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**JESUS AND THE POOR: Reading Stories of Poverty in the Gospel of Luke in the
Context of Poverty among Widows in Upper Eastern Ghana**

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Degree in Intercontextual Theology

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my beloved mother, Mrs. Mercy Melanie Amonzem, for pouring out her life that her children may drink from it. Mama, we love you.

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Oslo, Norway

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ABBREVIATIONS

CBS	Contextual Bible Study
CCAWT	Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians
CMA	Christian Mothers' Association
DDO	Diocesan Development Office
EC	Electoral Commission
KND	Kasena-Nankana District
KNWD	Kasena-Nankana West District
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
PNDC	Provisional National Defence Council
STC	State Transport Corporation
TZ	Tuo Zafi (local staple food)
UDS	University for Development Studies
UIO	University of Oslo
WF	White Fathers (Missionaries of Africa)
WOM	Widows and Orphans Ministry

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ABSTRACT

While there has never been a fixed view on gender oppression, a unified vision of women's liberation, or a common approach to knowledge production, different approaches to feminist research share a concern for the myriad of ways that gender impacts women's lives. Despite a commitment to action-oriented research, feminist researchers have been slower to articulate specific strategies that can contribute to such agendas. Possibly, those who are most marginalised have questioned the relevance and utility of the Western feminist movement and feminist theory and have identified with other social movements that are more directly action-oriented.

Consequently, feminists agree that there is the need to develop a range of research methods that address diversity as well as commonalities in women's lives, and experimentation with novel data collection techniques is important. Exploring different methods of representation can help cut across difference to understand the contextualities of women's experiences of discrimination, prejudice, cultural bias and disadvantage and how they are located in their particular social, economic, political, and cultural contexts.

The primary aim of this thesis is to articulate a variant of feminist action research grounded in feminist theological thought. The work takes a look at the impact of biblical interpretation on the lives of African women. Also, the work examines the interaction between Christianity and African culture and how this also impacts on the lives of African women.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Liberation theology and feminist biblical critique have shown that the bible, in order to empower all people, must be read with new eyes from the vantage point of oppressed peoples. When we read the biblical stories through today's experience, they come alive with new relevance. What follows in this thesis is not intended to be a reinvention of the wheel in Lukan studies. On the contrary, I stand on the shoulders of giants in the subject area of my thesis to see into what prospects there are in this current inquiry that I set myself to embark on with the aim of contributing to the ongoing feminist discussion on stories dealing with widows in Luke and indeed stories of women in Luke.

Today it is commonplace in the study of Luke-Acts that its author, more than any other in the New Testament, has a pronounced interest in women. Leonard Swidler summarizes the statistics concisely: "Where John has eight passages dealing with women, Mark 20, and Matthew 36, Luke has 42" (King 1987, 38-51). A bit less often it is noted that Luke has a surprising number of stories and sayings dealing specifically with widows (Price 1997, Introduction). In the view of Swidler (1979, 255, 261) from whom Via, E. J. in King (1987, 38) makes the above quote, the point of the number is not to make a comparison between the total number of 'passages dealing with women' and, whatever is taken to be the total number of passages in Luke's gospel. The point is to make a comparison with the other gospels, and the numbers show that Luke has more passages dealing with women than any other, even when taking into account the total length of the various gospels. What did Luke mean to do with these stories? This thesis is meant to make a small contribution to the ongoing discussion in this field to bring out the gender meaning of Luke's stories for today's reader.

The *woman question* in the gospel of Luke takes on a new quest for answers when it is framed in the context of poverty among a select group of widows in a particular context (Ghana) and time (21st century). The fact of poverty among women is not only a social problem for governments to fix; it is also a theological issue which the Church in Africa must address (Owen 1994). The Church as a creation of Christ has a mission. The mission of the

Church is a continuation of the earthly mission of Christ. The mission of Christ included an unconditional love, care and preference for the poor, the widow and the orphan (Vatican II 1964-65, *Ad Gentes* #2).

1.2 Problem and Objectives of the Study

In this thesis I investigated the problem of biblical interpretation by women in the context of endemic poverty and cultural oppression among women and widows in the Catholic Church in Upper Eastern Ghana. My main objective was to investigate the way Ghanaian widows and women who are considered poor according to statistics from the Ghana Living Standards Survey 4 (GLSS IV 2003, 13-28), read and interpret selected texts on stories of widows in the gospel of Luke in their own context as poor widows and women and how such readings challenge the Church particularly the Navrongo-Bolgatanga Catholic diocese and the government of Ghana and other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) working in the region in their efforts to alleviate poverty among women. In addition the study aims at highlighting some inhumane cultural practices that widows in this area are made to undergo in the name of tradition. In other words, the specific purpose of this study was to reflect on what it means to interpret the bible from the point of the Ghanaian women context of a struggle for liberation from poverty and cultural oppression. The analyses done in this study is based on contextual bible study of texts, by women of the Christian Mothers Association whose interpretations were expressed in their responses during group contextual bible study sessions, prayers, songs, jokes and local folk stories. The expression “ordinary readers” needs to be clarified. The use of the term “ordinary reader” has both a general and specific designation according to West (2007, 1-5). Generally, it designates the “non-scholar,” to use the phrase of the Nigerian scholar Teresa Okure (1993). The ordinary reader has been “trained” to interpret the bible by his or her primary (for example, the family) and secondary (the Church and School) communities, whereas the scholarly reader has been trained (very overtly) by a tertiary community, the academy (Meyer, 2002). The term “ordinary reader” is also used in a specific sense by West (2007, 3). He says that we are not just interested in the ordinary reader. But the term, says West, “refers to the specific commitment to the liberation struggle in South Africa and to the subsequent reconstruction and development of our liberated country leads me to take sides with particular social sectors, especially the poor, the

working class, and the marginalized (including for example, women and those living with HIV and AIDS)” (2007, 2). Both meanings of the term were adapted and implied in this work.

Poverty in Ghana has many dimensions. Therefore a range of indicators is needed to inform the range of policies to tackle the causes and mitigate the consequences of poverty. The categorisation of women in some regions of Ghana as poor is based on three dimensions of poverty according to the Ghana Living Standard Survey (GLSS4 2003, 13-28) thus: income or consumption poverty, lack of access to basic services, and deprivations in human development. The Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS4 2003, 13-28) was conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service over the period April 1998 - March 1999. The survey was conducted over this period but the results were only published in March 2003. The GLSS 4 (2003, 13-28) shows that overall poverty levels in Ghana decreased between 1991/92 and 1998/99 from 52% to 40%. Extreme poverty declined from 37% to 27% over the same period.¹ This apparent progress, however, masks uneven decline in poverty and incidents of growing and deepening poverty in some geographical areas and groups of people (IMF Country Report No. 03/56, March 2003). The evidence suggests that the vulnerability and exclusion among some geographical groups, socio-economic groups, gender and age groups may have worsened.

There are significant differences in the spatial distribution of poverty. According to the GLSS 4, five out of the ten regions in Ghana had more than 40% of their population living in poverty in 1999. By income measure, poverty levels are highest in the three northern savannah regions of Ghana (the Upper East, Upper West and Northern Regions), ranging between 69% and 88%. Nine out of ten people in the Upper East, eight out of ten in the Upper West, seven out of ten in Northern Region and five out of ten in Central and Eastern Regions were classified as poor in 1999. Of the ten regions in Ghana, the Upper East, Northern and Central regions experienced increases in poverty levels and extreme poverty in the 1990s.

¹The Ghana Living Standards Survey derives two nutrition-based lines of poverty. The poverty line is the consumption expenditure needed to achieve minimum nutritional needs. Overall poverty is based on an upper poverty line of 900,000 cedis (GHC 90) per adult per year. Extreme poverty is based on a poverty line of 700,000 cedis (GHC 70) per adult per year.

The next dimension of poverty is indicated by the main economic activity of household heads based on the upper poverty line. Poverty is by far highest among food crop farmers. This is of concern to this study for one main reason. Women are more predominant in both the food-crop and non-farm self-employment sectors because most women in these areas lack the academic qualifications to get employed in the formal sector and women are used as cheap labour on agricultural farms. This fact is even truer for the women of the Upper East Region of Ghana where annually scores of the youth from the region migrate to the urban centres and mining towns in southern Ghana in search of greener pastures.

The above indicators of poverty thus far indicate that poverty in Ghana has important gender dimensions and therefore requires focused Church and government policy measures. The evidence also suggests that regions experiencing the least reductions in poverty levels (Central, Eastern, Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions) also tend to have a high female population in the range of 60 – 72 percent.

It was partly based on the above facts that I proceeded to undertake fieldwork with a group of women (Christian Mothers Association) in the Upper East Region of Ghana, most of them widows and illiterate subsistence crop farmers, and many of whom had an annual income of less than 70 Ghana Cedis (Ghc 700,000) per annum. These women are considered poor on all counts by the above analyses. My research was conducted among these women who are part of all the women who form the majority of the membership of the Catholic Church in this area. There is a problem with the kind of *official* government poverty statistics that are periodically churned out by government and its development partners like what has been presented above. The problem with these types of poverty statistics is that they either overlook certain aspects of poverty or that they are completely ignorant of them. My research concern here therefore is to expose other forms of poverty that women in this very area captured in the statistics above completely ignored. One such forms of poverty in the Upper East Region is widowhood and general womanhood within the society. The Catholic Church in the area also appears to overlook this form of poverty among women because of the Church's inherent patriarchal structure.

My specific objectives include exploring:

- The opinions of widows on stories of Jesus and widows in the gospel of Luke from their *place* as *widows* (poor women) in northern Ghana

- The ability of the biblical texts to empower these *widows* (poor women) to rise above their situation of poverty
- To enable the *widows* (poor women) to talk back to the Church and the government through their contextual readings of the bible.
- The possible challenges posed by this contextual reading of the gospel texts for the Catholic Church and other concerned NGOs.

1.3 Background and Problem Statement

In 1906, Christianity was introduced in Northern Ghana by the Society of the Missionaries of Africa, generally known as the *White Fathers*. Initially, the colonial government gave permission to two Canadian White Fathers to open a mission station in Navrongo, a town about twenty kilometres from Bolgatanga the regional capital of the Upper East Region of Ghana. (Der 2001, 109; McCoy 1988). Later, the White Fathers needed the permission of the colonial administration to expand their mission in Navrongo. The Fathers were authorised by the colonial administration not to only proselytize but to educate as well. After Navrongo became a district of the Northern Territories, mission influence expanded rapidly. In 1925, they established the Sacred Heart Mission, Bolgatanga. On January 11th 1926, the part of the French Vicariate of French Sudan, which was in British territory, was elevated as the Prefecture Apostolic of Navrongo, with Oscar Morin (WF), as the Apostolic Prefect. The Diocese of Tamale was established with the whole North under it and the see transferred from Navrongo to Tamale. Six years later, on the 23rd of April 1936, on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the arrival of the first Missionaries at Navrongo and a year before the political independence of the Gold Coast from Britain, the Diocese of Navrongo was created independent of Tamale Diocese. In 1977 a request was made to Rome and the See of the Diocese was moved from Navrongo to Bolgatanga and the name of the Diocese changed to Navrongo-Bolgatanga Diocese. The diocese is located in the north eastern part of Ghana and covers a total land area of 31,068 km². The total population of the diocese as at July 2010, comprising Catholics and non-Catholics (i.e. members of other Christian denominations and adherents of non-Christian religions or cults) was 1,796,022. It had a Christian population of 26,447 (2010) out of which 107, 290 were baptized Catholics making 13% of the population

of the region. The diocese had a total of 14 parishes and two Rectorates with 59 priests manning these parishes. The strata of the about 107,290 Catholic population of the diocese approximately looked like this: 35% - women, 15% - men, 40% - youth and 10% - children and the aged. There are cultural and religious reasons that account for the above distribution of the Christian population in the region. Religiously, generally Kasena women are more religious than the men and so one finds many women in Church than men. Culturally, in the colonial days among the Kasena it used to be considered an act of betrayal for a son and a man for that matter to convert to Christianity. Boys were not allowed to go to Church because there would be no one to inherit the ancestral gods if all the men were allowed to convert to Christianity. In addition, the mission house was regarded as a home for orphans and needy children so parents did not allow their sons to go there. So, many girls got baptized than men. These reasons partly contribute to the current high percentage of women in the Catholic population in the area.

Most of the women in the Navrongo-Bolgatanga Diocese are within the poverty brackets. As already mentioned the precise problem of the study is the peculiar situation of poverty among women in Kasena society and in the Church in the area described above that is often not captured by the kind of official poverty statistics cited above. Widowhood among the Kasena as among many other African peoples, is a dreadful state. Most of the men from Navrongo migrate seasonally to the urban centres in southern Ghana and to the mining towns in southern Ghana in search of jobs. Most of these jobs in the mines and in the cities are so dangerous and physically demanding to the extent that some of the men die rather too early trying to win bread for their families back home in the north. So this accounts for the many young and old widows in Kasena society today. What is particularly dreadful of widowhood among the Kasena is that widowhood implies poverty for women. This is so because of social and cultural reasons. The patriarchal culture of Kasena society makes women completely dependent on men. A woman's economic dependence on her father is later transferred onto her husband when she marries. Men in this society own all the means of production and livelihood. A very important factor of production in this society is land. The land is owned by the men and women cannot own or even inherit land in this society. This economic dependency of women on men is completely premised on the ever presence of a man in the lives of Kasena women. However, widowhood is a state when there is either a temporal or permanent absence of a husband in the life of a woman. Such a woman, if she has no son,

will have no one to directly rely on and she cannot inherit her late husband's property either. Therefore, the patriarchal culture of Kasena society makes widowhood either a temporal or permanent state of poverty. The patriarchal structure of the Catholic Church does not seem to help the situation of widows in the Church in Kasena society. There appears to be what Oduyoye (2002, 97) described as "a conspiracy between African patriarchal society and the patriarchal structured" Catholic Church to keep women in perpetual poverty. In the words of Oduyoye (2002, 97), "the pyramids of power that exists in African culture have found companions in Christianity". Therefore, what are the implications of this situation of women for the Church? How will widows and other women in Kasena society identify with texts of stories of widows in the gospel of Luke when they study these texts of Luke in their specific Ghanaian context of "widowhood"? What will be the possible implications of these readings of the texts by these Ghanaian widows and other women for the mission of the Catholic Church in the area and for Kasena society at large? These questions and more constitute the precise enterprise of this thesis.

1.4 Methodology

The methodology of this thesis is the qualitative method. The thesis was carried out through the use of the contextual bible study (CBS) method of Gerald West (1999), and his other socially engaged biblical colleagues. The methodology has two sections: fieldwork and text studies of Lukan research history. The CBS method was used to conduct the fieldwork. A brief explanation of the CBS method is presented next and how it was adapted and used in the field.

a) Field Work

Contextual Bible Study

The study was based on an interdisciplinary approach drawing from various disciplines such as theology, sociology and anthropology yet focusing on the main method which is the contextual bible study (CBS) method as developed by Gerald West (1999) and other socially engaged biblical scholars who read the bible with their local communities in South Africa. Methodologically, "contextual bible study" begins with, but admits to more than the contextual nature of all interpretation. It is said that we have lost our interpretative innocence;

as David Tracy aptly shows that, “there is no innocent interpretation, no innocent interpreter, no innocent text” (Tracy 1998, 79). But the contextual bible study is not just content with the admission of contextuality. Contextual bible study embraces and advocates context. Commitment to rather than cognizance of context is the real concern. Implicit in the notion of “contextual” as it is used in the phrase “contextual bible study” is commitment to a particular context, the context of the poor and marginalized. This method according to West (1999) is a tactic for biblical interpretation which enables the researcher to gain access into the “safe spaces” of peculiar groups of readers or listeners of the bible.

CBS consists of four major commitments aiming towards enabling the voices of the poor and the marginalized. As stated earlier on, CBS was started when socially engaged biblical scholars, organic intellectuals and displaced communities came together to read the bible in the difficult times of apartheid rule in South Africa. The cry then of many Christians was that the crisis in South Africa “impels us to return to the bible and to search the word of God for a message that is relevant to what we are experiencing in South Africa today” (West 1993, 7). Experience had taught them that this new message from the bible could only be seen through finding a new way of *doing or conducting bible study*. Biblical scholars, *trained readers* and *ordinary readers* came together acknowledging each other, something that resulted in CBS (Breen 2009, 33-36). Therefore, the practitioners of CBS commit themselves to the following four goals in the CBS process.

- a. *A Commitment to read the bible from the perspective of the South African context, particularly from the perspective of the poor and oppressed*

Reading the bible, according to this method, begins with the lived reality of the poor, the working class and marginalized communities. This first commitment is founded on the incarnation and life of Jesus; “The incarnation and life of Jesus give clear testimony to God’s preferential option for the poor and marginalized” (Ujama Centre, 2009). The poor people’s lives, their daily struggle for survival, liberation and life represent the starting point for their biblical reflection, as everyone who reads the bible brings his or her context into the reading. Hence “a commitment of contextual bible study is that we acknowledge and recognize the environmental factors that have formed us” (West 1993, 12). This commitment goes on to demand that “when we choose to read the bible from the perspective of the poor and

oppressed in the South African context we choose to hear the concerns of the vulnerable and marginalised and God's concern for them" (West 199, 13).

- b. *A commitment to read the bible in community with others, particularly with those from different contexts different from our own*

The second commitment to the CBS process logically flows from the first. CBS is a communal process in which people come together and study the bible, and the bible studies take place in a community, underlining the importance of learning from one another through listening and sharing. "We cannot just make the bible say what we want it to say, and by reading the bible with others we allow the views and experiences of others to shape us and our readings"(Ujama Centre, 2009). This can be a challenging task to the trained reader and thus West (1993, 14) states that "for us reading the bible with ordinary readers requires something of a conversion experience; we need to be converted to a sense of community consciousness."

- c. *A commitment to read the bible critically*

The next commitment of CBS practitioners demands of them to read and study the bible critically. This means asking structured and systematic questions about the bible, a process whereby often the biblical scholars have a particular contribution. Ordinary readers may not have access to the resources needed to learn how to ask such critical questions. These resources are complimentary and "deeply valued because they open up the bible in ways ordinary people do not usually experience" (West 1993, 17-18). This is not to deny ordinary readers of the bible of critical thought but it seems when it comes to the bible this does not always seem to be the case with the ordinary readers.

- d. *A Commitment to personal and social transformation through contextual bible study*

CBS should lead to both personal and social transformation. The main focus of the method is not at gaining knowledge of the bible as such, but on the change that can come as a result of reading the bible. In the words of the Ujama Centre (2009), "South African society has been shaped by biblical interpretation, often in damaging ways. The challenge that lies before us is to allow the bible to transform our society for the better." The difference with CBS is that it is used for the personal transformation of the poor and the oppressed in contrast with how biblical interpretation was done under apartheid theology; in which the bible was used to

oppress or uphold the *status quo* of negative discrimination (Breen 2009, 33-36). When the CBS process focuses on both individual and social transformation, it includes the “existential, the political, the economical, the cultural and the religious spheres of life” (West 1993, 21). The contextual bible study participants require a transformation from their internalized normative and uncritical teachings of their primary faith communities. Transformation must be understood within the context of the specific struggle that the society is currently seeking liberation from. The above four processes are intrinsically and intricately linked. Therefore, my analyses of the CBS method which was adopted and used under a specific context of cultural oppression and economic poverty among widows in Upper Eastern Ghana were partly based on these four commitments of the CBS process.

