

# LANGUAGE

## DOCUMENTATION AND DESCRIPTION IN NIGERIA

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## **Theology and Gender-based Violence: Reflection in the Light of Cultural and Traditional Inhibitions against Women in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Gender-based violence in Nigeria is identified as a cultural issue that places serious sense of restrictions on women. This work examines these restrictions on female gender as they affect the development of society negatively. This paper examines Christian theology from the perspective of anthropology tracing that human beings including women constitute the image of God and therefore were created in God's likeness and endowed with equal worth as their male counterparts. Even though, some churches teach that women should not have a say in the church, theology emphasises that any form of human discrimination is identified to be cultural not divine. The paper also attempts to examine from theological points, how women should be fully integrated in all spheres of human development because they carry the image of God. It employs the descriptive research method which demands consulting theological materials in the light of biblical analysis. It recommends that theologians in Nigeria, faith based organisations and Christian activists should involve in the struggle against gender-based violence to avoid demonising Nigerian culture and tradition in the face of the gender injustices. Government bodies should ensure that there is a strict adherence and obedience to the fundamental laws which protect the rights of citizens irrespective of sex so as to help prevent gender-based violence.

### **1. Introduction**

Gender-based violence is prevalent in our society today. Although in some cases it seems not to be obvious, it does exist. It has eaten deep into the fabrics of socio-cultural, religious and political settings as well as homes and schools in Nigeria. In fact, it is a contemporary issue in society today. The disturbing issue is the desecration done on human nature in the name of gender inequality. This tendency has subjected the female folks in several Nigerian societies as second-class citizens. Despite legislative efforts and developmental strides in many countries in Nigeria on women emancipation, the typical culture has made some of the women to stay back from functioning effectively in the

## Theology and Gender-based Violence: Reflection in the Light of Cultural and Traditional Inhibitions against Women in Nigeria

society. This is a form of social injustice meted against the women, and it is affecting the human society in no small measure.

Christian theology is well positioned to respond to the contemporary trends on gender-based violence. In short, Christian theology has placed much emphasis on human dignity grappling with the importance of humanity in creation account as God created them male and female in God's image and likeness to multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 1:26-28). The entire humanity, male and female is to be understood as having originated not through a chance process of evolution but through a conscious, purposefulness act by God (Erickson 1992). This means that there is a reason for human existence, such as one which lies in the intention of God since the image of God is intrinsic to humankind. Also, in theological discourse, only human is capable of having a conscious personal relationship with God as well as responding to Him.

The account of creation in Genesis 2:22 which portrays that Eve was created from the rib bone of Adam has the intention of talking about the creation of intimacy between a man and woman indeed, marriage relationship. Eve was by no means inferior to Adam or a lesser being, but with same worth and dignity. The same God who made Adam, made Eve in God's image; God created them both male and female in His image (Gen.1:27). This work is therefore aimed at discussing the cultural and traditional practices that may violate the human dignity in gender discourse. It highlights the nature of Christian theology and provides an overview of the meaning of theological anthropology in response to gender-based violence in Nigeria.

## 2. Clarification of Terms

### 2.1 Theology

The term theology is defined by *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* as "the study of religion and belief" (1547). *The Complete Christian Dictionary* defines the term theology in two perspectives: first, as "the study of the nature of God and religious truth; second, as "an organised body of beliefs concerning God and man's (human) relationship to God" (2002). Theology is derived from the Greek, θεος (*theos*) meaning God and λογος (*logos*) meaning word, study, discourse and in the present day scholarship *logos* means the scientific or objective study of something. If *theos* represents God, the addition of *logos* to *theos* therefore renders theology an objective study about God. *Logos* in the theology makes the discipline relational to other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, science, philosophy, history as well as gender discourse. In explaining more elaborately on the etymology of the term, Sinclair, Ferguson, Wright and Packer (1988) note that theology is derived from the Greek, *theologos*, a compound of two words *theos* and *logos*, meaning basically an account of, or discourse about, gods or God.... More precisely, the word denotes teaching about God and his relation to the world from creation to the consummation, particularly as it is set forth in an ordered coherent manner (p. 680).

