



21 | ROSEMARY EDET'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO FEMINIST THEOLOGY IN WEST AFRICA

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Abstract

The issue of leadership and ordained ministry has been a predominantly male affair in both patriarchal and religious societies. Rosemary Edet argued that Mary Magdalene ought to be accorded the title of an Apostle against the exclusively male authority presented by the church, given the criteria that, she had been with Jesus throughout his ministry, was the first to witness Christ's resurrection and the first to proclaim his resurrection. In her stand on the inclusion of women in the ministry, she says, "ministry is everyone's baptismal right, and full-time professional ministry should be about calling people to exercise that right" (Edet, 1989:88) regardless of gender. Thus, she states that exclusive male leadership "structure supports and reinforces the traditional gender based societal roles ignoring the religious leadership of African Women in the same traditional culture" (Edet, 1989:96) as well as "overlooking the Christlike understanding of authority and ministry" (Edet, 1989:96) It is within this framework that Rosemary Edet argued for an inclusive theology and the liberation of women. This work thus seeks to investigate and analyse her contribution to feminist and liberation theology in West Africa and seeks to answer questions as: What was the context of Edet's writings? What are her sources of theology? What was her purpose for writing? What are the specific and unique features of her theology? What are the issues she addressed in her theology? How had she conversed with male and western theologians? What are the strengths and contributions of Rosemary Edet's works to knowledge and liberation theology and also the weaknesses of her works? What possible application does her work have for the future? These and other questions would be dealt with in the cause of unearthing Rosemary Edet's contributions to feminist and liberation theology.

Keywords: Rosemary Edet, feminism, theology, West Africa

Introduction

Rosemary Edet, writing from the Anglophone African countries perspective stated that, she cannot give a comprehensive examination of the socio-economic, political, cultural and religious context of the whole women in Africa because Africa is a large continent with vast population, with many countries, tribes and cultures therein. That despite slave trade, colonization, exploitation and those in diaspora, Africa continent is still teaming with life. According to her, a quarter of the world's population are Africans, and that America and Europe are what they are today due to "the bodies and sweat of Africans" (Edet, 1989:80).

Edet however lamented that the exodus of Africans from the continent which made it impoverished and deprived of human and material resources, that even though it has become demoralized, deflowered, abused; and it is still being exploited, oppressed and discriminated against, it still survives. In her opinion, the people mostly affected by the above-mentioned calamities are women and children e.g., Ethiopia, Angola, South Africa and other modern African countries (Edet, 1989:80-81).

Edet further highlighted that since Africa has many races and ethnic groups, who are identified by their languages, physical features and costumes, these groups have their own interests, and they work to maintain their identities, rights and privileges thus, political parties are often formed in line with these interests e.g., Uganda and Nigeria. Likewise, many socio – political, economic and religious conflicts in Africa have their root cause in tribal or ethnic sentiments as experienced in Sudan, however, Edet citing (Mbefor, 1988) said the only unifying factor now is English Language (Edet, 1989:81, 86).

Giving further background of Africa, Edet stated that politically, Africa has many political government structures – which range from (Apartheid or Colonial Rule as experienced in South Africa), A neo-colonial government (Kenya), democratic government (Tanzania) military government (Nigeria and Ghana), and Islamic government (Libya, Morocco and Algeria) (Edet, 1989:81). However, Edet noted that what is common to all these forms of government is that the masses are "excluded from deci-

sion making processes and any meaningful participation in issues affecting them, as well as in the political structures of their nation,” and the bulk of the masses are women. She said unlike other countries of the world, Africa has experienced more coups since its independence; thus, its governance is characterized by militarization as a form of political rule (Edet, 1989:81-82).

Rosemary Edet further stated that though countries in African continent have achieved some level of economic growth and development since their independence, it is still among the poorest countries of the world, thus, it is termed as “Third World.” There are human and material poverty and lack of economic progress. She blamed the unstable state of African economic and development on former colonial masters, who ensured that Africa countries remain poor and unstable for their own economic growth, and easy to exploited (Edet, 1989:82).

