



Introduction

Genesis 1–2 has played a central role in Christian debates about human identity and gender roles. Interpretations differ between egalitarian, complementarian, Midrashic, and philosophical readings. These views range from Christian Patristic philosophy to Jewish Midrashic traditions. The creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 provide the scriptural foundation for understanding human origins. Genesis 1:27 provides the key textual basis for the discussion of shared humanity and gender identity, while Genesis 2:21-22 describes the formation of Eve from Adam's rib. Some Midrashic texts depict Adam as initially androgynous, a motif also found in Plato's Symposium before being separated into male and female, a concept also reflected in Greek philosophy, such as Plato's Symposium (Belay & Muhammad, 2025).

Society and some Christian denominational views, emphasizing that Adam was created as a man from the beginning and that Eve was formed to complete divine harmony. While this interpretation aligns with traditional Christian teachings, contemporary gender discourse challenges historical understandings of gender as binary, calling for a renewed theological and philosophical exploration of the topic. The creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2 have shaped theological and philosophical discussions on gender and human identity for centuries. However, varying interpretations especially between Judeo-Christian traditions and philosophical perspectives have led to ongoing debates about the nature of Adam and Eve made gender distinctions. One of the most intriguing discussions arises from Jewish Midrashic traditions, which suggest that Adam was initially created as both male and female, later separated into two beings. This concept contrasts with the traditional Christian interpretation, which holds that Adam was male and Eve was formed separately from his rib.

The philosophy of Plato presents a similar idea, proposing that early humans were originally androgynous before being divided into male and female. This perspective has influenced various theological and cultural understandings of gender throughout history. However, some Orthodox theology, which is deeply rooted in the Patristic tradition and ancient biblical interpretations, firmly rejects the idea of an androgynous Adam, emphasizing that man and women were distinct from the beginning of creation. This among many other interpretations has uprooted gender disparity, discrimination, prejudice, sexism, imbalance, gap, inequality and bias in different sectors or areas in the society like education, social and cultural norm, economic, religious, health, politics and leadership, and among others.

This study examines how Genesis 1:27 can be read theologically in relation to gender justice and sustainable development. These gaps highlight the need for an interdisciplinary approach that assimilates biblical exegesis, theological reflection, and philosophical reasoning.

Conceptualising Gender Diversity, Justice and Sustainable Development

Gender Diversity

Powell (2011) defined gender as the physiological inference of a someone being either male or female, like expectations and beliefs regarding what kind of attitudes, behaviours, values, knowledge, skills, and interests' areas are more suitable for or typical of one sex than the other. Gender studies examine how societies construct differences, roles, and power relations between men and women. These gender variations influence the manner in which individuals react to the behaviours of others in the work settings or any other group coalition. Gender diversities are visible in prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination. Gender-based inequities in organizations, are reinforced and justified by stereotypes and biases that describe positive characteristics and therefore a higher status to the males.

The term "gender" refers to economic, social and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male or female (UN-Habitat, 2016). In almost all societies, women and men differ in their activities and undertakings, regarding access to and control over resources, and participating in decision-making. Riley (2019) identified gender as a social institution, cultural construct and power tool. According to Ostergaard (2012), the term 'gender' refers to qualitative and interdependent character of women's and men's position in society. On the other hand, Sex refers to the biological state of being male or female. It is important not to reduce gender to women alone, since gender

concerns relations between males and females. Sen (2000) posited that the concept of gender is not limited to the male or female species, but goes further to assess the relations between them as is constantly being renegotiated in the context of changing political, economic, social and cultural environments at the local, national and supra national levels.

Justice

Ogunmodede (2005) identifies justice as the oldest human virtues in the world. It is mentioned among the 42 virtues of “Negative Confessions” called the Book of the Dead (Hilliard 1987) by the Ancient Black Egyptians. The Egyptian term “Maat” is the oldest word for justice and it means “truth, justice and righteousness” of life among men and before the gods. In view of the various meaning to the concept of justice, Macquarrie (1967) in the “Dictionary of Ethics” opines that several meanings can be actually given to justice, namely: Justice in the oldest sense; justice in the narrow sense; and justice in the proper sense. Nwaezuoke (2011) pictured impartiality, integrity, rightness and fairness as constituting the right notion of justice.

