to partake in discussions that arise from the multifaceted subjugation of African women and consciously challenge the narrative that puts them under subjugation. This African kind of feminism does not end with equality, but rather it stresses on the need to educate, empower, and elevate women and recognise their agency.

The agency of women in Ghana began to dwindle during colonial governments as colonialists came from predominantly patriarchal societies (Busia, 1952). White colonizers of the Victorian era with little to no understanding of African cultures, arrived with their notions of governing societies and assumed the same repressive attitude amongst the women they colonised (Ata-Aidoo, 1990). This is because, as colonizers, they were not interested in understanding indigenous African societies. Rather, they imposed their way of life through education, economic control, and religion (churches).

Currently, gaps in education, employment and health are still prevalent among Ghanaian women (Ata-Aidoo,1990). Ghanaian women living in the rural sectors do not have access to resources, such as land ownership and economic stability, compared to men. Nonetheless, there is an increase in the number of women heading households which depicts a move towards equal rights and liberation for women under Ghana's Constitution. Due to occurrences of violence against women, including rape, child sexual assault, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and trafficking, feminist (women's rights advocates) organizations have increased in numbers in Ghana (Assibey-Mensah, 1998). These women-centered organizations' efforts are directed at the creation of awareness and recognition of the unique position women have in

Ghana. They also continue to foster gender equality in Ghana, through the advocacy and use of several international conventions on the status of women's rights. The government has offered platforms for women to address and seek stronger roles within the democratic government. In 2004, the Women's Manifesto was launched as a document endorsing women's equality in terms of their economic and political rights, amongst other human rights. Ghana's feminism is still evolving, and conversations about gender issues at the national and local levels continue to call for attention to feminism and women's liberation (Atia and Adatuu, 2017).

Generally, feminist activism in the Ghanaian context is in line with many of the concerns of mainstream African feminist activists such as Ama Ata Aidoo (1990) and Musimbi Kanyoro (1998) and Black feminist thought as voiced by theorists such as Angela Davis (1980), Alice Walker (1983), and bell hooks (1989). Contemporary critiques by these feminists have drawn attention to the neglect of race, colonialism, and settler colonialism in Western feminist theory. These critiques have also offered an additional layer of criticism in the assertion that colonialism, neo-colonialism, and global inequalities are generally overlooked as sources of African women's subordination (Day, 2016). Brewer (2017) notes that Black feminist struggles have never been strictly about dismantling patriarchy and have almost always centred on African American women. However, over the course of time, this school of feminism has been broadened to encompass Africa and the Diaspora with greater emphasis on communal living and complementarity as demonstrated in African life. Additionally, Ferguson (2003) argues that Black feminist thought processes were in motion before the discipline of Black feminism penetrated the walls of academia. He points out that Black women have always acted along the lines of both gender and race.

Research Questions

If literal interpretations by men is the tool used to oppress women, can I use the same tool to dislodge the power such interpretations hold? although it is evident that feminists and womanist biblical interpretations have already established the liberative power of scriptures, this has not trickled down quite well within Ghanaian Pentecostal environment. My interest in finding ideological alignments between feminism and Christianity lies in the fact that, I worked in Ghana as a women's right activist, but I am also a committed Pentecostal. Theoretically, within my Pentecostal circle, these two aspects of my identity are not mutually exclusive and balancing them demands a lot of translation and explanation. This thesis would be a focus on why certain biblical stories are interpreted through biased cultural perspectives and are used to endorse unacceptable religious practices. I am determined to reconcile feminism (equal recognition and liberation of women) with Christianity using two scriptures: Numbers 27:1-11 and Romans 16:1-7 because they provide a basis for understanding feminism within Christianity and vice versa. Numbers 27 narrates the story of the five daughters of Zelophehad, who claimed their father's inheritance in the absence of a male heir. On the other hand, Romans 16 details the multifaceted roles and contributions of women in the early Christian society.

The following are the two major questions guiding this thesis:

1. How has Ghanaian feminism/ feminists shaped the meaning of equality within Christianity?
2. What biblical texts are they using?

Below is a brief outline of my thesis. In Chapter two, the literature review explores existing secondary sources related to the subject matter, outlines relevant concepts, and offers

a critical theoretical framework that guides the thesis. Chapter three lays out the methods and methodology, describe the feminist hermeneutic approach employed in this research, and provide a discussion on the contributions and limitations encountered in the research.

Chapter four delves into discussion and analysis of biblical texts used, and chapter five concludes this research by suggesting what could be explored in future studies regarding the affinity of Christianity and feminism.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework – Intersectionality

The term intersectionality was first introduced as a concept by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, when she examined violence towards women from African American communities.

Intersectionality calls for observing and analysing the different layers of identity for everyone and helps explain how people experience multiple forms of oppression concurrently.

The theory of intersectionality is applied in this thesis to examine the ways in which Ghanaian women identify the multiple, overlapping sources of their oppression. The use of my personal narration is instrumental in exploring intersectionality, as it demonstrates the complexity of my multiple identities, and the ways in which these identities allow for inconsistency and discrimination within Christianity. For this reason, the theory of intersectionality is used not as a branch of feminism, but as a tool for analysing issues of social concern (Collins and Bilge, 2018). According to Collins:

When it comes to social inequality, people's lives, and the organization of power in each society is better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race, gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other.

Intersectionality as an analytical tool gives people a better access to the complexity of the world and themselves (Collins, 2016, p.2).

I used intersectionality to analyse how male centred and literal interpreted scriptures are treated within Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana, which is a central component of this study.

2.1 Literature Review

Intersectionality as a Tool

The use of intersectionality expands on the domains of power and its dynamics in Ghanaian society. Power is a major focus in applying intersectionality to Pentecostal Christianity as it holds a significant amount of power in Ghanaian society. The domains of power are categorised under interpersonal, cultural, structural, and disciplinary frameworks. For this research, I have relied on interpersonal, cultural, and structural domains of power (Singh 2016).

Domains of Power

1. Firstly, interpersonal power reflects who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged within social interaction and discourse. It exposes the relations that people have with one another. For instance, interactions between a Christian leader and a believer, or between a husband and wife, are almost always characterised by a type of hierarchy. These relationships reveal that power is imbedded within interactions and discourses because it is often [mis]interpreted as a man is the head of a woman as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5: 23), and the woman should be seen and not heard (Timothy 2:11-12). Christian leaders such as pastors and prophets are considered the mouthpiece of God and must therefore be revered. With such biblical texts stating specific roles that women must conform to thus, also demonstrates women's inferiority to men, it reveals that power relationships between men and women, gods or deities and humans, and the natural and the supernatural will be unlikely to cease. Teasing out these relationships is vital as the experiences of women within power interactions and discourses inevitably shape their identities and the choices they continue to make. For example, given that most

prominent Ghanaian Christian preachers are men, their interpretations of scripture often support the idea that feminism is incongruous to Christianity.

2. Secondly, cultural domain of power “helps create messages, which implies there is a level playing field for everyone, and all competitions are fair, and that any resulting patterns of winners and losers have been accomplished” (Collin 2016, p. 11). The overall narrative of faith in Ghana is focused predominantly on Christianity. Christian scriptures can be said to be part of the cultural domain of power because they are used not solely within Christian circles, but also in the daily interactions of many Ghanaians. For instance, in greetings, conversation, proverbs and explanations of natural events, the Christian God is invoked constantly in ways that marginalise women (Addai, Opoku Agyeman and Ghartey, 2013). As such, there are many aspects of social intercourse that Ghanaian Christian women may find oppressive. As a result, some women are obliged to tolerate norms that suppress their humanity. Although the enforcement of these norms might have become more flexible over time, progress in this direction has been regulated by men in positions of power to suit their needs, regardless of the impacts on women.
3. Finally, structural domain of power is revealed in organisations and institutions. In this case, the most obvious example is within Christianity itself, which has been male dominated from the onset. This is reflected in the numerous biblical texts and teachings that the Church lends a male-centred perspective to. Undoubtedly, the scriptures were written at a time when only wealthy males were educated, and most women were “culturally regarded as subordinate” (Uchem, 2001, p. 113; Giles, 2018, p. 87). Even after several version of Christian scriptures, male-dominated interpretations have stayed in place (Legaspi, 2010; Russell, 1985). The Christian Bible contains verses stating

explicitly that married women must be subservient to their husbands (1 Timothy 2:11-12). One of the reasons for applying intersectionality to this research is to investigate the structural power differences within Christianity in Ghana. How can Ghanaian Christian women openly challenge power differences between men and women without being labelled 'anti-Christian' or traitors to their faith?

By using intersectionality as a tool for analysis exposes how (Pentecostal) Christianity can be oppressive using certain interpretations, just like race, gender, or class (Singh 2016). In Ghana's case, it is difficult for Christian women to feel the same way about certain biblical interpretations and the identities such interpretations ascribe to them, especially when such scriptures put them under rigorous gender scrutiny.

Intersectionality in Religious Studies

There is limited scholarly research on the lives of feminist women in Africa. Even among African American society lack of research on feminist movement may partly be linked to the fact that mainstream feminism originated from secular thinking (Reilly, 2011). Within certain community's feminist views Christianity are composed of negative and positive perceptions. Feminist studies sometimes claim Christianity pushes women to participate in patriarchal religious traditions such as being submissive to men, paints women inferior to men and not ordaining women as priests because Jesus Christ selected only men as disciples (Amber, 2017). When women condone or subscribe to such ideologies, they act against their own interests as part of God's creation and therefore become passive victims for men who promote patriarchal institutions. (Avishai, 2008 and Burk 2012). There seems to be a blind spot about the affinity between feminism and Christianity especially within Ghanaian society because feminism is often

seen as an affront to Ghanaian tradition(s) and also, viewed as inconsistent with Christianity. Theologians like Mercy Oduyoye of Ghana and Kenya's Musimbi Kanyoro, have tried to fill in the gaps on feminism and Christianity in Africa, with a focus on Christian women's autonomy using feminist ideologies embedded within African tradition which have been practised in communities. Others like Elina Vuola (2017) asserts that intersectional studies about feminism must not exclude religion within its analysis and must interrogate how academic feminism has regarded religion such as Christianity over time. Intersectionality as a tool for analysing religion is uncommon. However, with the obvious limitations, I have still employed intersectionality because it was important for me to analyze the many intersections and identities women have other than just their feminist identities. In using intersectionality as a framework, I appreciate Singh's (2015) stance which focuses on using intersectionality to liberation.

Singh, (2015) posits that "intersectionality must at least have room for diverse notions and practices of both oppression and liberation, and that in order to do so it must be treated as sufficient negative consensus on anti-oppression" (p. 670). This reiterates Spelman's point about intersectionality as she argued that "no one ought to expect the forms of our liberation to be any less than the forms of oppression. We need to be at least as generous in imagining what women's liberation will be like as our oppressors have been in devising what women's oppression has been" (Spelman, 1988, p.132). Although this quote is old, it was important for me to revisit it because it is applicable to current situations and clearly shows that intersectionality does not only explore race, gender, and sex. For instance, African American theologians can be said to be proud of their Christian identities and to express them in ways that ensures their liberation. One way of expression is through womanism, which offer Black women a safe space to express their identities and ways of living in ways that empower and endorse their agency.

Intersectionality As Agency

Another way intersectionality is important to the study of Christianity is through the interrogation of personal agency. Singh and Spelman (1988) both assert that using intersectionality to examine oppression and liberation of women is important because agency entails taking proactive measures in the interest of a person's own life. Although their assertion is not directly linked to Christianity, it can be argued that intersectionality can be used to couch liberation for Christian women.

