



**A Christian Analysis of Indecent Dressing in
South West Nigeria**

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ABSTRACT

Indecent dressing among ladies in contemporary Nigerian Church is a serious issue that is of great concern to many people especially biblical scholars. The existing literature shows that even though so much has been written on the subject matter in connection to higher institutions in Nigeria, there appears to be little on the Nigerian Church. Therefore, this paper examines indecent dressing among ladies in South west Nigeria with a view to sensitizing Christians on the dangers associated with it. Historical and exegetical methods are adopted in the paper. Historically, attempt would be made to review related literature on dressing in biblical tradition. Exegetically, key words that are related to dressing code are interpreted with the use of Hebrew and Greek lexicon. It has been discovered that biblical injunctions on dressing are centered on modesty. Also, individuals involved in indecent dressing have various reasons which include self-esteem, public recognition among others. Furthermore, some pastors have stopped preaching against indecent dressing as they would not like to lose their members. The paper concludes that indecent dressing is not biblical. Therefore, parents and pastors must ensure that their children are morally educated.

Key words: Indecent dressing, Christian, Church, Modesty, Biblical Injunctions

Introduction

The culture of decency particularly in dressing has been in practice by humankind from time immemorial. Traditionally, and from the biblical perspective, the primary purpose of wearing clothes is to cover one's nakedness. Various reasons have been given as to the purpose of wearing clothes, some of which include: to maintain decency, to escape the rough weather, for beautification, for protection from germs and diseases, and to express personality among

others.¹ Ejila argues that clothes are worn to protect the human body from harsh weather condition and environmental hazards.² However, the high level of indecency particularly in the aspect of dressing is a serious problem in the contemporary Nigerian society as much emphasis seems to be placed on self-recognition and attraction. Ikuedowo notes that “indecent dressing is a social malady in the society today, especially by the youths.”³ It is a deliberate means of exposing vital parts of the body to the public. Indecent dressing is like an epidemic in the Nigerian society particularly among the youths. Today people go out almost half naked or nude to parties. Unfortunately, this has also been extended to Churches all in the name of looking attractive. The level of indecency in the Church is growing on a daily basis and ladies are guiltiest as many of them expose their vital parts-breasts such as thighs and chest to the congregation. These sensitive parts of the body are supposed to be covered properly so as to show respect to God and the worshipers in the Church. Incidentally, while some pastors are making efforts to speak against indecent dressing, several others have stopped preaching against it possibly so as not to lose their so-called members.

The pertinent questions that are raised in this paper include: what are the reasons for as well as causes and effects of indecent dressing in the Church in particular and Yoruba society in general? How can we check indecent dressing in the Church in particular and the Yoruba society? Approaching the paper from the Christian perspective, effort is made to survey the epidemic nature of indecent dressing in the Yoruba society and to examine both the Hebrew and Greek terms for dressing

¹ See: “10 Key Reasons for Wearing Clothes” in *fashion2apparel.blogspot.com*. Retrieved on 28/9/2018.

² E. E. Ejila, “Clothing Motivations and Behaviour of Female Undergraduates in Universities in Benue State” M.Ed. Research Project, Department of Vocational Teacher Education (Home Economics Education), University of Nigeria, Nsukka, (2014), 24.

³ Yomi Ikuedowo, “Combating Indecent Dressing on Campus” *The Hope* 4 March, 2016. See also *the hope newspapers.com*.. Retrieved on 02/02/2018.

with the aim of understanding its biblical concept. Specifically, exegesis of Genesis 3:7 & 21 and 1 Timothy 2:9-10 is carried out. The paper assumes that indecent dressing is a common feature among categories of people especially among the youths. However, the focus of this paper is indecent dressing among female worshipers in South west of Nigeria. Even though female youths are mostly guilty of indecent dressing, a considerable number of female adults are also culprits.

Theoretical Framework

To begin with, the noun form of the word 'dress' in the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English has different meanings, one of which is “a piece of clothing worn by a woman or girl that covers her body from her shoulder to somewhere on her leg.”⁴ Hence, a dress is worn to cover the body, that is, one's nakedness. Decent dressing, in this paper, is an acceptable dressing in the Yoruba Traditional society such as similar to biblical injunctions. Indecent dressing, on the other hand, is a provocative and unacceptable way of dressing which is at variance with the traditional way of dressing as vital parts of human body are exposed to the view of the public. Indecent dresses include skimpy skirts that are about one inch longer than the pants; dresses that are transparent, revealing thighs and other vital parts of the body for the public to see.⁵

Various theories have been identified with indecent dressing in Nigeria, some of which are modesty theory, immodesty theory, down theory, biological theory, psycho-social theory, theory of risky sexual harassment, protection theory, adornment theory and modernization theory.⁶ The modesty theory is adopted in this paper.

