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## **A text-centred rhetorical interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15 and the resilience of African women**

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### **Abstract**

This study analyses “but she will be delivered by childbearing” (σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας) in 1 Timothy 2:15 using a text centred rhetorical approach called *a text-generated persuasion interpretation* (Genade 2015:23). In addition, it integrates Virkler and Ayayo’s (2007:53) application step principle with special reference to the resilience of African women in the context of staggering gender-based violence (GBV)<sup>1</sup> statistics in South Africa. Male perpetrators of violence against women and children in South Africa were given birth to by women. As a result, their mothers carry the stigma of bringing GBV contributors into this world. How can women who carry this stigma be saved from it? This study examines how a resilient African woman, a survivor of GBV, who bore a male child was saved by raising him to become a moral voice against GBV in the context where he ministers. It is proposed herein that her faith and faithfulness in passing down the message of redemption to her son has resulted in her salvation from the stigma she would have carried had it not been for her resilience. As biblical researchers we should contribute to the combating of GBV in South Africa because one of the charges advanced for why GBV is prevalent is that biblical texts have been used to perpetuate GBV in various forms. As a result, the bible, the New Testament in particular, is partly blamed for the discrimination based on gender because of how genders are portrayed in the New

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<sup>1</sup> Hereinafter referred to as GBV.

Testament. We may contribute, therefore, through the interpretation of texts such as 1 Timothy 2:15.

## Introduction

Reports about violence against women in South Africa are staggeringly frightening. One reads of such reports, and they cannot help but feel disturbed at the levels of violence against women in all South African societies (Cornelius 2013:173). It is unsettling to read about the statistics that point to violence against women bordering on a pandemic-like state. Seeing that it is endemic, various academics from different academic disciplines have sought to contribute to the eradication of violence against women from their respective perspectives.

Mofokeng (2022) contributes to the tackling of GBV<sup>2</sup> from a branch of practical theology called pastoral care. She (2022:4) describes pastoral care as relating to the shepherding care offered to those in need of comfort, healing, guidance and reconciliation. Those in need are predominantly women who have been subjected to some form of violence directly or indirectly. She (2022:26) points out that GBV is prevalent in South Africa to an extent that a third of all women have been exposed to some form of GBV in their lifetime. As a result, South Africa is classified as a country where GBV is a common narrative, one of the leading countries with GBV and a rape capital of the world (Mofokeng 2022:26).

Von Meullen (2021) studied GBV from public management and governance perspective. The focus of her study is on GBV at institutions of higher learning and the role that student representative councils (SRC)<sup>3</sup> can play in combating the GBV epidemic. She (2021:34) reports that since there is a significant

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<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this study, GBV is conceptualised as physical, psychological, and emotional hurt or harmful act inflicted on a person on the basis of their gender. ‘Woman’ (γυνή) is understood in this study, according to Louw and Nida’s (1988:107, 108) definitions as an adult female person of marriageable age, and ‘man’ (άνδρός) as an adult male person of marriageable age. ‘Stigma’ is a form of discrimination due to ill formed disapproval about people. ‘African’ is understood geospatially, with specific focus on South Africa.

<sup>3</sup> Hereinafter referred to as SRC.

number of young women at university campuses, the university itself is an unsafe space for younger women. The reason is that it is at university spaces, private and public, that the young women encounter young men around whom they are vulnerable. After conducting her study on GBV at university campuses, Von Meullen (2021:136) concludes by designing a “GBV awareness model”. One of the key components of this awareness model is the empowerment of SRCs to play a significant role in supporting victims of GBV as it has a debilitating impact on their academic lives (Von Meullen 2021:136).

Leburu-Masigo (2020) conducted research on the empowerment programme for victims of GBV from a social work perspective. Her research highlights that GBV affects the quality of the lives of women. Its effects are social, psychological, emotional, physical and overall affect the wellbeing of a woman victim (Leburu-Masigo 2020:IV). Her (2020:284) findings from the qualitative research she conducted concluded that social workers practice various ways of intervening to assist and empower GBV victims. In addition, the social workers helped the victims to be able to recognise abuse for what it is, since some of the victims were not empowered to recognise the impact of GBV on their wellbeing. This was especially detected from women who stayed with their abusive partners due to failing to recognise that they were being abused. Moreover, social workers have ways to help victims of GBV to regain a sense of control, restored confidence, restored self-esteem and ultimately the ability to make honourable decisions to not stay in traumatic situations (Leburu-Masigo 2020:285).

Cornelius (2013) researched the use of scripture in violent situations against women and ancient texts as loci of power abuse. She researched the use of the NT in violent situations of abuse against women. She points out how violence against women is disturbing because its occurrence is not unusual. To highlight its heinousness, she looked at how it occurred in domestic situations, that is in intimate situations where women should be safe. In these intimate spaces, their intimate partners abuse them physically, sexually, destroy their property, harass and intimidate them in various ways (Cornelius 2013:174). Disturbing findings also include abused women becoming depressed, powerless, socially and economically deprived, abusers of substances, suicidal, losing confidence and suffering spiritually (Cornelius 2013:174, 176, 179, 183). She (2013:178) further finds that traditional norms and values trap women in abusive intimate

relationships because their commitment is anchored in traditional norms and values. These traditional norms and values, however, cause battered women to remain in painful situations for fear of being shamed if they speak about their abuse or leave the abusive relationship. Fearing that they will be blamed for marrying the wrong person, these women opt to blame themselves rather than blaming tradition and the perpetrator of violence against them (Cornelius 2013:178).