Edet maintained that African countries are top debtors globally, these debts ensured the enslavement and oppression Africans generations after them endlessly, since the condition of the debts made payment impossible unless the third world countries have attitudinal changes (Edet, 1989:82). Not only that, despite “economic progress and social mobilization, the economic situation of Africa shows that the masses are living in abject poverty while some very small minorities are living in affluence. (Edet, 1989:82).

Profile of Late Sister Rosemary Nkoyo Edet, HHCJ

Sister Rosemary Edet, HHCJ, was first African Catholic member of Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, and was also one of the members of the first International Planning Committee constituted by Prof. Mercy Oduyoye in 1988 (Kanyoro, 2012). Rosemary Edet was born on October 23, 1935 to late Mrs. Theresa Iquo Udoh, of Ikot Ansa, Cross River state and Late Mr. Edet Akpan Udoh of Ifa Ikot Okpon, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. She was the second daughter of the family of 13 children. As a baby, she was baptized and was brought up as a Methodist until 1949 when she was received into the Catholic Church, where her religious confession undergone a change and her vocation started at this period (Burial Service Program Booklet, 1993).

Sister Rosemary was a gentle and loving person who was very dedicated to God and humanity. As a trained teacher and Headmistress of Holy Child Convent School, Essene, she strongly felt that God was calling her to dedicate herself totally to Him in the Religious Life. She was received into the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus as a postulant after completion of Teachers' Training College at Ifuho on 25th January 1957. Her First Profession of Vows was on January 15, 1961. Her final Vows was on January 10, 1970. Her Silver Jubilee was on 15th January 1986. She was elected Vicar General of the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus on December 18th, 1989.

Sister Rosemary Nkoyo Edet was quite in nature but she made many friends in and outside the Congregation. What she could not achieve by verbal communication she achieved by her smiles. She was noted for her few words and quick service to all and sundry. Edet put in 32 years of service in the Congregation mainly in the Education Apostolate. She was the Principal of Holy Child Teachers Training College Oron, Holy Child Teachers Training College, Ifuho, Principal, Saint Theresa's Secondary School, Edem Ekpai, Pioneer Principal of Assumption Girls' Juniorate, Ndon Ebom, tutor at Holy Child Secondary School, Miran Hill, Calabar to mention but a few. She eventually was offered appointment as a Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies in the university of Calabar where she worked until her demise to eternity (Kanyoro, 2006; Funeral Service Program 1993).

Edet was a woman of principles and discipline. She was very simple, sincere, unassuming, charitable and sympathetic. She was hard-working, cheerful, soft-spoken, a woman of few words and strong personal convictions. She was a perfectionist with a warm heart. She was a woman of prayer and strong faith. She had very little time to herself, she was either doing religious and academic duties or teaching catechism to children who were preparing for the reception of the Sacraments. She was a gifted artist, and excellent seamstress and adept in the art of cooking.

Her Academic qualifications were as follows: She has First School Leaving Certificate was at Immaculate Conception Primary School, Ikot Ansa, Calabar; She obtained her secondary School certificate at Modern Secondary School, Calabar Road, Calabar, 1949 and her Teachers Grade 11 Certificate in 1954. Other educational qualifications of Rosemary Edet

are Certificate in Social Sciences; B.A. Fine Arts and English Literature; B.A. (Theology) Regina Mundi College, Rome, Italy 1974; Masters Degree from the Gregorian University, Rome 1975; Masters Degree in Religious Studies, Catholic University of America, Washington DC, USA, 1981; and PhD in the Catholic University of America, Washington DC, USA, 1983. Edet was a versatile writer and published widely in many national and international journals. Her academic achievement was steadily progressing towards a still higher cadre when she finally received the call to go back to her maker on December 1, 1993 (Funeral Service Program 1993).

The Context of Rosemary Edet's Writing

Rosemary Edet was writing from the context where there is wide gap between the rich and the poor which have effects on the "social, economic, political and religious life of African countries" (Edet, 1989:82). A context where the marginalization and discrimination of women both in the socio-economic and political spheres as well as ecclesiastical structures was common place, where it has been compounded by continuous control of African continent's economy by "imperialistic powers principally through the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and Multi – National Corporation" (Edet, 1989:82-83).