Justice is central to the biblical narrative. The prophets continually denounce systems of oppression and call for equitable structures (Amos 5:24, Micah 6:8). Jesus’ ministry emphasized the inclusion of marginalized individuals, including women (Luke 8:1-3; John 4). Gender justice, therefore, is not a modern invention but a biblical imperative. The failure of religious institutions to uphold this justice reflects a misinterpretation of scripture, often shaped by patriarchal cultural norms rather than divine intent (Trible, 1984).

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development can be defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations General Assembly, 1987). Albeit somewhat vague, this concept of sustainable development aims to maintain economic advancement and progress while protecting the long-term value of the environment; it “provides a framework for the integration of environment policies and development strategies” (United Nations General Assembly, 1987).

Sustainable development is the long-term stability of the economy and environment; this is only achievable through the integration and acknowledgement of economic, environmental, and social concerns throughout the decision making process (Stoddart, 2011).

Exegesis of Genesis 1:26-28

The narrator opens Genesis 1:26-28 with a statement wayyômer ʾēlōhîm nāʾāseh ʾādām. It is translated as “and God said, let us make humankind”. This indicates the Creator’s declaration of his intention to create humankind. ʾādām denotes humankind, male and female, as evident in its relation to zākār (male) and ʾunāqēbāh (female) in Genesis 1:27. Its appearance in Genesis 5:2 depicts the same sense. It is attested in Genesis 5:2 that God created them, male and female, blessed them, and called their name ʾādām. It is important to note that ʾādām is referring to both the male and the female in this context and not exclusively to the male. This then differs from its usage in the context of Genesis 2 where ʾādām with the definite article refers to “the man” and for that matter exclusively the male. God’s intention to create humankind in Genesis 1:26 is seen in the dominion mandate. Humankind was created to rule over all other creations. wayyirdû in Genesis 1:26 is the phrase that depicts the divine and cultural mandate bestowed upon ʾādām (humankind) to rule over creation, following the Creator’s declaration of his intention to create them as discussed.

wayyirdû appears jussive in meaning and a Hebrew compound of waw particle conjunction with the Qal imperfect 3rd person masculine plural of the verb rādā (rule). According to Gesenius, the jussive with the waw in conditional sentences depending on an imperative or cohortative expresses an intention or an assurance of a contingent occurrence as in Genesis 24:51; “Take her and go, and let her be”. Year 2024 54 Volume XXIV Issue II Version I (2024) Global Journal of Human Social Science In this context, wayyirdû is a verbal compound of the contingent occurrence, dependent upon its preceding expression whose verb appears in a cohortative sense as nāʾāseh. Thus, in Genesis 1:26, the Creator declares his intention to create humankind, followed by a conditional statement of humankind having to rule over His creation with wayyirdû the verbal phrase of the conditional statement. It has been concluded with the affirmation thereof that God’s purpose in creating humankind is to rule over the whole of His

creation: the universe. Though the universe in its Hebrew form is not mentioned in the narrative, the literary style of Merismus is adopted in expressing it. The reason why *haššāma'yim*, *hayyām*, and *hā'ā'reš* are mentioned in Genesis 1:26 is to represent the universe but enumerating on its parts (the heavens, the sea, and the earth) and therefore create what is called a merismus. According to Willem, whether *ereš* means earth or land is a subject of controversy, however, the expression *kol-hā'ā'reš* frequently means the whole earth, rather than just the whole land. When combined with *haššāma'yim* (heavens), the phrase "heaven and earth" expresses the totality of the created order; thus, the universe, as the opening verse of Genesis succinctly expresses it. The narrator then adopts the literary style of merismus to identify the universe with the mentioning of *haššāma'yim*, *hayyām*, and *hā'ā'reš* and the care for the universe is entrusted to the man. The purpose of the creation of humankind is thus to rule over the universe: to be its steward. Furthermore, this divine mandate is not exclusively given to the male. Still, both the male and the female, hence the verbal phrase, *wəyirdū* appears in the plural form comprising both male and female and the use of *ādām* likewise connotes both male and female.

Created in God's Image and Gender Debate

Christians have employed the Bible over the centuries for guidance on varied issues, many of which have sparked heated debates. Debates surrounding these issues remain unabated and in many parts of the world, one of these is the contentious issue of gender roles in the church and society. As the Bible remains the authoritative scripture for Christians, Genesis 1 and 2 have become the sources of reference for the gender debate in support of or against gender equality. In opposing gender equality, some arguments are put forward by scholars through the utilization and interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2. Polydrous, for instance, reviewed the works of Milton about the interpretation of the image of God in Genesis 1:27 and debunks Milton's view that man's status is elevated based on his nearness to God's image which effectively diminishes woman's status. Milton was strongly convinced by St. Paul's position that "the woman is not primarily and immediately the image of God but the man".