## **Common thread permeating the above findings**

A two-fold powerful tapestry emerges by weaving together the above perspectives. Firstly, there is a positive aspect from these research findings in that there is awareness of how prevalent GBV is in South African societies. It permeates every aspect of society just as it affects every aspect of victims of GBV. Different scholars from various fields recognise how their respective field of study can contribute to fighting the scourge of GBV. In her study, Cornelius (2013:173) points out that since society at large is affected by GBV, it is up to “the pastors, police officers, shelter workers, lawyers, therapists and counsellors to work together to prevent abuse”. She further points out that in her research she found steps that should be taken by churches to offer spiritual help and healing to battered women; however, the respective study she referred to singles out women’s bible study as one of the steps which is problematic because it implies that the rest of the church, particularly men, need no equal education on preventing the abuse of women (Cornelius 2013:177).

Mofokeng’s (2022) research brings to the forefront the awareness that the prevalence of GBV in South African communities means that a third of women in South Africa will either become directly affected by it by being a victim of violence or indirectly by knowing of someone who has been a victim of GBV. Von Meullen (2021) takes us to institutions of higher learning to show that even though women may be raised in safe homes or safe spaces pre-university life, being on university campuses in South Africa means that the young women will inevitably find themselves in an unsafe space. Leburu-Masigo’s (2020) research findings indicate that social workers who worked with victims of GBV had to find ways to help victims recognise abuse for what it is. The

inability to recognise it means that the victims are not empowered to make the justifiable decisions that will enable them to leave traumatic situations.

The second thread that permeates through the above research is a disturbing one. The above scholars, and other scholars in general will agree that broadly defined, GBV is violence targeted at specific individuals on the basis of their gender (Kangas *et al* 2014:40). However, disturbingly, women bear the biggest brunt of GBV in the South African context. Unwittingly, the spotlight is shone on GBV victims in that they have to be used to gather statistics of the proportional prevalence of GBV against women in comparison to men who suffer the same. This is bearing in mind the tremendous trauma women have to go through to talk about their ordeal; they are nonetheless our source of statistics in tackling the GBV pandemic.

With good intention, awareness is made of the fact that GBV is prevalent in South African societies; but that immediately alerts the woman of the staggeringly frightening statistics of this scourge. Women hear that it is endemic, in the home, in churches, in public spaces, in institutions of higher learning, in the workplace, and basically in a number of spaces that should be deemed safe for anyone. Strikingly obvious is that men share these spaces too but they do not become victims of GBV to the same degree as women in the same spaces. It feels rather sad and heavy that we have resigned to the fact that as a society we should conceive of the possibility that this problem will affect women more than it does men.

The efforts of those who want to know what to do to eradicate this debilitating culture must be strengthened, so that South Africa may become a society where we do not speak of GBV's women victims as the face of its traumatic effects. Is there a glimmer of hope that this rainbow nation that recently celebrated 29 years of freedom will find itself freed from the grips of this terrible nightmare South Africans wake up to almost on a daily basis?

In her research into GBV in the form of sexual assault, women's oppression and safety, Gqola (2015:7) contributes to the realisation of this hope by suggesting that if rape is taken seriously in our country and ensuring that there are consequences for perpetrators of this violent crime, then we will make inroads into getting to the heart of tackling it. She poignantly points out that

there are various places we have to start or various approaches we have to take. The first that she points out is that we need to find ways to not put pressure on women to talk about rape nor put the onus on them to find the perpetrator of rape. There is very little talk about the rapist. Inadvertently, rape then becomes a crime with just the victim but not the perpetrator. Vividly, Gqola captures the problem by stating that “sometimes it feels as if aliens come down to Earth to rape those constructed as feminine and vulnerable, only to then jump back up into their spaceships and return to their planet, leaving us shocked, brutalised and with inadequate technology to fight back, to make them stop, to hold them accountable or to act in collective self-defence”.

Slogans we chant, such as ‘real men don’t rape’, perpetuate the myth that rapists don’t live among us, or they are easily noticeable either by the class, race, or background they come from (Gqola 2015:4). At the same time the tension is there that we cannot profile everybody, suspect, and expect every man to be a potential rapist. It seems like an elusive balance to strike.

Endorsing Gqola (2015), Molope suggests that “an honest discussion about sexual assault, women’s oppression and women’s safety needs to begin with how we raise men. I’d like to move beyond the developed world’s approach to teaching women to empower themselves because – as I once announced to a room full of appalled first-world feminists – telling women to end rape is like telling black people to end racism”. This sentiment is what will be echoed in this article, that it is true that GBV is disturbing and reading about it is unsettling; but moreover, for this author, what is unsettling is firstly the pressure put on women about how to be safe, how likely they are to be the statistic, how difficult it is to prove violence against them beyond reasonable doubt in a court of law,<sup>4</sup> and how they must work hard to prevent the heinous crime that they might suffer that they have not called for.