The particular context of struggle in this thesis as stated earlier is however, different from the classical context of biblical interpretation in theologies of liberation and that of the South African context of apartheid rule. Nonetheless, although the primary focus of the study is biblical interpretation within the Ghanaian context of cultural and economic liberation for widows, there is a dialogue with biblical interpretations in other contexts of liberation. In classical liberation theologies, the central approach is a militant struggle aimed at liberation from oppressors and dictatorial regimes. According to Philip Berryman (1987), liberation theologians sought to interpret Christian faith “through the poor’s suffering, their struggle and hope”. Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff (1986) date the emergence of this theological discourse and praxis to early efforts of Latin American Catholic and Protestant clergy and laity to re-read biblical texts through the lens of the majority population’s experiences of marginalization and exclusion. These Latin American liberation theologians urged middle-class and privileged Christians, their brothers and sisters, to make a ‘preferential option for the poor’, that is, to align themselves with the interests of those most marginalized from power (see, Boff and Boff, 1986; Gutiérrez, 1973/1988). In this thesis the approach is not a militant struggle but nonetheless, it is a struggle for transformational liberation from oppression and poverty. I used the contextual bible study method with a Catholic women’s Church group called the Christian Mothers Association (CMA) of St. Oscar’s Church, Kajelo to reflect on a selection of texts from the gospel of Luke that speaks to them in their context as widows and oppressed women. My data was collected through group discussions which in this case was the reflections of these widows on the texts that I studied with them over the period of my fieldwork. I used the contextual bible study method with these women during

each session I met with them for the bible study. Initially, I explained to them the purpose of my project. The texts used in the study are: *Luke 21:1-4*, *Luke 7:11-18*, and *Luke 18:1-7*. I call these texts from Luke's gospel my motivational texts for reflecting on the situation of widows and women in my study area. These texts from Luke were chosen because they present widows in a typical patriarchal society and how these widows were marginalised by such a society. My motivation for choosing these texts are that first, I want to stick to one gospel (the gospel of Luke) and that the gospel of Luke contains many stories about women than any of the other three gospels. Second, these texts are chosen because they contain stories that present women in narrative social situations of real widowhood and how Jesus directly reached out to these women in a society that offered no hope for this group of marginalised persons. In some of the texts, Luke presents the women in the texts as models of good behaviour fit for the Kingdom of God. However, these same texts sometimes can be used also by the Church to legitimate subjection and oppression instead of liberation. Therefore, as a researcher in the field, I was aware of my delicate role as a mediator between presenting the texts as models of good Christian behaviour and not texts for legitimating poverty and oppression. I used a facilitator who opened up these texts for discussion through open-ended questions, such as, "what do you think of the widow's reaction to her son being raised from the dead by Jesus?" "Was the widow's behaviour after Jesus raised her only son typical of any widow today?" "Would you have behaved differently if you found yourself in such a situation today?" These open-ended questions led the women to share their reflections on the texts and related their first-hand experiences of similar situations in their lives in north eastern Ghana. The idea here was to follow the pattern of prepared guideline of questions after the model proposed for the contextual bible study method by Gerald West (1999).

Some Model Contextual Bible Study Questions on Luke 7:11-17

- What do you think it means to be a widow?
- What do you think this widow did for a living?
- Who do you think will take care of this widow now, after the death of both her husband and son?
- How do you think the widow felt after the death of her only son?

- Are there widows in your community today in similar situations?
- What would you do today if you lost your husband and son(s)?

A methodological problem for me as a male researcher in Kasena society was anticipated. My peculiar situation is that I am a hybrid Kasena male theologian. I am not the typical representative of the ideal educated Kasena man for a number of reasons. First, I have had Western form of education up to the University level which I may consider as the highest one can hope for in modern Kasena society. Second, I have had Catholic training for the Catholic priesthood in the major seminary for seven years. Third, I happen now to find myself in the West studying theology in a Western University. All these personal traits make me the less typical representative of Kasena male power. In contrast, the ideal Kasena man should not have discussions with women. He must keep to his space in society. His word is always final on all issues without consultation with women. My weaknesses as a Kasena man however became my greatest strength and an opportunity to represent solidarity with women. In this way, I was able to gain access to the *safe spaces* of the women and got access to their *hidden script*. That said, to the women I still represented a symbol of authority of the Church as a male theologian among women. I compensated for this inherent deficiency in my fieldwork by getting a woman facilitator to coordinate the bible study sessions I had with these women.

1.5 Critique of the Contextual Bible Study Method

Despite the intrinsic strengths of the contextual bible study method for both the academy and the community, the contextual bible study method is not without gaps. The difficulties I encountered in the field as I adapted and used this method can be seen as specific problems of the wider difficulties of the CBS method. The method seems to be more optimistic than it proved to be in the field. One major difficulty of the CBS is the fact that the bible studies with the community must proceed from a list of pre-planned questions based on a text. People can become constrained in their discussions of the text by such pre-planned questions. This was so evident in my fieldwork with the Christian Mothers Association of Kajelo when during the contextual bible study sessions the women occasionally preferred to discuss other issues arising from the text than the prepared questions my facilitator wanted them to discuss. Moreover, moving from one prepared question to the next often left many pertinent issues

arising from the previous question still hanging. Also, having a bible study based on texts chosen by the researcher and questions pre-planned by the researcher could be viewed as a way of patronizing the women of the contextual bible study sessions and reducing their ownership to the whole process.

In his critique of the CBS method, Mligo (2009, 102) pointed out that he finds it difficult to accept how the CBS is a “*process*” rather than a normal academic research exercise (p. 129). His critique was based on the words of West (1993, 11) that: “Contextual bible study is not a fixed formula or a set method; it is a process.” Mligo (2009, 102) is entitled to his interpretation of this statement but I differ from him in opinion. The “process” in the statement of West (1993), in my interpretation (bearing in mind that CBS is all about contextual biblical interpretation), refers to the *process* of personal and community transformation that is anticipated from participants of the CBS. This transformation cannot in any way be an intellectual exercise as Mligo (2009, 102) would want us to accept. It is a self empowering *process*.

The next issue with the CBS as it is practiced by the *Ujamaa* centre is conceptual. In the view of Mligo (2009, 103), the conceptual meaning of the phrase “reading with” as used by West (1993, 72) is not clear cut. Ordinary readers and scholars who read the bible under the CBS “read with” others as a community. This is because of the assumption that both “ordinary reader” and scholars bring something significant to the reading. But how does the “ordinary” reader be said to “read with” the scholar when the “ordinary” reader is being guided by the scholar through a set of prepared questions by the scholar?

A further devastating critique of CBS has been delved by Mligo (2009, 103). This critique is about the classification of the participants of the bible study into “ordinary readers” and “trained readers”. Mligo writes, “To me, this categorisation seems to play two roles: first, it classifies bible study interlocutors in the same way they are classified according to race, gender and class – and this creates differences, or a feeling of ‘otherness’ in some of the bible study participants” (cf. Masoga 2002, 97-98, Nadar, 2003). In other words, this is a classification of persons just as apartheid did to black South Africans which West and his colleagues at the *Ujamaa* centre set out to resist. A certain normative interpretation of the bible in South Africa was used to justify apartheid rule and so a contextual (that is siding with the poor and the marginalised) interpretation of the bible should not seem to create similar

class differences among people. It is only fair to add here that in West (2007, 1-5), West gives a pains taking explanation of why he classifies some interlocutors of the contextual bible study as “ordinary” readers and others as “trained” readers.

In my contextual bible study sessions with the Christian Mothers of St. Oscar’s Church Kajelo, the interlocutors of the bible study were a homogeneous group of widows and married women (Christian Mothers) with one of their own as the facilitator of the bible studies. I was present in the bible study sessions only as a participant observer and not as a “trained reader” reading with the group as in the sense of guiding them or facilitating the bible studies. This in a way did not create any feeling of *otherness* within the group. The only *other* present in my bible study sessions was a male research student, and that was me. Undoubtedly this male presence definitely had a foreseen effect on the bible studies but this effect was mitigated as explained above.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The first and foremost limitation of the study was the inability of the researcher to maintain a neutral position throughout the entire period of the fieldwork. Being a male researcher among women was already an anticipated interference with the contextual bible studies. This anticipated weakness was compensated for by getting one of the leaders of the Christian Mothers to facilitate the bible study meetings I had with the group. However, that did not completely ensure my neutrality among the women. It is the policy of the diocese in which the fieldwork was conducted to send out its seminarians to the various parishes and out-stations on apostolate during the summer vacation. This was exactly the same period that I was in the field. So to the women and the entire village, I was just another seminarian on summer apostolate. Most of the women and other parishioners have known me as a seminarian for a long time (then of the Diocese but currently an ex-seminarian) so to them I must have been posted to Kajelo to do my pastoral year of formation in their Church. So after my second week in the village, at our CBS meetings I was always under intense pressure from the women to teach them rather than listen to them because as they claimed “you should know better than we do.” I had to explain to the group that I was no longer a seminarian of the diocese and I was just with them to study the bible with them. They accepted though they were not convinced.

The second limitation of the study is linked to the first. Being a man (assumed still to be a seminarian), choosing to do research among women in the Church without first seeking permission from the men (who formed the parish council executives) was troubling enough for the women. In addition to that, traditionally a man must not always be in the same *space* with women during public discussions. When a man has to do so, then the seating pattern among the women must still preserve this *space*. After two Sundays of having CBS with the Christian Mothers of the parish, the leadership of the group came to my host's home one evening to discuss an issue with me. They said the group members said that they were beginning to feel scared having the bible studies with me without the *permission* of the men (parish council). As such I should go to the parish council chairman's house and ask for his permission to continue to have the bible study with them. In addition to that, the women demanded of me to come out during the next Sunday service and inform the entire congregation exactly what I was doing with them. Upon their request, I did exactly what they asked me to do. But after that Sunday I addressed the congregation, my neutrality as a male research student was heavily compromised. In their view, I had just confirmed the suspicion of the parishioners that I was actually a pastoral year seminarian of the diocese on summer apostolate.

The third constraint in this study was that the district under which Kajelo now falls is very young, barely two years old as an administrative entity with no statistical profile and map of its territorial limits. For this reason, much of the background information, the map, and the physical characteristics have been drawn from the Kasena-Nankana District Assembly's (KNDA) profile as at the time this current Kasena-Nankana West District (KNWD) was still under it. It is however, possible that not much has changed in the KNWD in the space of two years besides the political fact of being elevated to the status of a district.

In addition, the period for the fieldwork fell within the rainy season for the Northern sector of Ghana. This is one of the busiest periods in the lives of the people in this area and this made it rather difficult to reach out to many more members of the CMA who are basically farmers. The farming activities kept coming up as an excuse to hurry up with the bible study meetings because the women wanted to go home early after Church service and then go to their farms.

Also, the period of the fieldwork was not long enough, leading to some pressure on both the researcher and the various people involved in the fieldwork. Since I could only meet with the

Christian Mothers on Sundays after Mass for the bible study, the sessions were unduly prolonged because many of them contributed during the discussions. Therefore, although the period of the research was about two months, I could only meet the women on three Sundays. Also, getting current statistics on the diocese from the diocesan administration was quite difficult due to the hierarchical administrative structure of the diocese. I had to first meet the Diocesan Administrator (at the time of the fieldwork the diocesan seat was still vacant because the incumbent bishop had just passed away) before he then directed me to see the Diocesan Development Officer (DDO) who granted me an interview only after I had waited in the reception of his office for some time. These challenges were overcome by patience and resilience.

A related difficulty with this research was the unexpected financial demands made on me by some of the villagers because of their perception of me as someone studying in Europe (*Whiteman's land*). As mentioned earlier, the period of the research fell within the rainy season and this is the major farming season in Northern Ghana. So a few of the widows after they had struck enough acquaintance with me through the bible studies, approached me individually for assistance to buy grains for planting or to buy food and drinks (local gin) for communal labourers to weed their farms. I helped as much as I could since I was just a student on a very limited research grant.

What could be some of the possible implications of these limitations on the bible studies that I had with these women? The first possible effect of these limitations is that as the women consistently held me as a seminarian, then it is likely that some of the responses that were given by these women during the bible study were meant to impress the *authority figure* that they deemed me to be. For instance, when the question about what issues they thought were unjust to women in the Church and which they would want the Church to address, the women were all tight-lipped. It took further insistence from my facilitator before a few of them mustered the courage to speak out their mind. Could this have been the effect of my presence in the group?

In addition, the way in which some of the prepared questions were put to the women by my facilitator, Madam Margaret Awe, was not how I would have put them to the women myself should I have been the facilitator. She would begin some questions like “what were you

taught in your catechism about making offertory in Church?” Putting the question this way I felt would not elicit independent reflections on the text by the women.

Also, there were moments during the bible study when some of the women called on me to respond to some questions from the facilitator because they claimed I should know better than them and it is my duty to share with them also. These questions that I was called upon to respond to had to do with either Church canon or dogma. On the question of women ordination, I was referred to as an example by the women of how their daughters too could have been offered the opportunity to study abroad as priest-to-be candidates.

Furthermore, could it not be the case that the good turnout of the widows for the bible study on the second and third weeks be as a result of the impression created by a section of the villagers that I had come from Europe to assist widows in the village financially after they had discussed their problems with me? One cannot answer in the affirmative but this was certainly a legitimate impression. Consequently, notwithstanding the sure influence of these limitations on the field data, these challenges cannot be said to be enough to greatly affect the findings of the research.

1.7 Organization of the Study

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter one is a general introduction to the entire thesis and it comprises of an introduction to the work, a background to, and the statement of the problem. The methodology of the study is also presented in this chapter to offer readers a bird's eye view of how the research was conducted. The methodology is divided into two sections: a) Fieldwork and b) Text-Studies (Western and African Feminists Epistemologies). Under section (a), I have presented a description of the contextual bible study (CBS) method and how it was adapted and used in the fieldwork. The section (b) of the methodology comprise of a review of relevant literary works on the issue of women in the Christian scriptures. This section was done as a private working paper carried out as part of my preparations for the fieldwork. Therefore, it has not been included in the final thesis. The chapter closes with a section on the organisation of the study. Chapter two comprises of the context of the study. This includes a description of the research area, the Christian Mothers

Association, the status of widows in Kasena community, a brief history of the Catholic Church in the area and the situation of women in Ghana and in the Catholic Church.

The third chapter of the study is a discussion about arguments made by feminists and feminist theologians that the stories of women presented in the Jewish and Christian scriptures are not a complete representation of the stories of women in Ancient Israel and in the early Christian communities of the first and second centuries A. D. Specific commentaries by feminists theologians on the three chosen texts about stories of widows from Luke are presented in this chapter. The chapter also takes a general look at the stories of women in the Christian scriptures.

The fourth chapter presents a transcription of the fieldwork data and analyses of the data. The analyses of the data examines the manner in which the women seemingly stuck to the dogmatic teachings of the Church in their interpretations of the texts under study yet they also made their own subversive interpretations of the texts through their jokes, laughter, anecdotes, insinuations and even their silence.

Chapter five is a presentation on an alternative and contextual reading of the bible by African feminist theologians and how this affects the *status quo* of biblical interpretation in the African Church. The contextual reading of the stories of women in Luke's gospel by the widows of CMA of Kajelo will help us elicit responses from the status quo. A comparative analysis is made in the same chapter between the readings of the widows and the interpretations of African feminist theologians on the stories of women in general in Luke.

Chapter five also contains the general conclusions of the thesis. A summary of some of the major findings of the thesis are presented in this section. The chapter then closes with a prologue which enabled me to shift the discussion from the purely descriptive and analytical to the prescriptive. An Attempt is made to relate my conclusions to theory so that knowledge is added unto existing feminist theological theories.

In this chapter, what I did was a presentation of the general introduction to the thesis, a statement of the problem, the objectives to be achieved in tackling the problem and the order to be followed in achieving the purpose of the thesis. In the next chapter, I present the general background of the research area. This includes a description of the Christian Mothers Association and the institution within which this group is found, the Catholic Church and the

specific society within which the Church is planted in this area. These will form the major preoccupations of the next chapter.

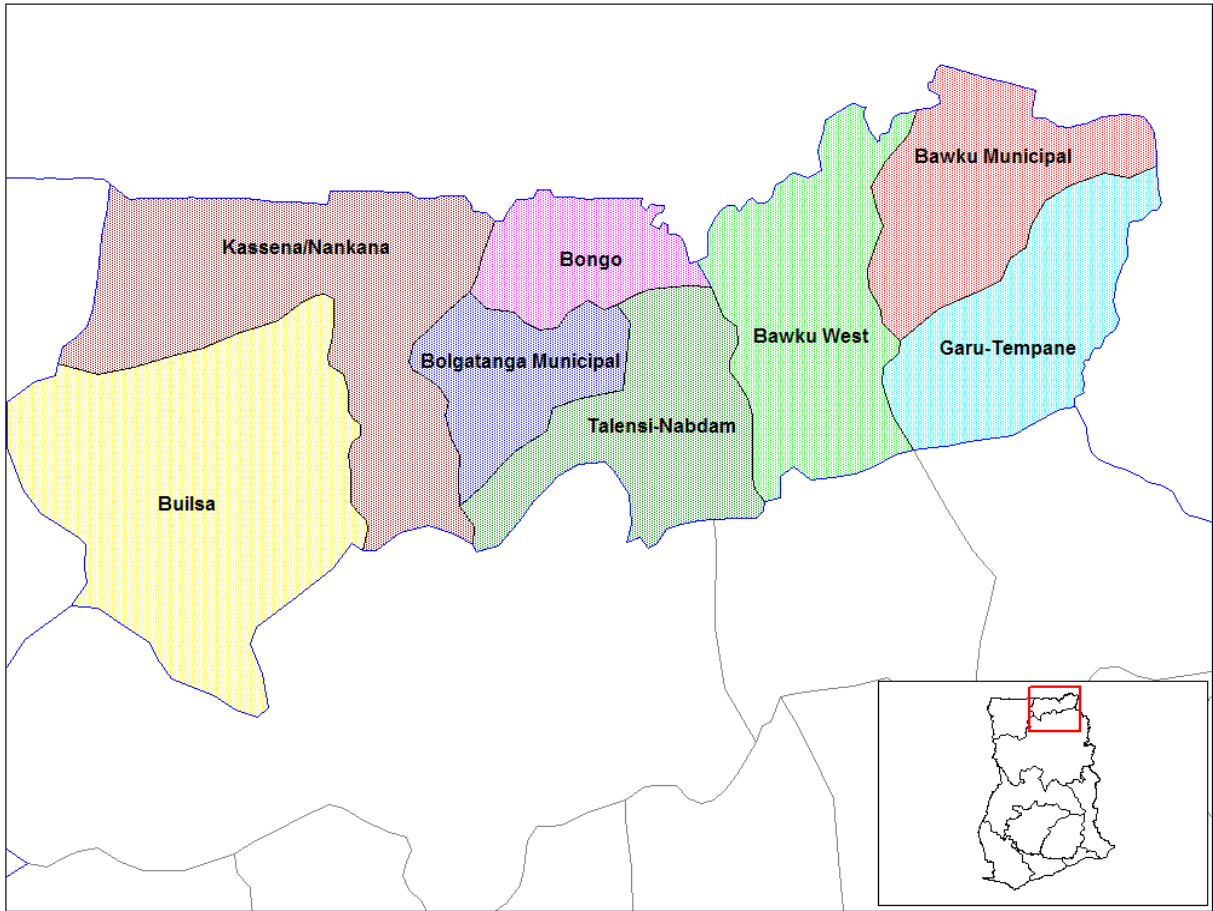
CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREA

2.1 BACGROUNG OF THE KASENA-NANKANA WEST DISTRICT

Kajelo, the village in which the fieldwork for this thesis was conducted is presently under the newly created Kasena-Nankana West District (KNWD). The KNWD with its capital Paga, was carved out of the Kassena-Nakana District (KND). So at the time of collecting the data for this study, relevant information about the district was difficult to obtain. The KNWD, though a young district, has not significantly changed in terms of its characteristics from that of the KND just within two years of its creation. The KNWD was carved out using the already existing demarcations for the Chiana-Paga electoral constituency. However, besides the political elevation of the area as a substantive district, nothing else about its various features has yet significantly changed after almost two years of its existence. Consequently, the people of Kajelo still conduct most of their commercial and administrative activities in Navrongo which is the District capital of the Kasena-Nankana District. Based on the fact that the people of Kajelo though administratively under the KNWD, still transact their commercial and administrative activities in Navrongo, the profile map of the former Kassena-Nankana District which comprised the current Kassena-Nankana District and the Kassena-Nankana West District has been used. Below is a map of the Upper East Region of Ghana depicting the KND under which the study area falls.²

² <http://www.ghanadistricts.com/news/?read=10233> (Accessed: 10.08.10)



Map of Upper East Region (Source: de Lange, 2003).