Therefore, she wrote to cry out against such injustice that, the "perpetual control of the African economy by super powers has placed many African countries under heavy debt crisis which makes them totally dependent upon and subject to the whims and fancies of these international institutions," (Edet, 1989:83) which further increase poverty, and that every step taken to make African countries self-sufficient has negative effects on the social and economic life of the Africans e.g., scarcity and inflation, resulting to starvation and death, and malnutrition of children e.g., Nigeria and Ghana with the devaluation of national currencies due to IMF Loan, things became worse (Edet, 1989:83).

Another factor that aggravated abject poverty in Africa according to Edet is high rate of unemployment which caused talented professionals to migrate to the West (America, Canada and Europe) to sell their labour and to secure greener pastures, which has resulted into "brain – drain." While those Africans who studied abroad refused to return, because of

poor work condition. Thus, African countries cannot “sustain production, growth and economic stability without assistance from powerful countries” (Edet, 1989:83) from the West. Since the talented brains and professionals who are supposed to ensure sustainability of Africa growth, economy and development are employed in Europe and America, all occasioned by the neo-colonial prejudices. More so “socio-economic and political realities of Africa have further aggravated the situation and provided additional causes for sources of social conflict, suppression of minorities, rivalries between ethnic loyalties and religion, tension within the countries of Africa” (Edet, 1989:83-84).

Edet (1989:84) further submits that though

the structures of economic poverty and dependence; uneven development within and among various countries of the region; political dominance and oppression; ideological conflict and foreign intervention persist but some movements of social and political transformation are apparent in different countries, and have constituted a major force socio-economic and political change in Africa.

Edet gave example of trade unionists in Nigeria who advocate for justice and equity; student union who demand for better condition for studies and freedom from government and military control; journalists who demand for freedom of press and the masses rights to know the truth, while human rights and liberation movements demand for liberation of women. Others are environmental movements who demand for environmental health due to dumping of toxic waste in African soil by industrial European countries (Edet, 1989:83). African women movements have formed themselves into groups and fought against oppression and injustice, and demanded for “the rights for full participation in decision – making bodies, in life and in the transformation of the religion – socio-economic and political realities of Africa” (Edet, 1989:84).

Making her submission on marginalization, discrimination and the exclusion of women from leadership and Christian ministry, Edet (1990:95) states that when the resurrection is examined in the light of

practical effect on Christian movement: We can see paradoxically, that the doctrine of bodily resurrection also serves as essential political function: it legitimizes the authority of certain men who

claimed to exercise exclusive leadership over the church as the successors of the apostles. From the second century doctrine has served to validate the apostolic succession of bishops and the basic of papal authority to this day.

Edet said that the political and religious movements of the church's authority developed along this line of biblical interpretation, and that subsequent split of churches in history are based on political and religious leadership, which contradicted Jesus' stand (Mk 10:42-44) (Edet, 1990:95-96).

Rosemary Edet narrated that when Jesus died, secular and religious leaders thought his movement had died along with him, however the resurrection "revitalized and regrouped his followers" because leadership was not their priority, rather the gospel. And from the account of the gospel writers Peter was to lead the flock (Lk 24:34; Matt. 16:13-19; John 21:15:19) – therefore peter occupied the leadership position and the early church worked with this blue print within 170 years of church movement and its existence operated bishops, priests and deacons (Edet, 1990:96), thus, women are excluded from both ecclesiastical authority and ordained ministry.