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<sup>4</sup> Ordinarily in a court of law, Section 35 (3)(h) of the South African Constitution states that “every accused person has a right to a fair trial, which includes the right to be presumed innocent, to remain silent, and not to testify during the proceedings”. This injunction in our law is rightly meant to protect innocent people against malicious prosecution, but it also places victims of GBV in a difficult position to prove their case beyond reasonable doubt. In a court of law, the onus rests on the

It is incumbent on those responsible in society to raise male children to be men, therefore, to raise them in a way that will ensure they do not contribute to the staggering GBV statistics in South Africa. As far as possible, this should not be done by putting pressure on women who despite their efforts to raise their male children well, still in the end have men who become perpetrators of GBV. There should be no stigma carried by women for the actions they did not commit. Furthermore, women alone should not carry the burden of raising men who are going to turn into moral voices against GBV. All of society should become moral voices against GBV and the stigma on women who bore perpetrators of GBV should be condemned and eradicated.

Recently in our country, a convicted rapist and serial murderer escaped from a maximum-security prison in Mangaung. He was sentenced to serve life in prison in 2012. In 2022 he escaped from custody, which later made headline news in early 2023 because contrary to earlier reports by the correctional facility where he was incarcerated that he had committed suicide in his cell by setting his body alight, he was spotted alive, and the police began a manhunt to bring him back in custody. While his mother was reported as saying she had not seen him in years, it seems as though some sectors of society unduly implicated her in this elaborate prison escape, and implied she must know about his whereabouts.

This was worryingly unfair on the escapee's mother, who told Bhengu (2023) that she "has been living in fear since the news of her son's escape from prison". As if no one felt her anxious fear, she added "I don't feel safe because I get phone calls from different people every day. I don't know who to trust. At the end of the day, these people have my address. When I see cars stopping at the gate, I get scared that it is someone who is coming to kill me"<sup>5</sup>. Exactly why his father or other male figures in the escapee's life were not sought, one may

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accuser to produce evidence to convict a perpetrator. However, in most cases, and due to the traumatic nature of GBV, the victim and the offender(s) are the only witnesses. In addition, when courage is gathered to report these incidents, evidence that could be used as admissible in court is often nowhere to be found. The burden and blame again lie with the woman.

<sup>5</sup> This is akin to a common occurrence in South Africa. Time after time the society retorts: "woman, where is your criminal-child that you brought into this world"? Why are the fathers not involved is the pertinent question we do not ask.

perhaps deduce the reason from the statistics provided later in this article. Even if they were, they should not be put in a situation where they have to fear for their lives like his mother feared. Overall, the common thread is that women have to do something for men to change their behaviour, or for the focus to shift from them to the perpetrators of GBV rather than the victims.

## **Fatherlessness epidemic in South Africa**

According to the findings of Statistics SA in the report on the wellbeing of children and child education in 2018, therein we detect a dire situation concerning fatherlessness in South Africa. The estimate population of South Africa in 2018 was 57.7 million, out of which Stats SA (2018) reported that “more than one-third (34,5%) were children under the age of 18 years”. These are minors who are still in the developmental stages of their lives. One cannot overstate the importance of the presence of family in the well-being and development of children. Moreover, Stats SA (2018) reported that “Children in South Africa live in non-standard family structures with mostly one of their biological parents. In 2018, there were twice as many children who had a co-resident mother compared to those who had a co-resident father (76% and 36,4%, respectively). Furthermore, black African children aged 0–17 were less likely to stay with their biological father compared to their peers in the other population groups”.

This means that only 31% of black African children were more likely to be raised with their biological father. In comparison to other population groups, 51.3% of coloured African children, 86.1% of Indian/Asian African children and 80.2% of white African children lived in standard family structures with their biological parents, especially fathers, present (Stats SA 2018:x). The likelihood of children growing without their biological fathers or fathers at all, means that their mothers as the next of kin are people who will be closest to them. This probably explains why when people who were looking for the above referred to escapee sought after his mother with the hope of being able to find him. However, such incidents perpetuate the stigma that the woman who gave birth to the offender who was wanted by law enforcement officers was somehow inextricably connected to her son’s whereabouts.



The said perpetrator had committed unspeakable acts of violence against women, for which he was justly serving a prison life-term. Yet, by virtue of being birthed by his mother, she carried the stigma of bringing a perpetrator of GBV into the world. Even though there was no lead that suggested she knew where he was when he escaped, society and the media naturally gravitated towards his mother for answers. Is this not a form of unwittingly extending the effects of GBV to someone who did not contribute to it? Is this not a form of stigmatising the woman who gave birth to the perpetrator? Although she should have never had to deal with the trauma unduly placed on her, she remained resilient even though the South African context induces trauma on the majority of women.