Butler (2003) adds that theology is a "discussion on what the Bible itself teaches about God and His dealing with human beings and the rest of creation". With this definition, it could be deduced that theology is a field of study which seeks to discuss God

and how God relates to the world as it is rooted in the Bible. This definition makes reference to Christianity and Judaism in whose circle, the term theology originated.

## **2.2 Gender**

It is obvious that many people do not have a clear understanding of the word gender. It is sometimes misunderstood with the term sex. It is argued in *The Nature-Nurture Dynamics in Gender Studies (Adapted from van Leeuwen, chapter 3)* that generally, sex refers to what we are by nature and gender to the sociological definitions and conditionings that shape our behaviour...gender is what is learned. This means that gender differs from sex in that it is social and cultural in nature rather than biological. According to *United Nations Population Fund (UNPF)*, the term gender refers to “the economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being a male or a female” (UNPF). Still in line with what gender is, Watson notes that “sex describes the biological existence of human beings as men and women, while gender refers to the denotations made to each of these biological categories by culture and/or theology”.

## **2.3 Gender-based Violence (GBV)**

*United States Agency International Development* explains thus in regards to the phrase Gender-based Violence;

Gender-based violence is that violence that is directed at an individual based on his or her biological sex, gender identity, or perceived adherence to socially defined norms of masculinity and femininity. It includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; threats; coercion; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; and economic deprivation, whether occurring in public or private life. Gender-based violence can include female infanticide; child sexual abuse; sex trafficking and forced labour; sexual coercion and abuse; neglect; domestic violence; and harmful traditional practices such as early forced marriage, and female genital mutilation/cutting. (USAID)

This clearly portrays that GBV is a generic name which encompasses various forms of violence against humanity whether male or female.

## **2.4 Culture (and Tradition)**

Culture refers to the total way of life of a people. Tradition is about values handed over or passed on from one generation to another. Nigerian culture encompasses the customs, traditions as well a lifestyle of Nigerian. Tite Tienou quoted John Mbiti in his lecture on Christianity and Nigerian culture given to the Pan Nigerian Christian Leadership Assembly in 1976 thus:

Culture is the human pattern of life in response to man's environment. This pattern is expressed in physical forms (such as agriculture, the arts, technology etc) in inter human relations (such as institutions, laws, customs etc), and in form of reflection

## Theology and Gender-based Violence: Reflection in the Light of Cultural and Traditional Inhibitions against Women in Nigeria

on the total reality of life (such as language, Philosophy, religions, spiritual values, world view, the riddle of life-birth-death etc) (20).

In 1978 consultation on Gospel and Culture held in Wiflowbank, Bermuda also defined culture as:

An integrated system of belief (about God or reality or ultimate meaning), of values (about what is true, good, beautiful and normative), of customs (how to behave, relate to others, talk, pray, dress, work, play, trade, farm, eat, etc), and of institutions which express these beliefs, values and customs (government, law courts, temples or churches, family, schools, hospitals, factories, shops, unions, clubs, etc), which binds society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security and continuity (20).

From the above definitions, it is clear that culture and tradition can be used interchangeably. It is also clear that culture and tradition are referred to as the way of life of the Nigerian people, whether negative or positive. That is to say, there is good ethos in Nigerian culture that must be inculcated to the younger generation and there are bad precepts which may change due to their devastating effects in society.

### 3. Theology and Gender: An Anthropological Reflection

Anthropology in a theological sense is that branch of theology which seeks to discuss humanity in relation to God. Berkhof (2000, p.181) notes virtually to the fact that:

Man (human) is not only the crown of creation, but also the object of God's special care. And God's revelation in Scripture is a revelation that is not only given to man (human), but also a revelation in which man (human) is vitally concerned. It is not a revelation of God in the abstract, but a revelation of God in relation to His creatures, and particularly in relation to man (human). It is a record of God's dealings with the human race, and especially a revelation of the redemption which God has prepared for, and for which He seeks to prepare for man (humanity).

