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CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND MEN IN UMU-NRI COMMUNITIES OF ANAMBRA STATE, IN THE LIGHT OF GALATIANS 3:26-28

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Abstract

Humanity seems to be standing with one leg (man) instead of with two legs (Man and woman). Hence, humanity is limping. This paper critically studies the Rights of women and men in Umu-Nri communities in the light of Galatians 3:26-28. It is a fact that women in Africa and even in the Old Testament times have been enjoying subjugated rights. Women and children can be seen without being heard; hence, the Jewish correspondence on some of the miracles of Jesus in the New Testament (Matt 14:21; Mark 6:44; Luke 9:14; Matt 15:38) reported only the population of men and not that of women and children. These show that women and children were grouped in ancient times in the known world, including Jews, Africans, Nigerians, Igbo, and Umu-Nri. Where women stand on the same pedestal is in the area of building a family as far as procreation is concerned. This points to the fact that women in Nigeria face many challenges and discriminatory practices under some extant laws and customs. Such challenges include gender-based violence, limited political representation, and disparities in education and employment opportunities. This work aims to critically examine the rights of women in relation to their male counterparts in Umu-Nri communities in the light of Gal. 3:26-28. To achieve this, data were collected from primary and secondary sources. The collected data were analyzed using the historical-critical method of exegesis, textual criticism, and intercultural hermeneutics to arrive at a good conclusion. The writers discovered that mankind as a whole and Umu-Nri, in particular, are standing on one leg and it really affects everything. The work recommended, among other things, that all hands must be on deck for balance to be maintained in Umu-Nri. Significantly, this work will be of immense benefit to men and women of Umu-Nri Communities for them to respect one another's rights and writers of all persuasions will use this paper to reset their minds' set, to appreciate and understand that equality pays more than inequality.

Introduction

Rev. Fr. Prof. B.A.C. Obiefuna is always worried whenever and wherever people are not equally treated or carried along. He detests discriminatory treatment of any sort. This work, as we have mentioned above, aims at critically examining the rights of women in relation to men's rights in Umu-Nri communities in the light of Gal. 3:26-28. To achieve this, data was collected from primary (participant observation) and secondary (written and published materials, internet materials, etc.) sources, and a combination of research methods was employed to analyze the data. The historical-critical method of exegesis and intercultural hermeneutics were utilized in the analysis of data. The historical-critical method of exegesis involves examining the historical and cultural context in which the biblical passage was written, as well as analyzing the linguistic and textual aspects of the text. This method helps to uncover the original meaning and intent of the passage, allowing for a deeper understanding of its implications for women's rights in Umu-Nri communities. By applying the historical-critical method to Gal. 3:26-28, the researcher aimed to derive a clearer understanding of the passage's relevance to the status of women within the cultural context

of Umu-Nri. Textual criticism is a method used to study and evaluate the accuracy and authenticity of biblical manuscripts. This method helps to identify any variations or discrepancies in different versions of the biblical text and provides insights into the reliability and interpretation of the passage. By applying textual criticism to Gal. 3:26-28, the writers aimed at ensuring the accuracy of the text and to avoid misinterpretation or misrepresentation of its message. Intercultural hermeneutics, on the other hand, is an approach that recognizes and accounts for the diverse cultural perspectives and contexts in the interpretation of biblical texts. It acknowledges that different cultures and societies may have varying understandings and applications of biblical teachings. In the context of this study, intercultural hermeneutics helps to bridge the gap between the biblical passage and the cultural norms and practices of the Umu-Nri communities. It enables a nuanced interpretation that takes into consideration the specific cultural context and its implications for women's rights.

Through the inquiry into the geographical, cultural, and religious dimensions, as well as through the analysis of traditional practices, social structures, and the impact of Christianity on gender roles, the researcher discovered that Umu-Nri is rich in valuable cultural traditions, but displays cultural disparities. Hence, women do not have equal rights in relation to men, which points to the marginalization of women. This implies that Gal. 3:26-28 stands in opposition to the realities on the ground as far as Umu-Nri communities are concerned, as well as other related cultures.

Background to the Study

Women in Nigeria face challenges such as gender-based violence, limited political representation, and disparities in education and employment opportunities. Despite these obstacles, Nigerian women have been active agents of change, with women's movements and organizations advocating for gender equality and women's rights. The issue of gender equality and women's rights has been a topic of great importance and debate across different societies and cultures worldwide. In many regions in Nigeria, traditional gender roles and patriarchal systems have often limited women's opportunities, undermined their autonomy, and denied them equal rights and status in various aspects of life.⁸ Nigeria, with its diverse ethnic groups and rich cultural heritage, presents a complex landscape in terms of gender relations and women's rights. Such practices are often justified by religious and cultural beliefs, which can perpetuate gender inequality.⁹

According to Chief Engr. Frank Ekwezo, the Traditional Prime minister of Nawfia na Umu-Nri, women are not allowed to pour sand into the grave of their husbands in Nawfia. The "dust-to-dust" and "ash-to-ash" rituals during a burial are symbolic and often religious or cultural practices associated with the interment of the deceased. The participation of women of Umu-Nri in such rituals is taboo and has some consequences as far as customs and traditions are concerned. One of the authors witnessed the burial of the Late Mr Vincent Onyema of Umukwa Village Nawfia, where the daughters of the deceased were not allowed to perform dust-to-dust funeral rites with the brothers of the deceased since the deceased

⁸ Chiliza, T. H., & Masuku, M. M. (2020). Manifestation of gender inequality in some Zulu proverbs that reflect patriarchal domination of women (by men) within the Zulu cultural context. *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 19(1), 58-69.

