

Revisiting women's role in world Christianity: A theological analysis of John 4:1–42



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A recent study reveals that women predominantly make up global Christian congregations. However, because of religio-cultural influences – common to both the contemporary and New Testament worlds – the contributions of women often go unrealised. For instance, John 4:1–42 illustrates how Christ's response to the Samaritan woman prevented the suppression of her contributions to Christianity. This study utilises Osborne's theological analysis to examine John's proposed solutions to these challenges, as it explores how the theological and dynamic dimensions of narratives convey theological ideas. This approach enables readers to reconstruct John's theological perspective on women's roles in global Christianity. The findings suggest that an encounter with Jesus must transcend religio-cultural barriers that marginalise women, thereby enabling them to fulfil their divinely appointed roles within global Christianity.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The characterisation of the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus challenges gender-based marginalisation and redefines gendered roles in global Christianity. Therefore, the research intersects with missiology, sociology and anthropology.

Keywords: revisiting women's role; world Christianity; theological analysis; Johannine Jesus; gender-based marginalisation.

Introduction

Based on a recent study, most of the global Christian congregations consist primarily of women (Zurlo, Johnson & Crossing 2023:13). Nevertheless, the valuable input of women is frequently overlooked and not fully utilised because of the impact of religious and social factors, which are shared by both the present day and the New Testament eras. For example, in John 4:1–42, Jesus' response to the Samaritan woman prevented her from being hindered in her ability to contribute to the growth and spread of the believing community. This highlights the importance of analysing the narrative to understand the solutions that Jesus, as portrayed in John, offers for these sociocultural problems.

To examine the remedy proposed in the aforementioned narrative, this study employs Osborne's theological analysis methodology (Osborne 2006:219–220). Theological analysis of biblical narratives, as a methodological approach, involves studying both the theological and dynamic dimensions present in John 4:1–42. According to Osborne, the theological dimension 'relates to the propositional component', while the dynamic dimension refers to 'the dynamic or commissive component of meaning' (Osborne 2006:219–220). Thus, this article examines how the nexus between the two dimensions culminates in establishing women's role in world Christianity as proposed in the narrative.

Gender and race in the community of God: A journey of the reader

To place the narrative in its narrative context, it is pertinent to examine how the prologue, the anthology of the themes in John, and the first three chapters of John introduce the subject (cf. Carson 1991:111). The Johannine prologue begins with the idea that God is a community. In an *inclusio*, John describes the community-oriented nature. He reveals from the beginning of the prologue the Logos' preincarnate, eternal, intimate relationship with God as distinct ontological coequals (Jn 1:1–2) and ends with a depiction of a familial relationship in which the incarnate Logos, the Son, enjoys unparalleled and timeless intimacy with the Father (Jn 1:18; Gharbin & Van Eck 2022:2–6; Köstenberger 2004:49; Voorwinde 2002:32). This makes ontological equivalence and family-centredness essential attributes of God's community.

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Furthermore, since the divine community's purpose for creation is that the world participates in community (Grenz 1998:49), God sends the Son with the goal of building a human community where people can experience and reflect the attributes of the divine community (cf. Jn 13:34–35; Jn 15:12).

Moreover, Jesus' ministry and its reception by the Johannine community develop the theme of the divine attributes redolent of a community of God. The prologue indicates that those who receive the Son or accept the social life of the community of God (Grenz 1998:49, 2000:112) are given the authorisation to become the τέκνα θεοῦ (Harris 2015:31; Keener 2003:403; Morris 1995:87).¹ This term represents a Johannine attempt at a new identification, reflecting the traits demonstrated by the ideal community (Van der Watt 2000:182). Firstly, it evokes the familial relationship introduced in the prologue (cf. Jn 1:1–2, 18; Van der Watt 2000:182). Secondly, it emphasises the ontological equality of the 'family members'.

