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THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE MORAVIAN CHURCH IN TANZANIA

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BY

MARY L. KATEGILE

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DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this work to my husband the late Rev. Eliah I. Kategile, who believed in the Shared ministry and to all my Children.

**THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE MORAVIAN CHURCH IN TANZANIA**

**INTRODUCTION**

God calls different people for ministry, in order for them to render service to this world in a variety of spheres. Jesus Christ was sent by God to bring salvation to fallen humankind. Upon his departure, he commissioned his disciples to preach and teach the good news to all people. Because whoever believes will be saved, that person becomes Christ’s follower and all of Christ’s followers are equal. Daniel L. Migliore asserts that, “God calls Abraham, chooses the people of Israel, summons the prophets, sends Jesus of Nazareth and commissions the followers of Jesus for service in the world.”[[1]](#footnote-2) That is, all believers are called to serve God in proclaiming the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ to all nations. From the beginning of Christianity followers of Jesus Christ, men and women have been involved in that task of proclamation of the good news. In fact, the first evangelists were the women who visited the tomb, in the work of evangelism and church planting in the early church men and women collaborated. As the church grew and became more institutionalized, the situation changed: women were left out of the ministry of the church, and that change shifted the original tenet that all believers are equal. Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo contend that;

The ebb and flow of women’s participation in leadership does not merely fluctuate according to changes in biblical exegesis or reigning interpretation of particular passages of scriptures. Rather, the pattern can also be traced to institutionalization of the church (the development of organizational structures), influences from the surrounding culture and the theology of leadership at work in the church.[[2]](#footnote-3)

The issue of women’s ordination has been debated greatly over centuries as theologians and biblical scholars have given their different views on the matter, according to their stance, however, an issue of biblical interpretation as well as historical and cultural influences that have shaped our tradition as the church. Though many western post-Reformation Protestant groups have, settled the issue in favor of women’s ordination, Protus Kendirum writes, “In the African Churches, however, the case of women and their demand to be allowed fuller participation at all levels in Church life remains a subject of endless debate.”[[3]](#footnote-4) Despite the fact that African women have been very active in the life of the church and their contribution has been remarkable, in many churches women have been denied the right to a full participation, especially in the ordained ministry. From the beginning African women have worked and continue to work tirelessly in the church and the results of their work cannot be ignored.

In affirming this concept John Pobee, an African male scholar speaking about women in Africa, says,

It is a truism worth repeating that women represent more than half of the church, and further, constitute a kind of backbone of the church. The commitment of many women to the life of the Church is what makes the church alive and visible in the society.[[4]](#footnote-5)

The aforementioned statement calls for proper discussions so as to enable women to participate fully in the ministry of God according to each one’s call. In African women’s commitment we can see their ability to serve in the ordained ministry as well as in other leadership roles.

The situation of women’s ordination in Moravian Church in Tanzania needs to be addressed, because so far only two out of four provinces have agreed to ordain women, but still even in those provinces not all people accept female pastors. Women’s ordination in the Moravian Church in Tanzania arrived as a new thing from the Western world not only to Moravian Tanzanians but also to most African Christians. As much as Tanzania embraced Christianity when it arrived from the Western missionaries, one would expect they would accept the ordination of women in the church as well; unfortunately Africans were not sure if it was the right thing to accept it or not, due to a conservative focus left by missionaries and the misinterpretation of the bible, especially the epistle letters.

The gospel that the early missionaries delivered from the Bible that today we can say sounded more male centered added to the cultural influence which was and still is very strong in the life of Africans. Most people in Africa find it hard to accept women as leaders in matters of faith simply because in African culture women are known as mothers and homemakers and not leaders, although in some cases women were queens who were leaders in their ethnic groups. B. E. Kunambi notes, “In ordinary life it has always been said that woman’s place is in the home, or even worse, in the kitchen. This has made a woman through history, in Africa and almost through-out the world, to be or feel a second class human being.”[[5]](#footnote-6) Kemdirim echoes these words: “There is no gain-saying that in traditional African Society women were seen rather than heard. Their roles were strictly to domestic circles….It is therefore not surprising that women could not participate equally with men in the social, political, and cultural life of the various societies.”[[6]](#footnote-7)

For most Africans the idea of women’s ordination brings many questions: why should women be ordained in the church? Why is this matter coming now to the church? Is this just another Western idea we are being forced to accept? What does it mean to the whole church? People who were against ordination had their different arguments on the matter. Some thought it was a political issue: since women had, been demanding their equal rights in the secular world, now they wanted to bring those issues within the church. Therefore, it could not be possible to ordain women because the Bible is very clear that women should be silent in the church. Besides Jesus did not select women among his disciples; therefore, the church should not ordain women. Also, since Jesus was male, those who represent him in the ordained ministry should be males as well. Some thought this was a new fad coming against the tradition by which Christianity came to Africa. Most missionaries were men; therefore, we cannot change and admit women because that will be against church tradition.