However, critical study of the text brings to light that the woman was primarily part of the image of God as the use of the terminology, *ādām*, about the creation of humanity in the image of God in Genesis 1:27, is a generic term that stood for both the male and female. It is therefore stated categorically in the text, "male and female, he created them". Tribble asserts that the creation of the woman finally happens in the Yahwist account of creation, after the making of the garden, the man, trees, and animals. Consequently, some biblical commentators claim female subordination based on the chronology of these events. According to Tribble, these commentators argue that the Priestly account espouses the egalitarianism of the sexes because both the man and woman are created simultaneously, whereas the Yahwist account makes a woman a lesser and inferior sex because she is created after the man.

However, the argument of these commentators that the woman is inferior to the man according to the Yahwist account can be rebutted on the basis that the trees and the animals would also be superior to the woman since they were all created before the woman. II. Creation of Humankind and the Gender Debate Christians have employed the Bible over the centuries for guidance on varied issues, many of which have sparked heated debates. Debates surrounding these issues remain unabated and in many parts of the world, one of these is the contentious issue of gender roles in the church and society. As the Bible remains the authoritative scripture for Christians, Genesis 1 and 2 Luis Dizon, Hansie Fernandes and Robert Grooves. *Complementarian and Egalitarian Approaches to Biblical Theology within Evangelical Protestantism*, (2013): 3. Frances Raday, "Culture, Religion, and Gender." *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 1, no. 4 (2003): 655. 7 Emmanuel Kojo Ennin Antwi, "Church Involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Biblical Antecedent vis-à-vis the Society's Attitude to Wealth." *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 44, no 2 (2018), 4 5; Chimwemwe Harawa-Katumbi, Froula endorses the traditional interpretations of Genesis 2 that impede gender equality and asserts that Adam's authority and superiority are derived from his act of naming the animals in the absence of Eve.

Thus, the subordination of the woman can be confirmed because the authority to name the animals was solely bestowed upon the man.¹⁴ She argues further that in the Yahwist account of creation, God creates man first and prohibits him from eating from the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil even before the woman comes into being.



The woman, meanwhile, is not only formed second but formed from the rib of Adam, and the rib as the “male womb” affirms the origin of humanity out of the male spirit, hence the woman’s subordination to the man. Froula in her view, interprets Genesis 2 to promote gender inequality using the naming of the animals solely by the man and the creation of the woman from the man as her basis. Aside from these interpretations which elevate the status of a man as against that of a woman, other interpretations seek to bring the woman at par with the man. In contrast with Froula’s views, Galinski perceives the rib as a symbol of equality between the man and the woman and has nothing to do with the subordination of the woman to the man in their relationship. Drawing upon Galinski’s view, one can note that the rib depicts equality of the sexes with further insight provided in subsequent arguments. Galinski, further asserts that as to the woman owing her existence to the man because of her being created from his rib, it is worthy of note that God without any aid, did the creation. God created the man from dust first and subsequently created the woman from the man’s rib when he put him into a deep sleep. Given this, deriving the woman out of the man does not imply subordination but affirms the purpose for which she was created. Thus, she was created from and for man to fulfil the perfection and goodness of God’s creation that “it is not good for the man to be alone” in Genesis 1

Drawing upon Galinski’s position, Joyce takes the argument further by asserting that the creator formed the woman from substance gained from the side of the man. 18 This consequently had nothing to do with ribs. Moreover, nowhere did the Hebrew language use *šēlāc* for rib as in the Old Testament. *Šēlāc* is translated as “side”, “corner” and “chamber” in its 49 occurrences in the Old Testament. In this regard, material for the creation of the woman suggests equality of the sexes owing to its interpretation by Joyce as the side and not the rib. One pertinent interpretation of Genesis 2:18 that supports gender equality was put forward by Eichler. According to him, the word *cēzer* never refers to a person of subordinated position, as it appears 19 other times in the Old Testament. While it is always appropriate to interpret it as “help” or “helper”, *cēzer* implies a helper who delivers or rescues or a person who is even superior to the one being helped. The word *neged* (*kāneḡdō*), combined with *cēzer*, also suggests equality, thus a helper who is a counterpart. This implies that the woman was created as a counterpart of the man based on the nuances of *cēzer* and *kāneḡdō* as it is used about the creation of the woman.