From Berkhof's idea, it is understood that anthropology seeks to discuss humanity in the light of God's world and creative work since humanity is the crown of creation i.e. the highest of God's creative work. It should be noted here that anthropology as used in this context is not the sociological anthropology but the theological anthropology.

Theological anthropology sees gender in the light of God's love and care. Frederick (1999, p.34) in his standpoint notes that, "humanity was deprived of freedom in the Garden of Eden where God lovingly placed them and therefore became slaves to sin, devil and death... But God so loved the world that God gave God's only Son to redeem humanity from their enslavement". This shows that when it comes to God's side, humanity is loved and cared for no matter the condition, namely sex. Noting further, he speaks that "man (human) is created in the *imago Dei* (image of God) and has in him the direct resemblance

of God...and should not be discriminated” (p. 40). The word “man” as used by Berkhof, Frederick and other theologians has direct interpretation of the Greek, *άνθρωπος* (*Anthropos*) which is a general gender description of the entire humanity, both males and females inclusive. It shows that humanity as a whole in *Imago Dei* represents God. Frederick adds, “both male and female are direct representatives of God on earth and any violence against them is invariably an indirect violence against God” (p. 63).

Moreover, being a male is not a different way of being human than being female. In the theological sense, *anthropos* is not identified by sex but by the relatedness of being a man or a woman. To identify *anthropos* by sex is a narrow perspective but to identify it by the relatedness of being a man or a woman is a broad perspective. Stating further, masculinity and femininity have two major dimensions namely being human and being in the body. The human dimension makes humanity relational to God being that the *imago Dei* is found in all human irrespective of sex, age, tribe, and age. The body dimension make human relational to one another in the same manner of talking, thinking, walking and behaving though with slide distinction but completely different from the way animals talk, think, walk and behave.

Sinclair, Ferguson, Wright and Packer (1988, p.29) stated that “the question of the nature of man is one subject that we might expect to be able to consider independently, without reference to other element of Christian doctrine, even without reference to faith”. It is stated that:

The Bible’s reference to the nature of humanity must be recognised as occurring within the overall context of our place within creation and our standing before God...Men and women were originally created in the “image of God”. The precise identity of this “image” has been a continuing issue of debate in the history of Christian thought and doctrine. Calvin maintains that the true nature of this image is revealed only in its renewal through Christ. (30)

#### **4. Gender-based Violence as Cultural and Traditional Inhibitions against Women**

The two words, culture and tradition can be used interchangeably when referring to gender roles in any Nigerian setting. In Nigeria, there is a strong appeal made to culture and tradition. In conversation, these words (culture and tradition) become the reference points. They are used to support any act when actually referring to gender issues, “according to tradition...”, “our culture holds that...” As stated above, culture is a lifestyle of a people and tradition refers to what is usually handed down from one generation to another. In Nigeria, they form a belief pattern upon an action performed. For the fact that the belief pattern by way of culture and tradition has been for a very long time, and lived with the people inherently, it becomes almost impossible to adapt to change or modification. The meanings of the two words under focus are intertwined. However, while the word culture emphasises more on behaviour, tradition emphasises belief system that has existed for a long time.

## Theology and Gender-based Violence: Reflection in the Light of Cultural and Traditional Inhibitions against Women in Nigeria

In handling gender issues in Nigeria, the two terminologies, create a barrier, or construct an abject distinction between a man and woman, describing a man as superior and a woman as insignificant human in society. Some aspects of Nigerian culture and tradition can be described as obnoxious. Madu (2010, p.27-28) posits:

We are only concerned with the obnoxious ones like widowhood practices, stoning women to death for committing adultery even without an opportunity of fair-hearing and no one is interested in looking for her male counterpart that she committed the adultery with; and female circumcision; In many societies, especially, in the South-East and Western Nigeria, it is a taboo for a woman to see a masquerade deliberately or by accident and the consequences of such a 'sacrilege' is usually visited with severe punishment ranging from outrageous fines, excruciating community-imposed atonement and impoverishing sacrifices. Thousands of women had paid dearly for eating chicken gizzards, a delicacy reserved exclusively for adult men.