According to Mohammed (2005), in Western feminism, there is less acknowledgement for religious women's agency because Western feminism is based on secular and liberal ideas which promote the assertion that women are in search of liberation, as opposed to accepting religious ideologies. However, womanism espouses the common idea that religious woman can still act as agents in their own lives, rather than letting Christianity dictate their lives. Womanist theologians such as Cannon (2016) and Weems (2007) agree that women can reinterpret Christian narratives to resolve everyday life challenges, and they draw on a myriad of cultural selections rooted in Christian communities to forge modern lifestyles. In Monica Coleman et al (2006) *Must I Be a Womanist* they assert that womanism creates political agency for African American women, because it provides a cultural toolkit for women to use to assist in their organizing. At the same time, womanist theologians negotiate the ideologies and identities provided within Christianity and insist on equality through interpretation of biblical texts. Some examples include womanist theologian and priest Gafney (2017), who reinterprets biblical texts to show womanist perspectives and ideologies that promote women's agency. Similarly, Oduyoye (1989) through the Circle of African Women Theologians has promoted the voices of African women within the canon of Christian theology and ethics. As cited in Oredein (2020),

the argument the Circle makes is that African women's theology recognises African culture as the bedrock of African identity, and it does not accept the theology of superior African men as a complete theology of faith for the entire community. So, while the Circle has been able to change the status quo using agency, there is still a lot to promote in terms of popularizing the fight for recognition using biblical texts and the ability for women to be seen as equals within African Christianity.

2.2 My Positionality

I play a dual role as the researcher and the researched in some parts of this research.

As a Feminist

I am a young Ghanaian woman who currently works in community service. I advocate for gender equality, equity and advancement of women like myself. As the researcher and the researched I acknowledge that I could identify with the biblical stories, think through the stories/issues from my personal perspectives, as well as being open about my values and opinions in the analysis.

As a Ghanaian Pentecostal

I am also a Ghanaian Pentecostal Christian and strongly hold my cultural roots dear to my heart and I believe in the works of the Holy Spirit. With my beliefs, I still find it difficult to clearly situate myself as a feminist. I analysed my personal understanding of the subject under investigation and opened my mind to exploring nuances that particularly stood out in the investigation process. To make sure others who are similar in my social location shared similar experience(s), I conducted member checking. Member checking involves checking facts and interpretations with persons who were present in the setting of my narrations. Member checking

served as a tool for reflective analysis and helped filter, rethink, add details or delete remarks that could develop into incongruous interpretations of the narration (Birt, 2016).

Chapter Three: Methods and Methodology

3.1 Autoethnography

Autoethnographic research accounts are written in the first-person voice and depict contextual details, emotions, self-awareness, and narrations that are often drawn from histories, social structure, and culture (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). There are several questions around the validity of this method. An opponent of this method Philips (1987) argues that while certain portions of this method may be convincing, they are (often) not true. However, because truth has many sides, Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) opines that the quality of autoethnography or self-study which makes use of readers' imagination is often filled with questions that are beyond the personal, which provides answers to the questions and in the process creates a meaningful piece of research.

Autoethnography provided an opportunity to draw on my experiences and understand my cultural context and experiences, with multiple interpretations drawn from the first-person account. It is important to note that autoethnography offers researchers the opportunity to be part of their research as a co-participant, morally, emotionally, and intellectually engage with their biographies (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

I used myself as the research instrument by narrating my own lived experiences and sharing other's understanding of Christianity and feminism. My current position as a Pentecostal Christian in a feminist program who is interested in locating an identity within both ideologies was the focal point. The challenges and experiences I encountered as a Christian who is also a member of a feminist group in Ghana was my central point. I observed that it is within this scope that autoethnography is also placed, because hermeneutics help to unite my thinking with my experience of reality. My aim as a researcher is to study myself within my subculture and

attempt to make meaning of all my experiences. Autoethnographies of a researcher leads to a more realistic representation of their experiences which are often inadequately presented or lost when conducted by an outsider. The connection between the researcher who is also the insider in this method allows for a detailed account and connects the personal to the culture through research and writing (Reed-Danahey, 1997).

As Ellis and Bochner (2000) explained, analysis in a personal narrative is a process of the researcher remembering past events. The researcher can replay memories on specific experiences while paying particular attention to the sentiments and surroundings during the recollection. When I started my study, it was unclear what themes would emerge from my readings and narrations. However, as I progressed in comparing narrations and the biblical scriptures an inductive analysis became evident. Inductive analysis means that themes, categories, and patterns are generated from the Bible stories (Janesick, 2002) and therefore, the themes that were generated from the biblical scriptures and narrations were not imposed prior to reading.

Additionally, my use of autoethnography as a method is informed by the desire to illustrate my perspectives as a Christian who holds feminist ideologies. My lived experiences and perspectives as a feminist living in a country where feminism is not appreciated were cross-checked through interactions with colleagues, family, and friends I encountered while living in Ghana. This approach is informed by Cunningham (2000), who states that “as a principal self, I am always interested in hearing the voices, interpretations, and experiences of my colleagues and constituents, and to recognize patterns in their perceptions” (p.15). But in contrast to Cunningham, I use the ideas and “patterns of perception” of other people to ascertain the validity of my own experiences as a Christian who accepts feminist ideologies. I did this with the

intention of centering and merging in these voices, perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of my colleagues and friends to capture a portrait of my life as ‘feminist-Christian.’

3.1.1 Literature Review

According to Sparks (2000), “autoethnographies are highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding” (p.21). My use of a personal story affirms Laslett’s (1999) claim that in every narration, it is the intersection of the personal and societal which offers a new entrance and exclusive contribution to social science.

My purpose for using autoethnography was to consider how I have dealt with questions about my (Pentecostal) Christian faith and feminist ideologies. I approached my autoethnography with a desire to interact with literature, rather than identify gaps in it with my perspectives. I used narrative ethnographies as a style of autoethnography. According to Tedlock (1991), narrative ethnographies are texts presented in the form of stories that incorporate the ethnographer's experiences into the ethnographic descriptions and analysis

When it comes to feminism and Christianity, individual identities, such as being African, Christian, and Feminist often play a huge role, as each carries some level of importance for the individual, Hinga (2017). Hinga posits that the voices of African women must be reflected in religions such as Christianity, within matters that did not consider their voices in the past, and those that continue to deny their experiences. What is most important, she argues, is the enduring hope that African women will have their voices and experiences made integral to Christian thought. Thus Christianity, which is often believed to have subjugated the lives of African women, invariably serves as the religion that breathes life into the communities through women.

This breath of life is seen in how women such as Mercy Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro used Christianity as a weapon to assert change within their social circles. They call this the ‘double-edged sword’ (subjugator and giver of life) of Christianity in Africa. This trait of Christianity evidences a need to integrate both feminism and Christianity practiced in Ghana and Africa as a whole. To Hinga, African women’s theological positions through the efforts of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, founded and led by Oduyoye (1989), discuss the issues, and concerns African women which African theologians articulate. African women theology alerts us to the diverse yet intense work of African women’s quest into religious inquiry.

In Ghana, the historically concealed yet simultaneous existence of feminism and Christianity can be seen as a part of the greater history of marginalization and alternative feminisms by “mainstream feminism” (Anyidoho, 2018, p. 143). Feminism in Ghana is often interpreted alongside religion and development within private and public discourses. In 2016, Anyidoho conducted research to ascertain how three women, who were heads of three separate non-governmental organizations in Ghana, merge their Christian and feminist beliefs in their work. Inasmuch as Anyidoho used the perspectives of these women to illustrate the ways in which feminism, Christianity and development intersect, her research also offered a quest for integrating feminism and Christianity to foster ideological balance, as supported by Musimbi Kanyoro (2001) who espouses: “In African indigenous thought systems, culture and religion are not distinct from each other, and there is no sphere of existence that is excluded from the double grip of culture and religion” (p.164).

In Ghanaian culture it is apparent that Christianity is intertwined with everyday life. The three women presented similar views on merging their (Ghanaian) feminism and Christianity; they all fostered their Christian faith within their feminist activism and their fight for restoration of status of women within modern Ghanaian society. However, Anyidoho's interviewees' articulations of their work and lives reflected different constructions of feminism and interpretations of Christianity in ways that appeared in their development work, yet the interviewees insisted that there was nothing obvious and uncomplicated in the ways that their religion (Christianity) and feminism interacted (Anyidoho, 2018). Their analysis is a quest for images created around Ghana's Christianity, feminism, and the biblical interpretations and ideologies used to support both.

3.1.2 Methodology: My Autoethnographic Process

Using autoethnography, Feldman (2003) proposed certain criteria for constructing representations which is an extension of Bullough and Pinnegar (2001). He asserts that these criteria must focus on making public how representations are constructed and not only focus on results. He proposed four stages of conducting self-study. I borrowed the first three criteria of Feldman's (2003) categories and adapted them slightly to suit my purpose in this study:

Firstly, he asserts that criteria for representation must provide clear and detailed information on the process of taking note of information, reinterpretation and explicitly explaining what counts as important in the work. Secondly, it must offer clear and detailed descriptions of how representations were constructed from research. It is valuable to add a level of knowledge and insights on how the researcher converted information into artistic representation.

Thirdly, there is a need to show or offer reasons certain information is chosen over others because that provides evidence of explorations of multiple ways to represent the same self-study. Moreover, multiple representations may support and challenge each other which adds a layer to the reasons to believe and trust the self-study.

These three from Feldman's (2003) criteria were essential for my autoethnographic documentation. Recollecting past events for my narrations began soon after I received commendation to carry out this research. Most of the commendations were received through strategic conversation from friends who shared in my experiences and struggles as Christians who are strongly inclined to feminist thoughts. Strategic conversation is defined as any naturally occurring, as opposed to scripted or interview-based, interactions including talk and nonverbal cues (Kyprianou et al, 2016).

Additionally, I have always kept journals to document different stages of my life, so revisiting some of my journals (meeting notes, letters, experiences, interactions, and events) and past photos assisted me to recall past events, some of which were confirmed through phone calls with friends and colleagues. Feldman (2003) citing Bullough and Pinnegar's (2001) *Guidelines for Quality in Autobiographical Forms of Self-Study* asserts that this form of research tool allows the design of the study to be fluid in its creation as it allows researchers to analyze and derive meaning from these pieces. In terms of recollecting past events in my personal journey, I found that reflecting on past events after reading my journals worked best for me early in the morning before I get out of bed. My thoughts were clearer and there were no distractions. I tried to adequately express what I remembered in a couple of paragraphs detailing my internal thoughts and reactions to issues, events, and impressions of what had happened. I listed descriptive words

and jargons that reminded me of topics to discuss with friends and colleagues who shared in that experience. At times I recorded these phone conversations for clarity and to be able to go back to it at a later period to not lose details. Interestingly, conferring information became difficult as I started to finally write this thesis. It became strenuous to finish a phone conversation due to unstable internet connectivity on my end as well as friends and colleagues from Ghana.

Similarly, the difference in time also posed a couple of challenges as the time these persons were available to talk *via* phone calls were often the periods I was engaged with other responsibilities.

One of the central questions in this thesis was on what the usefulness of this work was to the field of women and gender studies especially as I currently live in a society where religion (Christianity) is practiced rather privately, if at all. I did not question this because I believed my research was not pointless within academia, but rather because it is sometimes difficult for people to understand and appreciate other's religious struggles. This is especially the case, as I have found, when people do not subscribe to the ideals of a religion or when such struggles do not personally affect them. There has been crisis within Christianity in these current times where arguments abound over its precepts and where many people are either concerned with the religion itself, or how portions of the Bible tolerate patriarchy. With this context in mind, how can one express one's lived experiences as an example for the rest of the world to understand?

During my second year of my graduate studies, I noticed that although my program was interdisciplinary, it did not have clear interdisciplinary connections with the Religious Studies department, as I would have imagined. This once again reminded me of my long-held desire to find a common ground for the two ideologies that have become important parts of my identity. I felt encouraged by my graduate seminar class, which introduced me to other faculties and

provided a way to connect my thoughts and ultimately forced me to investigate my dilemma. This was not because I could not come up with a plan on my own; rather the class became a tactic I used to divert energy towards creating a real need to investigate the dilemma.

Nevertheless, despite being able to figure out a way to make my problem a need worth investigating, I was still not completely content with identifying as Christian in a feminist program. A part of me stayed restless and unsure about remaining in the program and whether I wanted to be known as a feminist for the rest of my life. I had other aspirations, but I was unsure whether being widely known as a feminist would allow me push through my career and as a member of a Pentecostal church, considering the name calling I had experienced in church and at work in Ghana. Colleagues at work and friends in church slowly drifted away because of my feminist approach to things. I finally decided to pursue this dilemma academically by making it my thesis topic, and thus hoping to discover a different way of balancing my love for Christianity and feminism and to also understand the Christianity and feminism dichotomy (if any). I tried to address this conundrum within my research questions. These questions influenced the discussions I brought to the topic of Christianity's compatibility with feminism.