2.2 PROFILE OF THE KASENA-NANKANA DISTRICT

Physical Characteristics

The Kasena-Nankana District is located in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The district lies within the Guinea Savannah woodlands. The District as at 2007, had a total land area of about 1,674 sq.km and stretches about 55km North-South and 53km East-West. The District shared boundaries to the North with Burkina Faso, to the East with Bongo and Bolgatanga Districts, West with the Bulsa District and Sissala District (in the Upper West Region) and South with West Mamprusi District (in the Northern Region). The District as at 2007 had a total of 216 communities.³

³ <http://www.ghanadistricts.com/news/?read=24171> (Accessed: 10.08.10)

Climatic Conditions

The climatic conditions of the district are characterized by the dry and wet seasons, which are influenced mainly by two air masses – the North-East Trade winds and the South-Westerlies (tropical maritime winds). The Harmattan air mass (North-East trade winds) is usually dry and dusty as it originates from the Sahara Desert. During such periods, rainfall is virtually absent due to low relative humidity. Day temperatures are high recording 42° Celsius (especially February and March) and night temperatures are as low as 14° Celsius. The District experiences the tropical maritime air mass between May and October. This is a moisture laden air mass that originates from the Atlantic Ocean and brings with it rainfall averaging about 950mm per annum.

It is only between the months of May and October that the Northern parts of Ghana come under the rainy season. That leaves November to April as dry season months. This is particularly important as most of the people in this part of the country are mainly subsistence farmers who depend largely on rainfall for their agricultural produce. The recent but worrying aspect of the rainfall pattern has been its erratic nature as well as the late onset of the rains. Besides the late onset of the rains is also their reduced intensity and shorter duration. This is an important factor that contributes immensely to the poverty situation of the people in this part of the country and thus vital in shaping the decision as to the kind of intervention measure needed to enhance the livelihoods of the people in the area (Achana 2010, 54). The District is generally low-lying with occasional undulation averaging about 1000 metres above sea level. The drainage system of the district centres mainly on the tributaries of the Sissili river – Asibelika, Afumbeli, Bukpegi and Beeyi. A tributary of the Asibelika river (Tono river) has been dammed to provide irrigation facilities, which is of great economic importance to the entire district. But with the current division, the Tono irrigation scheme now falls within the present Kassena-Nankana District only.⁴ The Tono irrigation project borders Kajelo and this project plays a very vital role in reducing the poverty situation among most of the widows and women in Kajelo as it was later seen in the reflections of the widows in the contextual bible studies.

⁴ <http://www.ghanadistricts.com/news/?read=10017> (Accessed: 10.08.10)

Accessibility

The district is physically accessible by road and footpaths. Besides Paga, which is linked by a first class road, the district is basically linked by feeder roads. Though these feeder roads are motorable, they need periodic maintenance to keep them effectively and efficiently functioning. There is an air strip near Paga, the district capital which occasionally is used by the Ghana air force and other light weight domestic commercial flights to fly dignitaries to the district. Foot and bush paths are available, linking people, beasts of burden, bicycles and motorists to settlements, farms, and market centres.

2.3 THE CHRISTIAN MOTHERS ASSOCIATION

The Christian Mothers Association (CMA), Ghana, is a national women's Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) established by some Nuns and highly spirited women in the Catholic Church in the early 1940s of the last century⁵. The CMA has the vision to offer a holistic ministry to women, thereby making them well-organized, self-reliant, self-sustaining, able to support the family up-keep, and more importantly to know their civic rights and responsibilities and being part of decision making at all levels⁶. The CMA operates in all the 18 Dioceses in Ghana and has a current active membership of over 35,000 women. As a broad-based democratic organization, CMA operates within the confines of its constitution, where they use the bottom-top approach in decision making. The core activities include the provision of civic, health, formal and non formal education and teaching of social and moral values, and also supporting the income generating activities of women. For the last decade, CMA has undertaken many development projects in the areas of poverty reduction, entrepreneurship, micro-finance and spearheading environmental and societal issues, and also raising leaders to take part in Ghana's decentralization process.

In the Navrongo-Bolgatanga Diocese, the CMA has membership in all the parishes and out-station Churches in the diocese. The CMA of St. Oscar's Church, Kajelo is one of the vibrant groups in the diocese. The group is comprised of Catholic women who have been baptised, confirmed and if married, have had their marriage blessed in the Church. Until recently, the

⁵ http://www.kas-benin.de/ghana/40_years_KAF_Ghana.htm Accessed: 27/09/10.

⁶ Ibid Accessed: 27/09/10

CMA was only opened to Catholic married women. However, this is no longer the case since now young women who are baptised and confirmed are encouraged to join the association. In St. Oscar's parish, the majority of the members of the Christian Mothers Association are still elderly women who have been married for at least over five years. The association has over sixty (60) women with over twenty (20) of the women being widows. A few of the women have been widows for over seventeen (17) years. The CMA in St. Oscar's Church, Kajelo has a vibrant executive made up of a president, a general secretary, a treasurer and a male member called Kenneth, a trained teacher who handles correspondence for the group.

2.4 THE PLIGHT OF WIDOWS IN UPPER EASTERN GHANA

This section discusses the plight and suffering of widows in terms of their social, economic psychological and human rights violations in Ghanaian society. The section particularly describes the situation of widows as silent victims who suffer cruel and dehumanising cultural and ritual practices as a mourning process for their dead spouse (Sossou 2002).

Empirical evidence and anecdotal reports from many regions of the Third World indicate that widows of all ages, and from different backgrounds and cultures, are likely to be subject to multiple forms of discrimination, neglect, cultural and psychological oppression and abuse (Owen 1994 in Sossou 2002, 201). Widows and orphans are among the most marginalized and discriminated against in Ghanaian society. A widow for the purpose of this thesis is any woman who has survived or outlived the spouse. In its simplest term, it means a woman who has lost her husband or partner through death (Sossou 2002, 201). In most societies in West Africa, widows are often branded as witches and are made to suffer maltreatment. In addition, widows are made to go through certain customary rites against their will and this occasionally traumatises them for life (Sossou 2002, 204). Public campaigns against some of these customs and practices seem to be yielding very little results. The Widows and Orphans Ministry (WOM)⁷, an NGO in the region has gone a step further in its campaign to help modify some of these customs. There is therefore the need for focusing on consciousness-raising so that women in West African societies realise the cultural and structural forces that operate against their interest and development.

⁷ The Widows and Orphans Ministry is a local NGO in Ghana with its headquarters in the Upper East Region. The Movement has over 7,000 widows comprising over 85 independent groups.

The very first accusation often levelled against widows is that they are witches and are responsible for the death of their husbands. This informs the bases for discrimination, harassment and other forms of maltreatment. On the issue of widowhood rites, most widows are compelled by custom to strip half-naked throughout the period of the rites. During this time, they are usually confined to one place and are made to eat and drink under unhygienic conditions (Vallenga 1986 in Sossou 2002, 204). In the Kasena and Builsa areas of the region, widows are sometimes bathed with hot water and made to put both hands in hot water to prove their faithfulness to their dead husband. In the Bongo District of the region, widows are bathed in the open and carried half-naked shoulder high in the name of tradition and custom (Owen 1996, 204). Most widows are often denied the property of their deceased husbands and in certain cases are even ejected from their matrimonial homes (Owen 1996 in Sossou 2002, 204). At a workshop organised by WOM, the story was told of a widow at Yameriga, a village in the Bongo District, who refused to choose a husband from among her late husband's relatives. For daring to do this, her room was set ablaze. The punishment of another widow who willingly chose a husband outside the brothers of her late husband was that she must have four additional children to the four she already had for her late husband. At that workshop, the traditional rulers shared the plight of the widows in the region but they were also unanimous in their view that issues of tradition and custom must be handled with circumspection.

2.5 WIDOWHOOD RITES IN KASENA SOCIETY

In the description of the situation of widows in the Upper East Region of Ghana above, I mentioned that widows were made to go through certain inhumane rituals and practices during the *final funeral* celebrations of their late husband all in the name of tradition. I shall briefly explain the final funeral rites of a man in Kasena society before presenting my data in chapter four. This will help put my analyses of the data in context for the reader.

The funeral of a Kasena woman or man does not end with the burial of the body. Important as it may be, the burial of the body is just the first step in the funeral ritual of a Kasena. After the burial, the Kasena believe that the soul of the deceased is still living with the living relatives of the dead person especially the spouse, if the deceased was married. The dead person is in a liminal state. So the final funeral rites have to be performed for the dead to

ensure that the souls of the dead reach their destination in the next life. I present the final funeral rites of a man because the rituals are fashioned to fit a patriarchal society where men are the norm. However, the final funeral rites are almost same for women too but with little variations to suite the gender differences.

About three months after the burial of a man, the elders in his clan gather at the compound of the head of the clan and after some initial discussions, they go to consult a sorcerer. Consultation of the sorcerer is always necessary before any funeral rites are performed, so as to determine what exactly must be done. Usually there are certain persons who may be forbidden to attend the funeral of a man. Occasionally, the beloved sons or daughters of the deceased are told that their father does not want them to participate in the funeral rites and it is the sorcerer who determines this. The reason is that if beloved children attend the funeral there is danger that evil men may harm or kill them spiritually.

The first final funeral ritual is the *Yibele zorem* (blackening of the tomb). This ritual comes after the burial. At a suitable time after the burial, often during the dry season when there are no farming activities, the elders gather again to discuss the next stage of the final funeral rites and when they arrive at a common consensus, every man from the sections that make up the clan of the deceased man is charged to contribute their share of the items required to celebrate the funeral rites like millet, tobacco and *pito* (local alcoholic brew) malt.

The next final funeral ritual is *Tula Lesem* (looking into the barn of the deceased man). On the day of the contribution of the millet and other food stuffs, the first son and first daughter of the man are called to peep into their father's barn for the first time. One of the elders sits on top of the barn and leads the son by the hand up the ladder. As they reach the top, the elder sitting on top blows some ashes into the barn and asks the eldest son to look in and see if his father has left anything in it. The son does as commanded and answers in the negative because he is not allowed by tradition to look into his father's barn. The same ritual is repeated for the eldest daughter. Then one of the elders goes down the barn and brings up some millet. It will be recalled that it was mentioned in chapter one that a wife is not allowed by custom to look into the barn of his husband. So at the beginning of the planting season, only the man can have access to his barn. If the man dies and his final funeral has been performed, then his son (if he had one) or any of his male relatives performs this role for him.

The next ritual is the *Lua Fulim* which concludes the final funeral rites symbolizing the birth of the deceased into the next world. This ritual consists of the burning of the dead man's bow and archery on his farm in front of his compound. By this ritual, the dead man is now believed to have reached his ancestors or family in the next world and may be allowed to eat and drink with them. Before then he was still regarded as an outcast, on the way but not yet admitted into the family cycle in the next world. At this stage of the funeral rites, the widow is forced to prove her continuous faithfulness to her dead husband because the bonds of marriage are not severed by death. She is made to sit naked on a heap of dry leaves that have been dragged on the ground from the forest to the house of the dead man. These leaves are kept outside of the compound for three days before the widow is asked to sit on them. If she is bitten by any insect or pinched by any thorn in this heap of branches of dry leaves, she is judged unfaithful. If she is bitten by an insect, she does not show it. So in most cases, these widows endure the pain just to prove their faithfulness.

The situation of the widows among the CMA of St. Oscar's Church, Kajelo is not isolated from what has been described above. Their story of poverty is part of the general picture of the plight of widows in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Therefore, although the widows of the CMA, Kajelo are members of a Christian women's group, their status as widows in the Kasena society has not changed significantly.

2.6 THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TODAY

The place of women in the universal Catholic Church is a far cry from what African feminist theologians and African and Western feminists wish for women. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT) has condemned the deplorable situation of women in Africa and Ghana for that matter (CCAWT, 2001). The group has been working tirelessly towards the goal that each woman and each man might be recognised as a child of God; it has worked for the human dignity of everyone in the African Church. This is in furtherance of the wider mission of the Church, which is to encourage the believer to be the human being that she/he is. Improving the lot of women in the African Church in the view of the CCAWT first, is the task of women. In the words of the Archbishop of Lubumbashi, it is not enough to pray or simply lament; for the liberation of women is in the hands of women themselves and they must go forth to do this. This thesis sought to do exactly that; to put the liberation of widows

and other women in Upper Eastern Ghana into their own hands through the liberative process of biblical interpretation. The Catholic Church in Africa and for that matter Ghana must henceforth stop being a *masculine* Church and become a Church for both *women* and *men*. The argument here is not about the ordination of women because many arguments have been advanced for keeping women away from their real spiritual leadership. The ordained priesthood of women in the Catholic Church is a difficult topic to address in the Catholic Church, and this still more so in Africa where women are not allowed to perform public community functions. Yet it will be good to discuss it in the light of certain African traditions that have given women an important place in the life of the community. It is not just a matter of women becoming clerics. Male clericalism in the Catholic Church is itself bad enough; would female clericalism be any better?

In the Catholic Church in Ghana, women are not hung up about the issue women becoming priests. This is what I view as the theory of intersectionality put to practice. Intersectionality is a theory that tries to bridge the weaknesses of gender theories. It tries to bridge the gap between multiple identities and group identities (McCall 2005, 1774). Intersectionality is a discussion of what is relevant to include in what context. What women want in the Ghanaian context is to live decently and be able to express their experience of God in their communities. The current proliferation of different kinds of spiritual life is a proof of the anguish searching of the faithful in Ghana, who are hungry for God while crushed with suffering and poverty. The different forms of spiritual life pose a problem for, and are a challenge to, the structures of the Catholic Church in Ghana.

In this chapter I have discussed the context within which this study was carried out. The particular contextual issue that was raised in this chapter was the seemingly similarity between the patriarchal oppression of women in my research area and the situation of women in the society of Luke. In both contexts, this was evident by the total exclusion of women from public worship and public places. However, a critical reconstruction of the early Christian communities of the first century of Christianity reveals that women were actually at the core of religion and society (King 1987, 38-50). This is the self-evidence present in the sources to the tensions between the status of women in the first century of Christianity and what is recorded in Luke.

In my next chapter, I present a discussion about some major arguments made by Western and African feminists and feminist theologians that the stories of women presented in the Jewish and Christian scriptures are not a complete representation of the stories of women in Ancient Israel and in the early Christian communities of the first and second centuries A. D. Therefore, there is the need to approach the stories of women in the gospels with circumspection. My goal in the next chapter is to create a dialogue between the interpretations of the women of the Christian Mothers of kajelo in the data and Western and African feminist theologians' interpretations of stories of women in Luke. I also point out how Western feminist critique and interpretation can be of benefit to the liberational struggle of culturally oppressed African women like my women from Kajelo when both Western and African feminists bring their unique interpretations of the bible into a conversation. The chapter also takes a general look at the stories of women in the Christian scriptures.

CHAPTER THREE

FEMINIST-CRITICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF STORIES OF WOMEN IN LUKE

3.1 Modes of Reading and Interpretation

It will easily pass as a major over-sight if I start a discussion on the post-colonial Western feminist-critical approach to the Christian scriptures without mentioning Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's (1995) ground breaking work in a gender critical method to reading the scriptures. Schüssler Fiorenza's (1995) work comes on the back of over two decades of work done by Bultmann (1972) and his school of thought. Bultmann and his school introduced the so called redactional method to the interpretation of the New Testament. This method was an attempt by Bultmann to find out if there were any differences between what really happened historically at the time of Jesus and what has been reported in the gospels. So Bultmann devised a method of going about this task. He decided to break down the gospels into fragments of *parables* of Jesus, *sayings* of Jesus and *stories*. This was the birth of the redactional method. Bultmann (1972) concluded based on his newly devised method that everything we know as recorded in the gospels about Jesus and his time is only what was seen through the eyes of the believing community. The only thing that is known historically with certainty, according to Bultmann (1972), is that this man Jesus ever lived in Palestine and this historical fact has consequences. So drawing inspiration from Bultmann and his school of thought, Schüssler Fiorenza applied this method to studying the New Testament and the letters of Paul. She looked at the list of names of women mentioned in the salutations of the various letters of Paul. She concluded that the names of some of the women mentioned in the original scrolls of the letters of Paul had either been changed to masculine names or they had been omitted completely from the canonical New Testament. Schüssler Fiorenza attributed this startling revelation to the fact that since the compilation of the letters of Paul to form the books in the New Testament was done by monks, it is possible that the monks made these omissions. The wider implications of this discovery for Schüssler Fiorenza was therefore, are the texts of the four canonical gospels completely reliable? The answer to this question led her to devise the feminist-critical method of interpreting the gospels.

This section of the thesis seeks enlightenment from Western scholars ably represented by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1995) and Price (1997) on the feminist-critical method. However, I should state that the arguments of Bultmann (1972) and Schüssler Fiorenza (1995) are but arguments “*ex silentio*”. That is their claims are based on arguments from history on the basis of lack evidence to the contrary. I dare to state here then that these arguments “*ex silentio*” *per se* are not over and above what my widows shared with me about the historical facts of the gospel stories that I studied with them. The common denominator here between my widows, Bultmann (1972) and Schüssler Fiorenza (1995) is that all of them lack the compelling historical evidence to support the claims they make.

However, Schüssler Fiorenza and other countless other Western feminist scholars have continued to demonstrate with convincing evidence that there could be another side to the stories of women in the scriptures. But the quest for the other side of the story of women in the scriptures may have already existed in the source-critical method to doing exegeses but these feminists have sought to present a variant of the source-critical method in the form of a feminist-critical method which seeks to find out what the sources are saying and most importantly, are *not* saying about *women* in the scriptures. This approach to the Christian texts is referred to as the hermeneutics of suspicion (Price 1997, xxix).

The idea of the hermeneutics of suspicion, says Price (1997, xxxi) “is to apply to the biblical text a close reading to disclose tensions and contradictions in the texts, which are then recognised as protruding like bits of masonry from a buried, earlier structure.” The expected outcome here is that when we do this to the texts especially the stories of women in Luke, we attempt to reconstruct history from the sceptic’s imaginative judgement and see if Luke is the “woman’s gospel” as previously held to be or not? In what follows in this section, I present a feminist critical reading of the chosen texts of Luke. My approach will be much in the manner of the contemporary feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza which involves the use of the hermeneutics of suspicion. The aim again is that if we hope to gain any insight into the situation of women in Luke’s text, we must at least experiment with extrapolating backward from the better known experiences of the oppressed and the marginalised nearer to our own time. The feminist-critical method which is an application of the hermeneutics of suspicion and it enables us to make the distinction between what is descriptive and what is prescriptive in Luke on women. This distinction impels us “to recognize that what poses as descriptive may in fact be prescriptive and thus proscriptive” (Price 1997, xxxii).

In the words of D'Angelo (1990), I launch my inquiry into what feminist-critical readers of Luke say about Jesus' encounters with women as presented by the author of Luke's gospel. D' Angelo says "the treatment of women in the gospel of Luke displays a number of anomalies which makes it of interest both to scholars concerned with women in early Christianity..." (1990, 441).

As I proceed to discuss the three central texts of this thesis which are but a selection from the many stories of women in the gospel of Luke and what scholars describe as the *suspicious* presence of many more women in Luke's gospel, it is important that we recall to mind the four major commitments of the practitioners of contextual bible studies (see above pp. 8-9). Are some interpretative interests more appropriate to the struggle for liberation than others? In the opinion of West (1999, 135-140), this question is answered in the affirmative by Mosala (1987), Schüssler Fiorenza (1984) and Gottwald (1985a). These scholars argue that a behind the text mode of reading is the most appropriate mode of reading for contexts of liberation. A behind the text reading here is the type of reading that uses informed imagination to look for the subversive and extraordinary stories of women either present in or left out of the gospel of Luke. These authors opt for this mode specifically because "only a behind the text mode of reading a text provides a theoretically well-grounded hermeneutics of liberation" (West 1999, 135). However, the claim of these three scholars is not just accepted on face value; their opinion is verified by other hermeneutics of liberation like the hermeneutic of suspicion in order to establish whether this mode of reading can also provide a theoretically well-grounded hermeneutic of liberation. In other words, is the hermeneutics of suspicion a sure method of knowing what we do not know or are not told about women from the past from stories of women in Luke?