⁴ “Dress” in *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, (Essex, England: Pearson Educational Limited, 2013), 420.

⁵ Gdagebe & Mawuli, “The Impact of Indecent Dressing on the Academic Performance of Students in Tertiary Institutions, a Case Study of Ho Polytechnic in Ghana,” 165.

⁶ For details see F. Chukwudi & A. A. Gbakorun, “Indecent Dressing and Sexual Harassment Among Undergraduates of Nasarawa State University, Keffi”

Modesty Theory

One of the definitions of modesty is “unwillingness to show your body or do anything that may attract sexual interest.”⁷ Hence, modesty is explained as the covering of the body according to propriety which is determined by culture, environment, age, location and situational factors. Modesty theory is also known as the Mosaic Theory since its origin is from the Old Testament. The biblical reference for the theory is Genesis 3:7 where Adam and Eve had a new awareness of themselves and each other in their nakedness and shame which made them to seek cover.⁸ The theory stresses that clothes are worn primarily to conceal or cover nakedness. The theory opposes adornment of gorgeous and scanty clothes. Clothes put on must be moderate with the aim of preventing disease, disgust or shame.

The weaknesses of modesty theory have been articulated by Maphosa.⁹ One, body parts that clothes are used to conceal differ from culture to culture, therefore the modesty theory is not universal. Two, expressions of modesty are habits set by the society one lives in. They are not instinctual. Three, even within one particular culture, variations occur depending on age, gender, sub-cultural groupings, locations and situational factors. However, this paper subscribes to the modesty theory as it corroborates the biblical injunctions along with the traditional Yoruba culture.

Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Anthropology in Practice, Volume 3, No. 2, (2011): 25-31 & E. E. Ejila, “Clothing Motivations and Behaviour of Female Undergraduates in Universities in Benue State” M.Ed. Research Project, Department of Vocational Teacher Education (Home Economics Education), University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2014, 41-45.

⁷ “Modesty” in *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, (Essex, England: Pearson Educational Limited, 2013), 918.

⁸ A. Maphosa, “Biblical Values on Dress in Teaching Clothing and Textiles” Institute for Christian Teaching Education Department of Seventh-day Adventists, Solusi University, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, 2005, 219.

⁹ For details, see Maphosa, “Biblical Value on Dress in Teaching Clothing and Textiles”, 219-20.

Dressing in the Contemporary Yoruba Society and Church

The traditional Yoruba society of South west of Nigeria places a very high premium on decency. Ademuleya classifies the use for dress among the Yoruba into three: clothes of daily use, clothes of prestige and clothes for rites/rituals (religious purpose).¹⁰ Dresses of Yoruba men include *agbada* (flowing garment), *buba* (short loose garment) *sokoto* (trouser) among others. For special occasions, ladies wear a four-piece attire: *iro* (wrapper), *buba* (blouse), *gele* (head gear or tie) and *ipele/iborun* (shawl).¹¹ Describing this complete outfit for a typical Yoruba woman, Agoke says:

Buba is designed like a blouse with long or short sleeves; the *iro* is tied around the waist to hold the *buba* in place. *Gele* is a head gear that adds aesthetics and beauty to the female Yoruba's dress while *iborun* gives completeness to the outfit. *Iborun* is usually hung on the shoulder and matches with the fabrics of *iro* and *buba*. *Gele* may not necessarily be the fabric with the outfit but colour has to be complementary.¹²

Women also use accessories and jewelleries to complement their dressing. These include: beads *ileke* or *iyun* (worn as necklace), *lagidigba* (worn around the waist by young girls) and *bebe* (worn by married women around their hips). There are also *egba* (bangles), for the neck, hands and legs made of *wura* (gold) or *fadaka* (silver) and same as *yeri-eti* (earrings). In addition, women compliment their dressing with various types of hairstyles: plaited in different forms.¹³

¹⁰ B.A. Ademuleya, "Textiles and Dresses" in *Culture and Customs of the Yoruba* Toyin Falola & Akintunde Akinyemi (eds) (Austin TX: Pan-African University Press, 2017), 290.

¹¹ Ademuleya, 291.

¹² A. Agoke, "Fashion" in *Culture and Customs of the Yoruba*, 298.

¹³ Ademuleya, 291.