⁹ Wood, H. J. (2019). Gender inequality: The problem of harmful, patriarchal, traditional, and cultural gender practices in the church. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 75(1).

man had no male child. In some places in Igboland, if a woman has children, she will inherit her husband's property. However, if she does not have any child, she will face the option of either remaining and bearing children for her late husband with the assistance of kinsmen, or she may choose to leave and forfeit all her husband's properties. While there is an existing law in place, it is important to note that in Umu-Nri, the practice is to share landed property exclusively among the male children of the family. In cases where there are no male children, the property will be transferred to the brothers rather than to the daughters, though the Supreme Court of Nigeria has voided this practice. But even at that, it is still in practice.¹⁰

According to Igwe Sir Raph Ekpe, (Igwe Enugwu-Ukwu na Umu Nri Okpalanakana Ukabia Nri), it is indeed a practice that women are not allowed to sell land independently in Umu-Nri communities. Even if a woman intends to sell land, there must be a male figure involved, even if that male is as young as a year old. The sale of land will be conducted under his supervision or guardianship. This practice reflects specific cultural and customary norms regarding land ownership and transactions in these communities. Igwe Sir Raph Ekpe further noted that there are many things women are not allowed to do. Women are not allowed to climb trees; they are not allowed to break cola-nut, sell land, pour libations to their gods, be part of masquerade cults, and so many other things. The discrimination of women among men was there even in the olden days. Women were relegated in the temple worship, and there was a men's court and a women's court, but today, the law has established that women have their rights. If you say no to them, they will sue you, and that has improved the status of women, although some men in Umu-Nri Communities are still ignorant of this law, and it is a no for them to allow women to have the right of inheritance.

Gal. 3:26-28 is a powerful passage in the Bible that speaks to the equality of women with men as God's children. This passage is a serious guide to the proper understanding of the status of women in Umu-Nri communities of Anambra State, Nigeria, as it provides evidence of a time when women were recognized and respected as equal to men in terms of religious rights and social standing. This passage is especially important to the Umu-Nri people, who are struggling to place women on the same pedestal as their male counterparts. In traditional Umu-Nri communities, women were not allowed to inherit property and were usually not included in decision-making processes. It is noted that women traditionally were excluded from certain religious rituals and ceremonies and were viewed as inferior to men in terms of their spiritual standing.¹¹

The instances of discrimination and humiliation against women in Umu-Nri communities are deeply rooted in cultural and traditional practices that have persisted over generations. These practices create significant disparities in the treatment of women compared to men, particularly in matters of inheritance, property rights, and participation in cultural rituals. Such discrimination can have profound implications for the women in these communities, especially when contrasted with the principles outlined in Galatians 3:26-28. This message of equality resonates with the Umu-Nri people and provides a

¹⁰ In the *Ukeje V Ukeje*, (2014) LPELR-22724 (SC) the Supreme Court of Nigeria abolished the Igbo custom of male primogeniture, which prohibited female children from sharing in the intestate estate of their father (africanlegalstudies.blog) and affirmed the rights of Nigerian women to inherit from their deceased parents.

¹¹ Behera, J. K. (2019). Tribal religion, transformation, and women participation: An analytical study. *Research Journal Social Sciences*, 27(3), 92.

theological foundation for advocating for the equal rights and recognition of women within their communities. In light of these biblical teachings, the discriminatory practices against women in Umu-Nri communities conflict with the principles of equality and unity that Christianity professes. This incongruity highlights the need to critically investigate the status and rights of women and men in these communities, taking cultural factors into account. The implications for women in the church are significant. While Christianity advocates for gender equality and inclusivity, the prevailing cultural norms in Umu-Nri communities can create tensions and challenges for women who wish to exercise their rights within the church fully. Women may find themselves caught between their religious beliefs and cultural practices that restrict their participation and limit their inheritance rights. By exposing the traditional patriarchal systems and emphasizing the equality of men and women, Galatians 3:26-28 can serve as an important resource for the Umu-Nri people, who are increasingly advocating for the inclusion and empowerment of women in their society.

The cultural traditions within Umu-Nri communities, as evidenced by folklores, proverbs, marriage customs, and purity rituals, have perpetuated the subjugation of women, rendering them unequal to the vision of equality envisioned by religious teachings. Chief Engr. Frank Ekweozo, the Traditional Prime Minister of Nawfia na Umu-Nri, highlights the pervasive denial of women's rights, including access to education, inheritance, and equitable treatment. Despite the influence of Christianity, which has partially mitigated certain discriminatory cultural practices, it remains unclear to what extent these practices persist. Specific cultural practices have come to symbolize gender disparities, such as the prohibition of women from pouring sand into their husbands' graves, a practice observed in various Igbo communities. While Roman Catholic burial rites allow both men and women to perform the "dust-to-dust" ritual, disputes have arisen between the church and communities that uphold these practices as cultural taboos, shedding light on the complexities of cultural and religious clashes. Some men, who only have daughters from their first wives, resort to marrying multiple wives to secure a male child, a privilege not extended to women. This gender-based discrimination extends to actions such as expelling women from wedlock if found with another man and pressuring wives to bear multiple children in pursuit of a male heir. The overarching problem lies in the persistence of male-instituted cultural laws that deny women their basic rights and perpetuate gender inequality within Umu-Nri communities. Briefly, this paper questions how the cultural basis of the patriarchal nature of Umu-Nri culture, and by extension, Nigerian culture, influences the treatment of women and how the principles outlined in Galatians 3:26-28 guide a way forward towards greater gender equality. This work aims to critically look at the status and rights of women and men in Umu-Nri communities in the light of Gal. 3:26-28. Specifically, the objectives of this work are to examine the historical and cultural factors that have shaped women's roles and rights within the Umu-Nri communities of Anambra State, Nigeria.