In conclusion, my use of autoethnography was informed by the desire to illustrate my perspectives as a Christian who believes in feminist activism. My lived experiences and perspectives as a feminism enthusiast who lived in a country where feminism is not appreciated were cross-checked through interactions with colleagues, family, and friends I encountered when I lived in Ghana. This approach is informed by Cunningham (2000), who states that “as a principal self, I am always interested in hearing the voices, interpretations, and experiences of my colleagues and constituents, and to recognize patterns in their perceptions” (p.15). But in

contrast to Cunningham, I use the ideas and “patterns of perception” of other people to ascertain the validity of my own experiences as a Christian and feminist. I did this with the intention of centering and merging in these voices, perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of my colleagues and friends to capture a portrait of my life as ‘feminist-Christian.’

3.1.3 Womanist Biblical Interpretations

Womanism serves as an all-encompassing theory which takes on the entire well-being of black community and (or) the marginalised (Smith, 2015). The term womanist was first used by Alice Walker in a 1983 book *In Search of Our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose*. Walker Alice (1983) defines a womanist as a Black feminist or feminist of colour. She refers to phrases like “acting womanish” (pg. 45), used by Black mothers in reference to any child whose behaviour was serious, courageous, or grown-up, as opposed to the “girlish” attributes expected by the general society. Womanism unites women of colour with general feminism at the intersection of race, class, gender, and oppression. She explained that a womanist was a Black woman whose feminism had a great deal of wealth — thick, broad, and wide: encompassing all facets of life which is not restrictive. Thus, womanism works to ensure the well-being of all humanity.

Currently, Black women in religions such as Christianity have appropriated the term womanist to explain the work they do. Smith (2015) further asserts that, womanist biblical interpretations privilege the voices, concerns and traditions of Black women and they read biblical text from that standpoint. This is important because it brings a different set of questions that may never get answered or questions that need to be addressed in order that everyone can live together in a society that recognises all voices.

Similarly, Hudson-Weems (2019) asserts that womanism is Black-woman-centered and complementary to Africana womanism specifically. It may be extrapolated that some characteristics of womanism have links with African principles of complementarity, self-determination, self-definition, and race (Hudson-Weems, 2001) which represents the various fields that bring into focus the totality of the experiences of African (American) women. Inasmuch as the term womanism typically relates to African American feminists, I evoke the term to reflect similar experiences shared by African feminists and or Ghanaian feminists within the context of this thesis. As Nigerian writer Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (2007) explains, “Womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womanhood” (p. 72).

3.1.4 Literature Review

The popular perception of Western Christianity is that it often uses interpretations that are exclusively within the Western Christian tradition (Chopp, 2002). These interpretations in Western Christianity have almost become a mainstream element, often creating an assumption that Western feminism and Christianity are too different to be seen together, and even appear to be antithetical to each other (More et al, 2020). However, a common theme in literature for feminism particularly in Africa is often based on religious and moral perceptions of women and African principles, which value gender roles as complementary, parallel, and autonomously linked to the continuity of life (Townes, 2003).

Patricia Hill Collins (1991) posits: “Black women are ‘womanist’ while white women are ‘feminist’ (p. 10). African womanists and writers such as Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa refuse the label feminist. Emecheta, in her 1988 essay, “Feminism with a small ‘f!’” writes:

I write about the little happenings of everyday life. Being a woman, and African born, I see things through an African woman's eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of the African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be a feminist. But if I am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small 'f' (p. 553).

The experiences and ideas of womanism are similar to the experiences of African women. Thus, the term rightly describes and encapsulates the need for progress for African women and women of colour. As Alice Walker puts it:

I just like to have a word that describes things correctly. Now to me, black feminist does not do that. I need a word that is organic, that really comes out of the culture and really expresses the spirit that we see in black women (Walker, 1984).

Within African history, the familial community is an interdependent system. Both women and men have equal roles in ensuring the sustainability of the community, in the same way as womanism secures and sustains the welfare of both men and women. Womanism provides analytical space for recentring historically marginalized narratives and epistemologies of African women in Africa and in the diaspora.

A womanist theology allows for biblical interpretation from a womanist perspective, prioritising Black women's experiences and traditions. Womanist biblical interpretations offer a space for liberation, recollection, amplification of marginalised voices specifically for women of colour in areas where they were previously dominated and subjugated. Womanist ethicists and theologians, such as Katie Cannon (2016) and Emilie Townes (2011), and womanist Bible

scholars Wil Gafney (2017) and Renita Weems (2007), have all offered scholarship and theological interpretations with specific foci on how Black women are portrayed and understood in the interpretation of biblical texts.

Womanists show a commitment to freedom through an exploration of key figures and movements in Black women's experiences (Townes, 1993), whose contributions have had a profound impact on womanism as a theory and on womanist theology for African and African American Christians. Womanist biblical scholarship commenced as a field of study in the early 1980s (Coleman, 2006). Prior to this, Black women such as Katie Cannon and Clenora Weems did the tedious work of racial recognition (identifying race inclined interpretations in scripture) and androcentric interpretations through biblical texts, albeit outside the realm of academia, often offering interpretations and engaging with biblical texts as a life practice source.

In Nyasha Junior's 2015 book, *An Introduction to Womanist Biblical Interpretation*, Junior states explicitly, "Despite the myriad ways in which the Bible has been used to oppress African Americans, many African American Christian women developed their own interpretations of the Bible ... that affirmed humanity and served to combat their subjugation" (Junior, 2015, p.39). Womanist biblical interpretation casts a specific focus on Black women's experiences and the way they are viewed by others within their community, on account of biblical texts. This is because biblical texts happen to be a part of the fabric of their societies. Wil Gafney, in her 2017 book *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*, offers critical interpretations of several biblical texts while adopting a uniquely womanist approach that focuses on Black women, although not at the expense of women of other races. According to Gafney:

Most simply, to exegete is to seek meaning; even more simply, the primary verb just means to seek. Seek God in the world and in the text. Seek God in yourself and others. And when you find that which is not God in the world, in the text, in yourself, in others, call it out to its face (Gafney, 2019).

Gafney entreats Black people to interpret biblical texts by relating them to everyday life. This way, biblical texts are not portrayed as abstract texts that one cannot relate to directly. Most African communities are characterised by a sense of togetherness that defines what it means to be a Black woman. By Gafney's explanation, 'community' and 'togetherness' may even function as an ongoing active commitment. Gafney explains further that by using womanist interpretations in biblical texts, the voice of each member of the community is valuable, independent, and sovereign. She does not only use interpretative practices to make claims about the lives of those who are overlooked in biblical narratives, but also questions agency, hierarchy, authority, and power as factors in the everyday lives of Black women. She does this by situating herself within and without the text, which informs her womanist interpretations as an episcopal priest. In effect, Gafney opines that Black woman must see a reflection of themselves within biblical texts; this way, Black women will be able to position and reflect on biblical texts in a meaningful way. However, she advises that the work of critical, womanist interpretations will portray Black women and their struggles in a powerful and affirming way. Since Biblical exegesis (explanations and critical interpretation) do not cease to exist with rigorous interpretation, womanist biblical interpretations must be a constant reckoning. Similarly, Putman supports this by explaining that sometimes the text is itself horrifying. And that doesn't go away with anybody's culturally cued hermeneutics (Putman, 2019).

Womanist biblical scholars provide a practical way of thinking about biblical texts that affirm the discourse womanism together. In effect, they show that the role and dignity of women in the Bible has never been negated, as was widely believed, though confirming that they have been glossed over during interpretation. Their work offers a deep analysis of race and culture, as well as Christianity. Many Black women are in search for a biblical tradition and interpretation that affirms and prioritises them. Black feminist scholars have taken on the task of deconstructing and interpreting scriptures in a meaningful way through the lens of a womanist perspective and have shown that pursuing women's liberation, recognition, and equality within Christianity, have always been in strategic ideological alignment.

3.2.1 1. Critical Engagement with Biblical Texts

Mercy Amba Oduyoye advocates for a critical interpretation of the Bible that secures justice and freedom for everyone within the context of African principles. She contends that male interpretations of the Bible have become a tool for subordination which must be abolished (Oduyoye, 2001). Feminist theologians such as Oduyoye and Kanyoro view themselves not only as academics, but also as part of a social movement for emancipation. They maintain that every interpretation must be judged based on empowering women in their struggle for survival and transformation. They also argue that churches in Africa are run by men and that leadership is largely in the hands of men who forget that African women have assisted in the growth of the church through proselytization. They do this by sharing lived experiences (evangelism) and rendering service in deeds and in kind (fundraising), even in the face of unequal recognition and subordination perpetuated through scripture (Walker, 1945).

Oduyoye (1986), in *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*, demystifies the Bible and brings it within an African context where Christ is the pinnacle of humanity and equality. She does this by deconstructing the historical and dogmatic singularity of a male Christ and positioning legendary African and Christian African women as “Christ-like women” (p.35). She places Christ at the centre of the everyday experiences of African women, who can generate a complete personhood despite their burdens and suffering (Oduyoye, 1986). In her 1986 essay, *The Christ for African Women*, she expresses the idea of gender not in terms of the traditional notions of masculinity and femininity (as conceptualised in the Ghanaian Christian context), but with individuals attaining their full humanity and with a less one-sided interpretation of biblical scriptures. Oduyoye opines that African Christians should position their faith within the context of the Bible, but critically question their religion in ways such as, “What role does my religion play in the community? What does my religion offer? What moral principles come out of my religion?” (Oduyoye, 2001, p. 15). For Oduyoye, to answer these questions means to situate oneself in Christianity by understanding scriptures from a critical perspective, instead of applying a one-sided interpretation. This way, she believes, African Christians will have a full idea of God and of what this God intended for women.

Oduyoye argues further that, just as not all African cultures are liberating for women, one should exercise caution when approaching the Bible because not everything said in the Bible is good for women (p. 11). She recalls the Bible’s account of Ruth and Naomi, in which a widow marries the brother of her deceased husband, pointing out that some people cite that text as a biblical endorsement for this common practice in many African cultures. Similarly, Kanyoro (2002) advocates that African Christian woman must use their “cultural hermeneutics to interpret the Bible and examine the multicultural layers implanted in Biblical narratives” (Kanyoro, 2002,

p. 6). She posits that by doing this, women will understand their actual role in Christianity, and thus identify those cultural practices such as marrying the brother of a deceased husband. While backed by the Bible, these are considered retrogressive in modern times. If these practices are abhorred now, then the continued repression of women using the pretext of biblical licence must be countered by invoking African culture, in which women are not marginalised (Kanyoro, 2002).

Oduyoye (2011), on integrating Christianity and feminism, asserts that women must appreciate and assess their image through three cycles — oral history, contemporary religion and culture — each in connection with a vision of how they wish to live now and in the future. She creates a uniquely African anecdote of Christ in arguing that an African Christian woman accepts the status of Christ's refuge as guest and organizes her life in ways that enable the entire household to feel at home with Christ. The African Christian woman thus creates a space where Christ is accepted sincerely. Within her home, Christ becomes a true friend and companion, liberating her from the assumptions of patriarchal society. This anecdote reflects how women can syncretise Christianity with their communal way of life and their love for humanity. Oduyoye theorises that Christ honours, accepts, and is not hypercritical of the single life, sanctifying both single and married life, as well as both parents and offspring. This is the Christ, high priest, advocate and just judge in whose kingdom African Christian women must pray to exist. Additionally, in her book *Daughters of Anowa*, Oduyoye (2005), explained and used this as a point of entry to offer clear perspectives on Christianity and society and creates a space for both Christian and African feminists to identify Christianity with African values, by affirming the wholeness of every human. By addressing the unique experiences of the African Christian

woman, Oduyoye shifts the focus away from Western perspectives of Christianity and feminism to the African woman's way of life which exudes feminism in every way.