However, the level of decency has deteriorated in the contemporary Yoruba society as indecent dressing is found everywhere including the Church. Perhaps this is due to the influence of Western education, culture, globalization and civilization which have generally made people individualistic and self-centered. Ademuleya opines that changes in Yoruba women's dress code could be linked with a number of factors which includes: introduction of Christian and Islamic religions; embrace of western life style; the influence of Sierra Leone Saro's dress code; as well as the exposition to dress styles of other nations during the well celebrated Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) which Nigeria hosted in 1977.¹⁴ Renne on her part, links the change in dress pattern from the traditional way to the origin of Christian missionary experience in the early nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in South west of Nigeria. At that time, part of the conversion process included the cloning of new styles of dress and the adoption of new names provided by European missionaries as exemplified by Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther who was always wearing European clothes.¹⁵ I am of the opinion that indecent dressing is gaining ground in South west Nigeria because of too much freedom and desire for creativity which is now the norm of the society. Many young people would like to be on their own with no monitoring by the elderly ones in the Church and society. Also, the problem can be traced to the decay in the society and the loss of moral values. So, the change of dress sensitivity has metamorphosed into what is called indecent dressing as several ladies are not ashamed to dress half-naked; exposing their armpit, buttock, breast, thighs and chest to the people. Igboin says:

¹⁴ Ademuleya, 292.

¹⁵ E.P. Renne, "Cloth and Conversion: Yoruba Textiles and Ecclesiastical Dress" in *Undressing Religion: Commitment and Conversion from a Cross Cultural Perspective* Linda B. Arthur (Ed.) (Oxford: Berg; 2000), 7 & E.A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political Analysis* (Essex, U.K.: Longman Group; 1966), 206.

Thus such fashionable outfits as mini-skirts, low-slung revealing the navel, see-thru blouses, non-use of bra, bikini, hot-pants, micro-mini-skirts, spaghetti, sleeveless blouses, fish skirts, monostrap, palazzo pants, hipsters, silted pants, halter neck, triangle tops, scrappy top necks, number tops, cupy tops, bell bottom, patra, lakra, tight fitting jeans, body-hugs, show-me-your-chest, strapless, wicked straps, tubes, show-me-your-belly, party wear, show-me-your-breasts and others that expose the cleavage of the body are regarded as indecent dressing.¹⁶

Chukwudi and Gbakorun argue strongly that indecent dressing is a product of modelling top movie stars who dress to complement the parts played in a particular movie.¹⁷ They concluded that indecent dressing has brought about sexual harassment which often leads to unprotected sex, having multiple sex partners and putting them at high risk of contracting all forms of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) as well as unwanted pregnancy.¹⁸

Uzobo, Olomu and Ayinmoro wrote with the aim of filling the gap through an investigative analysis of the impact of indecent dressing on body posture and other health related issues as well as ascertaining the spate of the new dress pattern (new fashion) among selected male higher school students in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. They observed that many young people in Nigeria have been influenced by television, internet and

¹⁶ B.O. Igboin, "National Dress Code: The Legal and Moral Issues." In *Religion and Nigerian Nation: Some Topical Issues*. Celestine O. Isiramen; Friday J. Imaekhai & Benson O. Igboin (eds.) (Ibadan: En-Joy Press & Books, 2010), 222.

¹⁷ Chukwudi & Gbakorun, "Indecent Dressing and Sexual Harassment among Undergraduates of Nasarawa State University, Keffi", 25.

¹⁸ Chukwudi & A. A. Gbakorun, "Indecent Dressing and Sexual Harassment Among Undergraduates of Nasarawa State University, Keffi", 30.

peer groups and so they dress indecently primarily for self-recognition and for the sake of fashion. It is as if failure to dress like the Europeans and Americans cause them to be perceived as primitive and unexposed.¹⁹

Oli's paper on indecent dressing is very educative as the author examined the social determinants and effects of indecent dressing among female undergraduates in higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. She argued that most of the ladies have been influenced by Western dress styles, peer or social group pressure, mass media among others to dress provocatively and seductively. And that the effects of indecent dressing include sexual harassment, contraction of HIV/AIDS, prostitution, ritual killing, poor academic performance and unwanted pregnancy.²⁰ Writing on what he observed in the place of worship, Ademiluka notes:

In many of the churches I visited many ladies left their heads uncovered, some in miniskirts showing their thighs, some in sleeveless gowns showing a large proportion of the body. Many of them had their finger nails and lips painted. I also saw that wearing trousers to the Church is fast becoming a fashion for many female members of these Churches.²¹

Unfortunately, some of these ladies are actively involved in worship services in leading praise worship and ushering among others. The motive for indecent dressing in the contemporary Church and society is

¹⁹ E. Uzobo, O. M. Olomu, & D. A. Ayinmoro, "Indecent Dressing and Awareness of Health Problems: A Study of 'Sagging' Dress Pattern Among Selected Male High School Students in Bayelsa State" *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*. Volume 7, No. 1(March 2014): 34.