Moreover, the existence of gender-based violence mentioned above is enormous in different individual communities in Nigeria today. Based on enormous presence of GBV, it should be noted that GBV takes different form, causes and effects such as female genital mutilation to sexual abuse like rape and others. However, before giving detail attention to the subject, there is need to consider the two main forms of GBV, namely narrow type, which is always discussed in favour of women. That is the reason why GBV is often regarded as violence against women. The next one is called broad type explained concerning both men and women. This work focuses on the first form, the narrow type due to the fact gender cases on injustice against women abound and number in millions. They therefore constitute a sociological problem. Whereas gender cases on injustice against men are drastically few in number.

### **4.1 Forms, Causes and Effects of Gender-based Violence**

#### **4.1.1 Female Genital Mutilation**

This act of gender-based violence is also known as female circumcision. It is the cutting off or excision of the clitoris, labia minora and labia majora of young girls, or older women during pregnancy before childbirth. The operation is done with unsterilised instruments and by insensitive and crude surgeons with some sense of fetishism attached to the practice. Here, Abdulcadira, et al. (2011, p.43) note that:

Female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as female genital cutting and female circumcision, is the ritual removal of some or all of the external female genitalia. Typically carried out by a traditional circumciser using a blade, with or without anesthesia.

The victims are subjected to the worst inhuman torture and excruciating pain, in some cases leading to instant death due to uncontrolled bleeding. Those who managed to survive the circumstance could die thereafter as result of prolonged bleeding or infection. For Madu,

female genital mutilation is a crime against humanity which is still practiced in this 21st century and common in communities in the southern part and north central part of Nigeria.

In recent times, the issue of female genital mutilation has become a case of thoughtful debate in the light of worthwhile effect. Those who feel that the act is inevitable, argue that it is done to reduce libido, prevent women from being promiscuous and as well, ease childbirth (personal interview). These notions have for long been debunked in the field of medicine. How can someone who is ignorant of the anatomy of the body and whose belief is superstitious be trusted in proffering solution to promiscuity and child mortality at birth?

Madu (2010) consulted the World Health Organisation and the Federal Ministry of Health in Nigeria to point out why the practice should be discontinued. This is because it could result in instant death through excessive bleeding. A victim who did not die instantly could die afterwards through prolonged bleeding or infection associated with germs, and the survivors are deprived of natural satisfaction for sexual intercourse as the sensitive organs of the genitals have been mutilated. In addition, the excruciating and traumatic pains associated with female genital mutilation could cause mental/psychological problems in the victim during sexual intercourse and childbearing.

From the above, it is pertinent to say that the effects of female circumcision are very disastrous. It is worthy to note that female genital mutilation has been outlawed or restricted in most countries, but the laws are poorly enforced” (Bonino 2015). Also, female genital mutilation harms women’s physical and emotional health throughout their lives...it has no known health benefits” (Reisel and Sarah 2013, p.131).

#### **4.1.2 Early or Forced Marriage**

Another loathsome customary practice against women in some parts of Nigeria for instance, in Nigeria, is early/forced marriage which is predominant in the North. This practice has created many problems for young girls whose vision of becoming great is cut short by the greed, poverty and ignorance of their parents. In this kind of marriage, a young girl of about thirteen years is forcefully given out in marriage to a man of about fifty years amidst any reason. The underage girl may not be able to withstand the stress of childbirth which may lead to the incidence of Versico Vaginal Fistula (V.V.F).