At this stage, the writers explicate some keywords like the following to make sure they understand them in the work.

- (a) Status: Status is the position or rank a person or group occupies in a family or community. It is simply a rank or position that one holds in a group or in a church. For instance, one can be a son, daughter, playmate, pupil, married man, married woman, medical doctor, father, mother, and so on. There is what we also call "achieved status". This is the type of status one can earn through one's own achievements. This is different from the type of problem that is our concern in this work. For instance, one can study

to become a medical doctor, professor, lawyer, etc. What one becomes as a result of one's personal effort is achieved status. Alternatively, one can be placed in the stratification system by their inherited position, which is called an "Ascribed Status". This is the type that is closely associated with accidents of birth. Good examples of this are being a man or a woman, being the husband or wife, being the first-born son or last-born son, etc.

- (b) Rights: Here, we are not referring to what is right or wrong but what is due to someone because the person is human. Broderick says,

These rights are understood and recognized as universal, inviolable, and inalienable rights possessed because the human person is a rational being endowed with free will. The human person possesses these by his nature as a person. They are safeguards of the dignity of the human person in a society that is often inimical (cf. Acts 4:19; Canon 208)¹².

Since this is very important and should not be violated, the Vatican II document states,

Human institutions, both private and public, must minister to humanity's dignity and purpose. At the same time, let them stubbornly fight against any slavery, whether social or political and safeguard humanity's fundamental rights under every political system.¹³

This is because rights are inherent entitlements and freedoms that individuals possess by virtue of their humanity. They encompass the principles of fairness, justice, and equality, protecting individuals from arbitrary treatment and ensuring their ability to exercise autonomy, dignity, and participation in various aspects of life.¹⁴ To accept a set of rights is to approve a distribution of freedom and authority, and so to endorse a certain view of what may, must, and must not be done.

Women and rights: Woman comes from the Hebrew word *'ishah*, which resembles another Hebrew word *'ish* (man). Their similarities are from their origin because when God created humanity/human beings (which translates the Hebrew word *ādām*), He created them male and female in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:27; 5:1-2; Matt 19:4). Therefore, the image of God appears equally in man the male and woman the female, and the peculiar personality characteristics of each sex are needed fully to mirror the nature of God.¹⁵ Women refer to adult human females who biologically and socially identify as female. They play crucial roles in society, encompassing diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences.¹⁶ Women often face specific challenges and discrimination, yet they contribute significantly to various fields, including politics, education, science, and arts. Recognizing and upholding women's rights and promoting gender equality are essential for achieving inclusive and equitable societies.

¹² Broaderick, R. Ed. (2005). "Rights" in the A to Z Guide to the Catholic Faith. Vancouver: Thomas Nelson pub. pp. 581–582.

¹³ Vatican II (1965). Pastoral Constitution on the church in the modern world (*Gaudium et Spes*) 7 Dec. 1965. No. 29.

¹⁴ Valentini, L. (2017). Dignity and human rights: A reconceptualisation. *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 37(4), 862-885.

¹⁵ Rea, J. (2005). "Woman" in *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*. Massachusetts: Hendrickson pub. P. 1817

¹⁶ Chiliza, T. H., & Masuku, M. M. (2020). Manifestation of gender inequality in some Zulu proverbs that reflect patriarchal domination of women (by men) within the Zulu cultural context. *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 19(1), 58-69

Women's rights encompass the fundamental human rights and freedoms that are specifically focused on the equal treatment and empowerment of women. They include the right to live free from discrimination, violence, and oppression, as well as the right to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, political participation, and decision-making.¹⁷ Women's rights are essential for promoting gender equality, social justice, and the full realization of women's potential in all spheres of life.

Men and Rights: Men refer to adult human males who biologically and socially identify as male. They play important roles in society, encompassing diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. Men often hold positions of power and privilege, but they also face societal expectations and pressures.¹⁸ Recognizing and promoting gender equality is crucial in addressing the specific challenges faced by men, fostering positive masculinity, and creating inclusive societies for all genders.

Men's rights refer to the rights and entitlements that specifically address the well-being, equality, and specific issues men face in society. They encompass areas such as father's rights, equal treatment in family law, recognition of male victims of domestic violence, and challenges related to gender stereotypes and expectations.¹⁹ Men's rights advocates seek to address these concerns while promoting gender equality and a more balanced understanding of masculinity.