²⁰ N. P. Oli, "Theoretical Reflections on Social Determinants and Effects of Indecent Dressing among Female Undergraduates in Higher Institutions of Learning in Nigeria" *International Journal of Health and Social Inquiry*. Volume 3, No.1,(2017):115-29.

²¹ S. O. Ademiluka, *Issues at Stake in the Contemporary Nigerian Church* (Ilorin: Nathadex Publishers;2007), 41.

not far-fetched. Many people dress for the purpose of self-recognition. They would like to be attractive especially those searching for a life partner. Also, some dress with the aim of emulating the example of a particular celebrity or so-called superstar in the community, nation and film industry.

Hebrew and Greek terms in Relation to Dressing

There are some Hebrew and Greek words used in connection with dressing and our understanding of them will shed light on the Biblical concept of dressing. The first word is *kitonet* which is a feminine noun and it means tunic or coat.²² Tunic is a long shirt like garment made usually out of linen. It is an ordinary garment for men and women. (Gen 3:21; 37:7, 31 etc.). It can be made of skin as in Gen 3:21 or can be made with long shirts and sleeves (Gen 37:3, 23, 32). Women or king's daughters wear them (2 Sam 13:18-19; Song of Songs 5:3). *Kitonet* is also a special coat for Priests (Exod 28:4, 39; 40:14; Lev 8:7, 13; 10:5; Ezra 2:69; Neh 7:69).

The second Hebrew word is *simlah* which is also a feminine noun meaning garment, wrapper or mantle (Gen 9:23; Deut 21:13; 22:5 etc.).²³ *Simlah* is a general word for clothes. It is usually a piece of cloth or wrapper worn as outer garment by a man or woman (Gen 35:2; Exod 22:26; Deut 8:4; 10:18; 21:13; 22:3; Isa 3:6-7; 9:4; 2 Sam 12:20; Ruth 3:4). *Simlah* is used as a covering wrapper while sleeping as demonstrated by Shem and Japheth when they covered Noah in his drunken state (Gen 9:23). In addition, *simlah* is used as covering for article (Exod 12:34; Judges 8:35; 1 Sam 21:10).

²² F. Brown; S. R. Driver; & C. A. Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers;1979), 509.

²³ Brown; Driver; & Briggs, 971.

The third Hebrew word is *beghed* which means raiment or garment. It is a masculine noun which occurs about 200 times in the Hebrew Bible.²⁴ The word signifies any kind of garment or covering for human wear- from the filthy clothing of the leper to the holy robes of the high priest; that is, *beghed* speaks of the ordinary covering of the poor as well as the costly raiment of the rich and noble (Gen 24:53; 28:20; Exod 28:2; Deut 24:17; Judg 8:26; 1 Sam 19:13; 2 Chro 18:9; Est 4:1, 4; Job 13:28; 22:6; 37:17; Psa 22:19; 45:9; 102:27; 109:19; Prov 6:27; 20:16; 25:20; 27:13; Ecc. 9:8; Isa 24:16; 33:22; 37:1; 50:9 etc. Also, *beghed* is used to describe a covering or wrapping cloth of furniture in the Tabernacle (Num 4:6-13; 1 Sam 19:13). On few occasions, *beghed* is used of the outer garment of the people (2 Kgs 7:15).

The fourth Hebrew word is *libush* which is a masculine noun and it means garment, clothing or raiment.²⁵ The verb form of the word, *labash* which means to put on cloth or garment and it occurs about 100 times in the Hebrew Bible. *Libush* is used as garment or clothing in Gen 49:11; Job 24:7; 30:18; 31:19; Prov 27:26; Is 22:19 and Lam 4:14. The word is used in a variety of ways such as woman's raiment (2 Sam 1:24; Prov 31:22), Princess' raiment (Ps 45:14); Warrior's tunic (2 Sam 20:8); raiment for worshippers (2 Kgs 10:22); mourner's garment (Pss 35:13; 69:12); and royal's apparel (Est 6:8; 8:15).