In Ghana, Christianity is the religion with the largest following, and it sometimes offers advocates of Christian feminism an avenue for expressing themselves (Bawa, 2017), and these advocates receive criticism from leaders of various Christian denominations. The situation in Ghana is complicated. While a large majority of Ghanaians self-identify as Christians, only a small minority of them admit to embracing feminism (Bawa, 2017 and Oduyoye, 2001). Melanie Springer Mock, in *Being Christian, Being Feminist* (2008), argues that one cannot be a Christian and a feminist, because she believes feminism undermines the very foundations of faith in Jesus Christ. Simply that, one cannot be a Christian and a feminist. Although Springer's assertion references Western feminists and their relationship to Christianity, the universality of Christianity (that is believe in God and Jesus Christ) and the commonality of the Bible allows one to imagine similar posed opposites in the Ghanaian context. Therefore, there is a need to begin a dialogue among Ghanaian Christians who would wish that serving God and identifying as feminists are not mutually exclusive propositions.

Most literature on Christianity and women discusses the practices of (re)interpretation of biblical texts and practices which often seem as though women are only recently being recognized in the field of Christianity. Inasmuch as there are different assertions regarding the place of women within the church (perpetuated through the Bible), literature regarding the faith of African women shows that they have always sought to reinterpret Christian practices in ways that are common to them (Oduyoye, 2001). According to Oduyoye, African women have found ways to live both Christian and feminist lives by situating their way of life within Christianity at

their own pace from their own place. African women see God as liberator in the face of oppression. In an interview by the Sojourners online magazine, Oduyoye says, “African women discover ...the Triune God as liberator of the oppressed, the rescuer of the marginalized and all who live daily in the throes of pain, uncertainty, and deprivation” (Sojo.net, 2020, para, 9).

2. *Feminist Theology Interpretations*

Theology is the science that rationally pursues the understanding of the self-revelation of God in scriptures (Marbaniang, 2012). Oduyoye (2002) describes theology as an expression of faith in response to experience. Feminist theology began in the Western world in the 19th century. During this period, equal rights for women were demanded in terms of education, employment, and law, and women also demanded equal rights in the church. The primary principle for feminist theology is recognition of the full humanity of women. For instance, feminist theologians like Rosemary Radford Ruether asserts that whatever denies or distorts the full humanity of women is cannot be considered redemptive (Ruether, 2011). Therefore, feminist theologians often contrast the depiction of women as gullible.

Fortunately, feminists’ theologians have developed interpretations that locate feminism within Christianity, proving that it is possible to be a Christian feminist, and more broadly, to see God from a perspective that fosters emancipation for women and recognition of their equality. Rosemary Radford Reuther (1985), in *Feminist Interpretation: A Method of Correlation*, adds that it is important for women to view God in an emancipatory way, because in both biblical and modern times, women’s voices have been understated. Reuther asserts the Bible has been interpreted in men’s voices, creating a presumption that men’s experiences are the “norm for Christian society” (Reuther, 1985, p. 112).

In *Sexism and God-Talk*, Ruether (1993) opines that feminist theology must support all human experiences including those shared by women. In the past, such experiences were only identified and dominated by men. In view of this, feminist theology uniquely examines the experiences of women to expose all male-centered biases within traditional theology and offers hope through their faith to incorporate and foster “full (complete) humanity” (Ruether, 1992, p.18). The idea of full humanity inspires a critical look into theology and nurtures a reflection on theology which appeals to women. Feminist theologians do not seek to conceptualize God from the standpoint of women, but rather, offer a counter position to the androcentric perspectives of current theological discourses.

Similarly, in her book *Church in the Round* (1993), feminist theologian Letty Russell critiques the church and its masculine interpretation of scriptures, stating that it is dangerous to call the Bible word of God and to uphold the idea that the Bible has unlimited authority. As an alternative, she recommends that the Bible may be viewed as a book that is “partly the word of God and partly the word of man” (p. 105), because it was inspired by God and written by humans, who superimposed their personal beliefs on what they wrote. As such, it becomes equally easy for women and men to reinterpret the Bible. To Russell (1993), depending on its interpretation, the Bible may be a tool to assert women’s liberation.

As one who retained her Christian faith while many others left the Church, viewing it as implacably opposed to women’s liberation. She argues that “scripture needs to be liberated from its patriarchal interpretation and from its strict conformity with the precepts of Western theology” (Russell, 1985, p. 13), which make an incomplete understanding of the Bible and permit the suffocation of women, particularly by neglecting their contributions to theology. This

point buttresses Russell's earlier call for 'a complete theology' (1974), one that fosters a life of Christian action based on biblical reflection. She describes this as "doing theology differently" (p. 13), in such a way that an individual reflects critically on the premise, and hopefully on the praxis of scripture. She opines that because Christian theology has always been the domain of men, discrepancies abound within it. Therefore, she avows that Christian theology must first combine feminism and theology to make it complete. She notes:

In a Christian context, Christian feminists reflect on how theology can become more complete, as all people are encouraged to contribute to the meaning of faith from their own perspective. Such action and theory form the basis of feminist theology. It is feminist because those involved are actively engaged in advocating the equality and partnership of women and men (p.89).

Russell upholds the idea that feminist theology is a complete theology, in which all women have equal rights in understanding and declaring their interpretations. Her analysis opens a space in which Christians may begin, based on biblical texts and their individually defined Christian faith, to tease out how they might locate, or create an intersection between their feminist and Christian identities. I agree with Russell that to have the ability to interpret Christian texts and it is important for women within the Christian faith to approach biblical texts from their own perspectives.

Russell's idea supports the assertion of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1985), who also asserts that the Bible must be interpreted critically to afford all Christians justice and "liberty. She advances this argument by explaining that the interpretation of the Bible should be a tool for creating consciousness about the structures of domination that stifle the role of women within the

church” (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1985, p. 30). When people become conscious of structures of domination, it activates their demands for equal recognition in the church and for the abolition of these structures. To Schüssler Fiorenza, certain aspects of Christianity, such as male-dominated traditions and literal interpretations of biblical texts, do not allow a full redemption of the potential of Christian women. She argues further that instead of women’s contributions to the early Church being overlooked, it must be recalled in ways that will help Christian feminists to ensure that theology will constantly create spaces for a critical use of the Bible as a tool for emancipation (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1985). Both Schüssler Fiorenza and Russell argue that through critical interpretation and positioning of oneself within the scriptures, there is room for a person to be both Christian and feminist. As these scholars have noted, most traditional interpretations of biblical scriptures are either male-centred or presented in a male tone. This is where I locate the issue under study.

In conclusion, feminist theology therefore analyses the nuances of Christian beliefs such that if Christianity believes, accepts, and can speak of the ultimate mystery and nature of God, then it can also speak of God in a language and conception of human embodiment. This is because people believe that God is uniquely revealed in the human person of Jesus Christ. Again, as espoused in Genesis 1: 27 of the Bible: “So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (New International Version, 2011, Genesis 1:27).

3. Womanism and Womanist Biblical Interpretation

Everyone is created in the image and likeness of God. Male and female, God made them, then understanding God on the part of humans requires active participation of both sexes created

by God (Beattie, 2005). This inclusion of women's experiences in theology has been criticized as being based only on the evidence of western women. This is because the category of western women did not encompass women of different experiences and contexts and excluded those in other parts of the world. Womanist theology has diverse range of perspectives and methodologies, although specific to Black women, the various contexts of womanist interpretation is intersectional, which means that it can involve the concerns Africa women.

In *The Bible and Women: Black Feminist Hermeneutics*, Masenya (1995), drawing on Sakenfeld (1985) analysed three major categories of biblical interpretations and how they can be useful for Black women. In the following paragraphs I locate the biblical scriptures used in this study within Masenya's (1995, p.194) categories and offer an insight into the benefits of (re)interpretation of scriptures, which also shows Christianity's affinity to feminism.

a) Category 1: Looking to texts about Women to counteract Famous texts used 'against' Women

Scriptures such as those in Ephesians 5 and Genesis 2 are often used to support the second place and subjection of women especially in (Ghanaian) Cultures. Such scriptures create the idea of Christianity's incompatibility with feminism or Christianity as an anti-women religion. It is important to use stories such as those in Romans 16 and Numbers 27 which strongly affirm and support women and should often be mentioned to neutralize androcentric interpretations. The more such women focused on scriptures (which are often erased from church sermons) are used, the more Ghanaian women will know and acknowledge their place in the Bible. In my analysis it was obvious that, Christianity recognises women as equals and as a fact, women are used in fulfilling God's purpose, which was revealed in this research.

b) Category 2: Looking to the Bible generally for a Theological Perspective offering a Critique of Patriarchy

This approach focuses on the Bible as an important part of Christianity, the message of God and Jesus. As opined by Rosemary Reuther (1985) and Letty Russel (1933) God is a liberator who constantly looks out for the complete liberation of women. As highlighted in Numbers 27, it was God's final verdict that got the daughters of Zelophehad their father's possession. What these two authors argue for is that the Bible should be viewed as a complete liberation tool. It does not contradict the first category, which lay emphasis on the use of women centered scriptures but rather offers an avenue which "makes feminist use of biblical materials available to the concerns and quests of other oppressed groups including Black women" (Masenya, 1995, p.196). Similarly, Oduyoye (1988) supports this with her assertion that the Bible has authority in (her) life because it makes sense of (her) experience and speaks to (her) about the meaning and purpose of her humanity in Jesus Christ.

c) Category 3: Looking to texts about Women to learn from History and Stories of Ancients and modern Women living in Patriarchal Cultures.

With this option, the Bible is considered as the medium through which the true condition of women is revealed by God as oppressed people. God does not leave women to their oppression, but rather offers women a vision of heaven and earth and how to live toward this vision (Masenya, 1995). According to Masenya, this category offers the prospects of dealing with androcentric biblical interpretations directly without excuse. Thus, African women can take up a tradition of identifying with oppressed women in biblical scriptures as well as their exercise of freedom. The Christian religion plays a significant role in the lives of women in Ghana which is probably because Ghanaians have a holistic view of life. It is therefore important to mention that,

to locate the affinity between the Bible and feminism, Ghanaian Christian women must forgo uncritical reading of scriptures. When there is fear to challenge the status quo fostered by biblical scriptures, androcentric interpretation thrives regardless of how women may find biblical scriptures as liberating.

In Davis's (2016) *Hermeneutics of Numbers 30 and the Politics of Singleness in African American Communities*, she approached biblical studies from the lens of womanist theory and masculinity to emphasize the biblical passage and analyse how women are often categorised under one of four groups: wife, minor daughter, widow, or divorcée. There is never a mention of adult unmarried or a never married daughter. I therefore adopted Davis's approach of doing womanist hermeneutics to think through patriarchal relations to highlight the ways the women in contemporary times and those in Numbers 27 verses 1-11 and Romans 16 verses 1-7 are discriminated against excelled and advocated for themselves using their words and actions.

Reading Numbers 27: 1-11 as a Ghanaian woman reminded me of the various ways hegemonic patriarchy plays out in society. The text describes Zelophehad's daughters' insistence over their father's portion of an inheritance in an era where women did not have a direct claim to inheritance especially when men were concerned. Their chances of inheriting any property would be from their line of marriage or death of a spouse. There were no ways for women to transition from their unrecognised position to inheriting properties or be considered as leaders and undoubtedly continuing to shape discourse about gender roles in Christianity to an extent. The insistence on having male heirs worked to warrant protection and continuity of property rights. Although this challenge continues to prevail under the backing of the Bible, the women in Numbers 27 are now in the majority and make a significant demographic in contemporary

Ghana: that is, women advocating for themselves. After colonial rule, (Ghanaian) women were considered invisible who lack agency because that strengthened patriarchal ideas about women's "proper" place (Davis, 2016, p.22). Currently, (Black and African) women continue to speak for themselves within their unique contexts and experiences, they challenge and oppose chains of silences that held them captive and defined what it means to be a woman which was not their own definition (Hayes, 1995). Using womanist hermeneutics as a thoughtful analysis of the absence of recognition for the five daughters in a biblical subject and writing from my context as a Ghanaian woman challenges the idea and normative standards of male as head. Cannon (2016), citing Walker (1983) asserts that womanism foregrounds black women's lived experiences which makes space for storytelling.