These above arguments explain whether subordination or equality was the original relationship that existed between the man and the woman in the creation narratives of Genesis. The divergent interpretations either promote or impede gender equality. The subsequent section would then offer readings into the text to establish whether the texts promote or impede gender equality.

Theological Interpretation of Gender and the Bible

Gender is one of the most debated subjects in contemporary theology. Biblical interpretation of gender involves examining how Scripture portrays the relationship between biological sex, social roles, identity, and human dignity. Throughout Christian history, theologians have sought to understand gender through the lenses of creation, sin, redemption, and the kingdom of God. The foundation of biblical theology of gender is found in the creation account: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). This passage teaches several key principles: Both male and female are created in the image of God (*Imago Dei*); Men and women possess equal dignity and worth before God; Sexual differentiation is part of God’s creative design; Human identity is rooted primarily in being God’s image-bearers.

In Genesis 2, the creation of woman as a “helper” (*‘ezer*) for man has been interpreted in various ways. Some theologians argue it suggests complementary roles, while others emphasize mutual partnership because the same Hebrew word is often used for God’s help to humanity. Genesis 3 describes the entrance of sin into the world. Many theologians argue that distorted gender relationships emerged after the fall: Domination and conflict replaced harmony; Patriarchal structures became common; Human relationships were affected by sin. The Old Testament reflects a predominantly patriarchal society. Men often occupied positions of leadership, yet women also played significant roles: Deborah served as judge and military leader (Judges 4–5); Miriam exercised prophetic ministry; Huldah provided authoritative prophetic guidance. These examples suggest that God worked through both men and women in significant ways. Jesus’ treatment of women was remarkable within first-century culture: He taught



women publicly; He welcomed women among his followers; Women were witnesses to his resurrection; He challenged social barriers that marginalized women. Examples include Mary Magdalene, Martha, and Mary of Bethany. Many theologians see Jesus as restoring the dignity and value of women within God's kingdom. The writings of Paul the Apostle contain passages that have generated extensive debate. Galatians 3:28 states: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Many scholars interpret this as emphasizing spiritual equality and equal access to salvation. Other passages, such as 1 Corinthians 11, 1 Corinthians 14, and 1 Timothy 2, discuss leadership, worship, and authority. Interpretations generally fall into two major perspectives: Men and women are equal in value; God assigns distinct roles to men and women; Certain leadership offices are reserved for men.

In traditional theological readings of the Bible, gender roles were often viewed as divinely ordained and fixed. However, modern theological perspectives that integrate gender equality and gender fluidity have begun to challenge this interpretation. The Genesis narrative of Adam and Eve, for example, has been reexamined in light of both historical context and modern gender theory to argue for a more egalitarian interpretation of gender (Meyers, 1988). Through the lens of modern theology, biblical passages traditionally used to justify gender inequality, such as 1 Timothy 2:12 and Ephesians 5:22-24, are being reinterpreted in a way that acknowledges the cultural context in which they were written, rather than as universal or timeless mandates (Ehrman, 1999).

Theological institutions have played a significant role in encouraging this shift, allowing for more inclusive readings of the Bible that support women's leadership roles and gender equality within the church. Additionally, theological institutions are increasingly adopting a more holistic understanding of gender that transcends the binary understanding of male and female and opens the door for discussions of non-binary and gender-fluid identities. This shift reflects a growing recognition that biblical teachings on gender must be understood within a broader cultural and historical context and must evolve in response to contemporary understandings of gender and identity (Butler, 2004).

Gender Diversity as Divine Mandate for Sustainable Development

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Empirical studies link gender equity to improved health, education, and economic outcomes. (UN Women, 2023). Theologically, sustainable development is about shalom holistic peace and well-being. Without gender justice, such peace remains incomplete. When half of humanity is restricted by discriminatory norms or structural barriers, the entire community suffers. Churches and faith-based organizations must, therefore, integrate gender equity into their missions as a form of stewardship and discipleship (Myers, 2011).

The persistence of male-dominated leadership structures within religious institutions undermines the message of the gospel. Different Christian traditions respond differently like the Roman Catholic Church maintains a male priesthood while affirming equal dignity of men and women, many Protestant denominations ordain women and some evangelical churches maintain complementarian leadership structures. But egalitarian view whereby men and women are equal in value and ministry, leadership roles should be determined by gifting rather than gender and that Restrictive passages addressed specific historical situations.