The Sources of Rosemary Edet's Theology

In propounding her theology, Rosemary Edet used the Bible as her primary source alongside biblical commentaries, historical materials from the catholic theological discourses on ministry and leadership. Edet also utilized large chunks of feminist theologians' writings such as the writings of Mercy Oduyoye, Aracely de Rocchietti and Elizabeth S. Florence), as well as liberation theologians' writings (Third World theologies), African literatures and life experiences of the African people¹

¹ Some of the sources used by Rosemary Edet are: African Novel's by Ngugi P. Clark, Achebe and Amah; Apocrypha, Bible Commentaries; Letty M Russel, Huma liberation in Feminist perspective: A Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974); Elizabeth Carrol, "Women and Ministry' in Theological Studies" – 36, No. 4. (1975), 686-687; Mercy A. Oduyoye, Paper on Women and the Churches. Lamberi, 1988, Canterbury 27/7/88; Aracely de Rocchietti,

Specific and Unique Features of Rosemary Edet's Theology

One unique feature of Edet's theology is identifying how women have effortlessly integrated cultural and religious symbiosis by coming up with a "creative extension" and continued to enrich it and still remain free, especially in English literatures (Edet, 1989:85) in spite of marginalization and restrictions. Citing Russell (1989:92) she further stated that even though women are restricted they are working her to improve the economic, political and social life of the society (Edet, 1989:92)

Secondly, Edet strongly argued that the orthodox churches have relied on secular materials vis-à-vis its stand on women participation in church ministry, and it is biased against women on the issue of leadership and authority based on Greek philosophy of dualism. They selected only materials that support their stand on exclusivism of the male. Not only that, Edet further maintained that the tradition of exclusion of women from ordained ministry and leadership is not based on sound doctrine, rather it is based on "a sub-structure of scriptural commentaries and canonical legislation which helped men to justify their exclusivism and the women of the church to interiorize their inferiority" (Edet, 1989:89-90).

Edet went further argued that the exclusion of women from church ministry is a form of "neo-Arianism" and a double standard which destroys "wholeness of Christian community." and "hurts solidarity globally." Thus, she says, ordaining women into the church ministry should not be seen as "threat to clerical culture," rather it is beneficial to the church because it enables it to preach, teach, and emphasis on the liberative ministry as well as enhancing "representational power of the priestly service" (Edet, 1989:94, 95, 96).

Another uniqueness of Rosemary Edet theology is analogy of the femineness of the Church; that the church is also feminine, because it is referred to as bride of God/Christ. Not only that the church is the receiver, imparter and dispenser of life, and women are partners with men in accomplishing this task and both are image bearer of God, (Edet,

"Women and the People of God" Through her eyes (eds) Elsa. Tame New York: Orbis Books, Mary Knoll, 1985; Elizabeth S. Fiorenza. 'Feminist Theology, a critical Theology of liberation in Theological studies, Vol. 36 (Dec. 1975) 606-626.

1989:95) thus, she maintained that women should not be excluded from leadership and ministry, that “ministry is everyone baptismal right, and full-time professional ministry be about calling people to exercise that right” (Edet, 1989:88).

Another unique feature of Edet’s theology is her argument from biblical narratives that Mary Magdalene ought to be conferred with the title of apostolic authority rather than the exclusive male apostolic authority/leadership. That according to the gospel narrations, apostolic authority is conferred on to those who have received him (Christ) and were eye witnesses of his resurrection and proclaimed it (Matt. 28:16-20; Lk 24:24-29; John 20:19-23) (Edet, 1990:97) thus, Mary Magdalene ought to be one of such persons.

Though Rosemary Edet is conscious that there were many witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection, the apostles were the official witnesses and official leaders of the whole community of which Peter was the spokesman of the group, because they met the above criteria (Acts 1:15-20). This claim was to replacement of Judas, of which Matthias was elected (Acts 1:21-26). Edet argued that Mary Magdalene should also be conferred apostolic authority, not only because she had been with Jesus, she was the first to witness the resurrection and the first to proclaim it instead of Peter (Mark 16:9; John 20:11-17). She argued that the limitation of authority to certain eyewitnesses has implications. It overlooked some biblical narrations like Mark and John, limits authority only to men (Edet, 1990:97-98).