In Romans 16 Paul practicalizes his vision of an inclusive community by making it evident in his letter to the Romans. As a Christian I know and believe that in the sight of God all genders are able and capable to inherit and partake in proselytizing of the gospel. I know and believe this because of multiple life experiences that have strengthened my faith as a Christian, my character, and my personality. As espoused by Shroeder (2018), "the more a person discovers who God is, the greater the level of loving conviction and correction He (God) brings to the soul" (p.5). Paul strongly articulates this in his theology and ethical instructions. Paul recognises and appreciates these women; Junia, Priscilla and Phoebe who came from different social backgrounds and who were part of his Christian Ministry. In Andrew Clarke's (2002) analysis of Roman 16 he asserts that Paul's theology of inclusiveness is conveniently exhibited in his letters of greetings. This is because the names as presented in Paul's letter breaks down gender barriers and social norms. These however may seem to contradict some passages and utterances Paul made to subordinate women within church (1 Cor 11:3-16, 1 Cor 14:34-35, Col

3:18-19, Eph 5:22-33, 1 Tim 2:8-15, Titus 2:4-5). In Romans Chapter 16 he openly recognises the immense contributions of women to evangelism, leadership, and ministry work. In his letter he commends Junia, Phoebe and Prisca for (i) their hard work in the apostolic ministry (Num.16:6-12), (ii) heading a house church (verse 3), (iii) serving as deacon and patron (verses 1-2) and (iv) assisting in apostleship (verse 7). In reference to this scripture, Shüssler Fiorenza (1995) expresses that there were women such as Huldah, Miriam, Deborah among others who emulated egalitarian leadership style as their way of leadership, therefore having women serve in ways like those in Romans 16 did was a common thing. In furthering this assertion, she states that: “women and men in the Christian community are not defined by their sexual procreative capacities or religious, cultural or social roles, but by their discipleship and the empowering by the Spirit” (Fiorenza, 1995, p.140). Paul’s mention of each person by name without lessening gender roles and his appraisal of the ministry by women provides a clear indication of an egalitarian and integrated community formed by the union of the Spirit with Christ, which is also an epitome of womanist interpretations.

3.2.2 Methodology: Process of Hermeneutics

Womanist hermeneutic is an approach which provides an intentional and contextual frame of referencing for biblical interpretation that is relevant for black women, the black community and / or the most marginalized in the world (Smith, 2015). Using womanist hermeneutic as a form of textual analysis allows me to interpret the scriptures in Numbers 27:1-11 and Romans 16:1-7 on my own terms. Thus, womanist hermeneutic as a method offers reading and re-reading of the biblical texts understudy to deconstruct the social context of the passages. Using womanist hermeneutic offered me the lens through which I arrived at a personal interpretation because I read biblical passages differently from androcentric interpretations or

patriarchal teachings. As espoused by (Cannon, 1985) womanist hermeneutic interprets the bible in ways that fosters Black women's liberation. Similarly, the use of autoethnography provide readers an opportunity to enter the researcher's world and directly relate with the researcher's perspectives.

For this study, using myself as a tool for interpretation and insight has been an ongoing process of about six months. I determined a few themes that resonated with me as I read the biblical texts with careful review with the aim to reinterpret the texts under study on my based on my understanding of God and the Bible. Although these themes: acts of care, women inclusion, and collaboration were determined using a common-sense construct, personal values, and experiences with subject matter (Ryan and Bernard 2000), as cited in (Bulmer, 1979; Strauss 1987; Maxwell 1996). As I read the passages, my focus was drawn to dialogues: comments made by a speaker and why they made such comments to elicit a response. This process of engagement revealed (to me) that although there are certain statements in the Bible which does not support women empowerment, it does not imply that such statements are justified or supported by God.

The next stage through which I engaged with the biblical texts is by critically considering the context. The context sets tone of every biblical passage and creates the basis for understanding scriptures. I employ this tact in reading the Bible to understand the situation surrounding a passage (Chaffey,2011). With this insight, it becomes imperative that verses are not taken out of context. I believe most Ghanaian preachers pay little to no attention on the context of biblical passages, hence, resulting in misinterpretations that subordinate women and see feminism as incongruous to Christianity.

Another important step after context is expounding or clarifying biblical texts with other biblical texts. The Bible is believed to be a revelation to Christians in the form of a message. Therefore, the Bible is expected to be understood by Christians as a direct message from God. This approach can be cumbersome because not every scripture can be understood at initial reading(s). However, clarifying scriptures helps me to establish that, I, as a Pentecostal Christian, can understand biblical scriptures through careful studies and understanding who I am in God: I am a child of God. As I read that Bible following the above-mentioned process and using womanist hermeneutics as method of interpretation, I came across statements that show Christianity's for equal representation and recognition of women.

There were certain assertions and beliefs that I identified in Numbers 27:1-11 and Romans 16: 1-7 that are identify with equal recognition of women to men when (re)interpreted through womanist hermeneutics. Womanist hermeneutics advocates critical reading of biblical texts and advocates collaboration and equality. Secondly, themes like acts of care, women inclusion, and collaboration are present in the final verdict or specific action taken especially in Numbers 27. Contextually, women in the story of Numbers 27 did not have a right to inheritance. In practice, this meant that men had the rights and sole ownership over properties. These practices and ideologies were not favourable to women. That notwithstanding, instances of diversity, equality and collaboration are clearly, identifiable as important social practices in both texts, practices that share sentiments with feminism. For instance, feminism in Ghana (often considered as women empowerment and gender equality) asserts the importance of communal service in support of women; therefore, being there for one another, sharing, and offering group collectivity strengthens solidarity and empowerment among women. Furthermore, while (Ghana's) feminism is concerned with equal representation and recognition of women, in the

context of this study this specifically means recognising women's roles in ensuring inclusion, fostering acts of care and collaboration when interpreting biblical passages.

When critically considering a personal interpretation of the two texts, I distinguished statements about ideologies or laws as practised in the era of the Bible passages used from statements that offer a critical and reflective commentary on these practices in the Bible. I connected both of these statements to my experiences as a Ghanaian Christian and the general attitude towards a variety of thoughts and values within Pentecostal Christianity as practiced in Ghana. Distinguishing the two statements is useful to identify biblical practice. In this study, biblical practice is defined as actions taken in the Bible that are backed by the laws effective at the time and are still revered presently. These actions can be interpreted as offering a clear guide to practicing Christians on how they could make meanings from the Bible.

Biblical Practice

Biblical practices are reflected in actions employed by leaders and preachers. These actions take specific forms in Pentecostal church settings in Ghana. For example, while Romans 16 discusses the contribution of women in leadership positions, women in Pentecostal churches in Ghana are not permitted to play dominant roles or head congregations in the absence of a male leader (Adomako Ampofo, 2017). Such practices that relegate women to subordinate roles are common within congregations and small groups found within Pentecostal churches. There is class masculinity that is often found among leaders of Pentecostal churches. By class of masculinity, I mean a set of norms, patterns or behaviors and expectations of how men must present themselves or act which is problematic (hooks, 2004). This class of masculinity generally portrays men as strong and capable while women are considered weaker than men in terms of

emotion and intelligence and thus, less skilled to lead congregations. The belief that women are incapable of taking up leadership roles are all based on androcentric biblical interpretations.

The practice of biblical interpretation can also happen outside of church setting. The first seven verses in Romans 16 makes significant reference to the contributions women have made throughout the process of expanding the Christian ministry after Christ. It reflects how women approached tasks assigned, their interactions with people (possibly including men) and their collaboration in social times. Their quality practices fostered and built relationships among community members and ensured a reliable recognition for women. To achieve this practice, Paul and the members of the church maintained active and responsible roles that opened opportunities for women such as Junia, Phoebe and Priscilla to be represented and recognized as they executed their tasks.

In hermeneutics, interpretation is not reserve for scholarly elites (Gafney, 2017). Everyone is welcomed identify and apply an interpretation based on personal engagement with scriptures. This approach ensures that one is on track in terms of scripture applicability. It must be noted that, application and interpretation are not the same. Whereas interpretation answers the question of what the Bible says or what does a biblical text mean to us, application is concerned with ways to employ what is read into daily life (Chaffey, 2011). Using womanist hermeneutics allowed me to have an exploration of dialogical interaction and analysis between the text and contemporary interpretation, with focus on the subject matter of the text and the reference of discourse itself (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1992). With womanist hermeneutics I analyzed the meaning of the biblical passages where the dialogical process of meaning making assumes a mutual understanding of the subject matter of scriptures (Fiorenza, 1992). It is on this bedrock that I use

womanist hermeneutics to offer an interpretation of the biblical texts under study to show how I engage with the Bible and the interpretations thereafter, which will highlight my kind of feminism which is predicated on (Pentecostal) Christianity.

I offered my hermeneutics of the scriptures in Number 27 verse 1-11 and Romans 16 verse 1-7 to examine their affinity with feminism. A close reading of the selected biblical texts shows the strategies and forms that govern a particular ideological similarity between Christianity and feminism. Womanist hermeneutics differs from interpretive methods that aim to reveal the meaning of a text or an author's intent. It is conscious of the conflicting positions of women within dominant societal discourses, thus exploring these contradicting positions reveal a possibility to (re)imagine other forms of interpretation and offer historical (re)constructions in interpreting and understanding the Bible in relation to the unique position of women (Shüssler Fiorenza 1992, p. 785 and Kanyoro, 2002). This research did not offer claims that the scriptures under study were originally written with feminist intent. In most literatures, without interviewing the author, it is difficult to arrive at a writer's true intent in the text. There are differences in the interpretations of text which are enabled by language and context. This means that the case of feminism may not always be evident in discourses, however, feminist structures can be communicated or implied through a rigorous analysis of hermeneutics. Womanist hermeneutics of the passages in Numbers 27 verses 1-11 and Romans 16 verses 1-7 reveal remarkable phrases from the scriptural passages which highlight a pattern of language consistent with womanism and feminism. This section explores the fundamentals of womanist hermeneutics.

Womanist hermeneutic investigative approach does not have one prescriptive method (Nyasha, 2015). Womanist and African feminist ideologies often stress on the importance of

recognition, collaboration, and inclusivity. The texts under study have these as central foci in them. My hermeneutics on both biblical texts found the presence of patriarchal and hierarchical thinking.

3.2.3 Choice of Passages

As mentioned in the earlier chapters, my aim in this study is to use two Bible allegories from Numbers 27 verses 1-11 and Romans 16 verses 1-6 and my lived experiences in Ghana (as a Christian interested in feminism) to tease out the affinity between Christianity and feminism. It was easy to settle on the scriptures because after my reading of the Bible, these verses stood out in their potential applicability of festering Christian women's liberation. In addition to these scriptures, I also conducted online searches for articles and journals to support and cross check the validity of my own interpretation of these verses. This was to make sure that the design, method, and the conclusion addressed the research questions without biases.

The study is comprised of womanist hermeneutical interpretation of Numbers 26 verses 1-11 and Romans 16 verses 1-7. The Bible contains of sacred scriptures, namely Old and New Testaments. It is considered by Christians as the unfailing word of God and a manual through which their Christian lives are governed. Christians view the Bible like a manual or a sourcebook for answering everyday life questions. The Bible provides standards for their conduct, guidelines for knowing right from wrong, and principles in an ever-changing world (The International Bible Society, 2020). The book of Numbers (in the Old Testament) was written by Moses around 1428 BC (Swindoll, 2021). The story in Numbers 27 verses 1-11 is about the daughters of Zelophehad namely: Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. It paints a picture of the challenges faced by women in the days of old, which are similar to the ones women face in contemporary times: the

lack of women's right and dignity. By contrast, the story from the book of Romans (in the New Testament) was written by Paul as a letter to the Greek city of Corinth in AD 57 (Swindoll, 2021). According to Swindoll (2021), Paul's letters to the Romans, which is called the book of Romans in the Bible, represents the most orderly exposition of Christian doctrine in scriptures. The chapter 16 verses 1-7, which is the focus of this study, affirms recognition across (binary) genders and in Christianity and Christian ministry. The two scriptures were selected through a personal engagement with the Bible and secondary data was also collected on the internet.