## **Trauma and resilience of a stigmatised survivor of GBV**

Monday, the 17<sup>th</sup> of November 1986 was the day that a twenty-five-year-old mother gave birth to a male child in the small village called Thaba 'Nchu in the Free State province. His mother named him "Hope" for two reasons. The first reason she named him "Hope" was because South Africa was at the cusp of transitioning from one state regime to a new state that was eventually ushered in during the 1994's first democratic elections held in South Africa. This was the change that the suffering millions of South Africans, and those who sympathised with them, wanted to see realised. The ruling state before 1994 was an apartheid state which committed unspeakable acts of violence against innocent, undeserving people. The trauma that it induced left people with resilience that one day they will experience freedom in South Africa, and that hope was held on to by millions including this 25-year mother.

The second reason why she named her son "Hope" was due to the fact that in her marriage and in her home, the place she should have felt most safe in she experienced unimaginable trauma at the hands of her husband. She had no refuge because even her family that she turned to for help neglected to protect her. More traumatic still is the fact that whenever she ran to her parental home for help she was always sent back to her abusive husband and was told to be resilient. She perceived the apathy by her family as akin to overtly conveying to her that she made the choice to get married to a GBV perpetrator, thus the struggle was hers alone to bear. It seemed to her around that time

that resilience is all she had, but she had hope that one day her trauma will dissipate.

While this twenty-five-year-old woman lived in a space where traumatic violence was normalised, and was given no refuge by her family, she knew that she could not endure the suffering nor numb up its pain. She understood her trauma for what it was. Her understanding of her trauma was not anecdotal. She understood trauma, as postulated by Punt (2022:111), as “deeply distressing or disturbing experience, at a social or personal level, not restricted to political contexts only, even if it often manifests in particularly acute ways in those contexts”. Its effects are distinguishable because the person experiencing trauma bears the physical and psychologically enormous effects (Punt 2022:111).

The traumatic effects were not only experienced by her. Her only son too suffered violence at the hands of his father. The two of them lived and experienced violence regularly in their home. The aforementioned violence survivors describe the perpetrator as a chef at work because he was a chef at the hotel where he worked, but a butcher at home because he attempted many times to end their lives but failed. Many times the perpetrator’s attacks were averted due to the bravery of Hope’s mother who stood between the perpetrator and her son and told the perpetrator that he would only kill her son if he killed her first.

During the year 1999 on a very odd day, this GBV survivor bravely decided to move out of her house with her son to start a new life somewhere where she felt safe. She found a place of safety and started building her life together with her son and two daughters who also survived violence by their father but did not endure as much as their sibling and mother did. Her survival is one of a resilient woman who had to face dealing with new challenges that presented themselves at her new home.

## **A stigmatised GBV survivor, her faith and her son**

A new challenge faced the survivor of GBV. As her son grew older, she started noticing character signs in him that although he was not influenced by his abusive father, he started developing tendencies of being a violent teenager

himself. Unbeknownst to herself, her hunch was valid. Her son practiced violence and exerted it on innocent people. According to him, this was a long-hatched plan from childhood that as soon as he was able, he was going to avenge against his father.

Although there was little of this plan that she was aware of, his mother thought that if her son turned violent she was going to be stigmatised for bringing a perpetrator of violence into the world. Worse still, she feared that if he was going to have a woman partner, she was going to suffer the same violence that she suffered at the hands of her husband. Driven by this fear she turned to faith for aid to avert the realisation of her fears.

Shortly after she gained her independence, she started associating with a community of the Christian faith that she hoped would guide her on how to pass on to her son the message of redemption that would result in his salvation and bear the fruit of causing him not only to not be a perpetrator of GBV but a moral voice against GBV. She faithfully devoted herself to the teachings of the Christian community that she had found and faithfully shared those teachings with her son.

Amongst the many teachings that she received from the Christian community was that she bears the stigma of bringing a sinner into the world. However, she was encouraged that if she applied 1 Timothy 2:15 she will be delivered from that stigma. This rabbinic interpretation, according to Hutson (2014:402-403), posits that Eve is to blame as the first sinner. In light of this view, it is from the woman that sin comes and death as a consequence of her sin. Her rescue from this stigma is by the propagation of godliness through raising godly children, adhering to her God-given role (Schreiner 2016:222, 225). This interpretation, which finds favour among many scholars, is what led the woman referred herein to take it upon herself to ensure that her son became godly so as to be preserved from the potential stigma he might have brought her had he not been redeemed. Her son, who authored this study, dissents as he will show later in the study why this interpretation cannot be sustained. Nevertheless, her motives and intentions were virtuous even though 1 Timothy 2:15 was used inaccurately.

Her efforts yielded the results she prayed for. Her son was redeemed in 2006. He started devoting himself to the teachings of the bible which led him to see the heinousness of violence against the *Imago Dei*. This means that he reneged from his plans to take revenge against his father. Not only that, but he committed himself to being educated about being violent-free. His education led him to being educated about the equality of men and women and of the proper understanding of relationships in society and in marriage. The bible, Christian values and norms taught him appropriate societal behaviour and to learn from Jesus how not to treat human beings as less valued, especially women. He thus gained a redeeming understanding of the value of human life through the life of Jesus in order to promote change in society that will ensure the protection of would-be victims of GBV and to train others not to be perpetrators of GBV (Cornelius 2013:188-190).