#### **4.1.3 Widowhood Practices**

As posited by Madu (2010), these cultural practices are meted out to widows in some traditional societies. A typical example has to do with forcing a widow to drink the bath water of the corpse of the late husband as a means of ascertaining her innocence in the death of her husband. Having been forced to drink the dirty water, the woman is to wait for a given period of time ranging from six months to one year to know her fate. If she dies within this period, she becomes the killer of her husband and if she survives the ordeal, she becomes innocent. The atrocities directed at the widow do not end in the drinking of the bath water of the corpse. She is also forced to sleep with the corpse of her late husband for as long as her tormentors wish. During this period, she is not to take any bath and must eat from a dirty broken plate without having to wash her hands as directed by her husband’s kindred.



## Theology and Gender-based Violence: Reflection in the Light of Cultural and Traditional Inhibitions against Women in Nigeria

Madu (2010) noted that among the Igbo tribe in Nigeria, *Umu-ada*, who are women born into the late husband's kindred but are married outside, would be raining abuses, accusations and curses on the widow. The corpse water given to the widow is a pool of all kinds of germs, diseases and other imagined and unimagined impurities. The poor widow is forced to drink it before a well-contrived tribunal whose judgment has already indicted the woman and found her guilty. The chances of survival for being forced to drink bathing water from a dead man's body is very slim. What if the woman dies as a direct consequence of the poison she was forced to drink?

In some areas, the widow is banished to the evil forest half-naked without food for a given number of days. If she has no child or has only female children, all her husband's property would be taken away from her and shared among her late husband's kinsmen.

### 4.1.4 Domestic Violence

This is a type of gender-based violence which is common in the homes. In regard to this, McQuigg (2001, p.13) points out that:

Domestic violence (also domestic abuse, spousal abuse, intimate partner violence, battering or family violence) is a pattern of behavior which involves violence or other abuse by one person against another in a domestic setting, such as in marriage or cohabitation. This type of violence is that by a spouse or partner in an intimate relationship against the other spouse or partner.

Additionally, Garcia-Moreno (2013, p.780-781) asserts that:

Domestic violence can take place in heterosexual and same sex relationship, and can also involve violence against children in the family. Domestic violence can take a number of forms including physical, verbal, emotional, economic and sexual abuse, which can range from marital rape and to physical abuse that results in disfigurement or death. Domestic violence affects men, women, and children. Globally, however, a wife or female partner is more commonly the victim of such violence.

There are various factors which stand to cause domestic violence. Kunhiyop (2008) speaks regarding these factors as being the following:

- a. **Demonstration of Power and Control.** According to him, "Nigerian traditional beliefs often hold that a woman is a man's property. This belief if exercised by a man over his wife, can cause domestic violence.
- b. **Denial of Sex.** He explains that, "because the woman is often assumed to be the man's property, he assumes that he has the right to have sex with her any time" (p.244) but when she refuses, domestic violence can occur.

- c. **Physical and Emotional weakness of Women.** In this case, “men are regarded physically strong while women are characterised as passive, dependent, physically and emotionally weak” (p.245). With this notion, women are usually violated in Nigeria frequently.

In another way, domestic gender-based violence is prompted through alcohol abuse. Therefore, Kunhiyop (2008, p.245) pointed out that “some men abuse alcohol and drugs. In their drunken state, they are unable to tolerate any disagreement from their spouses or children and are liable to interpret any action as insulting or insubordinate, and they respond to this with violence”. For this reason, the ladies and children are humiliated in the domestic settings.

Also, in Nigeria, domestic gender-based violence could be encouraged through academic priority basically found in the domestic settings and which has to do with the females being considered as unfit for education but perfectly fit for domestic works like cooking at home, weeding in the farm, and any other kind of domestic work. This is because the Nigerians believed that female children are to be married out of the family and so there is no need wasting resources in training them academically. However, theology posits that males and females are same than they are different, both in childhood development as well as mental development. In other words, denial of the girls the right to education may in one way or another affect the girl child in future, thereby raising a gender-based violence of humiliation rooted in the domestic settings.