Umu-Nri: The Umu-Nri community is a traditional Igbo community in Anambra State, Nigeria. It has boundaries with Awka, Nise, Agulu, Nimo, Abagana, Ukpo, Nawgu, Okpuno and Isuanocha. It is known for its rich cultural heritage and historical significance within the Igbo ethnic group. Umu-Nri is notable for being one of the oldest settlements in Igbo land and holds a special place in Igbo history and traditions. The community has its unique customs, beliefs, and social structures passed down through generations. Umu-Nri has played a significant role in preserving Igbo culture and traditions.

Umu-Nri communities hold immense cultural and political significance within the Nri kingdom and among the Igbo people. Umu-Nri comprises a network of villages with common ancestry and cultural practices. They have a distinct social structure with titles, lineages, and religious traditions passed down through generations. Nwaezeigwe noted that the Umu-Nri communities are known for their adherence to traditional customs and beliefs, including the worship of ancestral deities, the practice of divination, and the priest-king as the custodian of religious and political power. Igwe holds a sacred and influential position within Umu-Nri communities and wider Igbo society. The Igwe acts as the spiritual and political leader, mediating between the living and the ancestors.²⁰ The "Igbo-Ukwu" crown, a significant symbol of authority and divinity, emphasizes the sacredness of the Igwe's role. The people respect and uphold the Igwe's decisions and pronouncements on religious, cultural, and social matters. Over time, the Nri kingdom's influence extended beyond its

¹⁷ Popoola, R., Egharevba, M., & Fayomi, O. O. (2020). Celebrity advocacy and Women's rights in Nigeria. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 55(7), 1007–1022.

¹⁸ Kula, W. (2014). *Measures and men* (Vol. 421). Princeton University Press.

¹⁹ Allan, J. A. (2016). Phallic affect, or why men's rights activists have feelings. *Men and Masculinities*, 19(1), 22–41.

²⁰ Nwaezeigwe, N. T. (2013). The politics of Igbo origins and culture: The Igbo-Ukwu and Nri Factors Reconsidered. *IKENGA: International Journal of Institute of African Studies*, 15.

immediate vicinity, impacting neighbouring communities and kingdoms.²¹ The Nri's religious and cultural practices, such as the "Ọfọ" (divination) system and "Ọmụamu" (sacred groves), have been adopted and adapted by various Igbo communities, further cementing the significance of Umu-Nri as a cultural and spiritual centre.

The Umu-Nri communities are representative of the traditional Igbo way of life. This includes a strong patriarchal system where men are seen as the head of the family. As a result, women have a lower status than men in the traditional Umu-Nri community. This is evident in the fact that women are not allowed to participate in decision-making processes and are often excluded from economic and political activities.²² It is important to note that the historical accounts and understanding of Umu-Nri communities are shaped by a combination of oral tradition, archaeological evidence, and scholarly research. While the mythical origins provide a cultural framework, the historical details and specific timelines can be subject to interpretation and ongoing academic discourse.

Cultural Practice and Religions in Umu-Nri

The Umu-Nri communities of Anambra State, Nigeria are traditional Igbo-speaking communities that have been in existence for centuries. The communities are known for their strong cultural values, beliefs, and practices. As such, the traditional gender roles and expectations within these communities are very rigid. The cultural practices of Umu-Nri, as part of the Nri kingdom in southeastern Nigeria, are deeply rooted in the Igbo cultural heritage.²³ Umu-Nri communities have a rich tapestry of customs, traditions, rituals, art forms, and social institutions that shape their identity and way of life.

Social Organization

Umu-Nri communities have a well-defined social structure that reflects their collective identity and kinship ties. The society is organized around the extended family unit known as the "umunna" or "umuada." The umunna consists of individuals related through a common ancestor, serving as the foundation of social cohesion and support. Members of the umunna share responsibilities, provide mutual aid, and uphold cultural values. Within the umunna, gender roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Men traditionally engage in activities such as farming, hunting, and leadership positions, while women take on domestic tasks, child-rearing, and nurturing roles²⁴. However, it is important to note that gender roles and expectations are evolving in response to changing societal dynamics.

The Umuada is a significant and tightly-knit social organization within Igbo communities in Nigeria. Comprising women who share a common ancestral heritage,

²¹ Theresa, N. O. (2020). Woman's Protest and Liberation in Some Selected Igbo Novels. *Interdisciplinary Journal of African & Asian Studies (IJAAAS)*, 6(1).

²² Happiness, O. C. (2013). The essence of symbols on Igbo Modern Thrones. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(6), 457.

²³ Yu, A., Pichler, S., Russo, M., & Hammer, L. (2022). Family-supportive supervisor behaviours (FSSB) and work-family conflict: The role of stereotype content, supervisor gender, and gender role beliefs. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 95(2), 275-304.

²⁴ Bormann, K. C., Backs, S., & Hoon, C. (2021). What makes nonfamily employees act as good stewards? Emotions and the moderating roles of stewardship culture and gender roles in family firms. *Family Business Review*, 34(3), 251-269.

Umuada serves as a vital pillar of communal life.²⁵ In Umu-nri culture, Umuada members are bound by lineage, blood ties, and shared responsibilities. Their roles encompass preserving cultural traditions, supporting community events, and facilitating ceremonies such as weddings and funerals. Umuada's influence extends to dispute resolution and fostering unity.²⁶ This organization played a pivotal role in maintaining social cohesion, especially during change and modernization in Umu-nri communities. One negative role is that they help even to enforce the subjugation of their fellow women, especially when it comes to widowhood practices and inheritance of property by women.