The Purpose for Writing

Rosemary Edet’s main purpose for writings was to establish how the literal interpretation of the gospels’ narratives of the resurrection by the orthodox churches has significant consequences for determining male leadership and authority in Christian movement history (Edet, 1990:95). She also wrote to challenge the churches in Africa to come out of their lukewarmness and complacency and be alert as they celebrate their freedom and salvation. (Edet, 1988:57) The third purpose for her writing was to examine the social, economic, cultural, political context/situation of

African women and belief, with special emphasis on women and ministry in Africa (Edet, 1989:80).

In discussing how the literal interpretation of the resurrection authenticates authority and leadership in orthodox churches, Edet stated that literal interpretation has political consequences on male leadership “it legitimizes the authority of certain men who claim to exercise exclusive leadership over the churches as the successors of the apostles” (Edet, 1990:95). Edet maintained that political and religious movements of the church’s authority developed along this line of biblical interpretation (Edet, 1990:95-96).

Edet further elaborated within 170 years of the church’s existence it operated bishops, priests and deacons’ structures bearing in mind this biblical interpretation, since the interpretation of gospel narrations conferred authority to those who received him and were eye witnesses of his resurrection (Matt. 28:16-20; Lk 24:24-29; John 20:19-23). Thus, the apostles were official witnesses and official leaders of the whole community with Peter as spoke man of the group (Acts 1:15-20), and the same claim was used to replacement of Judas (Acts 1:21-26) (Edet, 1990:96-97).

Edet opined that this line of biblical interpretation places a limitation on certain eye witnesses of Jesus resurrection and that such limitation has “enormous implication for the political structure of the community.” It means they were ‘position of incontestable authority’ which gives them authority to ‘ordain future leaders as their successors,’ thereby, totally excluding women witnesses from leadership position, overlooking the first witness of the resurrection, Mary Magdalene (Mk 16:9; 20:11-17), who supposed to have been given apostolic authority (Edet, 1990:97).

Rosemary Edet said this line of biblical interpretation signifies that none can claim equal authority with the apostle nor challenge it, and that whatever the apostles had experienced and attested to can only be ‘believed, protected and handed down by successors’ who are male not female. She said church’s position stands contrary to the spirit of Christian movement because Jesus was very opened and inclusive towards women in his ministry. (Lk 10:38-42). Not only that, 10- 20years Christianity after the resurrection of Jesus showed that women held position of leadership in the church (Edet, 1989:97-98).

In criticizing the complacent and lukewarm attitude of the church in contemporary African setting in her interpretation of the parable of the ten virgins, Edet stated that the wedding is a sign of new age: the coming of the kingdom of God to the community and environs and it is a call for them to be happy. However, Africa must be alert for the coming of the bridegroom (Jesus) and should not be lukewarm and very complacent, waiting for a spectacular and immediate relief from troubles, rather should work it out. That some African churches who feel being saved or born again as a license to live anyhow, or condemn others should come down from their high horses because no one has monopoly of salvation, rather should be joyful and alert (Edet, 1988:57).

In her examination of the social, economic, cultural, political context/situation and beliefs of the African women, with special emphasis on women and ministry in Africa, Edet said in spite of colonialism and missionary activities in Africa, the socio-economy, and political situation of Africa still remains a point of concern. There are crisis, conflicts, abject poverty, discrimination, marginalization and untold hardship prevalent in the society and the worst victims are women and children. Consequently, churches in Africa are institutionalized to reproduce the replica of western values, structures, theology, options and problems of the missionary church and degrading, displacing or destroying Africans values and structures (Edet, 1989:100). Thus, the church continues to 'choose leaders who are male within a predominant female congregation,' thereby being insensitive to the gross marginalization and discrimination of the structure (Edet, 1989:90).

Issues Addressed in Rosemary Edet's Writings

The issues addressed by Rosemary Edet in her writings include the socio-economic, political, cultural and religious contexts of women in the Anglophone African context with a very special emphasis on their place in ministry. She submitted that though Africans have experienced some level of socio-economic growth and development after independence, their growth and development is hampered by white imperialists and multinationals, which is compounded by crisis and conflicts from within the continent as well as unemployment (Edet, 1989:82).