The fifth and last Hebrew word used in connection with garment is *addereth* which is a feminine noun and it means cloak or glory.²⁶ The word is used of an expensive or royal mantle like that of a prophet as in the case Elijah or Jonah (1 Kgs 19:13; 2 Kgs 2:8, 13, 14; Jonah 3:6). The word is equally used of the costly Babylonian mantle which attracted the attention of Achan in Joshua 7:21, 24. In addition, the word is used in connection with the glory or magnificence of vine (Ezek 17:8) or of the shepherds (Zech 11:3).

²⁴ Brown; Driver; & Briggs, 93-4.

²⁵ Brown; Driver; & Briggs, 528.

²⁶ Brown; Driver; & Briggs, 12.

There are four Greek words that are used in connection with clothing or garment. The first word is *imation* which is used to describe any kind of garment (Matt 9:16; Mark 2:21; 5:27; Lk 5:36; 8:27; Heb 1:11-13). Specifically, the word is used in Lk 7:25 in connection with soft clothing and in Rev 3:5, 18; 4:4 in connection with white clothing. Also, the word *imation* is used for outer clothing, garment or robe as in Mat 9:20-1; 24:18; Lk 8:44; 22:36; John 19:2; Rev 19:6.²⁷ The second Greek word is *chiton* which means tunic shirt. It is generally an underwear garment and it is used by both male and female (Mat 10:10; Mark 6:9).²⁸ The third Greek word is *ependutns* which basically means enter garment as in John 21:7.²⁹ The last Greek word is *peribolaion* which means covering or wrapping cloth or garment cf. Heb 1:12. In 1 Cor 11:15, the woman's hair is given to her as covering.³⁰

From the above Hebrew and Greek words used in connection with clothing or dressing, it is obvious that the two basic reasons for wearing clothes are for warmth and for modesty.³¹ Also, Wenham is of the opinion that clothing is “one of the most pervasive of human symbols through which a person's position and role in the society is signal.”³² Put differently, an individual is identified by what he wears. For example, there are royal robes (Est 6:8), mourning garments (2 Sam 14:2), prisoners’ garments (2 Kgs 25:29), priestly garments (Exod 28:2), prophetic and visionary garments (Zech 13:4), etc.³³

²⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* 2nd ed. Revised and Augmented by William F. Arndt; F. Wilbur Gingrich; and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 376.

²⁸ Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 882.

²⁹ Bauer, 285.

³⁰ Bauer, 646.

³¹ O. M. Jerome & F. C. Uroko, “Tearing of Clothes: A Study of an ancient practice in the Old Testament” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 39(1), 1.

³² G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, (Waco, Texas, Word Books Publisher, 1987), 84.

³³ Jerome & Uroko, 1-2.

There are several examples of individuals who dress decently and modestly in the Bible. They include: Rebekah (Gen 24:65), Ruth (Ruth 3:15), Esther (Es 5:1) among others. Unfortunately, there are individuals who shamelessly exposed their nakedness and this is connected with drunkenness (Gen 9:20-23; Hab 2:15), idolatry (Exod 32:25), and demonism (Lk 8:26-39; Acts 19:16) and prostitution (Ezek23). Covering of one's nakedness is encouraged in the Bible. God Himself is interested in the covering of our nakedness. This explains why He made a more lasting garment from the skin for Adam and Eve in Gen 3:21 to replace ordinary leaves which they sew for themselves. Also, nakedness in the Bible is associated with sin and shame as seen in the case of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:7-10) and judgment (Gen 9:22-23; Neh 3:5; Rev. 3:18). Hence, covering of one's nakedness is encouraged throughout the Bible. Incidentally, emphasis is placed on inner and outer garments as noted in the Hebrew and Greek words studied. This means that covering of one's nakedness must be understood spiritually and physically.

Exegesis of Genesis 3:7 and 21

Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew Bible derived its name from the first Hebrew word beresith which means "in the beginning". The Greek form of beresi this toledot which means generation, genealogy or account. Structurally, the word toledot is used at the beginning of major event in the book (Gen 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9 and 37:2).³⁴ Genesis is the book of beginnings - the beginning of the world (1:1-25), human race (1:26-2:25), sin (3:1-7), redemption (3:8-24), family life (4:1-15), civilization (4:16-9:29), nations 10-11), and Hebrew race (12-50).³⁵

³⁴ A. P. Ross, "Genesis" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty, Old Testament*, J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (eds) (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1985), 22-26.

³⁵ Ross, 15.