These ideas are further elucidated in John's portrayal of the mode of procreation, which legitimises the membership of believers in the family of God. The prologue employs three expressions such as human ancestry, human choice and human initiative [οἱ οὐκ ἐξ αἱμάτων οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος σαρκὸς οὐδὲ ἐκ θελήματος ἀνδρῶς], which are attributions to natural birth to negate the idea that it plays a role in their membership in the community of God (Harris 2015:33; Köstenberger 2004:39). He then applies the strong adversative ἀλλά to clarify that all members, both males and females, become part of the community as a result of divine procreation [ἀλλ' ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν] (Harris 2015:32–33). This claim is reiterated and restated in Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus on how to experience the community or family of God (Jn 3:1–21), by employing the terms ἄνωθεν (from above; Brant 2011:31; Carson 1991:189; Keener 2003:538; Moloney 1993:110; Morris 1995:188)² and birth by 'water and the Spirit', a conceptual unity, to stress that this is a transition from natural to spiritual birth (Carson 1991:194; Harris 2015:73; Keener 2003:550). This novel, idiosyncratic, and supernatural procreation gives all members a new and same status, essence or identity (Morris 1995:87; Van der Watt 2000:182). Thus, ontological equivalence in this context implies that irrespective of the differences in race, status and gender, the τέκνα θεοῦ are all coequal.

Finally, in the narrative of the cleansing of the temple (Jn 2:13–22), Jesus demonstrates that racial proclivities and boundaries have no place in the community of God. The temple, a symbol of Jewish communal identity (Köstenberger 2004:105), had separate courts for Jews and Gentiles, as well as men and women, effectively segregating worshippers

1. It is pertinent to note that John makes a distinction when discussing the relationships between the Son and the Father and believers and the Father through the use of the word 'υἱός' only for the Son. See Harris (2015:31), *John*, 31; Morris (1995:87), and Köstenberger (2004:39).

2. The word also means 'again'. Scholars appeal to the interpretation of Nicodemus, John's testimony of the Spirit descending on Jesus, and the origin of Jesus as the basis for the dual meaning (cf. Jn 1:31–36; Jn 3:31; Ridderbos 1997:125).

based on their Jewish or non-Jewish status and gender. Moreover, the activities of those who had turned the outer court into a marketplace were disruptive to non-Jewish worship (Keener 2003:524; Köstenberger 2004:106). Jesus' response to these challenges was the destruction and reconstruction of the temple, a cryptic message about his death, burial and resurrection (Jn 2:19; cf. Köstenberger 2004:102). The transition from the cleansing of the temple to his body signifies a new era, in which the religious and interracial identity of the community of God will be this new temple – Jesus (Köstenberger 2004:108) – the embodiment of all the symbolic significance of the Jewish temple (cf. Jn 1:11–12; Jn 3:16; Carson 1991:182; Van der Watt 2000:106).

Extrapolating the community theme from John 1–3, it becomes increasingly clear that in the divine community, spiritual procreation and its concomitant privileges supplant race and gender, which are attributes of natural birth. Therefore, the subsequent section examines how these factors could impede women's role in the believing community and the remedy proposed in John 4:1–42.

Theological analysis of the narrative

The setting and its theological implications (Jn 4:1–6)

John maintains the non-Jewish context of the earlier narrative, though in a different setting. He records Jesus' decision to move from Judea to Galilee to avoid the growing tension between His ministry and that of the Baptist (Jn 4:1–3). As a result, Jesus is compelled to pass through Samaria, a non-Jewish region. The decision is based on two factors: topographical and theological. Samaria was situated in the northern region of Judea and the southern region of Galilee, on the western side of the Jordan River in 1st-century Palestine (Meier 2000:204). Therefore, the shortness of the distance for a traveller moving from Judea to Galilee is a reason to consider this path (Jn 4:4; Carson 1991:215; Köstenberger 2004:146).³ Moreover, the grammar of the narrative suggests that the theological reason was one of the necessitating factors. John employs the Greek word δεῖ when clarifying why Jesus must go through Samaria (Jn 4:4). The word appears 10 times in the entire gospel and 3 times in this narrative (Jn 3:7, 14, 30; Jn 4:4, 20, 24; Jn 9:4; Jn 10:16; Jn 12:32 and Jn 20:9). It expresses the performance of an act that is a divine imperative. Similarly, in this narrative, it denotes a divine necessity (Carson 1991:216; Keener 2003:590; Köstenberger 2004:146; Moloney 1993:137; Ridderbos 1997:153). This makes it reasonable to surmise that the two reasons intersect: the necessity of accomplishing a divine mission required the selection of a shorter path that makes it possible, culminating in Jesus' arrival at Jacob's well in Sychar, a non-Jewish region (Carson 1991:216; Keener 2003:590; Köstenberger 2004:146; Moloney 1993:137; Ridderbos 1997:154).