Rosemary Edet blamed the unstable state of Africa on the former colonial masters who ensured that African countries remain poor and unstable for their own economic growth as they kept exploiting the human and material resources. However, Edet also blamed African countries for lack of self-control as they are top debtors globally, a situation where it led to forced enslavement and oppression along with generations yet unborn, since they cannot meet conditions and terms of the debts unless they have attitudinal changes, e.g., “the world bank, the International Monetary Fund and Multi – National Corporation” (Edet, 1989:82-83).

Rosemary Edet adds that the “perpetual control of African economy by super powers has placed many African countries under heavy debt crisis which makes them totally dependent upon and subject to the whims and fancies of these international institutions” (Edet, 1989:83). That the “export-oriented” production, nicknamed “Industrialization of African countries” which “aimed at making these countries self-sufficient” has negative effects on the social and economic life of the Africans – it led to scarcity and inflation, which led to starvation, malnutrition and death of children e.g., Nigeria and Ghana greatly due to IMF Loan conditions (Edet, 1989:83).

Another issue Edet addressed in her article is how foreign religions and cultures have further subjugated women they become spectators in religio-cultural and political life of the Africans. Since in most patriarchal cultures in Africa women as inferior and mere properties of their husbands, the orthodox churches,² Islam and colonial laws simply endorsed the status quo, thereby preventing women from political and religious participation in the ordained ministry (Edet, 1989:86-87). Edet argued strongly that exclusion of women from the ministry has no biblical and historical backing, rather it is a structure that “supports and reinforces the traditional gender- based roles, ignoring religious leadership of African women in the same traditional culture” (Edet, 1989:96).

² The orthodox churches referred to here, according to the context of this writer are: the Catholic churches and all protestant churches i.e., Presbyterian Churches, Lutheran Churches, Methodist Churches, Evangelical Churches, Reformed Churches, Anglican Church of Nigeria, Baptist Churches and Church of the Brethren. These churches are replica of the founding Western Churches.

According Rosemary Edet, that although both Christianity and Islam show concern for human life and talk of liberation, but they “re-enforced male domination in every aspect of African life.” She explained that all religions have liberating and oppressive factors in them and all preach equality of all persons and teach liberation, yet they all have “discriminatory attitudes towards women,” e.g., Christianity and Islam have barred women from leadership positions, however, in new religious movement women have liberty – they are “founders, leaders, priests, and administrators.” Though African Traditional Religion (ATR) stresses concern for human, social values, personal and communal living, cooperation, right relationships and liberation yet it discriminates against women (Edet, 1989:87).

Rosemary Edet also passionately questioned the basis for exclusive male leadership in the orthodox churches. This great scholar stated that the answer lies in the literal understanding and the interpretation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to her, “it is within the answer to this question that the New Testament and the consequent male leadership of the church is found” It is from it the political and religious leadership developed; in other words, it is from this claim that each church leadership and movement claims to represent authentic tradition and authority (Edet, 1990:95).

In her writings, Rosemary Edet challenged the exclusion and the disregard of women as witnesses of the resurrection, thus Mary Magdalene was never ranked as an apostle even though was the first to see the resurrected Lord and was the first to proclaim it. She stated that Orthodox Christian Movements have developed a one-sided theology and view of authority and leadership that totally disregards women witnesses, that such biblical interpretation places limitation on certain eye witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection which has “enormous implication for the political structure of the community” (Edet, 1990:97-99). This implies that the men are in a ‘position of incontestable authority’ which gave them authority to ‘ordain future leaders as their successors,’ thereby totally excluding women from leadership position, despite Markan and Johannian accounts (Mk 16:9; 20:11-17) (Edet, 1990:97-98).

Edet explained further citing Campehausen (1969) that, such line of biblical interpretation signifies that none can claim equal authority with apostle nor challenge what the apostles experienced and attested to but can only ‘believed, protected and handed down what the successors’ who were male said. She maintained that such stand is contrary to the spirit of Christian movement because Jesus was very opened and inclusive towards women during his ministry (Lk 10:38-42), while from 10-20 years Christianity after the resurrection of Jesus, women held positions of authority in the church (Edet, 1990:98).