Language and interpretation of biblical texts have often been used as weapons against women; however, reading these two scriptures from the New International Version (2011) of Bible unveiled a new conception I had never considered, namely that the Bible can be used as a tool through which women's liberation and recognition as equals to men can be fostered. I selected one scripture from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament because although these two Testaments make up the Bible, they assumed to espouse different ideologies due to the different eras they were written (historically both came into existence over a period of thousand years) and content (Van Aarde, 2011). For instance, it is often considered that the Old Testament is about the migration of Israelites and life stories of people and prophets such as Elija and Elisha. The New Testament, on the other hand, talks about the life and ministry of Jesus and the church (Van Aarde, 2011).

I considered investigating the stories in Numbers and Romans because of the ideological power that is inherent to the language that is used in these two passages. Ideological power, as Fairclough points out is "the power that projects itself as universal practice and a common sense which often exercises in discourse" (Fairclough, 1989, p33). By harnessing the ideological

power of these passages through womanist hermeneutical interpretation, I intend to establish and set forth the affinity between feminism and Christianity and create persuasive strategies that can be applied to (re)interpretations of biblical texts to make the compatibility between feminism and Christianity more evident.

Chapter Four: Analysis and Results – My Work

The goal of this chapter is to show that concern for women is congruent with Pentecostal Christianity. There are themes present within the biblical scriptures used that reflect feminist concerns. In each of the two ideologies (feminism and Christianity), there are values of collaboration, women inclusivity, and showing acts of care. To show consistency in how the biblical passages in Numbers 27: 1- 11 and Romans 16:1-7 embody concerns for women when (re)interpreted through womanist hermeneutics, I grouped them under the following subheadings: collaboration, women inclusivity, and acts of care. In cases where the connection to feminism was obvious, I demonstrate how the quote connects to the literature and biblical texts used.

1. Stories about the Life of Jesus

There are many opinions about the role of women in the Bible. According to Ryrie (2011), the Bible portrays Christ as appreciating the capabilities of women. To demonstrate the truth of this statement, there is the need to link this to the oft-quoted Pauline statement by theologians; “in Christ, there is no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, and there is no male or female, for you are all one in Christ” (New International Version Bible, 2011, Galatians 3:28). This is suggestive of what Jesus iterated in Matthew 12 verse 50: “whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister and mother” (New International Version Bible, 2011, Matthew 12:50). In effect, since the days of Jesus, women have showed active faith in service to Christianity and the propagation of the Gospel. While women were considered docile with less recognition within the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, women were very much used in fulfilling the gospel. At the start of his ministry, Jesus

initiated friendships with women, such as Mary and Martha. This could be seen as revolutionary at a time where women were of lesser reputation.

Martha and Mary

In the Bible, there are accounts of Jesus's unflinching support for women. One such example was His relationship with Mary and Martha. Based on this friendship, Mary reached out to Jesus while their brother Lazarus was on his sick bed (John 11: 3). This account reveals that when he arrived at the house of Mary and Martha, Lazarus was dead and buried for three days. The death of Lazarus moved Jesus to tears. Martha's utterance of unshakeable faith and belief in Jesus stirred in Jesus a will to raise Lazarus from the dead. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now, God will give you whatever you ask" (New International Version Bible, 2011, John 11: 21-22). Jesus responded: "your brother shall rise again" (New International Version Bible, 2011, John 11:23). This reflects how deeply Jesus considered and was concerned for his (women) friends. This also mirrors the kind of recognition and respect he had for the women of His time, as a group who needed attention and recognition like any other sex (Ryrie, 2011).

Woman at the Well

Another account of Jesus recognizing, and honouring women is the report of the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4: 27. Jesus often broke protocol by addressing women publicly. His disciples expressed amazement at Jesus speaking with this woman who was a known prostitute and Samaritan. Due to uncertainties regarding the holy place of worship, Jews and Samaritans had a fierce and long-standing hatred between them (Naseri, 2014). Therefore, Jesus's conversation with the Samaritan woman was unwarranted and an affront to tradition. His encounter with this woman revealed her plight and frustrations with life. At the end of their

encounter, she called out to other people and announced the good news about Jesus. This suggests that feminist interpretation of this passage is possible, instead of a one-sided interpretation of Jesus as an omniscient being who revealed the Samaritan woman's secrets.

Paul and His Mission – Romans 16:1-7

House Churches

In Romans 16, we note that Paul mentions women who have been outstanding in the work in the ministry of the church. Priscilla, Phoebe and Junia were women that Paul acknowledged alongside other women. Their names appear in several other books of the New Testament. Indeed, before church buildings became standard places of gathering and worship, the homes of these women were the meeting places for many new converts to Christ. My analysis of their roles, below, argues that their actions affirm the relevance of feminist ideology to interpreting scripture. Additionally, their actions parallel my own lived experiences as an active Christian participant in my Ghanaian Christian community. Thus, the commendation of their roles in the scripture can be read as commendations of feminist activism. I now look at these women in the Romans 16 passage:

A) Phoebe: A servant (Deacon(ess)) of the church in Cenchreae – Romans 16 verse 1-2

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of His people and give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a benefactor of many people including me. (New International Version, 2011, Romans 16:1-2).

It can be deduced from the above that Phoebe had certain outstanding qualities and skills that Paul recognised and respected. Although other translations of the Bible, such as the English

Standard Version (ESV), downplays Phoebe's role as not outstanding, the role she occupied as a deacon(ess) was worth commending because it led to the expansion of the church. As Gafney (2020) opines, scriptures such as the passage in Romans 16 raises the idea that women and men built the church of God together. There was no 'man's work or a woman's work' when it came to Christ, but rather everyone was involved in the work of God. Similarly, Carter (2018) supports this assertion when he states that, church historians have long believed that Phoebe was an apostle who had a high reputation for serving the church. As one example, she delivered letters to the Romans. Paul used the term deacon to identify people parallel to him. These were: Tychicus, Epaphras and Timothy, all of whom were men and very much involved in building new churches. Therefore, whatever Paul and the other three men were doing as deacons, it can be deduced that Phoebe was also engaged similarly within the church.

B) Priscilla (also called Prisca): Fellow Worker in Christ Jesus (Romans 16 verse 3)

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow co-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. (New International Version, 2011, Romans 16: 3).

What is known of Priscilla or Prisca, is that she and her husband worked together in church building new churches, and they also worked with Paul as tent makers. In an article entitled Priscilla, "Pastor, Preacher, Apostle", Gafney (2020) points out that the Books of Timothy, Luke and Acts all name women who were involved in the early work of building Christian churches. Gafney believes that this was an effort in "smashing patriarchy, then inverting the common hierarchy" (para.9). Analysing scriptures through the lens of womanist hermeneutics *makes it*

apparent that women have always been at the forefront to proselytization, and this is a feminist act that goes hand in hand with Christianity.

Priscilla's name is mentioned first in all mentions of the New Testament in conjunction with other names as well. As Gafney expresses, this was not a matter of courtesy, but rather indicative of the preeminent role she executed and her ability to take multiple roles at once, such as tent maker, travel evangelist, businesswoman and church planter. Although the first few verses of Romans 16 offer few details into Priscilla's work, the Books of Acts and Luke provides full details of Priscilla's work towards church ministry. Romans 16 verse 3 tells the story of a woman, wife, teacher, and pastor who was able to take on multifaceted responsibilities and also a woman whose story exemplifies the eminent roles played by women alongside their male counterparts in Christianity.

C) Junia: Renowned Among the Apostles – (Romans 16: 7)

Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was (New International Version, 2011, Romans 16:7).

The focus here, is to explore the nuances in Junia's role as a woman who was relentless in propagating the gospel of Jesus Christ and as a person whose role has been minimized within the Bible and Christianity as a whole. Junia is mentioned alongside Andronicus. It is unclear how they are related, however, as Junia's name has always been a subject of contention, whether as a male or as a female. The focus here is not to show how Junia is related to Andronicus (perhaps he is her brother or husband) or to debate the gender of Junia. Rather, from the New International

Version of Bible, Junia is identified as a woman and is also sometimes identified as an apostle. Paul acknowledged being in prison with Junia and Andronicus due to undertaking missionary work. Paul calls himself the least among the apostles because he persecuted the church, but he calls Junia “outstanding among the apostles” (New International Version, 2011, Romans 16: 7). An apostle is a person who is sent to transmit messages by the instructions of the sender (Slick, 2008). Junia was not only known among the apostles, but she was also long involved in the work of God even before Paul converted to Christianity.

Paul practicalized his vision of an inclusive community by making it evident in his letters to the Romans. Paul strongly articulates this idea of including people (mostly women) who were often excluded or marginalised at the time of his ministry and ethical instructions. Inclusivity in terms of Christianity might be a bit difficult to define.

For this reason, I chose Munoz’s (2007) explanation which states that; inclusivity is a practice of integration or mainstreaming. In view of this, I defined inclusivity within the context of Pentecostal Christianity as the quality and equality of participation in the things of a church and regard for the marginalized within Christian community. In Paul’s letters, he commends certain people within the Roman congregation. These people were prominent within church communities because they played diverse roles by sharing the gospel and assisting Paul in his mission’s work as he traveled between cities. Paul recognises and appreciates women, such as Junia and Priscilla, who were from different social backgrounds. In Andrew Clarke’s (2002) analysis of Roman 16, Clarke attests that Paul’s theology of inclusiveness is conveniently exhibited in his letters of greetings. This is because the names as presented in Paul’s letter surpass gender barriers and social norms. Paul commends these women - Junia, Phoebe, Prisca -

for (a) their hard work in the apostolic ministry (Romans 16:6-12); (b) heading a house church (verse 3) and (iii) serving as deacon and patron (verses 1-2); and (c) assisting in apostleship (verse 7). In reference to this scripture, Fiorenza (1995) states that there were women who expressed an egalitarian leadership style in early Christian history. In furthering this assertion, she states that: “Women and men in the Christian community are not defined by their sexual procreative capacities or religious, cultural or social roles, but by their discipleship and the empowering with the Spirit” (Fiorenza, 1995, p.140). Paul’s mention of each person by name, without lessening gender roles and his appraisal of the ministry of women, provides a clear indication of an egalitarian and integrated community formed by a union of inclusivity within Christianity.

Practices of Women Inclusivity

Although references of inclusivity appeared in both scriptures, most of the examples are seen in Romans 16. The first example was from verses 1 and 2 where Paul commends Phoebe’s commitment, his requests for her to be included in the congregation, and his request for support for her. These verses entreat Christians to be aware of the different roles each person plays, the different experiences, while taking note that there are different levels of engagement, and that everyone is welcome to play their roles at different times. This is exemplary of Oduyoye’s (1999) and Kanyoro’s (1995) cultural hermeneutics, which they explain as a framework that helps women interpret their experiences and realities, as well as identify and promote aspects of life which affirms their full humanity as members of the society. These verses also explain and endorse a variety of ways that Paul encountered and involved women in the Christian ministry. As (Pentecostal) Christian women explore the stories and concepts in these passages, they can (re)interpret and assess their place within the church. This aligns with Oduyoye’s statement

mentioned in the earlier chapters that African Christian women must assess the word of God in terms of what it does for them and what roles their religion (Christianity) plays in their community (Oduyoye, 2001).

In support of women inclusivity Romans 16: 17 (although not a focus of the research) addresses how all Christians, regardless of gender or status, must watch out for people who cause division and put obstacles in their way. Such obstacles are different from what they know or have learned. This suggests that there is no standardization practice in Christianity, and that there should be a variety of strategies to consider each person's strength and contribution which does not express that one group must usurp power over the other.

Women's Inclusivity Against Androcentric Interpretations

Inclusivity will offer Ghanaian Christian women various ways of bringing their experiences and knowledge into Christianity. Having identified examples of inclusivity through the selected scriptures and ways that the stories in the selected scriptures connects with how womanist interpretation offers appreciation for feminist practice, this section highlights how some Christian practices that identify with feminist ideologies are incompatible with androcentric interpretations rather than Christianity itself.