The book of Genesis has no express record as to who wrote it hence the authorship of the book has been a matter of serious debate between the critical and conservative scholars. The critical scholars on the basis of anachronism in the book, multiple accounts of the same events, disagreements between narratives among others argue that Genesis is made up of different sources - Yahwestic, Eloistic, Deuteronomistic sources and Priestly Code.³⁶ The conservative scholars on the basis of tradition and scripture ascribed the authorship of Genesis (and other books in the Pentateuch) to Moses.³⁷ The book of Genesis is divided into two major parts namely, chapters 1-11 which is centred on the primeval history and chapters 12-50 which deals with patriarchal narratives.

Genesis 3:7 and 21 belong to Genesis 2:4-3:24, which deals with the probation and fall of human in the garden of Eden. The creation of human is totally different from the creation of other creatures. Human is to have dominion over other creatures and to represent God in the world. Human has moral consciousness to choose between right and wrong; good and bad. Adam and Eve were given specific instruction of what to eat and from where. But, the serpent who was craftier than them came in and Eve was convinced to eat the fruit which God had asked them not to eat. She also gave it to Adam who also ate it.

Genesis 3:7 is the outcome of their disobedience. The sentence, “then the eyes of both of them were opened” is a combination of phrases from Genesis 2:25 and 3:5. The serpent's prediction of opened eyes was fulfilled but then it was more than what they bargained for. Adam and Eve realized that they were naked. Matthew Henry says:

Their eyes were opened as Balaam in Number 23:31.
They saw that they were naked meaning that they were

³⁶ For details see R. B. Dillard & T. Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1995), 38-48.

³⁷ See G. L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 109-18.

stripped and deprived of all the honour of the paradise;
they were disrobed of all their ornaments.³⁸

The discovery of their nakedness excited shame of which they sought to conceal and therefore, they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. Sewing fig-leaves was a palliative measure taken by Adam and Eve. Fig-leaves were used probably because they are the biggest leaves available in Canaan at that time; the leaves are twelve feet long and two feet broad.³⁹

Genesis 3:21 says “then the LORD God made for the man and his wife tunics of skin, and he clothed them”. This verse demonstrates at least four things: One, wearing of clothes is very important. Two, the fig-leaves earlier secured by Adam and Eve did not last. Three, God was not interested in Adam and Eve appearing before Him unclothed. Four, the clothing of Adam and Eve by God in this verse is a demonstration of His care and mercy towards them. Killing of animal and making its skin to clothe them is much more permanent than the ordinary leaves which they earlier sewed together. Henry suggests that the coat of skin made for Adam and his wife was large, strong, durable and its purpose was to make them warm and strong.⁴⁰

Exegesis of 1 Tim 2:9-10

1 Timothy is one of the three Pastoral Epistles by Apostle Paul. The other two Epistles are 2 Timothy and Titus. These three Pastoral Epistles are different from other Epistles written by Apostle Paul for two reasons. One, Paul wrote them towards the end of his ministry and so they reflect the burden of the Apostle near the end of his ministry. Two, the Pastoral

³⁸ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the whole Bible in Six Volumes: Volume I- Genesis to Deuteronomy*, (McLean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d), 1:26.

³⁹ Wenham, 76.

⁴⁰ Matthew Henry, 1:34.

Epistles unlike other Epistles written to different congregations were directed to two young men who were functioning in Pastoral roles. Specifically, First Timothy was written so as to instruct Timothy on how the Church should function and how mature men and women of God should interact in it (6:11-16). The central purpose of the Epistle is found in 3:15 which says “If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.”

Litfin divides 1 Timothy into six major sections: the salutation (1:1-2); instructions concerning false teachers (1:3-20); instructions concerning conduct in the Church (2:1-3; 13); instructions concerning guarding the truth in the Church (3:14-4:16); instructions concerning various groups in the Church (5:1-6:10) and final charge to Timothy (6:11-121). The text for exegesis 1 Tim 2:9-10 is situated in Chapter 2:1-3:13 which has to do with instructions concerning conduct in the Church.⁴¹ The section addresses the attitude of Christian men and women in the place of worship or prayer.

Apostle Paul having enjoined all men to lead the congregation in prayer (2:8), he thereafter turned to the females to inform them that their adornment should not be external but internal. Specifically, the Apostle made use of some Greek words that vividly illustrate his message. Three of such words are: *kosmios* which means modest, respectable or honourable. Its verb form is *kosmeo* which means to order, command, regulate, adorn, furnish or bring honour to.⁴² *Kosmios* is a form of humility which is the appropriate attitude for prayer. Ryken while explaining *kosmios* opines that “a place of worship is not a place of

⁴¹ A. D. Litfin, “1 Timothy” In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: New Testament* John F. Wolvoord & Roy B. Zuck (Eds.) (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 2000), 730-1.