3.2 COMMENTARY ON LUKE 21:1-4

The story of the widow's offering in Luke 21:1-4 depicts the poor as potential receivers of alms. In the story, the widow is said to have given the Temple, to God, all she had. According to some commentators the point of the story is that she gave more than the rich who gave from their surplus. She was poor and needed support from others, but she proved her love for God with a whole heart. Historically, we have understood Jesus' words as words of praise. Scholars have understood his description to mean that her offering is more valuable than the

others' because she has given up more of her livelihood than they have. The larger the sacrifice, this logic runs, the more precious the offering. But other commentators have questioned whether this story is a story of praise or a story of lament? Let me be critical and take the comments of Jesus to mean lament for the fact that the poor must make offerings at the Temple. Also, if we re-think over the story as others have done before us, are we really certain Jesus was happy about the widow's gift? In other words, was Jesus happy that the poor must continue to make offerings in the Temple? Imagine what the widow's life will hold that very evening or the following day? Unlike the widow in the Elijah story (1Kings 17:8-16), there is no indication here that her meagre resources would be replenished. In all likelihood, the fate of this widow would be the one that Elijah's widow only imagined; after making her pitiful offering, this widow would probably return home and die. This outcome would then be a reproach to the rich who have more than enough to spare but only give from their surplus. The death of this poor widow, if it did happen later as speculated, will be on the heads of the rich and the wealthy in that community. The certain wrath of God will be their judgement. This does not mean I am saying that Jesus does not require personal sacrifice from the poor. Personal sacrifice to God is a universal requirement of the Christian faith and Jesus himself made personal sacrifice to God by dying on the cross for sin. However, we must let the comments of Jesus about the widow's offering in the story of Luke remain in their proper context.

3.3 COMMENTARY ON LUKE 7:11-18

The story of the widow of Nain reported in Luke 7:11-18 was traditionally interpreted as instruction on the importance of persevering and unwavering faith in Jesus even in the worse scenario of the inevitable case of death. The raising of the widow's only son follows the story of the cure of the centurion's servant in Luke (Luke 7:1-10) and defines its Christology in a Lukan vein; Jesus is a great prophet (7:16 //Luke 4:19); his deeds recalls Elijah and Elisha (Luke 4:25-27), both of whom also raised a woman's only son (1Kgs 17:17-24; 2Kgs 4:18-37). But according to Price (1997, 83), this story though unique to Luke in the synoptic gospels, has the characteristics of a whole cycle of "Hellenistic tales in which a wise man or master physician narrowly saves from premature burial someone who has lapsed into a deep coma or been poisoned but still barely lives." The closest story to Luke's version is one found

in Philostratus's *Life of Appolonius of Tyana* (VI: XLV). Other scholars take the Nain story to be a Lukan creation, modelled on the Elijah and Elisha stories but we must admit the story has been coloured with a redactional interest in Elijah as a prototype of Jesus. What could be the significance of this story for our purpose? I agree with Price (1997, 83ff) who suggests that "the story is no mere an Old Testament redaction but rather it signals the key element of the story, namely that the miracle is not done in the first instance for the dead man, but for the widow herself, as several commentators note." Swidler, for instance, says; "When Jesus raises the young man, he *gives him back to his mother*; she is clearly the centre of concern" (1979, 215 in Price 1997, 83). But in keeping with the feminist-critical method, when I take a closer look at the Lukan adaptation of this well known Hellenistic tale, I notice the Christian ingenuity and novelty the story has undergone. In its Hellenistic parallel, the dead person that was carried out of the city gates of Shunem for burial was a young maiden who had died on the eve of her wedding (Price 1997, 83-100). In Luke's version, the dead person becomes an "only son". This redaction allows Luke to use the story to depict Jesus as the benefactor and patron of widows, just as the Old Testament cast Yahweh in the role of the defender of widows (Exodus 22: 22-24), even if no man would trouble to defend them.⁸

3.4 COMMENTARY ON LUKE 18:1-7

Scholars have long associated this story in Luke with the theme of prayer in the third evangelist.⁹ But although Luke is concerned to promoting the practice of prayer among his readers (as Ott and others 1965) have shown, it may not be his primary interest (O'Brien, 1973). My purpose here is to show a possible interpretation of this story from the social setting of Luke and the socio-ethical dimensions of this very story that could reveal other interests in the story.

First, the story depicts a widow in a patriarchal Jewish social setting where in marriage; women take up residence at their husband's family homes. This patrilineal marriage

⁸ Renteria, T. H. "The Elijah/Elisha Stories: A Socio-cultural Analysis of Prophets and People in the Ninth-Century B.C.E. Israel", In *Elijah and Elisha in Socio-literary Perspective*, ed. Robert B. Coote, 75-126.

⁹ W. Ott, *Gebet und Heil. Die Bedeutung der Gebetsparänese in der lukanischen Theologie*, München (1965).

arrangement is called the *virilocal* residence of wives. A reading behind the text which involves a creative use of imagination into the past may indicate to us that this widow in Luke's story was definitely out of the ordinary considering the social status of widows in a Greco-Roman setting. That a widow would approach a judge for a favourable hearing of her case tells us that not all women were passive victims of their patriarchal society. At least, this story indicates that some women resisted and fought the ills of their society.

Second, it is known that widows and judges had a special significance in the religious landscape of first and second century Palestine (Scout 1989, 175). The terms 'widows' and 'Judges' were sometimes used metaphorically in biblical tradition. "However, in this story the Judge can hardly be a metaphor for God" (Scout 1989 in Kartzow and Maseno, 2010). According to Kartzow and Maseno (2010, 142), when a widow is said to approach a judge, it comes to mind that she has some unsolved matters related to the death of her husband. Perhaps his death faced her with injustice. According to Scott (1989, 180) a Jewish marriage contract (*ketubah*) did not give her the right to inherit, but gave her the right to support out of her husband's estate as specified in the contract. But in the view of Kartzow and Maseno (2010, 142),

"if the wide use of the term for widow in antiquity is considered, there might have been other reasons for her standing alone. She was not necessarily weak and in need of protection, grieving over her dead husband. She could be part of a community of widows, like that of Tabitha in Acts 9:36-42, or it might be that she was wealthy with means and capital of her own. That she approached the judge to help her in relation to her opponent, thereby witnesses to her strengths and power" (Kartzow and Maseno 2010, 142).

The wide use of the term widow which Scout (1989, 175 in Kartzow and Maseno, 2010, 142) is referring to is the metaphorical type, of a weak, poor and needy widow. This definitely in ordinary circumstances is not the type of widow who can constantly approach a judge for judgement in a case against her opponent. So just like the widow in this story, the widows of the CMA, poor and oppressed women as the case may be, still have some human resource in them which can be harnessed for their own good. They can be inspired by the knowledge that they are the privileged minority of God. This knowledge has the inherent potential to transform their self-worth in the society that they live.

Fourth, let us scrutinise the ethical persuasions of the judge and the widow in the story. That a widow approached the judge on her own, going directly to him without company, is puzzling to scholars. What kind of judge was he supposed to be (Roman, Jewish or Christian) is also an open question (Price 1997, 197-198 in Kartzow and Maseno 2010). The judge was probably a Gentile official whom Herod or the Romans appointed. He was a judge who wanted money. People called them ‘thief judges’. Jewish courts had three judges. That made fair decisions more likely.¹⁰ The widow was someone who was without help (Malachi 3:5). She had no friends who could persuade the judge to act for her. She had no money to encourage the judge to answer her request. The judge answered her in the end. It was not because it was his duty. He was losing his patience because she kept coming to him. The original point of this story was to inculcate in Luke’s audience the resilience of the widow when they pray to God. According to Price (1997, 198), this story comes from the widow traditions and had exactly the same function as the widow stories of Elijah and Elisha, as described by Tamis Rentería:

Peasants tell stories about these events, shaping the narrative to celebrate their own ability to make a marvellous breakthrough in the struggle against oppressive restrictions on human life by juxtaposing an oppressive context and an extraordinary breakthrough of it (Rentería 1978, 98).

This message of self-reliance comes through in the story of the widow and the unjust judge upon a feminist-critical reading of the story. The judge is said “to neither fear God nor man”. But as a public official he feared for his public reputation. Although he feared no man or God, he might have feared for his own reputation and how this widow’s slander might ruin it. After all, his position as a judge heavily relied on respect in the broader society (Kartzow and Maseno 2010, 142).

In the discussion above, feminists and feminist theologians argue that the stories of women presented in the Jewish and Christian scriptures are not a complete representation of the stories of women in Ancient Israel and in the early Christian communities of the first and second centuries A. D. However, these scholars concede that Jesus’ attitude towards women as reported in the gospels by the four canonical evangelists was a novelty. But somehow along the history of transmission of these stories within the Christian communities,

¹⁰ International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology: <http://www.academicjournals.org/ijisa>

redactional and theological ideologies have blurred the original message that these stories of women were intended to convey. Therefore, there is the need to approach the stories of women in the gospels with circumspection. This attitude of positive suspicion is only in the interest of the mutual benefit of all those who read and are supposed to be edified by the scriptures. The feminist-critical approach to the scriptures as presented above only enables us to go behind the texts and discover what has been left out or added in the interest of redactional and theological concerns. This method was used to probe my three central texts from Luke in this thesis. This approach to the texts revealed that the texts are not as friendly to women just as they are not also completely in tandem with their patriarchal settings too. Just as the stories from Luke have been purged of their patriarchal Hellenistic and Jewish backgrounds, they have been skewed to fit Luke's theological agenda that women are intrinsically subordinated to men, women cannot be leaders and women are only passive recipients of the message of Jesus. As we however witnessed, it turned out that with an alternative feminist-critical reading of the stories from Luke, we discovered that women were raised to equity in discipleship in line with the message of Jesus, women were Apostles, women were resourceful and that women wielded some level of power within their Christian communities.

3.5 STORIES OF WOMEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Research on early Christian women has been an extremely important branch of the study of Christian origins for over two decades now. It must be admitted; however, that early enthusiasm for recovering women's lives by means of historical methods has been giving way in recent years to a clearly discernible trend in the direction of pessimism¹¹ (Osiek 2006, 244). According to Osiek (2006, 244), this pessimism has resulted in especially from more sophistication in literary and rhetorical analysis of early Christian texts and a growing awareness of how women were represented in order to further the agendas of male authors. The point here is that, in recent New Testament studies, approaches to the anthropological reconstruction of the religion of Ancient Israelite society, it has been confirmed by scholars that individual participation in religion in ancient religion was at three identifiable levels:

¹¹ See Elizabeth Clark, (1998) "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn'" (pp. 1-31)

family religion, community religion, and state religion. Each of these levels of religion had their major players. At the family level of religion, women were the major players in conducting religious affairs. However, the level of religion that is recorded in the bible is often religion at the state level where unfortunately, the major actors were not women. So we find women absent in the public worship in ancient Israelite religion (Bird 1996). In its most extreme form, this greater pessimism leads to a hesitation to draw any conclusions about real women at all in the bible.

Luke's gospel could be seen as a portrayal of the place of women in the society at the time. It portrays the polarities which existed in the society of the early Church. That is why in the view of some contemporary New Testament scholars (see Osiek 2006, 1-6); the gospel of Luke cannot be wholly accepted as a progressive text for women. According to feminist-critical Lukan scholars (such as Price 1997; Via in King 1987), there is more to the gospel of Luke on women than meets the eye. Even the silence of the sources on women's participation in public religion is itself an internal critique of the sources. According to Osiek (2006, 1-10), "the Greco-Roman and early Christian society was polarised between patriarchy and the discipleship of equals." Social science analyses has shown that the social structures of the culture, in which the Roman father had legal authority of life and death over every one in his "*familia*" (household) and women could not act as legal persons without a male *tutor* or legal guardian, as patriarchal.¹² Osiek (2006, 2), states that, "feminist and liberation writers, based on a different reading of the sources, have argued for a new spark of insight in earliest Christianity, especially in the teachings of Jesus, a vision of a new way of relating as female and male in the Church". According to this reading, the model of discipleship offered by Jesus broke through the barriers of social discrimination to a vision of true equality. But also according to this model, later disciples did not maintain this liberative tendency. "The 'fall from primal grace' occurred at different moments, depending on one's point of view: with Paul, with Deutero-Paul, or just after the New Testament" (Osiek 2006, 2). However, sometimes these categories are overdrawn and often rigidly applied.

Today it seems there is a paradigm shift in Lukan studies with regard to stories of women in Luke-Acts. This shift has come about largely as a result of the new questions raised by feminist biblical scholars in Europe, America and recently in Africa (sees Price 1997). The

¹² Osiek, C. (2006) "A Woman's Place House Churches in Earliest Christianity", Fortress Press, Minneapolis.

shift in Luke's treatment of women has moved "from an earlier sentimentalism that made Luke's gospel 'the gospel of womanhood'..."¹³ (Price 1997, xvii) to a more critical and sober feminist consciousness. Price states that "some scholars characterise Luke as egalitarian due to the sheer fact of the number of women cited in Luke-Acts" (1997, xvii). Others like E. J. Via (1987, 45) think that Luke carries the message of the patriarchal oppression of women, evident in their near total exclusion from public worship is itself a cause of the divine wrath acted out on Jerusalem and the Temple, the heart of unbending religious authority (Price 1997, xviii). The shift has occurred again because other scholars say that despite the initial romanticism with Luke's gospel; they still see Luke as part of the problem. But these phenomena cited above unfortunately according to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza "were so nearly invisible to the earlier feminists or feminist-sympathetic generation of writers because these scholars were representative of what she labels as the 'feminist apologetic' approach" (Price 1997, xix). According to this approach "no matter how sophisticated one's approach, as long as a scholar remains within the traditional community of faith, there is an instinctive bias to expect the bible to teach that which the reader believes to be the truth" (Price 1997, xix).

My own observations concur with those of Price (1997, xix) that "Luke does increase the number of stories about women in his gospel," but it is no less clear that "the roles in which women appear are more restricted by what is acceptable to the convention of the imperial world than are the roles of women in Mark or John"¹⁴. For instance, it seems women were regarded in the Temple, as Luke gave a note on the situation of widows at the time in Luke 2:36-38 (story of the prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel). After the death of her husband she did not get remarried and as such she gained the respect for not getting remarried. There are other stories about widows who were noted due to their faith and trust in God, for example the widow of Zarephath who was selected to take care of Elijah (Luke 4:25f cf. 1Kings 17:9). Jesus also gave the example of the parable of the widow and the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-18). Jesus' aim was to show how such people who are helpless and marginalized by society express their love for God. Another notable example was his pity

¹³ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke*, International Critical Commentary, eds. Plummer et al.

¹⁴ D'Angelo, Mary Rose in Price 1997, "Women in Luke-Acts: A Redactional View." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 109, (1990): 441-461.

shown to the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17). And Jesus admired the widow who gave in the Temple her last two coins, all she had to live on. Therefore, in the ministry and teaching of Jesus, widows and women, orphans and the poor were preferentially treated. This evidence could be an indication to the reader of Luke that there is a subtle tension between Luke and 'the historical Jesus'. The instances cited above about Jesus and women only show that for the sake of Luke's audience and the authorities of the day, and the overall theological redactional motive of the gospel, Luke shows signs of a tension between his material and the earthly ministry of 'the historical Jesus'.

There seems to be a similarity between stories of women in the New Testament and the plight of women in Kasena society. In Kasena society today, the plight of the widow has no significant variations from the classical treatment of the widow, the orphan and the poor in Ancient Israelite society. The plight of the widow among the Kasena becomes evident when one considers the social and religious status of a widow in Kasena society. Among the Kasena, when a woman loses her husband so many restrictions are immediately placed on her. These restrictions range from dietary prohibitions to restrictions on the freedom of movement of the widow. In Ghana, women's land rights are significantly influenced by inheritance systems as well as tenurial arrangements and land use patterns. One of the most important ways in which women acquire land is through inheritance both as wives and as daughters or sisters. However the hierarchical nature of rights and responsibilities over land and other property, which emerge as a result of gender-differentiated rights and roles, are skewed against women and girls in favour of men and boys. By granting men and boys primary rights of inheritance of land and property, and granting women and girls user rights mediated through their relationship to men, a situation of unequal power relations, drawn along gender lines, is entrenched in land tenure and production relations. In discussing gender and land rights in Ghana therefore, specific attention must be paid to the impact of the laws on inheritance on women as compared to men, both under the customary law as well as statutory law. As a result, widows cannot inherit their late husband's property. On the contrary, the widow herself is considered the property of her late husband and she has to be inherited together with other properties belonging to her late husband by her late husband's brothers. However, things have relaxed in Kasena society today allowing widows to inherit their late husband especially when the widow has a son. But in the event that a man moved out of his father's family compound to build his own house and lived there with his wife and

children, when such a man dies the widow and her children must be repatriated to the late man's father's compound house. This is done because the widow cannot become a Landlord (*Sɔnyɔtu*) in Kasena society. But when the widow has adult son(s), she is allowed to live in her husband's separate house alone with her son(s) and other children. Also, a widow cannot receive the marriage prestations of her daughter when she (the daughter) gets married. The marriage items must customarily be presented to the Landlord and since a widow cannot become a Landlord, she cannot receive the marriage prestations. But when the suitors of her daughter come to seek the hand of her daughter in marriage from the Landlord, they must also go into the compound of the widow and present her with gifts. These gifts can be directly received by the widow.

A widow whose husband's final funeral rites have not been performed cannot attend other funerals. If it becomes absolutely necessary for her to do so, she must not pass a night at the funeral house she is attending, and on her return from the funeral before she is allowed to re-enter her late husband's compound, she is handed an arrow from the arch of her late husband which she must plant at the fore court of the house before she is then permitted to enter her own home. Where ever the widow goes, she must hold a calabash and a staff in her hand and must be accompanied by a young maiden. For forty days, the widow is not allowed to go out alone at night at all.

The religious status of the widow in Kasena society is also bedevilled by customary restrictions. One situation when most of the ritual restrictions on widows are manifested is during the occasion of the funeral of her husband. During the funeral of the widow's husband, she is not allowed to sit on the traditional mat made of straw (*Lua Saraa*) which is normally put at the forecourt of the funeral house. The widow is not permitted to shake hands with the elders (*Nakoa*) of the clan gathered for her husband's burial. She is supposed to be quarantined in a dark room and if she has to eat the food must be cooked in a different house and passed through the window into the room for her. During the final funeral rites of the widow's husband, she must not partake in the eating of all the food prepared for the funeral rituals. On the other hand, there are a few things that only a widow must perform during the funeral of her husband but on condition that she has never been unfaithful to her late husband during his life time and even after his death. Her faithfulness is proven by making the widow to sit almost naked on dry leaves put on the ground. If she gets bitten by an ant or any insect, then it means she was unfaithful to her late husband. But if she is cleared, then she can hold

the arch containing the bows of her late husband to be wrapped by a traditional piece of cloth and carried out by the undertakers to be burned on the farm of the deceased man (a ritual called *choŋa zagem*). This ritual, it is believed formerly severs the ties of the dead from their living relatives and at the same time ushers them into life after death. Only the widow can also cry round the pots of *Pito* (local beer brewed from millet malt) being brewed for the funeral rites of her husband. Finally, after the final funeral rites of the widow's husband are over, she is then qualified to prepare flour mixed with water (*muum na*) for the Landlord (*Sɔŋɔtu*) of the house to pour libation to the ancestors.

This in sum is the social and religious milieu of widows in Kasena society. Despite the fact that the widows in the CMA in Kajelo are active Catholics most of them told me that they had gone through some of the rituals described above during the funerals of their late husbands. They told me they did it for the sake of tradition and custom. They also said they had to go through some of the rituals so that they would regain their *place* in the society although some of the rites were contrary to their Christian faith.