Lastly, Edet attacked the lukewarmness and the complacent attitude of the African Churches, because they are always looking for spectacular and immediate relief from trouble instead of working out solutions – and “feel being saved or born again is a license to live anyhow, or condemn others as if we were the only ones that have monopoly of salvation. Thus, miss the joy of salvation and the alertness that should characterize the behaviour of Christian community.” The warning to repentance and the gift of salvation is for all regardless of colour, religious affiliation, tribe and race (Edet, 1988:57).

Rosemary Edet’s Conversations with Male and Western Theologians

Rosemary Edet in her writings challenged male chauvinism on the issue of leadership and ministry, and the imposition of Western theology on the African church. She challenged the orthodox churches for allocating leadership and authority to only male in total disregard to Markian and Johannian account which shows Mary Magdalene was the “primary witness for the fundamental data of early Christian faith. She was the first to witness his resurrection and first to proclaim “Easter Kerygma³: which Christian faith is based upon the witness and proclamation of women”

³ The orthodox churches referred to here, according to the context of this writer are: The Catholic churches and all protestant churches i.e., Presbyterian Churches, Lutheran Churches, Methodist Churches, Evangelical Churches, Reformed Churches, Anglican Church of Nigeria, Baptist Churches and Church of the Brethren. These churches are replica of the founding Western Churches.

(Edet, 1990:97). Not only that, Edet cites Benard of Clairvaux in (Jungmann, 1950) that Mary Magdalene witnessed the life, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, thus, she is an “apostle of apostles” (1990:99). Edet buttressed her point that the orthodox one-(sided view of church authority and leadership is in total disregard to women as witnesses of Christ’s resurrection, thus, subsequently, all ranks of leadership in the church were occupied by men (Edet, 1990:98-99).

Edet further addressed male chauvinism in Paul’s letters. That though he regarded women as equals in terms of image of God, salvation, and gift of the Holy spirit, but he did not “advocate for their equality in social and political terms.” She says, Paul argued from “his own traditional Jewish conception of monistic masculine God for divinely ordained hierarch of social subordination” as in (Gen 2-3), so man has authority over woman (1 Cor. 11:54), thus, women are inferior to men (Edet, 1990:98).

Strength and Contribution of Edet’s Theology to Knowledge and Liberation

Rosemary Edet contributed to liberation theology by pointing out that the church has cleverly woven a shackle of bondage for women in their interpretation of the Bible as well as their theology by ensuring that leadership and authority are the prerogative of male gender alone. Citing Mary Magdalene as the primary witness for the fundamental data of early Christian faith, and the first to proclaim “Easter Kerygma: which Christian faith is based upon the witness and proclamation of women” (Edet, 1990:99) Yet, the church in her biblical interpretation and theology excluded her from leadership.

Edet further emphasized that the Orthodox churches’ exclusions of women from ministry is not based on sound doctrine, rather “that the structure of subordination of women and their exclusion from the called ministry is based on a sub-structure of scriptural commentaries and canonical legislation which helped men to the church to justify their exclusivism and the women of the church to interiorize their inferiority” (Edet,

1989:90) She said such leadership structure is based on “traditional gender based societal role not based on scriptures and she maintained that including women in ministry and leadership would enhance the ministry of the church (Edet, 1989:96, 99).

She said the feminineness of the church calls for the inclusion of women in the ministry, because it is referred to as bride of God/Christ, not only that the church receives and impacting and dispensing life, and women are partners with men in accomplishing this task – since both are image bearer of God. Thus, she called on the church to reverse its compromise with culture and be instrument of “redemptive liberation.” They should liberate women from “cultural subservience to the dominant male principle in society,” because “Christian theology does not recognize distinction between race, or sex, so full participation in ecclesial life should be open to all,” (Edet, 1989:95).