3. Some scholars opine that using this route is not geographically necessary because travellers could go north by crossing the river Jordan to the east and then crossing it again north of Samaria (Harris 2015:89; Moloney 1993:137; Ridderbos 1997:153). Although this is undisputable, it was a longer route (Carson 1991:215–216; Keener 2003:589; Köstenberger 2004:146; Moloney 1993:137). Therefore, going through Samaria seemed more appropriate.

The characterisation of the woman

At this point of his narrative, John incorporates a fresh character into the plot. The narrative excludes the individual's name but discloses the gender and race of this newly introduced figure. She is a foreigner – a Samaritan woman (Morris 1995:227; cf. Köstenberger 2004:148). In his elucidations on the relationship between the *historical* Jesus and the *historical* Samaritans, Meier asserts that the term Samaritans can be defined based on *physical descent* and *geography*. Essentially, the two classifications portray the Samaritans as the presumed descendants of the Israelite tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, with some admixture of non-Israelite groups from the Assyrian and Hellenistic empires, residing in a region known as Samaria (Meier 2000:204–205). This background makes the woman a non-Jew and a microcosm of the non-Jews because she enters the narrative as a representative of the race inhabiting that territory (Morris 1995:227; cf. Fehribach 1998:58; Köstenberger 2004:148). The Jews' perception of this group confirms this. Although the Samaritans identified themselves as descendants of the two Israelite tribes, the Jews regarded them as a mixed race. Consequently, they classified the Samaritans as non-Jews because of their combined Jewish and non-Jewish ancestry (Carson 1991:216; Keener 2003:599–600; Witherington III 1995:117).

Furthermore, based on her sexual history and response to Jesus' question about her marital status, the informed reader can legitimately surmise that the narrative portrays her as a societal outcast and marginalised woman (Harris 2015:95; Stephens 1980:59). In her interactions with Jesus, she reveals that she has no husband, even though she has been with five men and is currently with another (Jn 4:18). It is critical to note that the rabbis allowed only three legal marriages, even in cases of death (Harris 2015:92). But she had exceeded the permissible number of marriages. In a shame-honour culture, such sexual promiscuity and non-normative behaviour had negative implications for the women and their partners: it removed their honour (Neyrey 2003:110), that is, their publicly acknowledged worth, thereby culminating in shame (Plevnik 1993:96; Rohrbaugh 2010:109).

Maybe her publicly recognised diminished value played a role in her portrayal as a marginalised woman. According to some Johannine scholars, the act of going to the well alone during that period affirms that she was marginalised by her community (Keener 2003:606; Witherington III 1995:120).

Finally, the disciples' attitudes towards the woman and Jesus because of their interactions are important to note because they underscore the underlying marginalisation the narrative portrays. They marginalised her in their minds, not because of her past but because of her gender (cf. Jn 4:27). John portrays them as people who were bewildered to see Jesus talking to a *woman* (Jn 4:27). Their cultural understanding of such relationships informed their response, leading them to view it as a violation of Jewish religio-cultural norms (Keener 2003:621). Rabbinic precepts forbade men from talking to

women in public, including their wives (Garza 2015:96). The Jews also held that Rabbis should refrain from engaging in public conversations with women (Harris 2015:96; Köstenberger 2004:159; Morris 1995:242). According to the prevailing norms, this was morally unacceptable (Ridderbos 1997:166; cf. Brant 2011:83). In fact, it was considered one of the six acts that are a reproach to a Rabbi (Garza 2015:96).

Therefore, Jesus' interactions with the woman posed problems for his disciples because he was a Jewish man engaging in a public dialogue with a Samaritan woman (who was cohabiting with a man; cf. v. 9, 18). Most importantly, in the preceding narratives, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, and two disciples of John the Baptist identified Jesus as a Rabbi (Jn 1:38, 49; Jn 3:2), an identity that his disciples affirmed in this narrative (Jn 4:31). The first two references, occurring at the outset and early stages of Jesus' ministry, along with the testimony of Nicodemus (representing the Pharisaic community), reflect the growing recognition of Jesus' 'rabbinical role' within the Johannine community.⁴ The disciples' use of this title in John 4 further affirms the community's widespread view of Jesus (cf. Jn 4:31). Thus, Jesus' open conversation with a woman living with a man – particularly a Samaritan – would have undoubtedly sparked surprise and scrutiny (cf. Jn 4:27).⁵

However, while their concern about the interactions between their Rabbi and the woman was valid, it inadvertently reinforced the cultural view of women's identity and roles, which led to their marginalisation. We can therefore conclude that their response portrays the Samaritan as a marginalised woman (cf. Jn 4:7).