⁴² H. Sasse, “*kosmios*” In G. W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Abridged in one Volume* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1985), 459-65.

fashion. A Christian woman does not go to Church to meet men; she goes to meet God.⁴³ Another important word used by Apostle Paul in the text is *aidos* which means modesty or reverence towards God or divine things.⁴⁴ Explaining the *aidos*, P.G. Ryken says:

It describes a woman who is chaste and honourable. It implies that women should not dress in a seductive or suggestive manner. This extends not only to dress but also to demeanor to the way and to the way a woman carries herself.⁴⁵

The third word that is of interest to us is *katastello* which in the verb form means “to put in its right place”, to arrange, to restore order and in the noun form it means “propriety, ordered conduct, action with a view to such conduct and then clothing as a visible expression of decorum.”⁴⁶ In the verb form the word is used in Acts 19:35-36, where the clerk calms the excited mob at Ephesus. The noun occurs in the advice to women believers in 1 Tim 2:9, where Timothy is told to exhort them to adopt either a seemly demeanor or seemly apparel.⁴⁷

1 Tim 2:9-10 is a charge to women to dress modestly with decency and propriety. In other words, women are encouraged to dress appropriately when worshipping. They are not to put on the extravagant clothes that draw attention. Hendriksen opines that “in getting dressed for Church, women must practice sanity. They must dress in sensible attires. They must not try to show off, to be “all the rage wearing flashy

⁴³ P.G. Ryken, *1 Timothy: Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing Co., 2007), 83.

⁴⁴ R. Bultmann, “*aidos*” In G. W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Abridged in one Volume*, 26.

⁴⁵ Ryken, *1 Timothy: Reformed Expository Commentary*, 83.

⁴⁶ K.H. Rengstorf, “*katastello*” In G. W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Abridged in one Volume*, 1074-6.

⁴⁷ Rengstorf, “*katastello*” In G. W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Abridged in one Volume*, 1075.

apparel so as to make others jealous of them.”⁴⁸ Propriety means reverence, respect and shrinking away from that which is inappropriate. Moderation on the other hand speaks of sound judgment and self-control. Women must be respectable and honourable in their apparel especially in the place of worship. These terms suggest an appearance that is simple, moderate, judicious and free of ostentation.⁴⁹ Braided hair, use of gold, pearls and expensive clothes are not wrong in themselves but become inappropriate when they indicate misplaced values (cf. 1 Pet 3:3). In the Ephesian Church, these expensive styles may have been associated with the local temple prostitutes. Hence, Christians must be careful about letting a pagan culture dictate their fashion.

1 Tim 2:10 stresses the need for Christian women to give priority to inner beautification through their good deeds. While the verse is not saying that women should make themselves unattractive; they are simply encouraged to reject the world's yardstick for measuring beauty. What God wants is not the outward appearance but the heart of an individual (1 Sam 16:7).

Interrogating Biblical and Yoruba Mode of Dressing

Having anchored this paper on modesty theory whose objective is the covering of human's nakedness and thereby avoid every form of sexual attraction; the point at this junction is the reconciliation of both biblical and societal dressing code of which there are similarities between the two. Biblical accounts, especially as discussed in Gen 3:7 and 21, and 1 Tim 2: 9-10 encourage covering of one's nakedness and that the clothes and ornaments put on must be in moderation. Adam and Eve, after their disobedience were not comfortable seeing their nakedness hence, they covered themselves up with leaves which had little or no effect on them. God intervened by killing an animal and used its skin to cover them.

⁴⁸ W. Hendriksen, *I & II Timothy & Titus: New Testament Commentary* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 106.

⁴⁹ Litfin, “1 Timothy” In *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 375.

Also, Apostle Paul argues for decency and moderation in all that is put on the body.

The Yoruba attach great importance to the body and the need to dress decently. Dress according to the Yoruba is conceived as adorning the body which involves the use of clothes and other accessories.⁵⁰ The importance of decent dressing is further established in the proverb: *Aso laa koko ki ki a to ki eniyan* meaning “you adore the clothing first before you adore the person”.⁵¹ Generally, nudity or indecent dressing is condemned both in the Bible and Yoruba society. The Bible associates nudity with prostitution (Isa 3:16-25) while the Yoruba proverb says *Irinisi ni isonilojo* meaning “outward appearance provokes the respect one is accorded.”⁵² In other words, the way you dressed is the way you are addressed.