## **A text-generated persuasion interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15**

This section and the remainder of the study is devoted to interpreting 1 Timothy 2:15, to demonstrate how this text of scripture can hardly be used to perpetuate violence against women under the guise of an authoritative injunction found in the bible. The method that will be employed to analysis this text is called *a text-generated persuasion-interpretation*.<sup>6</sup> It is an analysis of the rhetoric of the text without preselecting a rhetorical model and fitting it into it. It most importantly does not rely on ancient Greco-Roman rhetorical model to analyse the text. It analyses the rhetoric of the text by firstly identifying the dominant rhetorical objective of a particular pericope, then analysing that strategy, and showing various rhetorical techniques that the author uses to enhance his or her persuasion (Snyman 2009:1). It answers two primary questions: (1) how can one describe the author's primary rhetorical objective in the particular section; (2) how does the author set about achieving this objective?

Tolmie (2004:37) first suggested a text-centred descriptive analysis of how the author attempts to persuade his audience by formulating an analytical guide called a "minimal theoretical framework". Genade (2015:21-22) formalised

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<sup>6</sup> Hereinafter referred to as TGPI.

this guideline into orderly steps that are involved in this methodology. The five steps followed in this methodology are:

Step 1: identify the dominant rhetorical strategy;

Step 2: create a detailed analysis of the author's rhetorical strategy;

Step 3: identify the supportive rhetorical strategies;

Step 4: identify the rhetorical techniques; and

Step 5: describe the organisation of the argument of the letter as a whole.

## **Dominant rhetorical strategy of 1 Timothy 2:15**

### ***Persuading the recipients to apply scripture correctly by interpreting it correctly.***

Ordinarily in TGPI one would take a pericope of a number of verses to describe the dominant rhetorical strategy of that section and show how the author uses supporting rhetorical strategies and rhetorical techniques to persuade the audience to see their point of view. In this study, however, 1 Timothy 2:15 is regarded as a concluding statement of the 1 Timothy 2:8-15 pericope (Porter 1993:93; Schreiner 2016:216). Thus, the rhetorical objective may be constructed from the 1 Timothy 2:8-15 pericope or from 1 Timothy 2:15 as a stand-alone text. This study will describe the rhetorical strategy of 1 Timothy 2:15 while using the 1 Timothy 2:8-15 text for context in the analysis.

As such, the dominant rhetorical strategy in 1 Timothy 2:15 may be described as *persuading the recipients to apply scripture correctly by interpreting it correctly*. In 1 Timothy 2:15 Paul<sup>7</sup> uses the conclusion of the argument to say “but she will be saved through the bearing of children, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification with self-restraint” (σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας, ἐὰν μείνωσιν ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ καὶ ἀγιασμῶ μετὰ σωφροσύνης 1 Timothy 2:15). At first glance this passage appears to be

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<sup>7</sup> This study will refer to the author of 1 Timothy as Paul who is identified as the author in 1 Timothy 1:1. Regarding the historic Paul of the undisputed Pauline letters as the author of 1 Timothy, see Carson and Moo (2008, 554-587).

problematic. Scientifically, scholars such as Porter (1993:95) and Upton (2007:175) have labelled it embarrassing, sexually discriminatory with regards to how the *hapax legomenon* τεκνογονίας appears to be confining childbearing to women only and oppressive towards women in ecclesiastical structures. Still more harsh categorisation, Jacobs (2005:85) calls it an irredeemable text. One can sympathise with such challenges to a biblical text, and others like it, that have been used to justify the subjugation of women without conducting due exegetical diligence of this text that will be able to withstand scholarly scrutiny.

Cornelius (2022) penned an article wherein she pertinently asks whether the New Testament can be blamed for unfair discrimination and domineering of women in societies. In defence of the New Testament, Cornelius (2002:1) argues that the New Testament is not to blame for such discrimination. She, however, recognises that it is without question that the New Testament has been used to foster such acts. It has been interpreted wrongly yet formed fertile ground for the formation of disparities between men and women and fostered by religion. She attributes this to New Testament texts that she claims promote patriarchy when referring to women described as child bearers and workers at home, required to be silent and obedient, dress and behave modestly (Cornelius 2022:3). Notwithstanding this, Cornelius (2022:3) recognises that there are hints gleaned from Jesus and Paul's writings that suggest their view towards women was revolutionary.

It was revolutionary in a sense that the equality of men and women is found in pertinent passages of the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> The equally yet different principle is how Strauch (1999:3) prefers to frame the portrayal of men and women in the bible because he believes the complementarian viewpoint is what has to be seen in passages some scholars categorise as patriarchal. The debate on the same passages of scripture have been traversed from a host of approaches of Biblical interpretation. As some scholars may have earlier discussed a text such as 1 Timothy 2:15 through the lens of either egalitarianism or complementarianism, it is unwise to assume that the debate is solely between proponents of these two opposing views.