Weakness of Rosemary Edet’s Theology

Though this work answered Paul’s stand on gender from Jewish perspective, yet there are still unanswered questions which need to be addressed biblically and historically. There is need to address why women were excluded in the priestly appointment in the Old Testament as well to why they were not among the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ from biblical perspective. Why has the Bible talked of male bishops, priests and deacons not female? (1 Tim. 3:1). We must not continue to shy away from the problem because these are texts often used to justify exclusion of women in the ministry and leadership in the church ministry.

Future Prospect/ Research

Rosemary Edet made a call that women are “disaffected from the institutional churches who seem to be insensitive in the allocation of power”, where women are completely relegated to the background, that it is something the church needs to look into because it has seriously affected it witness, love and unity both now and the future. More so, she said, including women in the ministry and leadership will enhance the

ministerial inputs and enrich its theologies and services to humanity (Edet, 1989:93, 94).

Whether yesterday, today or the future, her writings remain relevant because the issues Rosemary Edet has raised are cancerous problem that have no immediate solution in view⁴. Though women have formed themselves into groups and are making great impacts in the church and society (Edet, 1989:91), yet the church is still reluctant to get them involved in ministry and leadership. However, Edet points out citing Oduyoye (1988), that the prime focus of “ministries is healing of man-woman in the church and society ..., women brokenness is brokenness of humanity” (Edet, 1989:98). She further cites (Cunningham, 1976) saying that in scripture, “ministries of both men and women were seen as manifestation of the presence and action of the spirit in the church” (Edet, 1989:89).

Edet stated further that since Africans have very high sense of community, inclusiveness should be the model of African churches and ministry rather than exclusion. There should be inclusiveness in both the Church and society. There should be equality to all people both politically, socially, and economically without sex discrimination (Edet, 1989:920).

Edet called on women to take a leaf from woman in the independent churches to reclaim women’s role and contributions in Christian faith and tradition, and free the image of Mary Magdalene from all distortions and rediscover her role as an apostolic leader. She elaborates citing Fiorenza (1975) that “the distorted image of Mary Magdalene as a sinner and penitent woman signals the distortion of self-understanding of Christian women.” (Edet, 1990:100). She stated that in order for women to rid from the distortion they must not shrink back from suffering, and “fall back into the bondage of the seven spirits of our religion and culture,” rather

⁴ The percentage of the Orthodox churches that see the need to include women in church ministry and leadership in Africa is still very small. So far, only Methodist, Baptist (Nigerian Convention), Lutheran and Presbyterian Churches of Nigeria ordain and accept women into to full time ministry of the word and Leadership. See Maton, Yosi A. D. *Christian Higher Education, Cultural Worldviews and the Promotion of Discriminatory Policies in the African Church, Christian Higher Education and Injustice in the African Society*. West African Journal of Higher Education, Vol.7 (Osogbo: HiRISE Celebrity Publishers 2018), 173-178.

like women should be “apostle of apostles” by being witnesses and proclaimers of the faith though orthodox denied ordination but the N.T. recognized Mary as an apostle (Edet, 1989:99-100).

CONCLUSION

Rosemary Edet contributed greatly to liberation and feminist theology in West Africa by challenging male chauvinism that leadership and ministry is not an exclusive right of the men because such stand contradict both historical and biblical positions. She called on women to learn lessons from Mary Magdalene and women from the independent churches who did not allow barriers and restrictions to stop them from making their contribution in the church’s ministry, rather like them women should rediscover their roles in the church’s ministry and the society and make their own contributions. Edet went to rebuked the Western Churches for imposing their theology and structures on the African churches forcing them to disregard, discredit and discard everything about African as evil thus, African churches lose their value and cultures end up being replica of the western churches. However, Edet blamed the African churches for their gullibility in accepting everything from the West as the gospel truth.

Edet criticized the colonial masters that there coming to Africa added very little value to their wellbeing as compared to the mirages of problems created. That though Africa is independent, it is undergoing a neo-colonialism since the socio-political and economical structures drawn by global world powers and trade union continuously make Africans dependent on them to their own disadvantage. However, she blamed the African leaders for their greed, lack of self-control and lack of vision.

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