Patterns of recognition and self-advocacy in the scriptures used highlight how Christianity is linked to feminism and the significance of having an all-inclusive interpretation, especially regarding the various roles and experiences women introduced in the two scriptures which includes (re) structuring of laws so that women had equal and meaningful access within Christianity. Such practices show an affinity to Christianity and an incompatibility with androcentric interpretations. When at odds with scriptures, it is imperative to approach scriptures

with Fiorenza's (1992) hermeneutics of suspicion. This means one must approach biblical scriptures with the reality of androcentrism, and then question why a narrator of a biblical scripture speaks in a certain way, as well as question who has the most to lose by way of how the story is told. It is important to approach scriptures with hermeneutics of suspicion because the more sociohistorical events are made distant from its knowledge, the easier the claim to truth leading to creation of power (Trouillot, 2015). As expressed by Rolph Trouillot's (2015) in *Silencing the Past*, "power is unproblematic, irrelevant to the construction of the narratives as such. At best, history is about power, a story by those who won" (p.5). This is exactly what androcentric interpretation of biblical scriptures creates. Reading the Bible can be empowering for everyone, and people must be willing to challenge the dominant models of interpretation that undermines them. According to Oduyoye (2010), suspicion is also a good way for African women to approach scriptures because scriptures were produced at a time when patriarchy was highly practiced.

It is important to read each passage with confidence as the redeeming and liberating work of God as espoused in the Bible (Oduyoye, 2010; Gafney, 2017). An example of an androcentric scripture and interpretation is seen in 1st Timothy 2: 12 which commands women to be silent, listen to men, and not exercise any form of authority over a man. Under hermeneutics of suspicion, it is easy to ascertain the kind of culture practiced at the time the Bible was written. Relatively, it is easy to admit that this scripture (and several others) is not liberating for women, and through faith, we know that God's perspective is not based on or made complete by a single narration, interpretation, or idea. Androcentric interpretations drive out multiple approaches to understanding scriptures using a one-size-fits all approach.

The Story in Numbers 27 verses 1-11

Numbers 27 narrates the story of the five daughters of Zelophehad, namely: Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah who claimed their father's inheritance in the absence of a male heir. During the allotment of lands in the promised land (Canaan), these sisters discovered that their chance of inheriting a portion of the promised land was slim because their father died in the wilderness. It can be deduced that these sisters were orphans as there was no mention of their mother in entire passage as well. They therefore came before Moses, and asked a critical question: "Why should our father's name disappear from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father's relatives" (New International Version, Numbers 27 verses 3-4). The last verse of the story, concludes that God intervened and commanded that the five daughters should not be prohibited from inheriting their father's property (a parcel of land) in the absence of male heir or kin. The story outlines the practices and mindset of leaders and what they often demonstrate when adjudicating cases. Having a male representative is crucial to securing property. However, these daughters challenged the standard. They argued that they are equally eligible to be entrusted with their father's property even though they are not men. Their objective is made clear in the following statement in chapter 27: 1-2: "The daughters of Zelophehad came forward and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders and the whole assembly at the entrance to the tent of the meeting" (New International Version, 2011 Numbers 27 verses 1-2).

The preceding chapter 26 described the census of all males above the age of 20. It further described that, among the people of Israel, camps were formed on tribal lines and headed by men. However, the demand of Zelophehad's daughters was clear and straight to the point. Cohn and Weiss (2008) categorize the position of the daughters in these ways:

- I. *They were aware and familiar with the law and history:* They reminded Moses, Eleazer the priest, and the elders that, their father was not part of a past rebellion against Israel. They made this reference to support their claim to the land and to clear their father's name as a good longstanding member of the society (Numbers, 16).
- II. *The law was inefficient:* knowing that having a place to lay their heads largely depended on securing land, they realised that the current law was inadequate and patriarchal. There was no recognition for families without male representatives
- III. *The ability to initiate amendments within inefficient laws:* they recognised that they had the insight to recognize omissions in a law approved by God. However, they recognized God as unbiased, as one who recognizes all human creatures as equal. They point out the inconsistencies of the current law through compelling arguments:

Our father died in the wilderness. He was not among Korah's followers, who banded together against the Lord, but he died for his own sin and left no sons. Why should our father's name disappear from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father's relatives (verse 3-4).

Cohn and Weiss (2008) described this as a call to life with one's own hand. In other words, by taking this action, they ensured that, their livelihood was secured, and they could also participate in the economy for their community and fend for their own welfare.

Act of Collaboration

Collaboration is explained as the ability to work with a group, offer support to each other, and create an environment of alliance for everyone. This theme makes it evident that Christian leaders should assist their congregation to see the diverse ways of interpreting scriptures. There

is evidence connecting the practice of collaboration in the biblical texts. The first example of this appears in Numbers 27:1-5, where the daughters of Zelophehad arose and pleaded for their cause, asking: “why should our father’s name disappear from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father’s relatives” (New International Version, 2011, Numbers 27: 3-4). These verses espouse the ideas that Christian women can constantly seek outlets to share their opinions and experiences on scriptures. Thus, modelling a practice of collaboration. In verse 5 of Numbers 27, the story mentions that Moses consulted God on as the final decider in the case of the sisters, the verse reads; “so Moses brought their case before the Lord” (verse 5).

This text suggests that Moses and the leaders assessed other forms of judgement which were not in favor of the sisters. After examining other answers to problems like those faced by Zelophehad’s daughters, Moses’s consultation with God can be viewed as an approach to (re)interpretation and knowledge sharing as opposed to relying on a single source of interpretation. As Chimamanda Adichie said about the dangers of a single sided story: “the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (TED, 2009).

This means, it is important to constantly learn outside of what one is usually accustomed to because that may not provide the only answer. Moses would not have reached a decision if he had not relied on an unfamiliar approach. The verse reads:

So, Moses brought their case before the Lord and the Lord said to Moses, What Zelophehad’s daughters are saying is right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father’s relatives and give their father’s inheritance to them (New International Version, 2011, Numbers 27:5-6).

This verse echoes a principle that women must actively search for channels to build their practices of collaboration by sharing their knowledge and understanding of the Bible within the Church.

Acts of Care

According to Regan and Brooks (1995), showing care is having fondness for the world and the people in it and developing a commitment to act morally on behalf of, and for the benefit of others. I chose this theme because there were traits of showing acts of care in the selected passages. The two scriptures under discussion emphasised this as a common theme. Showing Acts of care happens when concern for others is seen as necessary and worthy of attention.

A womanist hermeneutics of the story in Numbers 27 verses 1-11 offers a simple and open-to-interpretation analysis. In my hermeneutics, women do not simply fit into a single category as wives to affirm their links to inheritance. Rather, men inherited properties; this entails land inheritance passed on from father to son, as only male descendants were registered through patriarchal lineage census (Austin, 2020). There was no provision made for females in the absence of a male heir. Women received dowry (clothes, jewelry, money, furniture, among others) either from their fathers or would-be husbands during marriage, and that was the most women could receive in terms of inheritance (Davis, 2016). The five daughters identified that losing their father's portion of the promised land left them destitute and their sense of agency entirely overlooked. This is because the story presumes a culture which only recognizes a connection between landholding and the preservation of male lineage. Therefore, there was the need to step in and request a reform of the laws against their gender which stifled their humanity.

The passage in Numbers 27: 1-11 reveals that the leaders (Moses and Eleazer the priest) paid attention to the women's petition and sought God for answers. In the Christian Bible, there are several verses, such as this one, that shows care for women in ways like the position of women within a framework of Ghana's feminism. Just as a teacher organizes a classroom environment that prepares the body and mind of students to foster their progress (hooks, 1994), a womanist hermeneutics prepares African women to realise their power and determine their environment, even when some scriptures do not support and appreciate their agency. By realising that not all scriptures support their agency, African women will be able to break down patriarchal structures and create avenues which support them and their community by exploring their personal identity and moral agency (Oduyoye, 2010).

The Practice of Acts of Care

“Say to the Israelites, ‘If a man dies and leaves no son, give his inheritance to his daughter’” (New International Version, 2011, Numbers 27:8). This scripture it is obvious that variety of strategies are used to show recognition and regard for equality. This section focuses on how Ghanaian (Pentecostal) Christian feminists may personally connect to scriptures, and in doing so, may identify how scriptures show care and regard for them. Such connections allow African women and African Christian feminists to align their lived experiences with the scriptures they read and bring in their insights, which will be relevant to their lives and the scriptures they engage. To achieve this, it is essential for Ghanaian Christians to (re) read and (re) interpret the stories regarding women who have been incorrectly portrayed and those who have been acknowledged in the Bible. This approach is described by Gafney (2017), who acknowledges that African (American) Christian women should listen and advocate for themselves because their experiences matter in the church.

Another show of care is evident in Numbers 27:2, where Zelophehad's daughters stated their case in the presence of Moses and the elder who often sat at the door of the tabernacle to adjudicate cases. This was the same spot they often sat and consulted God on difficult cases. The verse states:

They came forward and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders and the whole assembly at the entrance to the tent of meeting and said: our father died in the wilderness. He was not among Korah's followers, who banded together against the Lord, but he died for his own sin and left no sons. Why should our father's name disappear from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father's relatives (New International Version, 2011, Numbers 27: 1-4).

Here, one sees that in the absence of an advocate, the daughters showed enough care and concern for themselves by standing up and speaking for themselves. From the scripture above, learning to advocate for oneself is a recognised action in Christianity, and Christian women need not necessarily be quiet and obedient as Timothy alluded (1 Timothy 2: 12). The scripture can be (re)interpreted or expressed in support of a Christian's identity that *includes* advocating for ourselves and community.

As part of my lived experiences and interest and zeal in advocating for myself, I decided to reshape my Christian and feminist beliefs so that I can be both in clear conscience. Relying mostly on self-reflection, my initial attempts to braid these two identities (Christianity and feminism), resulted in a lifestyle that was heavily influenced by feminist ideology, my experiences (as a person who always struggled and defended her place in every sphere of life) and my association with the ladies of Pepper Dem Ministries in 2017. Pepper Dem Ministries is

an online group of young women committed to probing into Ghanaian social structures that leave both genders imbalanced to work in unison to advance society. They are all educated, have second and even third degrees and PhDs and have decided to put gender issues on Ghana's agenda. The group started by 'flipping the script' on gender roles which are often detrimental to the image of women. I joined this group and, soon our social media platforms, especially Facebook, became the talk of most radio stations in Ghana because we touched on 'taboo topics' like rape culture in Ghanaian Christianity, and criticized the biased sermons of prominent Pastors. Most sermons preached on radio demonized or discussed women as second-rate citizens. During one radio show, I served as a representative for the Pepper Dem Ministries group. The male host of the show pulled me aside during an informal interaction and said to me: "I hope you understand that if you want to genuinely follow Jesus, you don't join these loud-mouthed women who just returned from America? Feminism is evil. It is the devil's new way to sway God's children to hell. Feminists never get married, and they are against God. The Bible makes it clear what the woman's place is. Women can never be equal to men; accept this and you will enjoy the favor of God." (Journal entry, March 8, 2018).

It was after this comment that I began to question my Christian faith and its role in my life. This was the moment when I realized the rift between my Pentecostal Christianity and recognition of women as equal to men (feminism). However, anytime I integrated my Christian values, such as honesty and perseverance, into my 'feminist practice', it became enjoyable for me. I did not feel different, and neither did Christianity nor feminism seem to be opposing ideologies. I was no longer resorting to the things I felt that made Christianity and feminism incompatible, and neither was feminism all about a constant fight for women's recognition. My association with Pepper Dem Ministries led me to a question: What if feminism and Christianity

are not set against each other as opposing ideologies, but rather a quest for recognition and regard for everyone.

The final way in which acts of care, show up in this analysis, has to do with an assessment of the petition of Zelophehad's daughters. In God's response to the petition, He stated: 1) their requests were valid, and 2) they should be allowed to inherit their father's portion of the land in the absence of a male heir. This decision created a challenge to the patriarchal norm of the time. In this sense, offering a reading that is divergent from male centered norm, both the petition and the response endorses feminist ideology. When one is faced with such scriptures, and it becomes difficult to resolve the problems they pose, it is important to remain focused, to analyse what the scripture says, and to reflect upon what God's liberating verdict would be. This exercise calls for a level of care for everything that enables Christian women to acknowledge that their thoughts and sentiments are reflected in scripture. In this way, they can easily realize that scripture accommodates their new learning(s), and the ways in which they interpret the scripture connects considering those new learnings.