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<sup>8</sup> Gl 3:28; Eph 5:23; Jn 4:1-42; Lk 13:18-21; Mk 1:30-31; Lk 10; 38-42; Mk 15:40-41).

What Cornelius (2022:4) aptly observes, a view aligned to a position adopted in this study, is that one's method of Biblical interpretation is what will ultimately determine one's conclusion on what 1 Timothy 2:15 teaches and how it is to be applied today. This study has already stated that TGPI will be used to analyse 1 Timothy 2:15, which will yield insights obscured by theological treatises with which this text has been analysed. Suffice to mention, however, is that much can be relied on from existing scholarship to enhance the interpretation and discussion of this text. While Jacobs (2005) asks why we should still interpret irredeemable biblical texts, Porter (1993) already stated over a decade prior to Jacobs that 1 Timothy 2:15 is a text that will refuse to go away as an item of debate. The debates have been beneficial in that they have narrowed down the crucial issues to zoom in on this for purposes of enhancing New Testament research.

Paul's objective, as stated above, is to persuade the recipients of 1 Timothy to interpret 1 Timothy 2:15 correctly; this is what scholars have been embarking on as well. Some of what scholars have invited our attention to is the interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15 in context. The need for taking context into account is because of the lexical and grammatical points that stand out in this text. The commonly observed is firstly the subjects of the verbs σωθήσεται (Porter 1993; Schreiner 2016) and μείνωσιν (Schreiner 2016). The second is what type of salvation does σωθήσεται refer to. Thirdly, what and who does the *hapax* τεκνογονίας refer to? Lastly, how does the preposition διὰ function?

Louw and Nida (1988:241) define the indicative, future, passive verb σωθήσεται as "to rescue from danger and to restore to a former state of safety and wellbeing". The subject of this verb is not explicitly stated in 1 Timothy 2:15. The near reference this could refer to is ἡ γυναῖκα ("the woman") mentioned in verse 14. But as Porter (1993:90) poignantly argues this does not solve the difficulty of explaining which woman this refers to, because the woman in 1 Timothy 2:14 should have an antecedent to aid us in exegeting the text.<sup>9</sup> There is no specific woman this refers to, therefore it should at best be concluded that ἡ γυναῖκα ("the woman") is generic, which makes sense since the verb is in the future tense and will always reference every woman who has ever come

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<sup>9</sup> SE Porter (1993, 90-91) for at least five exegetical solutions that have been provided by scholars.

after Eve (Porter 1993:92; Schreiner 2016:219). This study argues that it could also refer to whoever will be saved or that the work of salvation itself is what will continue in the future as a result of children being born.

The moving away from the explicit mention of Eve in the illustration in 1 Timothy 2:13, to the omission of Eve in 1 Timothy 2:15, to the generic reference to the nominative singular “the woman” (ἡ γυνή) shows that neither Eve nor any woman is to blame for anything. It is purposeful by Paul to move away from stigmatising Eve or any woman. It is an illustration which should not be theologised. Jacobs (2005:91) fails to notice this but is quick to infer that Paul refers to Eve thereby accusing him of probably misunderstanding the account of Genesis 2-3. Similarly, Hutson (2014:402) points out that in the second century BCE, Eve was seen as the woman who plunged the entire human race into sin based on the Genesis 3 account. The sense of the entire text of 1 Timothy 2:15 will be provided below as the analysis continues.

The text continues to be more puzzling by alluding to “the woman” being saved through the bearing of children. Schreiner (2016:219) explains how some scholars have attempted to refer to the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15 to refer to the child as Christ so that the text would align the salvation of the woman through Christ. This will surely be scholarly palatable as it will be aligned with the other New Testament texts that make it plain that salvation does not come by childbearing. This reading saves this verse from many problems, such as women not having children but being saved, the women who are not married as 1 Corinthians 7 teaches, stepmothers being saved as Upton (2007) asks as well as adoptive mothers. Platt (2013:49) staying away from committing himself to the exegesis of the text, theologises it by stating that women are saved through Christ and not through the birth of children. Porter (1993:94) puts to rest the debate by examining from the letter-context that the passive verb σωθήσεται is salvific in the sense that the recipient of the salvation receives it from God who is the agent of salvation. This interpretation accounts for the use of the preposition διὰ as a marker through which an event is realised (Louw & Nida 1988:787).

The event that is anticipated to be realised by Paul is the salvation that will come through childbearing (τεκνογονίας). This is a notoriously bold conclusion to reach as it makes the conclusion prone to challenges that exegetes will find



difficult to answer. However, despite the interpretive challenges, this text cannot ignore the function of the preposition διὰ that it unequivocally states that the instrument through which salvation will be realised is by the bearing of children (Porter 1993:98). It is the bearing of children that accomplishes salvation, or that that childbearing makes it possible for salvation to be realised because without children continually being born there will be no perpetual availability of the recipients of salvation. This interpretation accounts for the use of the plural μείνωσιν which makes the children the product of childbirth and beneficiaries of salvation. This accounts for why Paul is generic and does not attach the subject σωθήσεται. It is worth noting that this makes the text grammatically awkward as Porter (1993:98, 99) provocatively remarks that it leads to the implication that the children will accomplish the salvation of their mothers through faith and love.