**Sexual Violence:** This is another form of gender-based violence prevalent in contemporary Nigeria society particularly among Nigerian youths. Basile, et al (2014) note that sexual violence is...a sexual act committed against someone without that person’s freely given consent. According to them, sexual violence is divided into the other types such as unwanted sexual contact, non-contact unwanted sexual experiences, etc. in the case of the unwanted sexual contact, they explain that this is the:

Intentional touching, either directly or through the clothing, of the genitalia, anus, breast, or buttocks of any person without his or her consent...unwanted sexual contact can be perpetrated against a person or by making a person touch the perpetrator. Unwanted sexual contact could be referred to as “sexual harassment” in some context, such as a school or workplace.” (p.40)

In addition, they mention that:

Non-contact unwanted sexual experiences...occurs against a person without his or her consent.... Some acts of non-contact unwanted sexual experiences occurs without the victim’s knowledge. This type of sexual violence can occur in many different settings, such as school, the workplace, in public, or through technology. Examples include unwanted exposure to pornography or verbal sexual harassment (e.g., making sexual comments).

The World Health Organisation notes that:

## Theology and Gender-based Violence: Reflection in the Light of Cultural and Traditional Inhibitions against Women in Nigeria

Sexual and other forms of gender violence are increasingly reported in situations of complex emergencies.... The term “sexual and other forms of gender-based violence” comprises not only rape and attempted rape, but also sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, forced early marriage, domestic violence, marital rape, trafficking and female genital mutilation.

**Rape as sexual violence.** Rape is a form of violence inhibiting the right of women and very common in the contemporary society. Kunhiyop (2008, p.173) notes that, “rape is rarely mentioned in male-dominated Nigerian societies”. According to him rape happens for a variety of reasons, but looking at these, it is important to dismiss some false explanations for rape. He further posits that the arguments presented by men and women as cause are as shown below:

Men say if she had been properly dressed, the man would not have been tempted. The way in which she exposed her body was an invitation to a sexual encounter. Whereas, women argue that it is just a matter of lust from the men, because there are “many respectably dressed women who have been raped” (p.274).

For Madu, the case of rape is established thus:

1. when two or more men descend on a woman and their victim is raped in turn;
2. some women are kidnapped in war zones and turned into sex slaves. Their job is just to provide sex for the soldiers who are at war;
3. some women have been abducted by their assailants and kept at a hidden location and forced into submission to marry the assailant;
4. sexual intercourse with a woman who is drugged;
5. sexual intercourse with a girl under the age of 14 years with or without her consent;
6. Having sex with a woman who is sleeping because such a woman is not deemed to have consented to such sex at that time;
7. Forcing a woman to have sex in the offices by her boss or lecturer against whom she cannot complain for fear of being sacked or failed respectively.

Rape in Nigeria has been as a result of gender-based violence. When the young females are violated, some get pregnant which may sometimes lead them to unsafe abortion and then sometimes to death. Others stand the high risk of being infected with sexually transmitted infections like HIV/AIDS.

**Sexual Rite of Passage** is another form of sexual violence meted against women in Nigeria. In the same vein, in southern Malawi precisely in Lomwe and Yao tribes, ritual sex as a form of rite of passage is practised. Virgin girls at puberty age normally spend two weeks at the initiation camp. There, they are taught how to engage in sexual act. At the end of the course, each one is expected to have her first sex known as sexual cleansing ritual. There is a ready sex worker known as *hyenas* that is always paid by the parents of the girl

to have sex with the girls. This exercise always left the girls vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases. BBC News Headlines in 2016 reported that Eric Aniva, an *hyenas* was HIV positive. He had sexually cleansed over 100 girls in the same year and most of the girls we infected with HIV. Despite the effect of the ritual sex exercise, every virgin girl accepts to observe it for fear of being ostracised from community and breaking tradition.

However, activists rose up to attack the ritual sex tradition as being cruel to innocent human beings (girls) and the government of Malawi then promulgated a law to abolish such practice. Unfortunately, the event is still practised in the rural communities in southern Malawi.