The early church featured prominent women leaders (Romans 16), and Paul's declaration in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" challenges essentialist gender roles. Feminist and womanist theologians have illuminated the ways in which scripture has been used to marginalize rather than liberate (Grant, 1995; Fiorenza, 1983). Reimagining theology through an inclusive lens is essential to counter patriarchal distortions and fulfill the divine mandate of justice.

Traditional biblical exegesis underscores the complementary relationship between male and female. The interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 has historically been understood as affirming distinct gender roles—Adam as the first man and Eve as the first woman, created in a complementary manner to fulfill God's plan for human society. In traditional Christianity, male headship and female submission have often been linked to this exegesis, with Eve's creation from Adam's rib symbolizing the unity and interdependence between men and women.



The traditional Christian interpretation aligns with the Patristic views of Augustine and Tertullian, who emphasized male leadership in the family and society, using the Genesis account as a foundation (Augustine, 1998; Tertullian, 1885). This idea has been deeply ingrained in Christian theology, with gender roles considered part of the divine order and thus unchangeable. The Ethiopian Orthodox interpretation also follows this line, emphasizing that the creation of gender was intended to be complementary and distinct from the start (Kaplan, 1992). However, these interpretations are increasingly questioned in light of modern feminist and gender theories that advocate for the fluidity of gender. For instance, Judith Butler (2004) argues that gender is performative and not inherently tied to biological sex, challenging the rigid male-female dichotomy. This contrasts the challenge to traditional readings of Genesis, which, while affirming the complementary roles of male and female, offer no space for alternative or fluid identities.

As contemporary gender theories evolve, religious traditions increasingly need to engage with these shifts. The traditional biblical exegesis that separates men and women into distinct roles may face a crisis of relevance in a world that recognizes multiple gender identities. Scholars may need to revisit the biblical narratives and theological frameworks surrounding creation, acknowledging that a binary understanding of gender may no longer capture the complexity of human experience. Theological debates about gender roles—especially regarding leadership in the church and family—are already at the forefront of religious discussions. The growing acceptance of gender equality in many Christian denominations, as seen in the ordination of women, challenges traditional interpretations of Genesis that uphold male leadership as divinely ordained. The shift toward gender inclusivity in some Jewish and Christian communities may push the biblical exegesis to engage more with contemporary gender

Theological and Practical Implications of Genesis 1:26-28 for Gender Diversities and Roles among Christians

The Midrashic tradition's portrayal of an androgynous Adam has profound theological implications for how gender and humanity are understood within Jewish thought. According to this interpretation, Adam's dual-gendered nature suggests that gender is not an intrinsic, immutable characteristic of human beings, but rather something created by God for specific purposes (Neusner, 1985). The separation of Adam into male and female represents a divine act of distinction, marking a transition from a singular unity to a complementary duality. This perspective challenges traditional theological views that gender is divinely preordained and fixed. Instead, gender identity is not static but subject to divine will and creation. It suggests that gender, in its binary form, is a necessary distinction for the functioning of human society, but not a fundamental aspect of the original human condition (Berkovits, 1993). Moreover, the Midrashic interpretation highlights humanity before the creation of gender roles. If Adam was male and female, this unity reflects the idea that all humans, regardless of gender, were created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), with equal worth and dignity. These challenges the idea of male superiority and provides a basis for more inclusive theological perspectives on gender equality in contemporary religious thought.

As indicated in the study, Christianity can impact gender roles through the teachings found in Judeo-Christian scriptures, which some churches interpret as endorsing patriarchy. However, society is transitioning towards gender equality due to urbanization, female education, single parenting, and increased economic opportunities for women. It is reasonable to assert that the perspectives Nigeria. Certain churches espouse principles of gender equality, advocating for equal opportunities for women akin to men in familial, ecclesiastical, and societal domains. This represents an egalitarian understanding of gender, where women are permitted to share equal roles with men in the church, society, and the marital home.

Conversely, other churches adhere to traditional Christian perspectives concerning women's roles that constrain their engagement in family, ecclesiastical matters, and society, hence opposing gender equality. In these religious entities, women's roles within the church are restricted, and their consecration as clergy is expressly prohibited. Nonetheless, a subset of churches promotes gender equality within ecclesiastical and societal spheres but does not extend this principle to marital relationships representing those views held by complementarians. Despite the high level of patriarchal norms of Christianity in the society, it has made significant strides from patriarchy to a society of gender equality. The study attributes this progress to female education, single parenting, gender norms and teachings of some churches and the wider economic roles of women in Nigeria.