The next chapter of this work presents how the women of the Christian Mothers Association in Kajelo interpreted selected texts of stories of women in Luke from their context of cultural oppression and economic marginalisation and from their place in a patriarchal society.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRANSCRIPTION AND ANALYSES OF THE FIELDWORK DATA

4.1 FIELD ENTRY

For anthropology, ethnography remains vital, not because ethnographic methods guarantee certain knowledge of others but because ethnographic fieldwork brings us into direct dialogue with others, affording us opportunities to explore knowledge... (Jackson 1996, 8 in Cassiman 2006, 4)

Moving into a Kasena village (Kajelo) in the North East of Ghana was a perfect moment to explore the advantages of ethnography highlighted in the quote above. I carried out my fieldwork in Kajelo from June 2010 until July 2010. After my initial background checks by telephone calls with various persons on the ground while I was still in Oslo, I finally arrived in Accra Ghana, on June 10th, 2010. On June 12th, after almost 24 hours of travelling by bus up north, I arrived in Saboro my own village. Saboro is a village next to Kajelo. It is a distance of about 6km from Saboro to Kajelo. The next day after my arrival, I went to meet the resident Catechist of St. Oscar's Church, Kajelo. I was rather directed to the house of the prayer leader. When I got to the said house, I was warmly welcome by the father of the prayer leader. After exchanging the traditional customary greetings with him, I informed him I had come to see the prayer leader of the Catholic Christian community. I was taken to a young man who introduced himself to me as Thomas Sɔnɔtu. He told me he was the prayer leader of the Catholic Christian community in Kajelo but at the same time acting as the Catechist since the resident Catechist was down with a stroke for the past three months. I briefly introduced myself to him as a research student. I told him of my research area and asked him which women's grouping in the Church was well organised and vibrant. He immediately suggested the Christian Mothers Association. The prayer leader then suggested that we went together to the house of the general secretary of the Christian Mothers Association so that I would formally tell her my request. I introduced myself to her and briefly described to her the type of research project I had come to conduct in Kajelo. She promised to take the message to the rest of the group in their next meeting.

She asked me to come back on Thursday for the feedback since she would have informed the group when they meet on Wednesday for their usual weekly morning Rosary devotion.

On Thursday, I returned to Kajelo to the home of Madam Margaret Awe for my response from the Christian Mothers. After we exchanged the customary greetings, Madam Margaret Awe told me that the Mothers accepted my request and were even happy that I had chosen to come and converse with them and not any other group in the Church. I asked Madam Margaret Awe if she would accept to host me in her home for the period of my fieldwork with the CMA. She accepted my request and immediately called her son Sylvanus to inform him that I was her new son and I would stay with him in his room. Sylvanus is the first son of Madam Margaret Awe and he is a teacher by profession. I returned to my village and packed a few of my personal effects and returned in the evening of the same day to stay with my host. My first night in Kajelo was when I met Madam Margaret Awe's husband for the first time. He is called Baba Aloᵐ. As the head of the family he formally welcomed me to his home and assured me of his assistance in his role as my new *father* in Kajelo. As such, I entered Kasena social life as a son; Margaret Awe's son, and as a brother to Slyvanus and his sisters. Before my first meeting with the CMA in Kajelo, I had some time with Madam Margaret Awe to take her through the selected texts for the contextual bible study with the group. I informed her that I would like her to coordinate the discussions at the bible study meetings with the group. I also went through the prepared questions for discussion on each of the texts with her. All was by now set for my first meeting with the CMA of St. Oscar's Church, Kajelo the next Sunday after the Church service.

4.2 FIRST CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY SESSION: LUKE 21:1-4

It was a beautiful Sunday morning in the village with limited farming activities. Before I woke up from bed, Madam Margaret Awe my host was almost ready for Church but she had to wait for me. Her husband Baba Aloᵐ told me that a man must not go to Church every Sunday. If he does, he could be perceived as a weak man. It was a wet morning so by the time we arrived at the Church after about a ten minute walk; the Church was still almost empty. At the time of the research St. Oscar's Church was under expansion to accommodate

the increasing number of parishioners. The village was connected to the national electricity grid, also the Church had electricity connected to it. The Church building is in the form of the middle Ages architectural style which reflected the medieval notion of the pilgrim Church facing the East and moving onwards to heaven. The congregation numbered about 600. It was made up of mostly women and children, the youth, the aged and only a handful of men.

Sunday Mass at St. Oscar's Church starts at 9:30am. But parishioners are encouraged to come at 9:00am for Rosary devotion before the Mass. Madam Margaret Awe asked me to take a seat in the back of the Church while she went to take her seat at the place reserved for the Christian Mothers. As we started with the Rosary prayers, the parishioners started filling into the Church one after another through the light drizzle. As I observed the people take their seats, I realised the seating pattern in the Church was unconsciously partitioned. The youth (mostly young men) took their seats to the back left row of the Church; the young girls took their seats at the pews in the middle row of the rectangular Church building. To the front right row of the Church, the pews there were reserved for the Christian Mothers Association. At the front pews of the middle row sat the Church choir, called St. Dominic Choir. At the back of each of the three rows in the Church, the men (mostly the married men and old men) took their seats.

There is a history to the seating pattern in the Church. The maintenance of space between men and women in public gatherings is seen here in the Church. But in the Church, there is a reversal of the traditional seating pattern of men and women in Kasena society. Traditionally, men are always in front and they always lead public discussions and functions. In St. Oscar's Church, the men were mostly behind and their voices were hardly heard during the service. In times past, it was a sign of weakness for a man to convert to Christianity. Only orphans and weak boys who could not farm were taken to the Missionaries as mission house boys to run errands for the missionaries. This group of boys were eventually catechised by the Missionaries, sent to the major seminary and some of them eventually got ordained as Catholic priests. Catholic priests who celebrate the Mass, which is a public liturgical function, are not perceived by traditional Kasena society as real *men* in the traditional sense of the word man. Today even men who have been born into Catholic families feel they must preserve their space among women in public gatherings like in the Church.

At about 9:35am the prayer leader, the choir and the other ministers of the Alter processed into the Church for the beginning of the service. After the introductory rites, the usual three Sunday readings were taken; one from the Old Testament, one from the epistles and one from the gospels. The gospel reading for that Sunday was coincidentally from Luke 10:1-18. It was the fourteenth Sunday in ordinary time (liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church). The text was from the pericopy on the mission of the seventy. In his reflection, the prayer leader said that since it was the planting season for farmers, they the prayer leaders and catechists had to take a break from catechism during the weekdays to attend to their farms. He also said that it was because the congregation was no longer taking care of the messengers of Christ that the Catholic Church has introduced the policy of self-reliance. He therefore exhorted the congregation to be generous to their priests, catechists and prayer leaders since these were today's "seventy" of Christ. Their reward, he said, is the promise of the Kingdom of Heaven among them here on earth. After the reflection of the prayer leader, the service continued as usual. During the announcements, it was announced that there will be a meeting for the CMA immediately after the service.

After the Church service, it took about fifteen to twenty minutes for the women to gather. Some of them had to buy some snacks or water to drink. Others whose houses were not too far from the Church quickly dashed home to take their breakfast before coming back. The mothers began taking their seats still with sachets of drinking water and some *maasa* (local cakes made from millet cereal) in their hands and eating. After a while, a good number of the mothers were seated but were busy chatting off to each other about events that happened during the service. Then a woman rose to her feet and called the group to order through the slogan of the group. She shouted out "*We ta ye teim!*" and the rest of the group responded "*daama daama!*" It means, "May God be praised!" and the response is "Forever and ever!" Immediately, there was dead silence and the woman introduced herself to me as Madam Bibiana Akadigiba, General Secretary of the CMA, St. Oscar's Church Kajelo. She welcomed me to the meeting and asked me to tell the entire group who I was and why I wanted to meet the group. Before she could finish there were comments from some of the women saying: "Who doesn't know this boy? Is he not the son of Daniel Amonzem from Saboro?" Another one said, "Then why do you ask him to introduce himself to us? He is our own son. Just let him tell us what he has for us." I heard another comment from a mother with her head buried towards the ground saying that we should all be mindful of the fact that

this time is the farming season and since it rained that morning, she would go to weed her farm after the meeting. Madam Bibiana came in again to call the group to order. I introduced myself as student at the University in Oslo, Norway. Then one of them asked me whether my University was part of the University for Development Studies (UDS). The University for Development Studies is the only state University in the entire Northern Ghana. It was founded in the year 2000. UDS has three campuses spread over the three Northern Regions of Ghana. The campus in the Upper East Region is situated in Navrongo. Students of the UDS go to the various villages in the region during the summer break to do their community service. Coincidentally, that very Sunday students of the UDS, who had been doing their community service for the past four weeks in Kajelo were given the opportunity to express their gratitude to the congregation and to wish them farewell. So the Christian Mothers had heard of UDS but not the University of Oslo (UIO). After the introduction I explained to them why I was there and what I wanted to discuss with them. However, I explained to them that the discussion was not very much what I had to tell them but what they had to share with me on the texts we were to discuss over the period of my stay with them. Therefore, I was handing them over back to their leaders who would coordinate the discussions. Madam Bibiana told the group that I was staying with Madam Margaret Awe, their president, and that, she would coordinate the discussions. Since I was her *son*, she would understand me better. Madam Margaret Awe accepted to lead the discussions and then straight forward told them that the text up for discussion for the day was from Luke 21:1-4. She went ahead and took the reading from the Kasem translation of the New Jerusalem Bible. Second time, she read the text slowly. After the reading there was a timid atmosphere of dead silence. Then Madam Margaret Awe opened up the discussion of the text with the first question. Below is a translation of the responses that were given by the women at the first contextual bible study with the CMA of Kajelo. At this first meeting, there were about 30 women present, including nine widows. The following designations were used for speakers in the bible discussions: *F*: Facilitator; *M*: Christian Mother; *G*: Group.

The Widow's offering (Luke 21:1-4)

F: "We are now going to have a conversation on the text we just heard from Luke 21:1-4. My first question to all of us is; where exactly do you think Jesus could have been standing or seated in the Temple for him to be able to take notice of this poor widow making her offering of two coins?" (1.1)

M: “You know Jesus was both God and man even when he was in that Temple. So he could have either been sitting or standing anywhere yet he saw everyone.” (1.2)

M: “As for me I think he was standing in front just like where the priests stand and preach in the Church on Sundays.” (1.3)

M: “If only she was an old and weak poor widow like me here, she would have waited for all the strong and wealthy members of the congregation to go and put their offertory in the Temple box before she took her turn. That is how her offering was so conspicuous to Jesus and others in the Temple.” (1.4)

F: “What do you think this woman did to get money for her offering?” (1.5)

M: “To me, poor as we are told she was, she was living on the charity of extended relatives.” (1.6)

M: “She made her living from her peasant farm that she and her late husband cultivated together.” (1.7)

M: “She made her living by gathering firewood for sale in the market.” (1.8)

M: “Let me make this clear to all of you. We have two types of widows; we have widows without children and widows with a child or children. So if this woman had a child or children, they would be the ones taking care of her now. Her children gave her those two coins for her up-keep but she used them rather for the offertory.” (1.9)

F: “Do you make offering at Church during offertory time?” (1.10)

G: “Yes! Yes! Yes!” (1.11)

F: “Where do you get your money for offertory every Sunday?” (1.12)

This question elicited a number of personal testimonies about the various economic ventures most of the women and widows were into in order to support themselves and their families. Some said during that time which was the peak of the planting season in the village, they, the women become the sole bread winners of the family. The reason was that at that time, the men had nothing else left in their silos because they had used all to sow the fields. It is normally from the silos stocked with grains that the men give out to their wives the daily ration for the family up-keep. But during this time when the silos are empty, it is up to the

women to fend for themselves and the rest of the family including the men. Another reason is that while the men wait till the next harvesting season to get resources from the sale of their farm produce, the women plant vegetables, on their men's farms. In the mean time, it is the duty of the men to maintain the farms. These assorted vegetables are soon ready in no time for harvesting. The women harvest these vegetables and take them to the market for sale and use some to feed the family. Below are a few of the common personal economic activities shared in the responses of the women at the bible study session:

W: "I asked my son in Kumasi (every major city in Southern Ghana is referred to as "Kumasi" at the village level in Northern Ghana) to send me some money to hire young men to weed my groundnuts (peanuts) farm for me. So I got my money for offertory this Sunday out of the balance left over after I had paid the young men who worked on my farm." (1.13)

M: "I got my money for collection this Sunday from the proceeds of my firewood selling business." (1.14)

M: "When a Sunday comes immediately after a Kajelo market day and my *pito* (locally brewed drink from millet malt) sells very well, I remove part of my profit for offertory in Church as thanksgiving." (1.15)

M: "I have a donkey and cart which I use to cart peoples goods to and from the market for a fee. I make my living from there and out of that also I get money for offertory on Sundays." (1.16)

M: "I make my living from the *shea* butter business that I do with my daughters. We take out money for our offertory from this business." (1.17)

F: "I was expecting to hear from those of you who are not widows tell us that they were given money for offertory by their husbands." (1.18)

G: "Loud laughter" (1.19)

M: "You must be joking! Give us money at this time of the year? Why do you ask as if you don't live with us in this village? Let me tell you my son (turning to me); at this time of the year, the men are as poor as the widow in the text we just heard read to us (Laughter from group). We feed and take care of them." (1.20)

M: “If we even give our husbands money for offertory they will collect and I am not sure most of them will use it for offertory on Sunday considering the deplorable financial state in which most of them are now.” (1.21)

F: “Do you compare your offering at Church with others?” (1.22)

M: “I don’t consciously compare my offering but there are times when you catch a glance at the money in the hand of the next person to you on your pew and you feel like yours is just too little. Other times you see and feel yours is also better than what that person is going to offer.” (1.23)

M: “When the rich people are going to make their offering you can guess that they are going to put in plenty money in the box. It even shows in the way they walk towards the offertory box; with some air of importance around them.” (1.24)

F: “Do you think God takes notice of each person’s offertory?” (1.25)

M: “I believe God does not size up each person’s offertory; just make your offering from your heart.” (1.26)

M: “In my opinion, offertory may indicate to us who are rich or poor. But in the eyes of God, it is who is making a pure offering that matters.” (1.27)

F: “If you were this widow in the story, would you have used all your money to make the Temple offering?” (1.28)

M: “Yes! So far as it is an offering from my heart, I will not mind putting in the little I have in the offertory box.” (1.29)

M: “Even today, I had only 20 Ghp (less than 50 Øre) but we were asked to make two collections at Mass today. So I put in 10 Ghp during the first collection and then dropped in the remaining 10 Ghp for the second offering. Is it different from what the widow in the text did? No!” (1.30)

F: “What has this story got to teach us today?” (1.31)

M: “I think that the story teaches us that when we give all that we have to God without restraint, God will reciprocate it in full measure or even more.” (1.32)

M: “God will appreciate and reward each one of us with heaven from the genuine offerings we make at Church.” (1.33)

M: “The lesson for us today is that no matter the amount of money we have for collection, it should not stop us from giving the little we have to God. The lack of money for offertory should not also stop us from coming to Church.” (1.34)

M: “For me I learned from the text that what is meant for offertory should be used for exactly that. The rest of our daily basic needs will be taken care of by God himself. One Sunday, I was given Ghc 1 (less than Kr. 1) for offertory at Church. Before the service, I decided to break the money down into two Ghp 50 coins. I used Ghp 50 for the offertory intending to use the balance of Ghp 50 to buy *maasa* after the service. But to my surprise, the rest of the money got lost in the Church!” (The entire group burst into uncontrollable laughter for a long time) (1.35)

F: “Has anybody got anything more to say or add? Or has any one got a question to ask? I think with that lesson from Kapuri on giving to God what belongs to God; we can draw the curtains for today” (1.36)

After a brief silence, one the very old mothers who had earlier on identified herself as a widow for over fifteen years raised her hand up. Some of the mothers were by now becoming impatient and others were tired and hungry. Some of the women told her to keep her question till next Sunday. But the facilitator pleaded that we just hear her out. She was given the floor to talk.

M: “My question is to our son (referring to me), why have you a young man decided to come all the way from the ‘white man’s country’ to have this conversation with the CMA of Kajelo especially us the widows?” (1.37)

I must say for a moment I was caught spot on when the facilitator, Madam Margaret Awe referred the question to me. I stood up and told her that I have come to converse with them based on the selected texts from Luke’s gospel because I wanted to hear the theology of widows and other women in Kajelo. I also told them that I wanted to give women in the Catholic Church in our diocese a voice on certain theological issues. Then the old widow raised her head up towards me and said;

M: “It’s not going to be an easy task for you because even in the Basilica at Navrongo, there is only one woman (Mrs. Veronica Feli) who is an extra Ordinary Communion Minister. As for here in this village (Kajelo) the women don’t want to come out and speak or to take up roles in the Church.” (1.38)

With this motherly advice from the old widow, the facilitator of the study session, Madam Margaret Awe brought the bible study to a close by asking the mothers to sing a closing song before one of them would then give us a closing prayer. Spontaneously, one of the mothers in-toned a song which they rest of the group joined in to sing enthusiastically. The words of the song went like this:

There is no life for sale in the market (2x)

Christian Mothers you have a life that is good

Let us go there and thank Him (Jesus) and get God’s blessing (Repeat Stanza)

After about three minutes of singing the facilitator took the closing prayer herself after which she wished every one safe journey home. She however reminded them that we would meet same time after Mass next Sunday.

4.3 ANALYSES OF THE FIRST BIBLE STUDY SESSION

After presenting the data on the first session of the contextual bible studies, I now analyse some of the important responses of the women in the first session. But first a quick explanation on my sequence of presentation of the contextual bible Study with the Christian Mothers.

My first Sunday in Kajelo was the 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time (liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church). The gospel reading for that Sunday’s service was from Luke 10:1-18. In the reflection of the prayer leader who conducted the service, he exhorted the congregation to be generous to today’s ‘seventy-two’ of Christ. He then identified the seventy-two disciples of Christ today as the bishop, the priests, the catechists and the prayer leaders. He exhorted the faithful to be generous to the modern day ‘seventy-two’ of Christ so that on their return, they will have a good report to give to Christ. So after the service, when I met with the CMA for our first bible study session, I thought it would be a good idea to study the text on

the widow's offering (Luke 21:1-5) because this text has a similar theme of personal sacrifice from the faithful with the reflection of the prayer leader during the Church service. The next Sunday, I decided that we studied the text of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-16) because after my first meeting with the group, I realised that this text reflected the group dynamics in the sense that, there were widows, widows with children, and widows without any child in the group. Then on the last week of the CBS, we studied the text on the unjust Judge and the persistent widow. This text was studied and the application was made in the context of finding out from the widows how they usually addressed their grievances. It was obvious from the widows that they had lost faith in the civil courts as well as the traditional authorities in addressing issues that affect widows and women in general. This explains why my sequence of presentation of the texts is different from their sequence in Luke. That notwithstanding even the stories in their original sequences "in Luke's presentation is not a systematic treatise, but a narrative" (Seim 1994, 7). According to Seim (1994, 7), "this means that it tells a story, a series of developments, a sequence of events, in which the individual narratives are pieces that are given their place at a particular stage in a larger and overarching narrative." So sequence of events in Luke's presentation only counts so long as it fits into the overall plot of the narrative. In my discussion of the stories from Luke with the women, a similar trend occurred. My sequence of the stories fits into my overall itinerary of life in the field and with the research group.

The prepared questions on the texts that were used in the bible studies were of two categories; text-based questions and socio-cultural or community-based questions. The text-based questions were directly related to the characters and events in the texts. The community or socio-cultural based questions were an application of the text to the context of the women; these questions invited a personal interpretation of the texts by the women. The aim here now is to try to make sense out of the new material obtained from the first bible study session. The analyses on the first session seek to bring out what the information obtained from the fieldwork means in the context of the women.

In contextualizing the story of the widow's 'offering' through sharing their personal life experiences of their attitude towards Church offering, I got the impression that the women were sending a message across to their men and the authorities. For instance, some of the Mothers said that even if their men had the money to make offering at this lean time of the year, they would not because the men were very poor during the planting season (1.21). Yet,

the fact that the women still made offering at Church even at that difficult time meant for them their gift to God had an extra value because it was a voluntary act.

In her contribution, a widow shared her story that revealed an interesting image of God. She shared her experience of how one Sunday she was not prepared to give all she had to live on during the offering. So she divided her last coin (Ghc 1) into two parts (Ghp 50 each). She put Ghp 50 in the Church offering with the intention of living on the remaining Ghp 50 after the service (1.35). Unfortunately according to her, the money got lost in the Church even before she got out. It was an experience to laugh off and the widow drew a different lesson from her experience for the rest of the group but I got an image of God from her experience. There was an immediate shift here from the image of the incarnate God of the New Testament to the Old Testament image of God. This is the image of the Old Testament Yahweh who is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. The woman who lost her Ghp 50 in the Church gives us an image of a God who supervises the intentions of people and intervenes to punish them. That is still the dogmatic image of God preached by the Church today. God continues to stay the same in the Church even after Christ has come to introduce the new order of divine relationship with human kind.