Continuing on that trajectory, Paul concludes by stating that the subjects who will be saved through childbearing will be σωθήσεται ἂν μείνωσιν ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ καὶ ἀγιασμῷ μετὰ σωφροσύνης, 1 Timothy 2:15. The spanner in the exegetical works of this last clause of the verse is the third-class conditional clause, the *protasis* ἂν followed by the subjunctive verb μείνωσιν. Little attention is paid to the *apodosis* and the *protasis* of this verse, which have massive implications for the interpretation of this verse. Porter (2010:307-320) discusses at length the impact the third-class conditional clause has on one's exegesis. Similarly, Mounce (2009:329) and Wallace (1996:679-712) discuss the meaning and impact of conditional clauses on one's exegesis with reference to whether they refer to a likely or unlikely future occurrences.

Figuring out the responsible interpretation and application of this text proves to be quite challenging, with scholarly consensus remaining elusive. A panacea cannot be reached, and this study does not propose to solve the debates. The contribution this study makes is to observe from the scholarly debates something not stated, namely Paul's strategy in 1 Timothy 2:15. It is argued herein that his dominant rhetorical strategy was to *persuade the recipients to apply scripture correctly by interpreting it correctly*. He intentionally phrased it as provocative, vague, ambiguous, not exactly appearing to be interpreting the Genesis account correctly, appearing to be teaching a salvation by works, using a *hapax legomenon*, and ending with a third-class conditional clause which is hard to solve.

This appears to be his point, to puzzle the audience so that they may embark on an exegetical journey leading to the discovery of the meaning and application of 1 Timothy 2:15. He also uses the supportive rhetorical strategy and rhetorical techniques to enhance the effectiveness of his main persuasive strategy. Some of them will be discussed briefly below to show how they contribute to the dominant rhetorical strategy and the probable interpretation and application of 1 Timothy 2:15.

### ***Argument based on authority of scripture***

At the back of Paul's argument on 1 Timothy 2:15 lies the prohibition against women teaching and exercising authority over men in 1 Timothy 2:12. What follows this injunction is Paul's substantiation in 1 Timothy 2:13-14. What we find him employing is the supportive strategy called *argument based on the authority of scripture*. *Argument based on the authority of scripture* is a rhetorical strategy that Paul employs numerous times in his letters. The main purpose for alluding to scripture is to motivate the readers to engage with the scriptures they hold in high regard. If they find that his teachings are consistent with the authority they hold, they are likely to be persuaded to accept Paul's point (Tolmie 2004:108).

Scholars are generally in concert that Paul alludes to the Genesis account regarding the creation order of Adam and Eve in 1 Timothy 2:13, but then strangely he attributes what is commonly known as the "original sin"<sup>10</sup> to someone other than Adam. To be specific, an unspecified woman. Jodamus (2005:28) specifies the woman as Eve and draws the reader's attention to the intensified word for deception "ἐξαπατηθεῖσα" in relation to her in 1 Timothy 2:14. Jacobs (2005:91) is even more scathing of Paul. She accuses Paul of distorting Genesis 3:13 by scapegoating Eve as the only transgressor in Genesis.

Jacobs (2005:91) further points out that deception was fairly used in the then world to silence people. However, is that what Paul is doing here? The answer may emerge from the rhetorical techniques that Paul employed which will be

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<sup>10</sup> Grenz et al (1999:87) define original sin as "the state of alienation from God into which all humans are born". Original sin is also connected to Adam as the first human to sin, thus plunging the entire human race into sin. Some scholars refer to it as "federal theology" (Horton 2011:994).

discussed below. Suffice to mention at this point is that Paul's allusion to scripture, or using it for illustrative purposes, is a very effective strategy which serves to enhance his persuasion.

### **(a) Irony**

The rhetorical technique that Jacobs (2005) fails to notice that Paul employs by referring to the Genesis account, is the technique of irony. Irony, argues Lanham (1991:128), employs fallacious speech to imply the opposite of what is stated. On a more sophisticated level, the author may infuse irony with hyperbole and lead the readers to do *reductio ad absurdum*. In *reductio* Paul wants the readers to engage the scriptures to see that if they accept a fallacious reading of the Genesis account, they will reap disorder as all of 1 Timothy 2 is about accepting the orderly way God wants the church to conduct its business. If Paul were to argue that Eve was deceived, then he would be committing *ad absurdum*. Traces of his understanding of Genesis in his other teachings, imply Adam is the one who was deceived.<sup>11</sup> If Eve were deceived, who was she deceived by? It seems the culpability lies squarely with Adam as it would be *ad ridiculum* to conclude otherwise.