Using womanist interpretations of scripture offers Christians deeper perspective in ways that support shared interactions. Such actions involve re-interpretating well-known biblical stories of women such as Eve, Hagar, Jezebel, and others to empower each other rather than be overpowered by androcentric interpretations of these women's unfortunate circumstances. Strategies such as offering women the space to speak without interruptions, while calling on one another to offer thoughts and interpretations on biblical texts, is an example of a collaborative practice. Womanism and feminism allows women to use their voice to empower each other and build relationships which support treating women as sovereign (Weems, 1993 and Ampofo,

2010). Womanist theologians such as Weems (1993), and Cannon (1993) have alluded to the importance of collaboration regarding the everyday lived experiences of Black women within Christianity to empower their community. Collaboration and shared ownership become the drive behind the ideas of womanist theologians because they seek to connect people, ideas, and communities. The story of the daughters of Zelophehad is beneficial to contemporary Christian women who seek biblical models for identification and empowerment (Buckhanon, 2016).

Additionally, interpreting scriptures must be representational. It should serve as a basis for current decisions. I had been exposed to a single-sided narration of Christianity which was unfavorable in many ways: I had grown to accept androcentric and incomplete stereotypes of women. I felt reassured through exploring my identity in these scriptures. I began investigating the concept of identity and exploring the intersections of Christianity and feminism, which led me to writing this thesis. After reading articles on Christian identity, feminist identity and Christian feminist identity, I realized Christianity was more about action and embodiment, than what the term imply. After reading Sarah Bessey's (2013) *Jesus Feminist* and Teresia Hinga's (2017) *The Enduring Search for What Matters*, generated a level of nuance within me as I had to answer a question I had avoided; What is it that scares me to merge or find a confluence for Christianity and feminism? My single-sided story about Christianity, alone, created the incompatibility.

My interest in the topic discussed in this thesis began as a search to uncover what I did not understand, namely, whether there can be a reconciliation between feminist and Christian values relating to gender equality, and mutual participation in the Christian faith between male and female within my Ghanaian culture and personal experiences. I was curious about what I

will find. I knew that I would not have enough time to deeply investigate my five-year work as a gender activist in Ghana. To prevent frustration, I used autoethnography which allowed me to relive my past experiences while leaning on other people's interpretations to understand some of the broader issues implicated by the specific experiences I could narrate for the purposes of this thesis. Consequently, I chose to situate feminism within my Ghanaian Pentecostal Christianity. I embraced both as part of who I am, also acknowledging that, the actions, and decisions I had made were influenced and will continue to be influenced by both.

In my life, androcentric interpretations of biblical scriptures made me feel unwanted and alone among my church friends when I lived and worked in Ghana. When I joined the vibrant online feminist group, Pepper Dem Ministries, I faced a backlash in my church for being part of this feminist group. There was name calling both in church and among colleagues at work. One of my colleagues at work said to me one afternoon, "Being part of these feminist groups is witchcraft. Everyone who supports feminism is a witch. They want to change the order of things. God deliberately put men as heads over women, and feminism wants to change that" (Journal Entry, February 17, 2017). I understood that such entrenched positions about feminism were fueled by androcentric interpretations of scriptures in most Ghanaian churches.

In most fields of human endeavour, the achievements of women involve a lot of digging into history to uncover. This is because women's achievements are often swept under the carpet. The stories I have analysed in this section show how much it matters to put feminist ideology alongside Christian values. The stories show that women have always known what to speak for, or against, and that they have always found ways to make Christianity work in their favor. If women are considered second best, then it is because such ranking happens within cultures that

choose to see women as second place, and not because Christianity endorses this cultural misrepresentation.

In sum, the scriptures I have analysed, like unopened flowers, hide details of vivid initiatives and bold actions that these women, in their various roles and in their own eras of male domination, undertook to secure impressive degrees of liberty from adversities imposed on them through androcentric interpretations of God's word. Although their actions were not understood as feminist actions, they exemplify the struggles that women have had to engage in, to survive and thrive over the centuries.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Through my autoethnographic narrations and reinterpretation of texts using womanist hermeneutics to analyse of the selected biblical passages, I arrived at the conclusion that the biggest obstacle to recognizing an affinity between Christianity and feminism is a personal and systemic limited perception of the scope of the two. This is reflected in strident androcentric interpretations of the scriptures by Ghanaian men of God and obstinate attachments to these interpretations by men and women, both in Christianity and within the social-cultural conditions I grew up in in Ghana. In contrast to this position, Oduyoye (2010), Gafney (2017), Cannon (1993), and Weems (2007) have contributed theories, ideas and exegeses that offer new ways of thinking about biblical scholarship, feminism, and womanism together. Their contributions have helped reinforce my own thinking being a Ghanaian Pentecostal and advocating for women's right and recognition (feminism) mutually reinforce each other in their commitment to social justice.

I explored relevant aspects of my experiences in this work *via* autoethnography (Richardson, 200). In writing my personal history, I have allowed myself to experience what Denzin (2013) calls a "sting of memory" (p.126), and a moment of epiphany. Through re-examining my past, I negotiated the past and the present in an attempted to resolve some of the dilemmas and uncertainties that past events left me struggling to understand. Autoethnography gave me the opportunity to investigate whether certain practices, such as being part of a feminist group affirm the perception that Christianity and feminism are incompatible.

As I put personal narrations into word and text, it afforded me the chance to recognize and map out patterns and preferences which allowed me to make a list of recurring words to

identify themes that I pursued in this thesis. These words helped me name events and experiences that brought together the concerns I had explored in this thesis. For instance, in writing about my experiences with the Pepper Dem Ministries and my role within the group shaped my perception of Christianity. In later identifying as a feminist, my perception was that to be part of the group meant you were educated, open minded, and from the middle class. That by being part of the Pepper Dem Ministries, one would be recognized for their efforts for bring up discussions on topics that were not often talked about.

The story of the daughters of Zelophehad and the women acknowledged in Romans 16 offer ways to think about feminism within Christianity. The five sisters did not know what their chances were when they decided to confront Moses and the elders about their father's portion of that land. In a sense, they knew that without demanding what they were due, they would forever lose access to their possession and their father's name will be wiped out, an occurrence that would have been detrimental to their generation. They therefore challenged the status quo and received what was rightfully theirs. Feminism and Christianity share common ideologies that are the very reason for which they each exist. For example, they offer support and act a safe space for women. However, as a Ghanaian Pentecostal Christian, I sometimes allow the cultural implications in biblical texts to cloud my sense of judgement.

I will acknowledge that my ideas and beliefs about feminism were shaped by the interwoven nature of society and Christianity as practiced in Ghana. As I wrote my thesis and revisited my journal entries and reviewed all the authors I have engaged so far, I began to see how much of my own issues with Christianity and feminism stemmed from unsettled questions and assumptions I had about the two ideologies. Through writing, I uncovered how I fabricated a

particular idea of how Christianity is aided by the interpretations I believed in over the years. In presenting these narrations, I focused on my experiences with one group and how they made me rethink my Christian identity. However, what I did not explore in depth were the assumptions about feminism that I had during that time. Through the process of this research, I better understand how society and my Christian faith have combined to influence and shape who I am today. It was also through the narration process that I was able to plan and map out particular events, people in my life, and every experience that helped me shape an understanding of Christianity. These experiences challenge interpretations that will cause me difficulty in accepting my unique position as a Christian woman who is important to God.

In terms of reconstructing my identity to remain a Christian and a feminist, Adam, Ellise & Jones (2013) assert that autoethnography is often a method “for figuring out life and writing through difficult experiences” (p.35). My eagerness to enroll in a feminist master’s degree program allowed me to understand that part of my work as an advocate and life as a Christian made it difficult to reconcile my dual identity as a Christian and a feminist. To say this differently, I found myself leaning towards feminist aspirations through my life circumstances. However, my direct experiences with people who accept the label of feminist and Christian in my current community, and class readings came to fundamentally shape my perception as a Christian and helped me understand feminism – that is, my kind of feminism as an African woman. Autoethnography also helped me find that, a temporary conception of the label ‘feminist’ Christian will not help me achieve what I want to do. I need to rewrite and reconstruct a new path forward. Most importantly, this movement is achieved through work, rather than labels regardless of who is involved. Although identifying and accepting these labels are

important in situating oneself in our current social structure, when such terms are deployed uncritically without asking what these labels mean to us, it can become addictive and lack action.

I also realized through these scriptures that in reflecting on my journey to finding a confluence for my Christian faith and feminist ideology, confusion and discomfort will be a recurring emotion as I am currently exposed to different ways of marrying the two. Additionally, I learned that my feelings of confusion and discomfort stemmed mostly from the myriad ways that Christianity and feminism have been wielded by patriarchal pastors (in Ghana) to be distinct from each other. This process challenged my ideas and preconceived notions of Christian feminism or womanism that were informed by my past experiences and upbringing. I learned that when I allow my ideas and perceptions of polarized notions of both feminism and Christianity to be challenged and personally continue to remain open-minded and inclined to shift, I build on the conditions that help me to develop a hybrid identity as Christian and feminist. As an opinion, I believe that the affinity between feminism and Christianity is interwoven with the lives of people who practice and believe in both ideologies. In reading literature relevant to womanist hermeneutics and the work done in this field, it was obvious how authors such as Gafney (2017) and Oduyoye (2010) make use of personal interpretations and refute androcentric interpretations that do not offer complete humanity to women.

1. In terms of answering my research question regarding how Ghanaian feminism/ feminists have shaped the meaning of equality within Christianity, through my analysis, there seemed to be unequal recognition, representation, and participation of women among Ghanaian Pentecostal Christians. This is due to the misinterpretation of scripture and misrepresentation of some women characters in the Bible. Ghanaian women may have to

read and reinterpret biblical texts to assert their position in the Bible, rather than rely on interpretations of preachers. Answering my second research question on what biblical texts they are using?

Weems (1993) connects womanist biblical interpretations with humanity by connecting biblical characters to people of today. When such connections are popularised and seen alongside rigid concepts and interpretations which are often made to oppose feminism, it becomes easy to locate how close Christianity and feminism are related. I speculate that when we envisage being Christian and a feminist as an action, there can be productive conversations regarding the two as liberating concepts, rather than focusing on the states of being Christian or feminist and deciding which is more oppressive.

I believe that being both is more layered and complex than I initially thought. I believe Gafney (2017) states this best when she suggests that one cannot separate faith from race and identity. Therefore, being a Ghanaian Christian compels me into a life of social justice, and for me, justice begins in biblical interpretations. My race as an African interferes with the traditions of patriarchal order set forth in white Christian culture. Therefore, my Christian faith will constantly be a necessary quest for both liberation and recognition.

The major conclusion from this research as set out in the discussion of this thesis is obvious: I can confidently conclude that as a Ghanaian Pentecostal Christian and a feminist, my faith and my social politics are compatible. I can grow in my faith in the God of the Bible while being fully confident that what feminism has opened my eyes to is more than sufficiently acknowledged, endorsed, and prescribed for in the Bible. This discovery tells me that God is not confined to anyone's cultural philosophies and ideologies. Rather, irrespective of culture, God's

word, social justice, and gender cooperation are essential in serving God. This understanding emboldens me to embrace my feminist activism with greater zeal to pursue avenues such as dialogue with patriarchy and education of other women to promote and embrace our faith without accepting the undermining of our humanity that androcentric views of scripture have imposed on us for many generations.

One unexplored topic of research which arises from my thesis would be a focus on hermeneutics of fear. As a Ghanaian Pentecostal Christian, I struggled with forming my own interpretation of the scriptures I read and studied. This is because in my minds-eye I considered myself to be unqualified to render any form of biblical interpretation. I believe this fear or idea of being unqualified to interpret scriptures by situating one's lived experiences of God and the work of the Spirit is what allows some Ghanaian Pentecostal women to succumb to androcentric interpretations. Additionally, one other area of focus for future studies can be strategies Ghanaian women can adopt to rise above or reject patriarchal interpretations. Examples include women considered as weaker vessels and over submission to men as heads. In addition to this, cultural perspectives that subordinate women are used as the foundation for unequal inclusion and subjugation of women in both church and social institutions.

At the conclusion of this thesis, a question lingers: Is being both a Christian and a feminist enough for women empowerment or liberation? At the end, I feel it does bring some sanity to my initial confused state.

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