Occasionally the women laughed at some of the questions that the facilitator asked them. For instance, a thunderous laughter from the women greeted the question from the facilitator when she asked them if any of them was ever given money by their husband for offertory in Church (1.18, 1.19). This laughter subtly revealed that the women had the economic power at that time of the year contrary to public opinion that the men always had the economic power.

4.4 SECOND CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY SESSION: LUKE 7:11- 17

Life back in the home of my host was gradually becoming very typical of village life in a Kasena society during the farming season. At this time of the year, roles in the village are clearly gender assigned roles. So my roles in the home of Madam Margaret Awe were clearly marked out. I assisted in all the roles the men did daily at that time of the year.

As I lived in Kajelo and interacted with the villagers for about two weeks now, word started going round that a seminarian was living in the house of Madam Margaret Awe. This was as a result of the interactions I had with some of the villagers who asked me if I were that son of

my father whom they had heard some time ago was studying in the major seminary to become a priest? I told them I was that son of my father but I was no longer in the major seminary but that I was currently studying in a public University abroad. To some of them that even meant I was nearing ordination to the priesthood and that was why I had been sent abroad (Rome) to complete my studies. I noticed that after about two weeks' stay in Kajelo, my neutrality as an ordinary male research student among women was greatly compromised.

The next Sunday morning, as usual, Madam Margaret Awe was up early to get her chores done before we prepared and left for Church. Waking up early was seen by Madam Margaret Awe as part of her socially assigned gender roles as a mother. We soon got to the Church and each of us took our seats appropriately.

After the Rosary devotion, it was announced to the congregation that that Sunday was the 15th Sunday in Ordinary time. Also it was announced that in attendance was the resident catechist of St. Oscar's Church who had been down with a stroke for the past three months. This announcement was greeted with a loud applause from the congregation in thanksgiving to God for answering their prayers. St. Dominic's choir took the entrance song and the ministers and the choir processed into the Church and the service got under way. The order for communion service in the Roman rite was followed to the letter and communion was distributed to active and prepared communicants. Towards the end of the service, the congregation was informed that the Catechist had a word for them. He was literally helped to the pulpit since he was still visibly recovering from the stroke that left him almost half paralysed from his right hand down to the right leg. His voice was shaky but he managed to thank the congregation for their unceasing prayers for him. He attributed his remarkable recovery to the powerful prayers of the congregation. He thanked those who were able to visit him at home and prayed that the Lord would reward each one of them in the Church according to their hearts desires and according to the will of God for their lives. I observed in the testimony of the Catechist that to him his remarkable recovery was a reward to him even on earth for the work he has been doing for the people of God. It was announced that the CMA would meet immediately after the service. After the service, I was taken to the Catechist by my host Madam Margaret Awe to introduce myself. Even before we finished exchanging greetings, he had recognised me and asked my host if I was the person doing my research with the CMA. He remembered me because during my days as a seminarian in the

diocese, I came to Kajelo on several occasions with priests from the Cathedral in Navrongo to celebrate Mass for the people.

Last Sunday, I observed that the bible study was delayed in starting because most of the mothers went to the common market by the Church after the service to get some snacks and water to drink before coming to the meeting ground. So I went to the common market with the prayer leader and asked him to order enough *maasa* (local millet cakes), some sachets of water, and some iced blocks. I gave him some money to pay for everything and we took it to the meeting grounds. He then went round to tell the mothers that there was snacks and water at the meeting grounds and so they should not waste their money and my time buying snacks and water before coming for the meeting. During the earthly ministry of Jesus, he often fed the crowds (Mk 6:30-44) or attended to their physical needs before preaching to them. I saw myself in a similar situation as Jesus in his ministry to women. It did not take long for the women to gather but we had to wait for them to finish taking their snacks before the meeting could start. My facilitator called on the women to stop eating so that we could get started and after we are done they could eat their *maasa*. But I came in to plead with her to allow them to take in something first since the snacks were meant to be taken before the start of the bible study. She agreed but still asked them to hurry up. That Sunday round, the Mothers had turned out in their numbers for the bible studies. Probably my presence in the village for the two weeks could have accounted for this high turnout. There were over 46 Mothers at the start of the meeting and some joined us as the discussion went on. As usual, with Madam Margaret Awe as the facilitator of the session, the meeting was kicked started by a couple of songs from the women before an opening prayer was said by one of the women. One of the opening songs sung by the women translates as follows:

Let us bend our knees and clap our hands begging God to send the Spirit

So that He will bless the whole world

Because gods have taken over the world and are destroying the world (2x)

Another song that was sung translates as:

The Christians Mothers have seen the light of God

We have seen Jesus; we have seen Jesus (Repeat first two verses)

We are going to collect God's blessings. (Repeat Stanza)

The text for discussion that week was read in Kasem by Madam Bibaina, the general secretary of the group. After reading the text, below is a transcription of the responses that were given by the mothers present to the prepared questions on the text:

F: "For those who were here last Sunday, I don't have to tell you again, but for the sake of those who are joining the bible study for the first time, we are now going to have a conversation on the text we just heard from Luke 7:1-18. (2.1)

F: "Who is a widow in the text and what do you think it means to be a widow?" (2.2)

M: "A widow is a woman whose husband is dead. And to be a widow means to be without a helper." (2.3)

M: "I think this widow was a woman who was very old and must have been married for a long time before her husband died." (2.4)

M: "In my view, the widow must have been very old and sorrowful to be able to attract such a display of public sympathy from the passing Jesus and his disciples." (2.5)

F: "What do you think this widow did for a living?" (2.6)

M: "In my view, she goes to the near-by farms of people in the village and gathers the millet stalks left over after harvesting and sells in the market for money." (2.7)

M: "She sells firewood for a living." (2.8)

M: "I think she now lives on charity because now she has no one to take care of her after the death of her husband and only son." (2.9)

M: "As for me I want to believe that her late husband must have died and left behind a farm and some cows. So she has inherited her late husband's farm and other properties and that was sustaining her." (2.10)

F: "Who do you think will take care of this widow now, after the death of both her husband and son?" (2.11)

M: "If her late husband had good relatives left behind, they could be taking care of her until the final funeral rites of her husband are performed." (2.12)

M: “We are not told in the text whether her husband’s final funeral rites have been performed or not; but if it is so, then probably she could be living now with one of the brothers of her late husband who has remarried her.” (2.13)

M: “I don’t think that is the case!” (2.14)

F: “Why? Is it not possible that she could have been remarried to one of the brothers of her late husband?” (2.15)

M: “If it were so, we would have been told that among the crowd that accompanied the bier carriers of the widow’s only son for burial was the new husband of the widow.” (2.16)

M: “As for me I don’t even think she was remarried to anyone otherwise she would not have still been referred to as a widow in the text we have just heard. Why are you people saying things you didn’t hear in the reading? My son (referring to me), am I lying?” (2.17)

F: “That’s enough for now. Shall we continue?” “How do you think the widow felt after the death of her only son?” (2.18)

M: “I feel she will be questioning God why these calamities are happening to only her?” (2.19)

M: “She will feel God had abandoned her or that these deaths are a punishment from God for her wrong doings.” (2.20)

M: “In my opinion I think she will definitely think her enemies were at work against her. Or some witches and wizards in her villages have *eaten up* her husband and son.” (Outburst of laughter from the group) (2.21)

F: “What do you think this widow did in return for Jesus after Jesus had raised her only son from death and given him back to her?” (2.22)

M: “After Jesus had raised her only son back from death for her, she will just follow Jesus and take him as her new husband and the father of her only son.” (2.23)

F: “May the name of God be praised!” (2.24)

G: “Now and forever more!” (2.25)

F: “Please, let us continue and finish soon since some are yet to go to Navrongo market to sell and others to their farms. So the next question is: I know some of us here are widows, do any of you know of a widow in this village in a similar situation like the widow of Nain?” (2.26)

This question triggered a brief moment of murmuring among the mothers. I could hear some of them saying that there are worse cases in the village than the case of the widow of Nain in the story.

F: “Please mothers; let us talk one after the other! Or you don’t want us to close today?” (2.27)

M: “Some of us here have been through similar situations. My husband died when I was pregnant with our first child. But fortunately my only daughter did not die also. Today she is seventeen years old.” (Then in a jovial tone she added), “May be she did not die because she is not an only son.” (The entire group burst into laughter). (2.28)

M: “Most of the widows I know in this village at least have children. But in my case, my three children were still very young when my husband died nine years ago.” (2.29)

M: “I also have something to add: let us not forget that there are some of our fellow widows in this village who are so lucky to have good relatives of their late husband and in some cases very good and caring children who are taking very good care of them.” (2.30)

F: “What do you think this story means for us today? (2.31)

M: “To me, the story wants to tell us the widows of today that Jesus can take care of all the misfortunes in our lives just as he did for the widow of Nain in the story.” (2.32)

M: “The story teaches us that we should not lose faith in Jesus in times of difficulties and misfortunes because it was based on the strong faith of the widow in Jesus that he was able to raise her only son back from the dead for her.” (2.33)

F: “What would you have done today if you were the widow of Nain?” (2.34)

M: “If I were this widow today, I will tell what Jesus has done for me to the entire world and henceforth, do everything the Lord tells me to do.” (2.35)

M: “As for me, I will put all my faith, hope and trust in Jesus from now onwards.” (2.36)

F: “This goes to those among us who are widows; do you have children and do you stay with your children as widows or some of you are being forced to remarry the brothers of your late husband as tradition allows?” (2.37)

This question was greeted with a heated debate among the mothers. Some were saying to others, “In this day and age?” Another said, “Can they even take care of themselves and the wives they already have?” (2.38)

M: “Yes! Some of us were given the option to choose between remarrying a brother of our deceased husband or to stay with the grave of our late husband and our children. We opted to stay with our children and those of us without children have decided to stay with our husband’s grave.”(Choosing to stay with one’s late husband’s grave is an accepted traditional option in Kasena society for widows who intend to stay in their late husband’s homes without remarrying a brother of the deceased husband as custom demands of them). (2.39)

F: “Any other contribution from anyone? If no, then we can bring our discussion on today’s text to a close. Who will volunteer to give us a closing song and prayer?” (2.40)
Spontaneously, one of the mothers in-toned a song which the whole group joined in to sing enthusiastically. The song translates like this:

There is no life for sale in the market (2x)

Christian Mothers have a life that is good

Let us go there and thank him (Jesus) and receive God’s blessings

After a few minutes of singing and dancing, some of the mothers started pointing at me and saying, “let our son pray for us”, “he has been too quiet during the discussion, so let him talk now”, “you will soon be saying Mass for us after your ordination (still believing I was a seminarian), so pray for your mothers to go home safely.” I was asked by the facilitator to say the closing prayer which I did. She then announced to the group that the next Sunday will be our last meeting for the bible studies. She reminded the mothers to wear their ceremonial attire for Mass next Sunday. In the company of some of the women together with my host, we chattered our way home to spend the rest of the Sunday on various farming activities.

4.5 ANALYSES OF THE SECOND BIBLE STUDY SESSION

This session was commenced by singing from the mothers and the words of the songs translated above portrayed a certain understanding of Christianity in relation to the Traditional African religion still practiced in the community. In the first song, the words call on all Christians to go down on their knees in prayer imploring God to bless the world and save the world from destruction by the gods (demonic forces). The words of the song portray an image of God as the Supreme Being who is all powerful. This Supreme Being even has power over other gods and can punish them for wrong doing or destroy the lesser evil gods completely. This is exactly the image of God the Creator and Supreme Being preached by the Church. The God of the Church is not a *Deus inter paris*. That means the God of the Church is not a God among equals.

In this session also, the responses of the widows and other women indicated that they perceived women as the recipients of Jesus' ministry. When the question was put to them about what they would have done today if they were in the shoes of the widow of Nain, they unanimously agreed that they would follow Jesus and obey his teachings the rest of their lives (2.36, 2.36). One widow even said that if it were her, from then on, Christ would be her 'husband' (2.23). Christ is the *ideal husband* with a difference in the sense that her experience of Jesus is not as an oppressive husband. Taking Christ as her husband changes her status as a widow to a married woman. The interpretation of Christ as the ideal husband offered the women a way of negotiating masculinity with their patriarchal husbands. Also, taking Christ as her new husband empowers her because she is recognised differently by Christ from the way the community continues to perceive her. This empowerment by Christ helps the widow to fight the social evil of widow inheritance by brothers of deceased husbands.

The role and authority of the facilitator in the group was ambivalent in this session. Occasionally, she was suppressive by clamping down on the women to put an end to a point she thought was not appropriate for women to discuss (2.26). This was the case in the widow's alternative interpretation of Christ as a new husband. At other times, she pushed the women to talk when there was an easy silence after a question was posed on a sensitive issue in the community.

In their insistence on being defined as a wife – albeit with a different husband than the society offers – the widows’ interpretation take a different route than the classical White Euro-American feminism which seems to advocate a universal independence for all women. But Womanist feminists theologians and African feminist theologians criticise this position by saying it does not represent the concerns of all women (Oduyoye 2002, 35-37). Womanist theologians and African feminist theologians are of the view that Black American and African women still need their husbands to maintain a good and model home. However, they add that the women should be seen by their men as equal disciples of Christ and co-beneficiaries of the salvation of Christ to all human kind; just as the widow of Nain benefited from Jesus’ ministry (Luke 7:11-16). In the case of the widow of Nain, the young man was raised up; but the life-giving act was done, not for him, but for his mother: Jesus “gave him to his mother” (7:15) It appears women were in special need of the resurrection. Jesus perceived and responded to that need; and his ministry to women is a sign of divine salvation (Via E. J. in King, 1987). The ultimate goal of Jesus’ ministry on earth was the salvation of all human kind. This human thrust of divine salvation was first realised in the lives of individual women especially widows.

The next important issue which came up strongly in this session was the *identification with the widow characters* in the texts (compare Via, in King, 1987). The feeling of association with the characters of the texts was so strong among the women especially the widows in the group. This was even further demonstrated in how the women called the CBS in the local dialect; “widows conversations” (*Kadena lara*). The stories were about widows and they as widows and women were given the opportunity for once to share their experiences in relation to the experiences of the widows in the stories of Luke.

Also, the image of the divine drawn from the text by the women switched from an image of Christ to an image of God. For instance, a mother shared that in her opinion, the widow of Nain must have felt that God had either abandoned her or that these deaths were a punishment from God for her wrong doings (2.19, 2.20). This recalls the image of Yahweh that the friends of Job questioned in the story of Job (Job 4:1-24). Why should a good God allow evil or bad things to come the way of good and faithful people? This is the image of the God of the Old Testament who punishes people in this life for bad deeds and rewards people for good deeds. In spite of the fact that the Christian God gives people a second chance to the

very last in this life and even still gives people a hearing in the next life before deciding on their fate, it is still the Old Testament God that is preached by the local Church.

In a response to the question if any of the widows in the group had ever experienced what the widow of Nain had gone through in the text, a widow shared her similar experience but was quick to jokingly add that she did not lose her only child because perhaps her child was an only daughter not an only son (2.28). She said this because male children are asserts in that community. A son is the only source of inheritance for a widow because as I stated earlier in this thesis, women cannot inherit their late husband's properties in most Ghanaian communities. Therefore, sons are a source of envy from evil persons for their parents in most Ghanaian communities. This can let them become innocent victims of demonic forces from envious persons in their communities. It is this reality that the mother who was of the opinion that the widow of Nain must have felt that her enemies were at work against her or the witches and wizards in her village had *eaten up* her husband and son. This was the world view behind the widow's joke.

Also worth commenting on was the few instances in which the women called on me to validate their contributions or resolve arguments that arose (2.17). They portrayed to me the authority I had in the group just by my mere presence. The defiant perception of me as a priest-to-be by the women to my surprise turned out to be the rallying point for the women to negotiate masculinity. As a priest-to-be, so they thought, made the women feel very safe and comfortable with me. This perception also changed the group dynamics. Doing theology was seen by the women as a public activity. Only men are allowed to perform public functions in most Ghanaian communities. That means doing theology in Ghana is still largely the sole preserve of men. Women are not allowed to participate in public discussions with men. So if I was a priest-to-be, it meant I was certainly going to live the celibate life. I was a different man to them. Therefore, having a conversation with me was not a public activity in the manner of the public activities that their men engaged in and from which they are forbidden to participate in. Also, their marriages were not in jeopardy because their husbands did not see me as a threat to their wives when they were told that I was a priest in the making.

The words of the closing song to this session touched on the unique and privileged identity of the Christian Mothers. They asserted this new identity in the song because of the empowerment they got from being accepted by Jesus Christ the ideal *male* and *husband*.

4.6 THIRD CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY SESSION: LUKE 18:1-7

This was now my fourth week in Kajelo. I was by now gradually gaining an insider's perspective on various aspects of life in the village. Communication with the villagers was not my problem since I spoke the same Kasem dialect with the people of Kajelo. However, there was tension brewing within the Christian Mothers. The leadership brought the issue to my attention one afternoon as I was writing down my field notes at home. The issue was that some of the women had expressed fear that they seem not to have received overt permission from the parish council (made up only men) before beginning the bible study with me. They were therefore worried about the consequences of their participation in the bible studies without the expressed permission of the parish council chairman. So for that matter, they were afraid that whatever they were discussing with me could be held against them in future by the Church leadership because women are not supposed to speak on public issues. Doing theology is a public activity because it is still mostly the preserve of male theologians in Ghana. Some of the women also complained that I had not shown myself to the whole congregation during Church service so that the entire congregation could be aware of my presence in the community. This would have allayed the fears of the women from possible agitation and confrontations from their husbands because the men could have thought their wives were engaged in unauthorised public discussion with an unknown male. Therefore, they were recommending that I immediately go to the house of the parish council chairman and officially seek permission from him to continue to have the bible studies with them. I did as they suggested. I, in the company of the prayer leader went to the chairman's house. I explained to him what I was doing with the CMA. I also explained to him why I chose not to show myself in Church at the beginning of my stay in the village. I told him that I would rather do that at the end of my stay with the community which fortunately was that coming Sunday. The Chairman assured me of his support and permission to continue my bible study with the Christian Mothers. This was communicated back to the leadership of the CMA through my host, Madam Margaret Awe. In a related development, immense pressure was now on me by this time to either lead the Sunday service for the coming Sunday or say something to the congregation on Sunday during the service. As the week wore on and Sunday drew nearer, my dilemma worsened. It was therefore a great relief when I met Fr. Joseph Atadana, a priest of the diocese who is a native of Kajelo; and he told me he would be coming for Mass in the village that Sunday. Fr. Atadana was at the time of my fieldwork the

first and only Catholic priest from Kajelo. He was as at the time of my fieldwork resident in the United States of America, precisely, St. Paul, Minneapolis. He was on summer vacation in Ghana and came home to see his people in the village. The issue about me leading the Sunday service was resolved. The only thing I had to do was to address the congregation during the Mass and express my gratitude to them and at the same time say farewell to them since that was my last Sunday in Kajelo.

As word went round during the week that Fr. Joseph was coming to celebrate the Mass that Sunday, the Church was packed to capacity even before the usual Sunday Rosary devotion preceding the Mass. The celebration started exactly on time at 9:30am. The congregation came to life and sang very melodious Kasem rendition of Latin tunes. After Holy Communion and before the Church announcements were made, I was invited by Fr. Joseph to say a word to the Christian Mothers and the rest of the congregation. I took the pulpit and in a few minutes thanked the entire congregation for their support during my stay with them. I specifically thanked the Christian Mothers for their time and support throughout my research period. A short response was given by the parish council chairman who wished me well as I returned to Europe to complete my studies. He added that after completing I should return to Kajelo to help them.

After the Mass, the mothers turned out in their numbers for the bible study. Could the overwhelming turnout that week had been due to the fact that I had spoken in the Church or the fact that the Parish council chairman gave them his *permission* to continue the bible studies with me? In any case, a head count before the bible study got under way indicated that there were seventy-five (75) Mothers present. Since we had placed an order in advance for the snacks (*maasa*) and the sachet water, the snacks were ready at the meeting venue for the mothers. They all had enough to eat and drink and in no time the facilitator Madam Margaret Awe, was on the women to finish up quickly with their snacks so that we could start the bible study. To start with, the mothers sang so many songs for quite some time. It took several attempts before the facilitator was able to bring the loud singing and dancing to a stop for the bible study to continue. The text for discussion, Luke 18:1-7, was read in Kasem by Kenneth, the only male member of the group. As such, the women affectionately called him *Christian Father*. His primary function in the group is to handle the correspondence and other public relations tasks for the group. Kenneth was present in the bible study that Sunday because it was my last bible study with the group and he was only there to make a

presentation from the group to me. However, as he sat through the bible study, he asked for permission to also contribute to the discussion.