**Women Trafficking:** Trafficking is a universal issue today. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of women and children have been trafficked within and across Nigeria for domestic services and sexual exploitation. The International Organisation for Migration estimates that between 200,000 and 450,000 people are trafficked annually in Nigeria (Madu 2010). As cited by Madu (2010), the International Labour Organisation also noted that the trafficking of women and children is a major issue in Nigeria. It is worthy to note that economic and social factors contributing to trafficking in humans in the region include poverty, disparities in economic development, lack of education and job opportunities. It is necessary to observe that sexual exploitation remains the predominant purpose for which women are trafficked. Generally, when trafficking of women or girls occurs, the image that easily comes to mind is sexual harassment, prostitution, and illegal pregnancy that will give birth to babies auctioned for sale. In this way, trafficking constitute one of the most dangerous human rights challenges in Nigeria today.

In many rural communities, it is common for poor families to send their young children, particularly girls, to work as domestic servants in the households of well to do families or relatives in the cities. Sometimes, parents send their children away to gain extra income or with the hope that they will receive better lodging, nourishment, and even education. In some cases, girls as maids work as domestic workers to repay debts incurred by their parents. They run errands, shop, provide childcare, fetch water and firewood, clean, do laundry, cook, and perform other household chores (Madu 2010).

The effect it leaves on victims is always very devastating including serious physical and mental injuries, and even death. Despite the international prohibitions on trafficking and national legislations of each Nigerian country aimed at curbing this problem, the practice still continues and endures, even spiting the consequences. Trafficking of women violates the right to integrity of the body and the personality, which belongs to every person. It is at this point that the application of theology as an aspect of moral suasion is necessary. Morality in theology injects the fear of God in the lives of people as well as the worth of human dignity causing them to do what is right without being compelled to do so.

## 4.2 Extent of Gender-based Violence in Nigeria

Cases of gender-based violence in Nigeria in recent times continue on a rapid rise. From rape cases to kidnap of girls and women in Northern parts of Nigeria, these crimes have remained unabated. Ayaan (2007) notes that, gender-based violence has become an epidemic and female children suffer consistent defilement by men which sometimes create psychological damage until they become addicted to sex. Ayaan also explained the story of a girl who was forced into child marriage in which she suffered abuse...until her husband died. These are just some of the many common cases women in Nigeria face and many times, these cases are unreported and without support or immediate solution. It is pointed out by Nawal that “gender activists say the culture of silence, weakness of the laws and lack of support for victims of violence against women and girls are some reasons for increase in the crime” (p.27). It is obvious that gender-based violence has seriously affected Nigerian women particularly the youths. It has extended into areas such as kidnapping, rape, child marriage, *et cetera*. With this, it is pertinent for one to notice that it has even extended into the religious setting, academic settings and even in the homes and workplaces.

Cases of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) underscore that women are more vulnerable than men. HIV is significant for widows and the victims of child marriage and rape. Such early marriage does not bring security but serious risk and vulnerability to infection.

## 5. Responses to Gender-based Violence

This section seeks to reveal the responses to gender-based violence by human rights and Christian theology.

### 5.1 Human Rights Response

In the Nigerian Constitution, the rights of every Nigerian are clearly enshrined. These rights warn against the infringement of any Nigerian citizen. Precisely speaking, chapter four of the Nigerian Constitution records the fundamental rights of Nigerian citizens. Numbers 34 and 35 of chapter 4 stresses the right to dignity of human persons and the right to personal liberty. In the constitution, it is paraphrased below:

Every individual is entitled to respect...the dignity of his person, and accordingly, no person shall be subject to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment; no person shall be held in slavery or servitude; and no person shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour... Every person shall be entitled to his personal liberty and no person shall be deprived of such liberty.

In chapter four, number 42 of the Constitution, it reads:

A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not, by reason only that he is such a person:- (a)

be subjected either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government, to disabilities or restriction to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religions, or political opinions are not made subject...