This is the point Paul aims to achieve in the text of 1 Timothy 2. The text may appear unpalatable to someone like Keener (1998) who relies on extrabiblical sources to interpret the meaning of Paul's words. Jacobs (2005) similarly misrepresents Paul's argument by claiming that Paul did not understand the genre of Genesis and that he interpreted and applied it through the lens of the patriarchal traditions that shaped his theological understanding of scripture. It seems that relying on Graeco-Roman literature leads one to depart from critically engaging with the text comprehensively and let the text speak for itself.

If one looks closely at the 1 Timothy 2:15, rather than attempting to explain away that Paul says "but she will be delivered by childbearing" (σωθήσεται δὲ διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας), we can find a plausible explanation by looking at his rhetorical intent. He intends for his recipients to plainly discover that to conclude women will be preserved, rescued from danger and restored to a

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<sup>11</sup> A detailed argument is made in Romans 5:12-21. The other passage that alludes to Paul's understanding of the Genesis account is 1 Corinthians 15:22.

state before the deception is interpretively implausible. It is implausible because this supposed salvation through childbearing happens “if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint” (ἐὰν μείνωσιν ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ καὶ ἀγιασμῷ μετὰ σωφροσύνης). The use of the third-class conditional clause “if” (ἐὰν) casts doubt into whether Paul promises this to be a future reality the recipients of 1 Timothy 2:15 should anticipate.

### ***(b) Paralipsis***

One of the rhetorical techniques that Paul employs to enhance his persuasion of the recipients to interpret and apply scripture correctly is by deliberately omitting the antecedent of ἡ γυνὴ in 1 Timothy 2:14. While some scholars have concluded that it is Eve and her progeny, Paul has not committed himself to that conclusion. It is deliberate on his part because to say this is Eve would legitimise some of the criticism this text has received, namely that Paul blames Eve for being deceived by misreading the Genesis account.

In 1 Timothy 2:14 it was not Eve who was deceived, so she cannot be stigmatised for plunging the entire human race into sin. Women are not saved by childbearing and depending on their children’s faithfulness of works nor the mother’s perseverance in godly living. The use of a third-class conditional clause “if” (ἐὰν) makes it almost unequivocal that there is no promise of future salvation as a reality to be anticipated by anyone. TGPI promises to converse with scholars seeking to solve a number of problems associated with this passage with the hope of eradicating the stigma women face because of how it has often been interpreted. It however remains a challenging text and we are invited to embark on this challenge, looking at other Paul and women texts using TGPI to interpret them.

## **Conclusion**

This study started on the premise that up to this day scholars who have embarked on analysing 1 Timothy 2:15 have done so to determine which theological viewpoint this text supports. The lacuna that emerged from literature reviewed pointed to the need for a new way of interpreting this passage using Greek rhetorical analysis called TGPI since it has never been applied to this text. This methodology takes full advantage of exploring the

beauty of Paul's rhetorical wit without proving or disproving theological viewpoints that have emerged from interpreting this verse in Christendom.

The application of this methodology yields new insights that may have an impact on one's interpretation and application of this text. Taking a closer look at Paul's dominant rhetorical objective, the supporting objective, and rhetorical techniques used to enhance his persuasion, alternative meanings of this contentious text emerged. The first alternative interpretation is that Paul persuades the readers by showing them that it is not Eve who is to blame in Genesis 3. Subsequently it is not women in general. The second alternative interpretation is that since it confines the role of rearing children and passing the message of redemption to women, that role cannot be their sole responsibility. Interpreters of this text should properly teach about the collective effort it requires to pass the message of redemption to children.

After all, Paul will proceed in 1 Timothy 3 to say overseers have the responsibility to teach the message of redemption. This surely includes overseers teaching the children. The third alternative interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15 is that Paul knows that the bearing of children cannot apply to everybody for various circumstances. Some people may not have children. If that is the case, does that mean they will not be "delivered" (σωθήσεται)?

First Timothy 2:15 is about persuading the readers to discover the meaning of scripture for themselves. Once they do, they will take pleasure in having the ability to interpret the scripture for themselves (Kukuni 2022:51). Once they have discovered the meaning for themselves, they will see that 1 Timothy 2:15 does not apportion blame to women. Therefore, those who have used it to stigmatise women or those who read it to be perpetuating GBV should be persuaded to look at it afresh through a text-generated persuasion analysis.

Notwithstanding this challenge, women in Africa who have had to endure the stigma attributed to the fact that they birthed and reared male perpetrators of GBV should be liberated from this burden by reading texts correctly. The fact that some embarked on a journey of faith to faithfully pass the message of redemption to their children through struggles and wrong readings of texts must be applauded. The woman referred to in this study must be applauded because a wrong reading of a text was used by God who knows the true

meaning to pass the message of redemption to her son. He now not only has been rescued from being a perpetrator of GBV, but he also now has a wife and female daughter who he knows should never suffer any violence because there is no justification for it in scripture. Moreover, his teachings and activity in the church offer a safe space to women, do not stigmatise any woman for the acts of her child(ren), and offer support to survivors of GBV.

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