Right to Inheritance in Umu-Nri

Just as in many traditional African societies, it is a complex and culturally significant aspect of the community's social fabric. Inheritance practices determine how property, wealth, and other assets are transferred from one generation to another, and they often reflect the community's values, kinship systems, and gender roles. In traditional Igbo society, including Umu-Nri, inheritance is based on a patrilineal system, where property and other assets are primarily passed down through the male line and never matrilineal. Under the patrilineal system, ancestral land, titles, and other valuable resources are typically inherited by male children, considered the rightful custodians and successors of the family lineage. The eldest son, known as the "*okpara*" or "*odo*," often holds a privileged position regarding inheritance, as he is expected to carry on the family name, traditions, and responsibilities.

In Umu-Nri, as in many traditional African societies, gender dynamics play a significant role in inheritance practices. Historically, women have been excluded or marginalized from inheriting ancestral land and significant assets, primarily due to cultural norms and patriarchal structures that prioritize male inheritance. Under the patrilineal system, women typically inherit moveable property, such as jewellery, personal belongings, and household items. However, these inheritances are often considered secondary to the rights and privileges granted to male heirs. This gender disparity in inheritance practices has led to women's economic vulnerability and limited control over resources.

The writers observed that there had been evolving practices and challenges regarding the right to inheritance in Umu-Nri. Shifting societal values, legal reforms, and gender equality movements have influenced inheritance practices and contributed to efforts to address gender disparities. Legal Reforms: At the national and state levels, legislative measures have been enacted to protect women's inheritance rights in Nigeria. For instance, the Nigerian Constitution recognizes the right to equal inheritance and prohibits discrimination based on gender. Furthermore, some states have enacted laws specifically addressing inheritance rights, aiming to promote gender equality and protect women's rights.

Increased awareness and sensitization campaigns have sought to challenge traditional gender roles and norms that perpetuate gender disparities in inheritance. These initiatives aim to promote understanding and respect for women's rights to inherit and encourage dialogue within communities about the importance of gender equality.

²⁵ Obasi, C. O., & Nnamani, R. G. (2015). The role of Umuada Igbo in conflict management and development in Nigeria. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 5(04), 256.

²⁶ Amaechi, C. M., & Muoh, O. U. (2018). Women and development in Africa: Urbanization and the role of Umuada in Igboland, southeast Nigeria. *Asian Women*, 34(1), 85-107.

Customary law, which often governs inheritance practices in Umu-Nri, is being reinterpreted and adapted to address gender disparities. Customary courts and community leaders are encouraged to interpret customary laws in a manner that promotes gender equality and safeguards women's inheritance rights. Testaments and wills have gained more recognition in Umu-Nri, allowing individuals to determine the distribution of their assets according to their wishes, regardless of gender. Testamentary freedom provides an opportunity for individuals to ensure that their inheritance decisions align with their values and principles, including gender equality. These are the emphasis of Gal 3:28.

Widowhood Practices

The practice of widow inheritance involves the widow marrying a male relative of the deceased, often the deceased husband's brother²⁷. This custom serves multifaceted purposes, including safeguarding the widow's economic security and maintaining lineage continuity. Yet, this practice can also raise ethical concerns, potentially infringing upon widows' agency and autonomy. Additionally, the expectation for widows to remarry within their deceased husband's family reinforces kinship ties and socio-economic stability. However, this expectation may collide with modern aspirations for personal choice and self-determination. In contemporary contexts, these practices have undergone transformations due to changing attitudes, legal reforms, and shifts in societal dynamics.²⁸ Examining widow inheritance and remarriage practices offers insights into the intricate negotiation between tradition and modernity in Igbo communities, prompting a broader reflection on the dynamics of gender, kinship, and cultural preservation.

As in many other traditional African societies, the widowhood practice in Umu-Nri has historical and cultural significance. Widowhood rituals and customs shape widows' experiences and social status within the community. Widows are expected to adhere to a strict set of rules and customs, often seen as a way of honouring their deceased husbands. These customs include wearing mourning robes, living in seclusion, and abstaining from certain activities.²⁹ Women suffer a lot at the loss of their husbands, which is never the same when men lose their wives.

Exegesis of the Text of Galatians 3:26-28

Authorship of the Epistle to the Galatians

The question of authorship surrounding the Epistle to the Galatians, a significant book in the New Testament, has been a subject of scholarly debate for centuries. Traditionally, the Apostle Paul has been credited as the author, a belief supported by internal evidence within the text and the thematic consistency with Paul's broader theological teachings. The internal evidence supporting Pauline authorship is rooted in the letter's opening salutation: "Paul, an apostle - sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus

²⁷ Akinbi, J. O. (2015). Widowhood practices in some Nigerian societies: A retrospective examination. *International journal of humanities and social science*, 5(4), 67-74.

²⁸ Okoro, K., & Nkama, C. (2018). Widowhood Practices in Africa [Igbo] Traditional Society: Socio-Anthropological [Re] Interpretations. *Journal of Humanities And Social Science*, 23, 42-54.

²⁹ Mezieobi, D. I., Mezieobi, S. A., & Iyamu, E. O. S. (2011). Widowhood practices among Igbos of South Eastern Nigeria as a betrayal of the fundamental human rights of women. *LWATI: a Journal of Contemporary Research*, 8(2).

Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead - and all the members of God's family who are with me, to the churches of Galatia" (Gal.1:1-2).

However, dissenting voices within modern biblical scholarship have raised valid concerns. Scholars like Keener, Savoy, and Lee point out differences in writing style and vocabulary when comparing Galatians to other undisputed Pauline letters.³⁰ The Greek used in Galatians appears more refined and forceful, leading to speculation about a potentially different author or, at the very least, significant editorial influence. Furthermore, the historical context in which Galatians was written raises questions about its dating. Unlike Paul's other letters, Galatians, addressing the debate over circumcision and the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians, is often considered one of his earlier works, challenging the timeline of Paul's ministry. Despite these dissenting views, Paul is the author of this letter.

Textual Criticism of Galatians 3:26-28³¹

A closer look at the text without going into many details reveals that Gal 3:26-28 has been relatively well preserved, for it has only four textual problems in verses 26 and 28, and verse 27 has no textual problem. In these two verses, we have two critical problems each. In verse 26, we have an omission and alternative reading of a phrase or replacement of a phrase with another. In contrast, in verse 28, we have an alternative reading of a phrase or replacement of a phrase with another and an alternative reading of a word or replacement of a word by the cited witnesses. These little changes have not affected the fundamental meaning of the text.

Structure of Text under Consideration 3:26-28

This is a compact yet profound passage that Paul uses to convey his theological message about the transformative power of faith in Christ. The structure of these verses is instrumental in conveying the unity, equality, and identity in Christ that Paul is advocating for in response to the challenges posed by Judaizers in the Galatian churches.

Introductory Statement (V.26)

The passage opens with a foundational statement: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." This introductory statement sets the stage for the entire passage. It introduces the central theme of sonship and establishes the idea that faith in Christ is the means by which individuals become children of God.³² The inclusivity of "you are all" underscores that this message applies universally to all believers.

Baptism as a Metaphor (Verse 27)

In verse 27, Paul shifts to a metaphorical description of baptism: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." This metaphorical language

³⁰ Savoy, J. (2019). Authorship of Pauline epistles revisited. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*, 70(10), 1089–1097. Keener, C. S. (2018). *Galatians*. Cambridge University Press. Lee, C. C. (2010). *The blessing of Abraham and the promise of the spirit: The influence of the prophets on Paul in Galatians 3: 1–14*. Wheaton College.

³¹ Here, the researcher relies on the Greek text Novum Testamentum Graece, 27th edition by Nestle-Aland.

³² Dibley, A. G. (2013). *Abraham's uncircumcised children: The enochic precedent for Paul's paradoxical claim in Galatians 3: 29*. University of California, Berkeley.

emphasizes the transformative aspect of baptism. It depicts the act of baptism as a spiritual garment change, where believers "put on" Christ. This imagery underscores the intimate identification with Christ that occurs through everyone's baptism.

Elimination of Distinctions (Verses 28a and 28b)

Verses 28a and 28b form the heart of the passage, addressing the elimination of distinctions. Paul employs a structure of parallelism and contrasts to emphasize the eradication of societal and cultural divisions. He begins with the pair "neither Jew nor Greek," addressing ethnic distinctions. Then, he moves to "neither slave nor free," addressing social distinctions. Finally, he includes "no male and female," addressing gender distinctions. This structure highlights the radical nature of the transformation brought about by faith in Christ.³³ In the broader context of the Greco-Roman world, these distinctions were deeply entrenched and had significant implications for social status and identity. By systematically addressing these categories, Paul challenges the traditional norms and underscores that faith in Christ transcends all such divisions.

Unified Identity in Christ (Verse 28c)

The passage concludes with a unifying statement: "For you are all one in Christ Jesus." This final verse ties together the previous ideas and underscores the ultimate unity and identity found in Christ. It emphasizes that, regardless of one's background or status, all believers share a common identity in Christ.³⁴ This unity is a theoretical concept and a lived reality within the Christian community.

Rhetorical Devices and Chiastic Structure:

Paul employs rhetorical devices such as parallelism and contrasts throughout the passage to emphasize his message. Additionally, there is a chiastic structure in verses 28a and 28b, where related ideas flank the central point (the elimination of gender distinctions). This structure draws attention to the central message and reinforces the unity of the passage.

The structure of Galatians 3:26-28 serves to reinforce its theological emphasis. Paul's central message is the transformative power of faith in Christ, which erases divisions and unifies believers. The practical implications of this message are profound. It challenges societal norms and expectations, calling believers to live out their faith in a way that transcends cultural, social, and gender distinctions.³⁵ It advocates for a truly inclusive and egalitarian Christian community in which all members are equal heirs of God's promises.

Content Analysis of Gal. 3:26-28

In this section, there will be a lexical (and diachronic) and a thematic study of keywords or phrases and major themes of the text. The following words used by Paul need attention before we can fully comprehend Gal. 3:26-28. They are crucial to the proper understanding of the theology of Gal. 3:26-28.

³³ Prior, J. M. (2010). Integration, Isolation or Deviation: Reading Galatians 3: 27-28 in Indonesia Today. *Mission studies*, 27(1), 71-90.

³⁴ Streett, D. R. (2015). Cursed by God? Galatians 3: 13, Social Status, and Atonement Theory in the Context of Early Jewish Readings of Deuteronomy 21: 23. *Journal for the Study of Paul and his Letters*, 5(2), 189-209.