The responses of the mothers to the prepared questions on the text are transcribed below:

F: “Where do you think the Judge (translated as *Pε* meaning *Chief* in the Kasem New Testament Bible) in the text lived in the town?” (3.1)

M: “He would definitely be living in his palace since he was a Chief.” (3.2)

M: “He lived in his big palace with so many wives and men servants and maidservants to serve him.” (3.3)

F: “And the widow, where do you think she lived in the town?” (3.4)

M: “It all depends on the type of widow she was. If she was a lucky widow and she was not thrown out of her late husband’s house, then she would be living in her late husband’s house.” (3.5)

M: “I don’t think she was living in her late husband’s house. She was thrown out. That could be why she was constantly going to the Judge’s house for justice.” (3.6)

F: “That brings us to the next question; what could be the case of the widow that she was seeking justice from the Judge?” (3.7)

M: “I suppose it could be a case of her late husband’s cows and farm taken away from her by her husband’s relatives.” (3.8)

M: “She was fighting to free her children from the child labour the children have been subjected to by her late husband’s relations after his death.” (3.9)

M: “I feel that her case was that she wanted justice done to some of the unfair cultural widowhood practices that she was being forced to go through after her husband’s death.” (3.10)

F: “Why do you think the widow was granted unrestricted access to the Judge (*Pε*) everyday she went to his court?” (3.11)

M: “It was due to her persistence at demanding to see the Chief (Judge) that she was eventually given access to him on a daily basis.” (3.12)

M: “As a widow and an old woman, everyone knew she was harmless to the Chief and that’s why they allowed her to see him every day she came to the palace.” (3.13)

M: “As for me I think it was perhaps because the Chief’s guards knew this widow had a genuine and legitimate case for which she must be given a hearing by the Chief (Judge).” (3.14)

F: “Has any of you here who are widows ever been through a similar situation like this?” (3.15)

M: “Madam, when it comes to property ownership in this village, all of us are widows!” (3.16)

F: “What do you mean by all women are widows?” (3.17)

M: “Don’t you live in this village with us? We the women own nothing here. We don’t even own the very children we gave birth to. So where is the difference between us and the widows?” (3.18)

M: “It has happened to some of us before. It even happens frequently to widows these days than it used to happen when I was a little girl growing up in my village” (3.19)

F: “Where do you normally take your cases to for a hearing?” (3.20)

M: “I took my case of constant sexual harassment from a brother of my late husband first to the Chief of the village before I then made a police report. I went to the Chief’s palace first because most often when we report family cases of abuse to the police, we are later advised by relations to use alternative resolution method which is an out of court settlement of the cases. This man who was harassing me was given a verbal caution by the police and since then he stopped disturbing me.” (3.21)

M: “My daughter in High School once told me that there is a law protecting us the widows from greedy family relatives.” (3.22)

This was in reference to PNDC Law 111. Intestate inheritance was introduced in 1985, but with little effect, and both the inadequacy of the legal provisions as well as their non-enforcement leave widows with precarious rights. The Intestate Succession Law, 1985 (PNDC Law 111) was designed to eliminate all forms of gender discrimination in the

distribution of property upon intestacy by granting equal rights of succession to all children of the intestate, irrespective of gender or age. There is however an urgent need for a review of the law after 26 years of its operation to ensure that its practical implementation is in fact achieving equity for spouses, especially widows of persons who die intestate and their children. This law however, has helped to better the situation of most widows in the country since its introduction in 1985. But the problem is that in most cases, this law is hardly invoked because most cases of abuse are not taken to the law courts because other family members discourage the idea with the excuse that it is not good for family members to wash their dirty linen in public.

F: “Are there things in your village or in the Catholic Church you feel are not just to women and which you think should be addressed?” (3.23)

M: “Left unto me alone, almost all the widowhood rites that we are subjected to when our husbands die should be done away with immediately.” (3.24)

M: “I don’t think we Christian wives should be subjected to such widowhood rites although we are Kasena women.” (3.25)

M: “As for issues with the Church, who are we to talk? If we don’t comply they will not give us communion. And what is the use as an active communicant coming to Church on every Sunday without taking communion for the rest of your life as a Catholic?” (3.26)

F: “But are there issues you wished the Church would address?” (3.27)

M: “Oh yes. A number of issues need to be addressed in relation to women in the Church. But we don’t know if we are actually allowed to openly speak about them.” (3.28)

M: “For instance, when a man marries a second wife which tradition allows him to do; the wife of such a man is not allowed to come to communion. She can’t have a wedding in the Church and ultimately she cannot join the CMA.” (3.29)

M: “As for the priesthood in our Church, you all know that our daughters cannot also study to become priests just like you are doing (referring to me and an indication that she still perceived me as a seminarian) in the *white man’s country*.” (3.30)

F: “Finally, mothers, what lesson do you think this story has for us today?” (3.31)

M: “That if we have any problem at all we should always take it to God.” (3.32)

M: “I have learned that if we persist in taking our problems to God in prayer, God who is not like this bad Chief in the text will readily answer our prayers and give us all what we lack as widows.” (3.33)

F: “I now call on Kenneth to say something to our son who will be leaving us for good after today’s discussion” (3.34)

Kenneth: “You were all informed in the Church at the end of the Mass that today was the last Sunday of your son with us in Kajelo. So shall we now ask him if has something to say before I come in and then we close for today?” (3.35)

I took the opportunity to thank the Christian mothers and to brief them on some development projects specifically meant for the Christians Mothers Association of the diocese available at the Diocesan Development Office (DDO). I charged the leadership of the CMA in Kajelo to follow up the leads I was leaving with them since I was informed at the DDO that the policy of the DDO is “community response” and not “community advocacy”. That means the DDO only responds to the specific needs of each parish or parish group only after the parish or group has made their request known to the office.

As it was my last bible study meeting with the CMA, arrangements were made in advance to get some food and drinks (*pito*) ready for a little celebration after the meeting. The food and drink was now served. There was general singing and dancing amidst personal maternal good wishes and blessings from the mothers. It was very difficult to say goodbye to the group but eventually that goodbye was said and the closing prayer taken by Kenneth.

4.7 ANALYSES OF THE THIRD BIBLE STUDY SESSION

Again, this last session started with intense singing and dancing by the mothers whose number had by now tripled that of the first session. It seemed the women preferred to sing all day long than to study the bible with me. This could be because they were still not very comfortable studying the bible which they still perceived as a public function meant for only men. But singing was the area of monopoly by women in the Church in St. Oscar’s parish. The Christian Mothers doubled as a standing choir in the Church and they were given slots

during the Sunday services to sing. So singing was just their best known and acceptable function as women in the Church.

It came up again in this session that the women could identify their experiences with the female figures in the teaching of Jesus in the story from the gospel of Luke. In the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-7), the widow represents the persistent, humble petitioner before the deity in the original context of the parable in which Jesus used the parable. In the context of the widows of Kajelo, the widows saw the widow in the text to represent all the widows in patriarchal society who are constantly unjustly treated by the patriarchal structures of their community represented in the story by the unjust judge (3.24, 3.25). This is a contextualized reading of the story which revealed to me that the women had seldom experienced an unjust judge becoming just. That is, the analogy of the unjust judge compared to the just God. Yet the persistent widow inspired them. The analogy is that even if an unjust judge can give in to the persistence of the widow then the just God will surely also give in one day to the pleas of all oppressed African women. So inspired by this text the widows in Kajelo hope that with persistence, they will one day win justice over the inhumane cultural practices that they are subjected to as victims. This is a daunting task in the context of the widows of Kajelo in the sense that the patriarchal regime, in order not to let the widows feel that they are victims of such cruel cultural practices coupled with the accompanying poverty as widows, entrust fellow women to administer these cruel rites and rituals unto the widows (Owen 1996 in Sossou 2002, 208). For instance among the Kasena, during the final funeral rites of a man, his widow is made to sit naked on dry branches to prove her past and present faithfulness to her late husband. This ritual and others like the shaving of the hair of the widow are superintended over by fellow women mostly widows who have themselves gone through similar rites when their husbands died. However, it is my hope that with contextual bible studies of this nature and with the formation of liberational images of Christ from the gospels, African women in patriarchal societies will use the resources within them to fight the system just like Jesus teaches them to do in this parable of the unjust Judge and the persistent widow in Luke.

Again, in another instance of character identification, the Christian Mothers identified very much with the widow in the story of the persistent widow and the unjust judge. One of them shared her experience of how she had to resist several attempts by her deceased husband's brother to inherit her after her husband's death (3.21). She reported the matter to the civil

authorities and the case was resolved in her favour. Another shared her experience of how her children and her late husband's property were taken away from her. She and her children took the case to court and the case was settled amicably under PNDC Law 111. These contextual experiences shared by the Christian Mothers learn some support to the historical speculation by some scholars that the case of the widow in the story of Luke had to do with unresolved issues of inheritance after her husband's death (Kartzow and Maseno 2010). Again, my concern here is which character identification is most appropriate for the context of liberation? Certainly it is the kind of character identification that makes the readers of the story realise the potential they have in themselves even as widows and how they can do something about their oppressed situation (3.21, 3.22).

Some comments on Kenneth who was present during this session (3.34). Why Kenneth, a man, acts as the secretary to the group though a few of the women could read and write could be traced to the gender bias perceptions of some executive positions in the Church. Consciously or unconsciously, positions such as *president*, *chairperson* (often written *chairman*), and *secretary* are reserved for men. Only the position of *treasurer* is forced on the women. This could be because of the general public perception that women are more economical with money and are better managers of public funds than men. Also, a secretary is the public relations officer of a group and this task will inevitably make such a person to perform public functions on behalf of the group. So for the women, a man would be best suited to perform such public tasks for them. That explains why Kenneth has been conscripted into the Christian Mothers Association to be their secretary.

This chapter surveyed the core of the thesis. The chapter gave a glimpse into what widows (CM) had to say on stories in Luke that describe similar social conditions like their own present social conditions. This was an opportunity to hear women discuss the bible and share their experiences on theological issues of personal and contextual relevance to them. I noticed – and this comment runs through the other two sessions as well – that, whenever the women were asked “what have you learned from the text?”, they always came up with the dogmatically right answers; even if they discussed other inherent issues from the biblical story during the session. Seemingly, the women adhered to the Church dogma in their interpretations of the texts, yet they had something else up their sleeves: a *fair husband* in the image of Christ. They cleverly negotiated masculinity with the Church authorities. Also, in

this chapter, I have analysed what the women shared during the contextual bible studies with a trained predisposition and come to some personal conclusions.

4.8 EXTENDED ANALYSES OF THE THREE BIBLE STUDY SESSIONS

Finally, I will reflect on the contextual bible studies in the light of the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) as contained in some of the relevant documents for our purpose here (*Gaudium et Spes*: “Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World”, 1965; *Ad Gentes*: “Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church”, 1965).

The second paragraph of chapter one of *Ad Gentes* (1965) entitled, “Principles of Doctrine”, states that “The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father” (*Ad Gentes*, #2). This means that the proper purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization, and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where it has not yet taken roots. The real test of evangelization is when people after the gospel has been introduced to them, can articulate the Christian message in their own cultural religious language and also apply the gospel values in their daily lives. So the mission of the Church must move a step further from evangelization to inculturation.

In the responses to the questions on the widow’s offering (Luke 21:1-4), the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), and the unjust judge and the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-7), an indigenous expression of the Christian message was observed. The widows in the bible study group used personal life stories of their own context to describe what the texts say about the widows in the texts. To the questions where they thought the widow would have gotten those two coins she put in the Temple offering, how they thought the widow of Nain could have survived without her husband and only son, and what case they thought the persistent widow was constantly seeking justice for from the unjust Judge, their responses clearly portrayed a translation of gospel values and imagery into their cultural context (1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9; 2.12, 2.13; 3.8; 3.9, 3.10). They used the gospel to support their own vision of another social order. This was an indication of inculturation of the Christian message.

The Church’s one mission throughout its history has both shaped and been shaped by the historical-cultural context and the corresponding theological thought of particular times and

places. In a 1982 meeting with the bishops of Nigeria, Pope John Paul II said, “the Church comes to bring Christ; she does not come to bring the culture of another race.” In 1979 the term inculturation was included in an official Pontifical document by John Paul II, in his Apostolic Exhortation ‘Catechesi Tradendae’ (CT). Another encyclical letter, ‘Redemptoris Missio (RM) of John Paul II, a missionary document par excellence, says that “inculturation means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration into Christianity and the insertion of Christianity into various human cultures” (RM #52). This definition makes it clear that inculturation is a process which works in two senses: we can speak of inculturation ‘*ad extra*’ and inculturation ‘*ad intra*’. The former indicates the impact of evangelizing mission on the culture of the people who receive the gospel; the latter refers to the effect in the life of the Church as a result of its presence within a new culture. In my discussions with the widows and the other Christian Mothers during the bible study sessions, this two way impact was often not portrayed by the women in their responses to questions bordering on the application of the stories under discussion. It was mostly the impact of the Church’s mission on the women’s lives that was expressed in their responses but not the effect in the life of the Church with particular focus on the place of women in the Catholic Church and in Kasena society in which the Church is found. Arguably, in my opinion, the Church appears to have just mirrored the patriarchal treatment of women in Kasena society throughout its mission in Navrongo.

In a nutshell, the split, that the women made between God and Christ, allowed them simultaneously to give the Church its due and so wage a different social non-patriarchal order!

The next chapter presents an alternative and contextual reading of the bible and how this affects the status quo of biblical interpretation in the Church. The contextual reading of the stories of women in Luke’s gospel by the women of the Christian Mothers Association of Kajelo presented in the last chapter will help to elicit some responses from the status quo in the next chapter. Then the focus is shifted to African feminist theologians’ views on stories of women in the bible and the state of interpretation of the bible in the African continent. I also discuss what the scholars propose for a way forward for women in Africa for whom the Christian scriptures are not just “texts of terror” but “texts of faith” as well.

CHAPTER FIVE

AFRICAN WOMEN THEOLOGIANS' INTERPRETATIONS OF STORIES OF WOMEN IN LUKE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The issue of Christian distinctiveness in relation to its surrounding culture was a major preoccupation for the early Church. In the early third century of the Common Era, for the theologian Tertullian (d. AD 220), the absolute demands of the gospel were non-negotiable. “What has Jerusalem (*the city of Faith*) to do with Athens (*the city of Learning*)?” he asked, attributing the highest authority to the unbroken integrity of the apostolic witness. Inversely, Justin Martyr (c. AD 100-165) argued that converts to Christianity should not be expected to abandon prior cultural loyalties, if, as he argued, they could be proven consistent with the values of the gospel (Graham et al 2005, 200 *Italics mine*).

In the post colonial era, other voices (e.g. the documents of Vatican II 1962 – 65) have proved particularly influential. These voices fostered an appreciation of culture as a human material and a symbolic construct; and they also emphasized the need to understand the distinctiveness of each local context *from within* in order to offer theological responses that respected the integrity of that situation. As a result, terms such as ‘contextualization’, ‘indigenization’ and ‘inculturation’ have been used to highlight the ways in which cultural diversity necessarily shapes the transmission and expression of the gospel. As Bevans S. (2002, 2) has stated, we may identify the primary focus of inculturation as one of reading culture, meaning, “the web of human relationships and meanings that make up human culture, and in which God is present, offering life, healing, and wholeness.”

5.2 THE WIDOWS' CONTEXTUAL READINGS OF LUKE

It is therefore obvious that the contextual bible study method requires that particular attention be given to the local traditions, material and symbolic practices that make up the way of life of a people. The responses from the contextual bible study with the Christian Mothers portrayed a contextual interpretation of the stories of women in Luke by these women

through their personal life stories and cultural symbols that are particular to their own context and culture. The women identified the widows in Luke's stories as being in similar cultural oppression as they are in Kajelo, Northern Ghana. They also said that the widows in the stories in Luke would have been engaged in economic activities similar to what they are engaged in like farming, selling in the market on market days, use of donkeys to cart firewood for sale as fuel, and working on peoples' farms as hired labourers. The presentation in this section therefore, is, has the local faith community (Church sermons) interpretations and African feminist interpretations of the stories of women in Luke been taking into account the cultural milieu of the people outside academia such as the Christian Mothers of Kajelo? I present here the interpretations in the form of written sermons by two indigenous Catholic priests working in the Navrongo-Bolgatanga Diocese of the story of the widow's offering (Lk 21:1-4) I used for the contextual bible studies with the Christian Mothers of St. Oscar's Church. The reflections of the priests were sermons specifically meant for the Christian Mothers group that participated in the bible studies. First I present the script of the reflection by a priest who was working in the co-Cathedral of the diocese, the Sacred Heart Parish, Bolgatanga.

Theme: Real Gift; True Love

My dear Mothers,

The poor widow was the only one from among so many worshipers who made retribution to God as He deserves. She was the personification of those uncountable poor, who have practically nothing but somehow find a way to give part of the little they have. The humble person is capable of sacrificing part of his/her paid time to study or participate in common activities in order to help his companions. Jesus noticed the offering of the poor widow and remarked that, it far out-valued all the other offerings because it was everything she had. She had nothing to lean or to live on after that offering.

Mothers and sisters in Christ, a gift which is unwillingly extracted; a gift which is given with a grudge, a gift that is given for the sake of prestige or of self display, loses more than half of its value. The only real gift is that which comes from the inevitable outflow of a loving heart. The rich gave from their surplus. It was not out of real generosity. It did not cost them much to give out of their surplus. The

rich no doubt gave having nicely calculated how much they could afford to give out from their surplus. The poor widow gave with that utterly reckless generosity that cannot be measured by calculation. Gifts and sacrifices that we make to each other is done out of love. Love is the only option. Love God and love your neighbour and offer sacrifices for both God and neighbour.

Still on the same story from Luke with the same audience in mind, below is the sermon by the youth chaplain of the Navrongo-Bolgatanga diocese as at the period of my fieldwork on the theme; “*Jesus is Aware of you:*”

Dear friends in Christ, this piece of scripture reveals to us that, Jesus does more than just teaching, explaining and challenging of people in the Temple. He observes with keen interest, first, the behaviour of everyone and secondly, every activity in the Temple. It is not surprising therefore, that he knows who is a rich person and who is poor. Apart from knowing the various people through interaction with them, he also knows them by their outward show or actions; since behaviour is an outward exhibition of inner character, intentions and convictions.

Would it therefore be surprising that Jesus was able to tell who was making a show of wealth and who was giving in sincerity, sacrificing the little out of love for the course for which the offering was taken? It is important therefore, for each one of us, and you in particular, to know that Jesus knows you in your particular state as you sit here in the Church and he knows every action of yours; if it is sincere and if it is not. Jesus notices and blesses sincere sacrifice. What is more is that Jesus had particular attention on the widow. He saw her state, saw her faith, saw her sacrifice and applauded it in the full view of all. In all her lack, of husband and wealth, she was raised high by Jesus.

Know my dear mothers that your state is in Jesus’ hands in so far as you live it in sincerity, making all the necessary sacrifices as is possible for you out of love for whatever course in your faith and in the Church.