This clearly points to us that the Nigerian constitution is strictly against the issue of gender-based violence and strives to protect her citizens and their rights. In addition, the Malawian government has promulgated a law to abolish the practice of sexual rite of passage in southern Malawi yet, the practice is still upheld in the rural communities.

## 5.2 Theological Response

Theology, on its own has responded positively and perhaps more helpfully to the issue of gender-based violence in the religious. The Bible is against the issue of gender-based violence. In Ephesians chapter 6 verses 4 and 8, Paul writes: "And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.... and masters, do the same to them (slaves), stop threatening..." (NRSV). More so, Paul in Colosians chapter 3 verse 18ff and 4.1 argue that wives should be subjected to their husbands (not to be oppressed but respected, honoured and above all be loved) because it is fitting in the Lord. More so, in I Peter 3.1-9, Peter writes saying:

Wives...be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words but by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.... For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master.... Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

In response to these passages, Warren (1989) notes extensively that:

We must not think of submission as "slavery" or "subjugation." The word comes from the military vocabulary and simply means "to arrange under rank." The fact that one soldier is a private and another is a colonel does not mean that one man is necessarily better than the other. It only means that they have different ranks. God does all things "decently and in order".... If He did not have a chain of command in society, we would have chaos. *The fact that the woman is to submit to her husband does not suggest that the man is better than the woman.* It only means that the man has the responsibility of headship and leadership in the home. *Headship is not dictatorship or lordship.* It is loving leadership. In fact, both the husband and

the wife must be submitted to the Lord and to each other (Ephesians 5:21). It is a mutual respect under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

He posits further that:

True spiritual submission is the secret of growth and fulfillment when a Christian woman is submitted to the Lord and to her own husband, she experiences a release and fulfillment that she can have in no other way. This mutual love and submission creates an atmosphere of growth in the home that enables both the husband and the wife to become all that God wants them to be.

This makes it clear that in the domestic settings, the Bible teaches that between women and men none is either better than the other.

## 6. Recommendations

This work recommends the following:

- i. Theologians in Nigeria, faith-based organisations and Christian activists should involve in the struggle against gender-based violence to avoid demonizing the Nigerian culture and tradition in the face of the gender injustices. There is need to appreciate that Nigerian culture like all cultures has a vital part to play in the overall response to gender-based violence.
- ii. Nigerians should be educated on their human rights through the social sectors like the media and the religious sectors like churches and other religious settings so as to help prevent gender-based violence in society.
- iii. The law enforcement unit should show the seriousness of the offence of gender injustice like rape, widowhood practice, *et cetera*. The investigation should be taken seriously and victims must be willing to co-operate with the prosecutors to ensure that these injustices are curbed.
- iv. Government bodies in Nigerian countries should ensure that there is a strict adherence and obedience to the fundamental laws which protects the rights of citizens so as to help prevent gender-based violence particularly that which is meted against women.

## 7. Conclusion

It has been shown that gender-based violence has endemic effects on Nigerian women as it affects them (particularly the youth) almost in all areas and aspects of their lives, beginning sometimes from the home down to the social sphere. Gender-based violence is evil and should be called by its name. Nigerian culture has been implicated in the discourses on gender-based violence in the areas such as widowhood practices, women circumcision, and general discrimination against women. It is also noticed that some parents in Nigeria sometimes are perpetrators of gender-based violence in ways such as: parental attitude towards their children, poverty, illiteracy, inadequate sex education, early

and forced marriage. Gender-based violence generally is a “crime against humanity” who have been created in the *Imago Dei*.

However, there are many positive aspects of Nigerian culture that need to be retained and emphasised in gender debates. Such aspects that give value to human life, communal solidarity, teachings on appropriate sexual behavior, male responsibility and protection of life are vital in mobilising Nigerian communities to respond to forms of injustices against the female folks in our Nigerian society.

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Theology and Gender-based Violence: Reflection in the Light of Cultural and Traditional  
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