³⁵ Esler, P. F. (2013). *Galatians*. Routledge. (<https://www.kobo.com>. Galatians)

Εβαπτίσθητε (*ebaptisthēte*)

This is aorist passive indicative from the Greek word *baptizō* meaning to baptize. It means "to immerse, submerge, to make whelmed (i.e. fully wet), used only (in the New Testament) of ceremonial ablution, especially (technically) of the ordinance of Christian baptism – Baptist, baptize, wash."³⁶ Baptism, as we know, was the sign of an entry into a new kind of life³⁷. Jesus says to his followers, "Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth; go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world" (Matt 28:18-20). The effects of this sacrament are: (1) it cleanses us from original sin; (2) it makes us Christians through grace by sharing in Christ's death and resurrection and setting up an initial program of living (1 Cor. 6:9-11); (3) it makes us Children of God as the life of Christ is brought forth within us (Rom. 8:15-17); (4) it makes us heirs of heaven for through baptism we "walk by the Spirit" whereby we will possess the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:21-25)³⁸.

Number three above clearly made us understand what baptism did for all the baptized. The entire baptized are equal in their childrenness or their sonshipness. All the baptized have clothed themselves with Christ. This implies that they are all wearing the same uniform, of which none is better than the other.

Ενεδύσασθε (*enedusasthe*)

This is aorist middle indicative from the word *enduomai*, meaning to put on, to put on a garment. Just as a garment which one puts on envelops the person wearing it and identifies his appearance in his life, so the person baptized in Christ is entirely taken up in Christ and the salvation brought by Him³⁹. This clearly demonstrates the effects of baptism. Only the baptized can put on Christ as cloth.

Ελεύθερος (*eleutheros*)

Free, i.e. not a slave and not under any restraint. This shows that all the baptized are free men; they are no longer slaves of kind. Hence, they are free, i.e. not slave, or they are not under any constraint or restraint, one at liberty, unrestrained person, etc⁴⁰. This is also one of the sweet effects of baptism. Oneness is assured when and where all are free.

Thematic Analysis

In verse 26, Paul lays the foundation for the transformative message he intends to convey. He addresses the Galatian believers, emphasizing the universal nature of their spiritual identity. The use of "sons and daughters of the Divine" transcends mere adoption; it conveys a profound sense of belonging and inheritance. The term "unwavering faith" underscores

³⁶ Strong, J. (2020). *The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Atlanta: Thomas Nelson Pub. P. 18

³⁷ Rienecker, F. (1980). *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*. Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House.

³⁸ Broaderick, R. Ed. (2005). "Baptism" in the *A to Z Guide to the Catholic Faith*. Vancouver: Thomas Nelson pub. p.62.

³⁹ Rienecker, F. (1980).

⁴⁰ Strong, J. (2020).

that this sonship is not achieved through works or rituals but is a result of their trust and allegiance to Christ Jesus.⁴¹ Again, the concept of being "sons and daughters of the Divine" signifies the depth of our relationship with God through faith. This language of divine sonship goes beyond mere inclusion; it speaks to the inheritance and closeness believers enjoy with God.

The opening statement of verse 26 lays the foundation for the entire passage. It communicates a profound truth about the identity of believers and their relationship with God. The phrase "you are all sons of God" emphasizes that all believers, regardless of their background or ethnicity, share a common status as children of God. This concept of universal sonship challenges the conventional understanding of God's chosen people, which was often tied to specific ethnic groups like the Jews. In Christ, this distinction is transcended. The phrase "through faith in Christ Jesus" underscores that faith is the means by which individuals become children of God. It's not through adherence to the law or lineage or by one's gender but through trust in Christ. This aligns with Paul's broader message in Galatians, where he vehemently opposes the idea that circumcision and adherence to the Mosaic Law are necessary for salvation. Importantly, the use of the term "sons" here is not exclusive to males but is an inclusive language that encompasses both male and female believers (Gal. 3:26-27). This inclusivity is a departure from the cultural norms of the time and reflects the radical nature of the Gospel message (Gal. 3:28).

In verse 27, Paul employs vivid imagery to illustrate the spiritual transformation that takes place through baptism. Baptism is portrayed as a powerful and symbolic act through which believers are not only identified with Christ but also enveloped in His divine character. The act of clothing oneself with Christ suggests a profound union and identification, emphasizing that believers take on His attributes and righteousness.⁴² Furthermore, Verse 27 employs powerful imagery of baptism as a transformative experience where believers "clothe themselves with Christ" (Gal. 27). This metaphor underscores that baptism is not a mere ritual but a profound identification with Christ's nature and character.

The act of baptism is not just an individual experience but a communal one. It serves as a unifying factor within the Christian community, signifying that all who undergo this rite become part of the body of Christ.⁴³ This underscores the communal aspect of faith and the interconnectedness of believers. The visual imagery of "putting on" Christ through baptism would have resonated strongly with Paul's audience. It paints a vivid picture of the believer's transformation and new identity. This metaphor is not just abstract theology but something tangible and relatable.

In verse 28a, Paul continues by addressing the profound social and cultural distinctions that existed in the Greco-Roman world. He uses the term "realm of faith" to emphasize the transformative nature of faith in Christ. Within this realm, the distinctions that previously defined one's identity and status, such as being a Jew or a Greek or being a slave or a free person, lose their significance and no longer serve as barriers or markers of

⁴¹ Kahl, B. (2010). *Galatians Re-imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished*. Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

⁴² Jones, H. (2018). The Vocabulary of Righteousness in Martin Luther's New Testament Translations. *Oxford German Studies*, 47(4), 381–416.