The theological dialogue between Jesus and the woman (Jn 4:7–27)

John uses the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman to establish a theological context for theological interactions. On one hand, Jesus, the only authoritative expositor of the divine community, has a responsibility to exegete God (Gharbin & Van Eck 2022:5–6). Conversely, the woman represents a particular strand of Judaism. Meier correctly observes that the term Samaritans has religious connotations (Meier 2000:204–205). Because the woman appears in the narrative as a representative of the Samaritans, her responsibility is to embody their theological beliefs. The repeated use of 'our' in her submissions on the Samaritans' theological perspective affirms that she performs this role (Jn 4:12, 20).⁶

It is crucial to observe that Jesus opened the conversation by making a request. Ridderbos notes that Jesus did so, seemingly unaware of the barriers and boundaries that isolated the Samaritans and the Jews (Ridderbos 1997:154).

4.This is based on the import of *oidamen* in John 3:2.

5.The narrator's comment and the disciples' unspoken questions (Jn 4:27) reveal elements of surprise and scrutiny.

6.John records a similar situation, in which Nicodemus speaks as a representative of the Pharisees, employing the first-person plural personal pronoun (Jn 3:2).

However, the deliberate choice of this route, driven by a divine imperative, suggests that the illocutionary act was purposeful to use their conversation as a means to break religio-cultural barriers (Köstenberger 2013:73).

Notably, the woman's question, whether Jesus believes he is superior to Jacob and can offer more than Jacob's well, encapsulates the first religio-cultural issue that Jesus addressed (Jn 8:12). The phrase 'our father Jacob' has cultural connotations because it reiterates the cultural understanding of the *physical descent* of the Samaritans as descendants of Jacob (Jn 4:12; cf. Meier 2000:205). The resemblance between this question and that of the Jewish interlocutors, as well as Jesus' response, also confirms that her statement had theological undertones (cf. Jn 8:53). The inquiry serves the purpose of enabling Jesus to illustrate the nexus between what he offers and his identity. Jesus' response was that he offers water that leads to eternal life, something that Jacob's well cannot promise (Jn 4:13–14). Furthermore, it originates from a 'well of salvation' that transcends racial boundaries and fosters an inclusive community that unites Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Jn 4:14; cf. Jn 3:16–17).

Offering something better or superior elevates him above Jacob, who provided a well that quenched one's thirst temporarily (cf. Fehribach 1998:63). Indeed, John 1–3 establishes the superiority of Jesus over every human being, including Jacob. For instance, in the prologue, Jesus is the pre-existent Logos and the incarnate Word (Jn 1:1–3, 14). Subsequently, John characterises him as the supplier of abundant and superior wine (Jn 2:6–7, 10), a foretaste of the superabundance of wine at the eschatological messianic banquet, thereby attributing to him qualities reminiscent of the Messiah (cf. Jn 4:25–26, 29; Keener 2003:494; Köstenberger 2004:93).

Subsequently, the woman affirmed Jesus' messiahship after introducing a discussion on messianic expectations, prompted by Jesus' actions (cf. Jn 4:25, 29). The Samaritans' theological reflections include the anticipation of an eschatological figure, a 'Restorer' [*Taheb*], expected to be a teacher and lawgiver like Moses, who will reveal all things (Brant 2011:83; Harris 2015:94; Keener 2003:619; Köstenberger 2004:157). Thus, Jesus' capacity to disclose her previous and current circumstances and elucidate her community's theological dilemmas caused her to bring up the matter of the anticipated Messiah's function and obtain a confirmation from Jesus that he is indeed the one they had been waiting for (Jn 4:25–26).

The woman introduces another theological issue into the discussion, reflecting the religious barrier that existed between the two communities: their views on the locus of true worship. The terms 'our ancestors' and 'you' (plural) employed by the woman affirm the contrasting perspectives of the two communities on the subject (cf. Harris 2015:92–93; Köstenberger 2004:154). These divergent theological positions arise because they draw from the same religious

tradition. The Samaritans practised a strand of Judaism and, as a result, worshipped YHWH just like the Jews. However, they revered Mount Gerizim over Mount Zion in Jerusalem as the divinely mandated place of worship (cf. Meier 2000:205),⁷ because of the site's association with many events in the patriarchal period (Köstenberger 2004:153–54). This belief led to the construction of a temple on the mountain, which the Jews regarded as an illegitimate rival to the Jerusalem temple and thus razed it (Morris 1995:237; Witherington III 1995:117), showing the religio-cultural rivalry that existed between the two groups.