Implications of Genesis 1:26-28 for Gender roles among Christians in Nigerian Society As indicated in the study, Christianity can impact gender roles through the teachings found in Judeo-Christian scriptures, which some churches Despite varying interpretations, an analysis of Genesis 1:26-28 suggests that these texts do not promote gender inequality. Nigeria has also made strides towards gender-based parity in contemporary times. As a result, Christians can refer to Genesis 1:26-28 as a framework for determining the appropriate roles of both men and women in family life, church, and society. In society, women must be accorded equal rights, opportunities, and roles as their male counterparts provided that the dominion mandate to rule over the universe is bestowed upon both the male and female in Genesis 1:27. Education has proven that women are equally level-headed as their male counterparts and for this reason, their opinions must count in the decision-making process in the society. Women must be given the nod to head any institution in society and enjoy equal representation in governance since the mandate to rule the universe is bestowed upon both males and females. It is crucial to acknowledge women's invaluable role as partners and supporters in familial relationships, rather than relegating them to subordinate or servile positions. As Genesis 2:18 wisely counsels, women should be regarded as equals to their husbands.

In modern societies, education has served as a powerful tool in empowering women to achieve greater social, political, and economic autonomy. By achieving economic independence, women can also make meaningful financial contributions to their families, thereby easing the financial pressures on their husbands. Churches need to recognize the equal creation of women in the image of God and their mandate to be stewards of the universe. As seen in the Old Testament, women like Deborah, a judge and prophetess, played significant leadership roles. In the New Testament, women were instrumental in the growth of the church. They were the first witnesses of Christ's resurrection and were the first to proclaim the gospel message, which is a pivotal part of Christian theology. Therefore, churches should assign more leadership roles to women using interpretations of Genesis 1:26-28 as the basis.

Conclusion

Embracing gender diversity is not optional for communities of faith; it is a divine mandate rooted in the very identity of humanity as bearers of God's image. Although theological interpretation of gender in the Bible begins with the affirmation that both men and women are created in the image of God and are equally valuable before Him. While Christians differ on questions of gender roles and church leadership, most theological traditions agree that Scripture calls men and women to mutual respect, service, and participation in God's redemptive mission. The ongoing challenge for biblical theology is to remain faithful to the biblical text while thoughtfully engaging contemporary questions about gender and human identity. Therefore, by advancing gender justice, the church aligns itself with the mission of God in history seeking peace, justice, and sustainable life for all. The call to justice is a call to transformation of theology, of systems, and of hearts toward the flourishing of all God's creation. In exploring the relationship between Genesis, gender diversity, and justice, this study has highlighted how theological and philosophical traditions shape societal understanding of gender roles in sustainable development. The research has shown that biblical exegesis and philosophical discourse, as well as debates on the creation and gender roles, which offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on gender duality. The theological interpretations of Genesis 1 and 2, emphasize complementarity between male and female, suggesting that both sexes are essential to the divine plan. Meanwhile, the Jewish Midrash and philosophical traditions like Plato's Symposium introduce the concept of androgyny, challenging the traditional understanding of distinct gender roles. These diverse interpretations open the door to dialogue on gender fluidity, equality, and human identity in contemporary discussions.

The findings point to a crucial intersection of faith, philosophy, and culture, where gender roles must be reexamined in light of modern gender theory and social justice movements. While traditional views rooted in religious texts still influence many societies, the ongoing gender diversity discourse requires a rethinking of the theological and philosophical underpinnings of gender identity and human roles in bringing about sustainable development in the Nigerian society.

Recommendations

The paper recommends the following steps for churches, seminaries, and faith-based organizations.



- Ecclesial Reform: Churches should review ordination, leadership, and governance policies to reduce gender exclusion.
- Theological Education: Seminaries should include courses on gender, hermeneutics, and contextual theology.
- Advocacy and Policy: Faith communities should engage policy debates on women's rights, education, and participation.
- Global Partnerships: "Churches can align social programs with SDG 5 and related development goals.
- The paper also recommends a fresh evaluation of theological interpretations in light of contemporary gender debate.
- Integration of Gender Theory with theology should be embraced. There is a need to explore how philosophical interpretations like those in Plato's Symposium can be incorporated into theological discussions of human identity and gender fluidity.
- Promotion of inclusive gender narratives; modern religious discourse should embrace inclusive gender narratives that respect traditional values and gender equality in promoting a more just and equal society.

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