⁴³ Hunn, D. (2016). Galatians 3: 6–9: Abraham's Fatherhood and Paul's Conclusions. *The catholic biblical quarterly*, pp. 500–514.

worthiness.⁴⁴ Paul addresses the erasure of societal and cultural distinctions. He highlights the radical nature of faith, which transforms individuals and redefines their identity. This message would have been especially impactful in a culturally diverse and hierarchical society.

Hence, "There Is Neither Jew Nor Greek, There Is Neither Slave Nor Free," (v.28a).

This verse marks a pivotal point in the passage, where Paul addresses the elimination of cultural and social distinctions within the Christian community. Paul begins by addressing two major categories of division in the ancient world: ethnicity ("Jew or Greek") and social status ("slave or free"). In the Greco-Roman world, these distinctions were deeply entrenched and often resulted in significant social hierarchies.⁴⁵ By proclaiming their irrelevance in Christ, Paul challenges the existing societal norms. The declaration that "there is neither Jew nor Greek" signifies the breaking down of ethnic barriers. In Christ, distinctions based on one's Jewish or Gentile heritage are nullified. Likewise, neither "slave nor free" emphasizes that social hierarchies are irrelevant within the Christian community (Gal 3:28). All believers share an equal standing before God. This statement reflects a radical equality that would have been revolutionary in the context of the first-century Mediterranean world. It signifies that the Christian community is not defined by social, ethnic, or economic factors but by their common faith in Christ.⁴⁶ This profound theological truth points to the oneness of the body of Christ, where believers, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, become a harmonious whole in Christ. It underscores that faith in Christ unites them into a single body, and their ultimate identity is rooted in Him. This collective unity is a powerful theological concept with practical implications for early Christian communities.

Again, **"There is no male and female" (v.28b):** here, Paul extends the message of unity and equality to the realm of gender. Paul's assertion that "there is no male and female" is a groundbreaking statement within the context of his time. It challenges traditional gender roles and implies that women have equal standing and significance within the Christian community.⁴⁷ This idea aligns with other passages in the New Testament that recognize the contributions of women to the early church. The inclusive language used here is significant. It emphasizes that both men and women are equal participants in God's promises and are granted the same spiritual status. This is a powerful message of gender inclusivity and equality within the body of believers.

Finally, **"For you are all one in Christ Jesus (v.28c):"** This oneness is almost the centre of this paper. This final subsection of verse 28 serves as a unifying and summarizing statement that ties together the previous ideas we have exposed above. The phrase encapsulates the central message of the passage. It emphasizes that the diverse elements of society—ethnicity, social status, and gender—are transcended in the unity found in Christ. Believers share a common identity and purpose in Him. This verse reinforces the theological underpinning of the passage. It is not merely a call for social or cultural unity but a

⁴⁴ Dunne, J. A. (2015). Suffering and covenantal hope in Galatians: a critique of the 'apocalyptic reading' and its proponents. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 68(1), 1–15.

⁴⁵ Keener, C. S. (2018). *Galatians*. Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁶ Berzon, T. (2018). Ethnicity and early Christianity: New approaches to religious kinship and community. *Currents in Biblical Research*, 16(2), 191–227.

⁴⁷ Uzukwu, G. N. (2010). Gal 3, 28 and its alleged relationship to rabbinic writings. *Biblica*, 370-392.

declaration of a profound theological truth.⁴⁸ Believers are unified in their faith . Christ, and this theological unity is the foundation of their communal life.

The message of unity and equality in Christ has significant practical implications for the early Christian communities and for Christians today. It calls believers tve out their faith in a way that transcends societal norms and divisions. It advocates for a truly inclusive and egalitarian Christian community where all members are equal heirs of God's promises.

Conclusion

This paper has undertaken a rigorous examination of the status and rights of women as it relates to that of men in the Umu-Nri communities, drawing inspiration from the transformative message conveyed in Galatians 3:26-28. Umu-Nri traditions, while holding intrinsic value, also exhibit disparities in gender roles and rights, where women are looked at as inferior. By examining the biblical text of Gal 3:26-28, the study uncovered its profound theological message of equality and unity in Christ, transcending divisions based on ethnicity, social status, or gender. The letter to Galatians, especially the chapter and verses under study, provided the needed opportunity to foster equality and respect between opposite genders. This passage challenges the prevailing gender norms within Umu-Nri communities and offers a new perspective rooted in the teachings of Christ. Furthermore, Galatians 3:28 challenges the conventional distinctions between " the Jews and Greeks, slave and free, male and female." This egalitarian message calls for a reconfiguration of societal norms that may perpetuate gender-based inequalities. It advocates for the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, communal activities, and religious leadership.

The paper, therefore, recommends that women se-papere given equal rights with their male counterparts in all aspects of family and societal affairs so as to meet the demands of Gal. 3:26-28. tol enable all (both men and women) to contribute their quota for the proper development of Umu-Nri Communities.

⁴⁸ Maston, J. (2012). The Nature of Salvation History in Galatians. *Journal for the Study of Paul and his Letters*, 2(2), 89–103.