Responding to the woman, Jesus offers new theological perspectives that circumvent the significance of two sacred spaces, the religious boundaries. He reveals that his ministry, crucifixion and resurrection – that is, the coming hour that is also here now – will occasion, or have occasioned, a new season where he replaces the temple as the centre of worship for the believing community (Jn 4:21; Carson 1991:224; Köstenberger 2004:155; cf. Witherington III 1995:120). This makes him the initiator of a new era where topographical locations are not the focus, but rather genuine worship, where people give the Father what he seeks: worship in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23–24). In this new temple, racial barriers do not exist because the believing community will worship one Father, God (Köstenberger 2004:155; Morris 1995:238; Witherington III 1995:125).⁸

John demonstrates the universal dimension of God's community through the Samaritan woman's participation in the divine activity of witnessing and its concomitant results. By testifying about the Messiah to her community, she participates in the harvest as a witness (Jn 4:35; Brant 2011:31). Being a non-Jew witness also implies that in Christ, the community of witnesses is universalised. Finally, the inclusion of many Samaritans in the believing community symbolises a universalised community of God in Christ (cf. Jn 4:39–42).

The following section explores the theological implications of the conversation at the well, with a particular focus on the role of women in Christianity.

Theological synthesis and implications

John 4 reveals that the patriarchal system creates obstacles for women to overcome gender-based marginalisation. Its catastrophic impact on society is evident in how sometimes even Christ's disciples reflect its tenets by allowing their cultural and patriarchal propensities to shape their theological beliefs about women's identity and roles. For instance, the disciples' religio-cultural understanding of gender led to the surreptitious marginalisation of the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4:27). This clarifies that cultural and

⁷The sense of divine necessity indicated here originates from the utilisation of the Greek word δεῖ, which is found in other instances in the book of John, including the opening of this narrative, with the same theological significance.

⁸The racial proclivities (our fathers) give way to the universalised (the Father).

theological influences could become barriers to the valuable contributions of women to Christianity, necessitating a theological response.

By situating the conversation within a narrative filled with religio-cultural boundaries, John seeks to demonstrate Jesus as a breaker of barriers – racial, religious, gender and social (Rabbi and outcast; cf. Harris 2015:95; Köstenberger 2013:73). Consequently, an encounter with Him must empower women to become barrier-breakers themselves, rising above norms that hinder the realisation of their divine identity and roles in Christianity (Dube 2001:93).

The barrier-breaking process starts with understanding and accepting their place in the believing community. Because the qualification for membership in the community of God – divine procreation – ensures ontological equality for every member of the τέκνα θεοῦ, women must recognise that they are full members of the community, just like their male counterparts, irrespective of their race or social classification.

Consequently, their membership obligates them to transcend culturally gendered roles. One of these responsibilities is to actively engage in theological discourse and to resist the suppression of their voices by patriarchal societies. This is one of the positive traits demonstrated by the Samaritan woman. Although she went to the well to perform her gendered role (Dube 2001:93) – fetch water – she demonstrated that she possessed the acumen for provocative theologisation. In John, Jesus' theological 'debates' were mostly with the Jewish temple authorities (see Jn 2:18–21; Jn 3:1–21 and Jn 5:16–47). Furthermore, John 4 is sandwiched between Jesus' theological discussions with Nicodemus, a Pharisee and microcosm of this religious sect, and 'the Jews', who are ubiquitously held to be religious leaders (Köstenberger 2013:26; Martyn 2003:41). This unequivocally demonstrates the dominance of masculine voices in theological discussions within the Johannine community. Yet John characterises the woman not just as a representative of her society, but as a theological voice in a religious space where the silent voices were women. She fulfilled this role flawlessly. Notably, she brought up all of the theological topics that were discussed.⁹ She is also the only person to discuss multifarious theological subjects with Jesus in one conversation in the most extensive account of the Samaritans in the gospels (Meier 2000:205), showcasing her profound knowledge and familiarity with her religious traditions. The narratological portrayal of the woman as a theological voice of her community may be John's way of advocating the need not to downplay women's capacity to theologise in their societies. It also makes it imperative for women to theorise theologically and make their voices heard in sociocultural and religious conversations concerning their identity and place in Christianity, even if it means dialoguing with 'Rabbi Jesus' or 'authoritative' male counterparts.