These interpretations by the two priests of the story of women in Luke seem to me the same as the interpretations by the Christian Mothers during the contextual bible study of the same

text. These two sermons are a typical instance of the kind of local Church interpretations women in the Church in this area have been hearing since the inception of the *third wave* of Christianity in Africa that came with the thrust of the missionary movements. Though these reflections were made in the context of sermons delivered from the pulpit, they are supposed to edify, inspire, and give hope and at the same time illicit Christian action in their audience. However, these reflections seem to perpetuate the passive acceptance of suffering in their audience. These reflections by the priests suggest a fatalistic stance for women in the area which does not help the course of the liberation of women. Inversely, the contextual interpretations of the Christian Mothers of St. Oscar's Church (many of whom were widows) though done within the context of a bible study group allowed these women the opportunity to interpret the texts from their place as women. This very act of interpretation is in itself empowering for these women. But tragically, apart from doing the interpretation of the texts themselves as women, these women sadly paraphrased the meaning of the texts as they have heard from sermons or have been taught in catechism. That means the Christian Mothers did not form the kind of liberational images of Christ in their process of self interpretation of the stories that can then lead to personal transformation. For instance, none of my women questioned the relevance for their context as poor women, the sacrificial image of Christ from the text of the offering of the widow (Lk 21:1-4) often preached to them in Church sermons. From the responses of the Christian Mothers, they said they would do same as the widow in the story by offering all they had to live on in Church even if it meant going home to die afterwards. None of them saw the need to question the fairness of the current practice where the Church continues to take money from the poor through Church offerings. To me, the only image of Christ that these women know and have come to accept is that of the sacrificial Christ and the cross. Would anyone blame them for that when religion is often used as "opium" to justify exploitation and suffering? My point here is that women need to seek the best interpretation of the stories of women that aims at the gender inspired message that Luke communicated then and hopes to communicate now in these stories.

The next section of this chapter also pitches the contextual interpretations of the stories of women in Luke by the Christian Mothers with African Women Theologians' writings on the same issue. It is often said that African feminists stand the risk of being accused of having been corrupted by the Western feminists' academy and therefore, they do not fully represent the social context of women in Africa. Some African feminists have also been accused of

romanticizing with the *woman question* in Luke (Phiri and Nadar, 2006). That is the moderate feminist position which says that not all stories of women in Luke are hostile to women. In other words, this group of feminists are saying that, “do not throw away the baby with the dirty water”. They advocate an emphasis on the positive interpretations of even the apparent hostile stories of women in the bible. On the other hand, other feminist theologians have a slightly different approach to the issue of the subjugation of women and the vilification of woman’s body in the bible and in Christian teachings. This position is similar to the Womanist theology from North America. This position advocates a peaceful coexistence of women and men. That is why feminist theologians like Oduyoye (2004) think that the classical Euro-American concerns regarding women’s subjugation and the vilification of women by Christianity is not representative of the concerns of all women. This is why the next section is designed to be an exploration of contemporary African feminist theologians’ interpretation of the stories of women in the New Testament with particular attention on the stories of women in Luke and how these stories relate to the lives of women on the continent.

5.3 AFRICAN FEMINIST WOMEN THEOLOGIANS INTERPRETATIONS OF STORIES OF WOMEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In Africa, theology is both contextual and liberational. In dramas, novels and poetry, Africans demonstrate the importance of contextual expression. In the situation of African women, contextualisation means that theology deals with the liberation of people from cultural captivity. It is also liberational because “oppression is found not only in culture but also in political and economic structures and the dominant mass media.”¹⁵ In African feminist theology, the focus on the liberation of women in African theology connects it with other Third World liberation theologies. African theology concerns itself with bringing about solidarity of Africans with Black Americans, Asians and Latin Americans.¹⁶ African feminist theologians focus on African women’s oppression and liberation (Ruether 1998, 258).

¹⁵ "Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians," *Voices from the Third World* 11 (1988): 27. This Conference is held in 1977 (December 17-23) in Accra, Ghana. Like Latin American and Asian theologians, African theologians also see the need to be liberated from socio-economic exploitation.

¹⁶ "Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians," 27

African women's theologies are a "critical, academic study of the causes of women oppression: particularly a struggle against societal, cultural and religious patriarchy" (Phiri 2004, 156). They are committed to the abolition of all forms of oppression against women through a critique of the social and religious dimensions both in African culture and in Christianity. African women's theologies take women's experience as its starting point. For example, they focus on the "oppressive areas of life caused by injustices such as patriarchy, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, capitalism, globalisation and sexism" (Phiri 2004, 156). Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2004) describes the contemporary African context as one in which "the drama of poverty has altered much of Africa's traditional norms of human relationships" and thus "African women's theology cannot but reflect this poverty syndrome by working to construct a liberating theology" (Oduyoye 2001, 22). The Pan African Conference of the Third World Theologians referred to the need to struggle against sexism. The participants of the document declared thus:

We recognise that African women have taken an active role in the Church and in the shaping of our history. They have shown themselves to be an integral part of the liberation struggle. But we cannot ignore their exclusion from our past theological endeavours. The future of African theology must take seriously the role of women in the church as equals in the doing of theology.¹⁷

In the continent, women liberation struggles have been taking place in different forms over the years. For instance, women's revolt against colonial oppressive measures was held in Aba, Nigeria, as far back as in 1929. However, it is recently that these struggles have become a theological issue. "Feminist theology seeks to clarify the identity of women as equal partners with men in the human community" (Ukpong 1988, 71). Oduyoye challenges Third World Theologians "to see the women issue as a priority, and calls for a theological redefinition of the concepts of headship, authority and power in the light of the gospels" (Ukpong 1988, 71). Teresa Okure tries to analyse the image of the woman in Church and society from a biblical perspective. It is a cultural bias, according to her, that there is continued exclusion of women from participation in certain Christian ministries (Ukpong 1988, 71). Rosemary Edet (1988, 71) urges that "women be moved from the periphery to the

¹⁷ "Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians," 28

centre of the Church's life and activity."¹⁸ Bette J. Ekeya (1988, 72) says that elaboration of theology should be done with the involvement of women at the grassroots level. She is of the view that in evolving an African Christology from women's perspective the image of the victorious Christ is most relevant.

The next issue of concern in African feminist theology after liberation is an emphasis on an inclusive Christology. The writings of African women theologians emphasises on an emerging African feminist Christology. For example, Mercy Amba Oduyoye has pointed out that African women

do theology with their whole beings: rural women walking for water and firewood, cooking meals, caring for children; urban women working in shops and in the market – everywhere in Africa women proclaim through their lives a courageous hope in the goodness of life in the midst of incredible poverty and oppression. (Rakoczy 2004, 17)

Therese Souga emphasises that “[w]e need a Christology that takes into account the situation of women in the African world. Christology cannot be reformulated without taking into account women and their place in the Church and society in Africa” (Souga 1988, 29). This Christology is “not a discourse but a relationship” (Oduyoye 2004, 58) and the praxis which flows from it. In a more clear way, for African women Jesus is a friend, healer, advocate and source of transformation. Again African feminists, according to Oduyoye (1996, 113) consider Jesus as ‘the boundary breaker’ which means that he is a source of hope for women bound on all sides by religions and cultures of Africa. It is from their experience that African women speak of the images of Christ which gives them hope and courage.

Another important point is the anthropological focus of African feminist Christology. In this respect, African women name Christ as mother, the one who nurtures life and cares for the weak. In African culture women are seen mainly in the roles of bringing forth life and lovingly caring for their children (Rakoczy 2004, 120). But Nasimiyyu-Wasike stresses that women's roles in Africa can no longer be limited to physical motherhood. Then she puts forth

¹⁸ Rosemary Edet, teaching at the University of Calabar, Nigeria, has written on women and inculturation issues. Her publications include, *From Nature to Divine: An Introduction to the Study of Religions* (Rome, 1984); “Women in Church Life” (EATWOT Conference Paper, Mexico 1986).

the example from the gospels showing that Christ recognised women as responsible persons in their own right and called them as disciples. She adds:

Jesus today recognizes the African woman not just as a nurturer of life but as one who participates fully in the life of the Church – as theological teacher, catechist, biblical interpreter, counsellor and as one called to restore the Church and humanity to the initial inclusiveness, holistic and mutual relationships between women and men. (Nasimiyu-Wasike 1989, 131)

Other Christological models for African women are: Christ as the liberator, cosmological restorer and healer (Nasimiyu-Wasike 1989, 131-133) Denise Ackermann (1997, 63) asserts that the future of feminist theology “is crucial to the future of the entire theological project in southern Africa.” Rakozy (2004, 20) remarks, and I agree with her, that this is applicable to all of Africa. The development of African theology will be incomplete without women’s voices and contributions. There are a number of significant contexts which influence the approach and themes of African women’s theology. The religio-cultural context is central to the work of theology.

African feminist theologians came to the realisation that to achieve an effective break through for their message to the patriarchal African theological discourse, there was the need for a united front. This campaign was championed by Oduyoye and her Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT). Oduyoye (2004, 37) emphasised the communal nature of African women’s theology. The various women’s groups in Church communities “give them both a community of accountability and a locus of resource for theologising.” Anne Nasimiyu (1993, 26-27) outlines five tasks for African women’s theology: (1) To conscientise the community so that people become aware of both their own dignity and that of others; (2) to unmask the cultural bias against women and “recover the basic, communal, liberative thrust of the scriptures;” (3) to awaken people to critical reflection so that they do not accept tradition simply as given; (4) to critically undermine the “established sinful order” and renounce all that dehumanises people in African culture; and, (5) to consider the gospel as “a sharp cutting edge to our culture in order to transform and restore it to wholeness.”

As said already, a significant era in the development of African women’s theology began with the establishment of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (CCAWT) at the Trinity College, Accra, Ghana in 1989. The goal of this group was to assess critically the

status of women in Africa and to examine the role of religion and culture in shaping their lives and destinies (Hinga 2002, 79). This CCAWT has become the major vehicle for the exchange and development of African Christian women's theological thought (Ruether 1991, 254). The CCAWT's vision is to encourage African women to write and publish their works. The goal of the CCAWT is to promote the well-being of African women and all women through theological analysis and the study of the bible which commits us to social action (Kanyoro 2001, 48). The CCAWT is decentralised with a minimum of formal co-ordination. The work of the CCAWT focuses on three main areas: "the roles and images of women in relation to men in African culture, with special emphasis on rituals in rites of passage; an analysis of the interaction between African culture and Christianity and its impact on African women; and reading the bible through the eyes of African women" (Phiri 1997, 71). The CCAWT's first evaluation meeting was held in Kenya in 1996 and their decision was that there should be a fourth area of focus, namely, African women's histories (Phiri 1997, 71). Here we can see that theological reflection by women in Africa is gradually increasing as they begin to reflect on their experience and articulate new interpretations of the meaning of the Christian life. As at 2003, there were about 400 women in Africa who are members of their local CCAWT. The CCAWT "includes African women representing all the major religions of Africa; it also embraces all women of Africa, regardless of colour" (Phiri 1997, 69).

In summing up this section on the presentation on African feminists theology, I will like to tie it in with the central focus of this thesis; which is the responses from the contextual bible study of the Christian Mothers in Kajelo, Ghana. Are the African women feminists speaking the same language with the women (widows) of Africa?

First, although the concepts used by the African feminist theologians to express their interpretation of the impact of biblical interpretation in Africa are different from the contextual existential experiences of the Christian Mothers in the contextual bible studies I conducted, the issues the African feminist theologians raise are similar to if not identical with the concerns of the Christian Mothers in the sense that both groups do the interpretations through the eyes of African women in Africa. For instance, the very process of interpretation by both the Christian Mothers and the Concerned African Women Theologians is itself empowering and a liberating process which the two groups share in common. It is a step

towards the achievement of one of the goals of the CCAT which is to create an African Women's theology through the eyes of African women.

Second, Phiri (1997, 71) rightly states that one of the main areas of focus of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians is "...to make an analysis of the interaction between African culture and Christianity and its impact on African women; and reading the bible through the eyes of African women." The responses from the contextual bible study with the Christian Mothers can be an instance of this concern. However, the Christian Mothers did not sufficiently demonstrate a liberative way of interpreting the texts I studied with them as was documented in their responses. Unlike their liberated sisters in the CCAWT, the Christian Mothers in their responses to the *meanings* of the stories under study to them simply recapitulated the stereotyped interpretations of these stories that they have heard from sermons over the years preached to them unfortunately by male priests. For instance, in their responses to the *meaning* of the story of the widow's offering (Lk 21:1-4), their interpretation of the story perpetuated the image of the sacrificial Christ and the cross as depicted in the sacrifice of the widow. In this way, the Christian Mothers did not question the impact of this form of interpretation for their context of extreme poverty and cultural oppression. The image of a victorious Christ, the CCAWT think is what is needed for transformation and liberation.

Third, African feminists seek to unmask the cultural bias against women and "recover the basic, communal, liberative thrust of the scriptures" (Nasimiya 1993, 26). They propose that the gospel should be considered as "a sharp cutting edge to our culture in order to transform and restore it to wholeness" (Nasimiya 1993, 26). This process took place in chapter three of this thesis through the presentation of the criticisms of the selected texts by Western/post-colonial feminists. For instance, the fairness of the widow's offering (Lk 21: 1-4) is questioned by Schussler Fiorenza (1984) and Price (1997) because this story is directly linked to the image of the sacrificial Christ on the cross. However, the initiative to do this "sharp cutting edge" liberative interpretation of scripture is still lacking in many African women as was demonstrated in my fieldwork. The initiative to doing this must come from within all African women but not just a liberated few if they have to transform and restore the liberative thrust of the scriptures and unmask the cultural bias against women in which they find themselves. Unfortunately, the same gospel is often selectively used in Africa to justify the cultural bias against women. So women through careful and contextual study of the scriptures will become aware of such biased usage of the gospel and respond appropriately.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

This concluding section of the chapter aims at summarising some of the salient findings of the entire thesis.

In this thesis, it was argued that there are numerous ways of interpreting a particular biblical story. We also stated that there is no innocent interpretation of a text or a biblical story. Often, interpretations are skewed to suite the particular need of the interpreter based on the admission that all research is biased. The contextual bible study method, it has been argued in this thesis, is one way of interpreting the bible in Africa. The particular context within which this type of biblical style of interpretation is most useful is in liberation struggles. It was also stated that some interpretative interests are more appropriate to the struggle for liberation than others. In the struggle for liberation from the so called “texts of terror” in the bible, from cultural oppression, and from poverty and economic bondage, I stated in chapter three that scholars have suggested that a hermeneutics of suspicion should be applied to the biblical texts so that the reclaimed original meaning of the biblical texts can be used as double-edged cutting sword to purge our patriarchal society.

A variant form of this proposed biblical hermeneutics of suspicion is the gender-critical approach. Again, it was stated in this thesis that the feminist-critical method which is an application of the hermeneutics of suspicion enables us to make the distinction between what is descriptive and what is prescriptive in the biblical stories. This method was put to the test when it was applied to selected stories of women in Luke (Luke 7: 11-17; Luke 18: 1-7; Luke 21: 1-4) particularly about widows. The distinctive method of application in this thesis was the contextual bible study method. This method as has been shown is a hybrid interpretation of the bible by scholars and the faith community.

My fieldwork with the Christian Mothers of St. Oscar’s Church revealed that the women still held the dogmatic image of God preached by the Church. This is the image of the God of the Old Testament who punishes people in this life for bad deeds and rewards people for good deeds. However, when it came to their expressions of the images of Christ, the women had images of Christ that enabled them to negotiate masculinities in their community through the images of Christ. For instance, they perceived Christ to be the ideal *husband*. Therefore, I

concluded that the split that the women made between God and Christ allowed them simultaneously to give the Church its due and so wage a different social non-patriarchal order.

A major aim of this thesis again, as stated earlier in chapter one under the aims and objectives of the thesis, is to empower the women of the Christian Mothers Association of St. Oscar's Church through a process of personal and community transformation. This was particularly demonstrated in the process of character identification that my women had with the widow characters in the stories that I studied with them. This form of character identification made the women realise the potential they had in themselves even as widows and how they can do something about their oppressed situation (3.21, 3.22). But no matter the degree of impact or visible results, the widows have all been found to be in the process towards liberation. Liberation implies freedom from oppression and oppressive structures existing in a culture. The level of empowerment will be conditioned by the nature of its influence. The contextual bible study, being one of such influences, has evidently resulted in potential transformation and liberation for the Christian Mothers. The women have all been transformed in one way or the other, and they are all in the process towards total liberation, yet at different stages of the process. Some have come farther than others, depending on the levels of empowerment and awareness that has taken place in them. Despite this, the women are all on a transformational journey towards total liberation; a journey conditioned by their socio-cultural situation and by the different ways the contextual bible study they participated in addressed their situations.

It was discovered during the course of my research that some of the women in Upper Eastern Ghana lack access to supportive structures in their communities, support groups, Church or fellowships, which can provide the safe place needed for creating security, facilitating growth and openness for sharing their stories. The liberative journeys of African women are both individual and social, in that it takes place in community. Bible study as a communal process in the form of contextual bible studies is truly a powerful tool, providing that safe place for growth and change to take place, and it provides the participants with the needed resources and tools to continue the process towards liberation through awareness and empowerment. This sums up the major concerns of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians who have been calling for the liberation of women on the African continent. The voices of the Circle Concerned African Women Theologians resonate perfectly with those of their sisters of the Christian Mothers Association.

Therefore, my thesis has provided empirical evidence to confirm my first major research question – the method of contextual bible study has the potential to contributing to individual and social transformation for women. I have also been able to identify the nature of the process of liberation and transformation that is initiated and facilitated by the contextual bible study method, and to show how this process is closely linked to the socio-cultural and theological context within which Ghanaian women live. Having listened to the voices of the Christian Mothers and other women from Upper Eastern Ghana, it may be concluded as others (Breen 2009) before me have done, that the vision of West (1999) and his colleagues at the Ujamaa Centre and the Centre’s objectives of contextual bible study operates both adequately and legitimately (albeit few criticisms), with regard to assisting oppressed and marginalised African women in their journeys towards individual and social liberation from poverty and cultural oppression.

5.5 EPILOGUE: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES FOR AFRICAN WOMEN

Though the conclusions of this thesis extend the struggle for liberation from the marginalized poor to the door steps of the appropriate oppressive institutions of society and the Church, yet, irrespective of these positive conclusions, social inequalities and structural economic oppressions and their intersectionalities, which this thesis has tried to identify, challenge and transform, are ever more entrenched in Africa. In the light of this, as I draw the curtains on this project, I wish to put forth a few areas for possible collaboration between the men of Africa and the Church – who still wield the power in most African societies – on one hand and the mostly poor and oppressed African women on the other hand. So I offer the following suggestions purely on the basis of personal observations from Ghana concerning the power imbalance in society and in the African Church.

Following from the call of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians for equity in Christian discipleship in the African Church, I propose that there is the need to transform the model of power in the Church. The model of power operative within African societies is impersonal, hierarchical, and basically a male concept. Women must all work together to transform this patriarchal model into one of shared power – power that lifts up and strengthens others, not power that clings to keeping others (women) down. But women must develop expertise in what has been called ‘the technology of participation’. African feminists

often argue that women in the Catholic Church have been left out in the power structures of the Church. But women often lack the expertise to engage meaningfully in the structures of the Church. However, that is exactly the core of the issue here. The men who mostly wield the power positions today should give women the opportunity to acquire the needed expertise through the education of the girl-child. The current gap in the level of schooling between girls and boys in Ghana continues to widen. The rate of retention of girls in school up to the university level is still low. So many factors may account for this unfortunate state of affairs in Ghana. In certain instances, some fathers pull out their daughters from school and give them out in marriage so early. In other cases where a choice has to be made between keeping a girl-child or boy-child in school because of lack of money to keep both in school, most fathers in Ghana choose to keep the boy-child in school rather than the girl-child. In the final analysis, we realise that the men contribute to the high illiteracy rate among women in Ghana thus, preventing women from participating effectively in the spiritual leadership of the Church.

Second, I suggest that the Catholic Church in Ghana should openly condemn in no uncertain terms all forms of customs and cultural practices which deprive women of their rights and respect due them. The Church must speak to these deplorable traditions because today, most of the women in Upper Eastern Ghana are Catholics. I recommend that the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ghana should establish a special commission to study further women's problems, in co-operation with interested government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Third, the issues of female genital mutilation and the practice of giving out girls into early marriages continue to be a bane on Ghanaian women. The practice of female circumcision where some parts of the genitals are taken out is really horrible and yet it is done. When a certain sensitive part of the female genital is removed, the woman cannot enjoy the sexual act and then she becomes the instrument of pleasure only for her husband or for the man. This eventually negatively affects how these women live their experience of the Christian life as persons created in the image and likeness of God and equal to men.

Finally, the Church must always and at all times be perceived to be the voice of the voiceless and the marginalised in society. The Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light and manner of the example of Christ set in the

gospels. I dare to conclude that the manner of Jesus was a novelty, a preferential option for the poor and the marginalised in society.

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