Indecent dressing is a challenge which according to Igboin and Awoniyi “has led to sexual immorality and promotion of prostitution and general sexual promiscuity on campus.”⁵³ Indecent dressing has negative implications on individuals. It has increased the level social problems in the society as some cases of rape are linked with it.⁵⁴ Igboin and Awoniyi further lists the moral implications to individuals which include:

Loss of integrity; loss of dignity; loss of virginity; mistrust of others; shame or reproach; etc. Emotionally, many students, especially the female ones, have had to battle with untold pains and agony, regrets, heartbreaks, emotional stress and trauma, and in severe cases, brain disorder.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Ademuleya, 290.

⁵¹ Agoke, 295.

⁵² Agoke, 295.

⁵³ B.O. Igboin and S. Awoniyi, *Perspective on University Dress Code*, (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 2006), 58

⁵⁴ Igboin and Awoniyi, 58.

⁵⁵ Igboin and Awoniyi, 59.

Indecent dressing also has implication on the church. Apart from distracting faithful worshipers in the assembly, it is an open invitation to lecherous men whose aim is to pester ladies for sex.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the following categories of people: individual ladies in the Church, parents, pastors and tertiary institutions.

Individual ladies: Ladies in the Church must understand the motive for wearing the type of clothes they put on. Can it be said that such dress is moderate and modest? Any dress that encourages the arousal of fleshy lust in other worshipers is wrong. Any dress that is worn with the intention of pleasing self may invariably be offensive to God and other worshipers. Therefore, ladies at every given time must prayerfully consider their dresses and ask whether their adornments reflect their profession of Christ. Effort must be made to seek counsel from those who are mature in the faith; those whose senses have been exercised to discern good and evil (Heb 5:14).

Parents: Christian parents are encouraged to live by example. Also, they should create time to educate their children on the need to dress decently and protect their dignity. Parents should monitor the friends their children keep; the films they watch with the intention of giving appropriate counsel. Parents should dress decently and act as role models to their children. Oli aptly observes that the behaviour of parents have impact on their children more greatly than what they tell them to do or not to do.⁵⁶

Pastors: Pastors must adhere to the teaching of the Scriptures and thereby promoting the culture of decent dressing. Pastors and Church leaders should organize the teachings and seminars on what the

⁵⁶ Oli, "Theoretical Reflections on Social Determinants and Effects of Indecent Dressing among Female Undergraduates in Higher Institutions of Learning in Nigeria," 126.

Bible teaches about dressing and its importance. Specific dress codes can be introduced in some units in the congregation such as choir, ushering among others. They should not be tired of preaching against every form of indecent dressing and should not entertain fear of losing some of their members. The Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries has taken a bold step to ban indecent dressing in all its branches worldwide. The Church whose standard is on holiness and preaching of the gospel affirms that it is principally a deliverance ministry and that means it is fighting against demonic forces.⁵⁷

Tertiary Institutions: Higher institutions in Nigeria should promote the culture of decent dressing. Institutions can introduce dress codes to students and there should be proper information at the time of orientation. The laws governing dress codes should be enforced and offenders, properly sanctioned.⁵⁸

Conclusion

This paper, which is a Christian analysis of indecent dressing in South west of Nigeria, has examined the biblical basis for decent dressing. It has been demonstrated from Hebrew and Greek words related to dressing and with the exegesis of Genesis 3:7 and 21 and 1 Tim 2:9-10 that the Bible is not against neatness and fashion but it does not promote nudity of any form. God Himself is interested in the covering of human nakedness as He made a more lasting garment for Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:21. The Bible promotes decent dressing especially in the place of worship and failure to do so bring the wrath of God. Again, the strength of the paper lies on the similarities that exist between the Yoruba traditional mode of dressing and the biblical injunctions. Therefore, Yoruba Christians must make effort to bring a halt to the daily fast rising tide of indecent dressing in the Church in particular and in the

⁵⁷ See “MFM Bans Indecent Dressing in the Church.” www/nigerianbulletin.com.

⁵⁸ For Details, see Igboin and Awoniyi, 61-7.

contemporary Nigerian society in general. The paper recommends among others that ladies should dress modestly so as to avoid attracting unnecessary attention which in turn arouses sexual urge in the opposite sex. Ladies should not expose the vital parts of their body by wearing short skirts, sleeveless and transparent clothes especially to the place of worship. They should avoid every form of distraction.

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