9. The topics include Jacob's greatness, the locus of worship, and the Samaritans' messianic expectations.

The significance of daring to theologise as women, especially in a patriarchal society, is that it asks relevant questions to provoke conversations that challenge the *status quo* and help provide a Christological response to the sociocultural challenges perpetrated under the guise of Christianity and perpetuated by religio-cultural traditions. For instance, the woman's question on the divergent theological positions of the Jews and Samaritans on the two sacred spaces provoked a response from Christ that was contradistinctive to the widely held views among the two communities and offered a radically new perspective on the subject as a cure for the religious and cultural boundaries. This implies that engaging in theological reasoning as women can potentially alleviate marginalisation by challenging religious and social ideas that underpin the perpetrators' behaviour.

Furthermore, women should conduct a theological evaluation of the traditions that shape societal behaviour, as some of these traditions rest on questionable assumptions and are therefore not sacrosanct. For instance, when the woman revealed that they worship on Mount Gerizim because it was the place where their fathers worshipped (Jn 4:20), Jesus replied that the Samaritans worship what they do not know or are unaware of (Jn 4:22). This raises a lot of concerns. The fact that their fathers, whom they are emulating, are unaware of the object of worship and have successfully passed on their religious beliefs to generations, leading to religious tension between them and the Jews, suggests that some traditions, despite having a long history, may not be founded. It also suggests that the community might be promoting other religious and cultural aspects that discriminate against women, stemming from the same issue. Therefore, women must develop their own theological perspectives rather than merely adhering to the traditions taught by patriarchy. Only by challenging the legitimacy of these practices through provocative theologisation can we address these challenges.

Apart from stimulating theological conversations, the encounter transformed her from someone who was playing a gendered role into a woman who played a divinely assigned role. After encountering Jesus, she left her jar, a symbol of her gendered role (Dube 2001:93), to fulfil her missional role as a member of the believing community. This entails participating in the divine activity of sending, that is, becoming a witness (Gharbin & Van Eck 2022:6–7).¹⁰ The outcome her testimony evoked signifies the breaking of her culturally gendered role because women were not seen as trustworthy witnesses (Fuchs 2012:129; Stephens 1980:57). In Jewish oral law, the comparison of the testimony of one hundred women to that of a man affirms the systemic marginalisation of women, the attempt to restrict them to gendered roles, and the distrust in the veracity of women's testimony, making her case exceptional (Stephens 1980:57). Consequently, her response is one of John's proposed roles

10. In John, believers constitute a community of witnesses. They are individuals who experience Jesus and testify about him to others in order to broaden the believing community (see Carson 1991:151). That was exactly what the woman accomplished. After experiencing Jesus, she returned to her community to testify about him and invite them to see him, resulting in the only genuine harvest of souls in John (Jn 4:29, 39–42).

for women in Christianity and prognostication of what future generations of believing women should do: their encounter with Christ must turn them into witnesses who testify about Christ and invite their communities to come and experience him, thereby contributing to the expansion of Christianity.

These roles necessitate the involvement of males within the community of believers. The narrative suggests that Christian men should adopt a Christ-centred perspective when considering women, rather than being influenced by cultural norms or predefined gender roles. While the latter calls on men to break down the barriers of gender-based marginalisation, mirroring Jesus' approach, the former encourages it, akin to the disciples' mindset, which is detrimental to the productivity of women's roles in global Christianity.

Conclusion

Given the nexus between women's marginalisation and gendered roles that exist in the contemporary and New Testament cultural worlds, this study sought to provide a Christological response to the problem through a theological analysis of John 4:1–42. The findings indicate that sometimes religious and cultural practices encourage women's marginalisation and confine them to gender-assigned roles. Therefore, Christian women must allow their encounter with Christ, the liberator, to empower them to reclaim their identity in Christ and perform roles redolent of members of the believing community, such as theologising and witnessing. Additionally, Christian men should become bridges, not barriers, to complement these barrier-breaking endeavours by adopting a Christ-centred perspective on women's identity and gendered roles. These roles have communal and missional implications. They help to address these sociocultural challenges for women and contribute to the expansion of global Christianity.

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