Early African church fathers were very clear on the matter that women were unfit for ordained ministry. Moreover, in African culture a woman’s place is at home, so it is not possible for her to go into the ordained ministry because that will mean that she will be leading men and will leave her place in the home. This mindset has been due to misinterpretation of both the bible and its context and historical church tradition, as well as a reflection of cultural perspectives.

It is my intention in this study to address the ordination of women from biblical, historical, and cultural perspectives, so as to contribute some theological understanding on this important matter. The first chapter will deal with biblical arguments against the ordination of women and their counters in support. The second chapter will examine the historical arguments which have shaped the church traditions; the early ordination of women in the Moravian Church will be used as counter argument. The third chapter will address some cultural arguments and their counters. Then the conclusion will offer some suggestions to enhance the understanding of the women’s ordination in the Moravian Church in Tanzania.

“Ordain” in Latin means “to order or decree. God ordains or decrees what God wills; also to confer a sacred office for the purpose of ministry.”[[7]](#footnote-8) Theologically we can say ordination is an official act which comes upon someone as a result of God’s call to a believer who is set apart for the ministry of the word and sacrament upon the laying on hands. Migliore contends,

Ordination is properly understood missiologically rather than ontologically. That is, ordination is not a mysterious change of ontological status elevating the person ordained over other Christians. It is being commissioned and authorized to a particular task in the power of the Spirit.[[8]](#footnote-9)

This is the understanding of most protestant churches which is contrary to the understanding of the Catholic Church which believes ordination to be ontological. For the Moravian Church the ordination in Christian ministry has its source in God alone. According to the Faith and Order Commission of the Moravian Church in America, “Any Christian theology of ministry must begin with the *missio Dei:* the work of God in the world at all times and in all places. The church’s ministry is to carry out the work of God. This responsibility belongs to all who are baptized.”[[9]](#footnote-10) That is, all women and men who are baptized are responsible in carrying out the ministry of God in this world. The Moravian Church believes in the priesthood of all believers, that men and women both are called to serve in the ministry of God and that their vocation is holy and based on a biblical foundation. The ordination does not contradict the priesthood of all believers but rather it consents it, and those who are ordained are set apart for the ministry of the word and sacrament, and that the ordained people are responsible in providing the leadership in life and service of the church.[[10]](#footnote-11) In her church order, the Moravian Church affirms that mutuality:

The constituted orders of the ministry in the Moravian Church are those of Deacons, Presbyters and Bishops…The ministry of the ordained is an expression of ministry of the whole people of God and a response to the call and gifts of Christ Who is Chief Elder of the Church and its ministry. The orders are expressions of service rather than rank. Only one is recognized as having authority in Himself: Jesus the Christ Who also served. Persons feeling a call to ordained ministry in the Moravian Church shall be given equal consideration without reference to their sex.”[[11]](#footnote-12)

Our goal should be to translate that affirmation into reality. That is, the Moravian understanding of ordination is based on service to God and Gods people. In the service of ordination, the ordinand promises to be faithful to Christ and to the whole people of God that means it is not a hierarchical issue but rather a service to people one is set apart to represent others before God as he or she is one of them.

**CHAPTER ONE**

**THE WOMEN’S ORDINATION FROM BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES**

Through faith all believers are baptized; once one is baptized and/or confirmed then that person becomes a follower and a servant of Jesus. Baptized women should have the right to respond to God’s call to ordained ministry and serve their savior in solidarity with men.

From the very beginning of the Christian era women did remarkable work in the church. During the time of Jesus Christ, according to the gospels, women played important roles and contributed tremendously to the spread of the good news. In the Gospel of Luke, for example, women are mentioned as followers of Jesus as well as providers: “Mary Magdalene… and Joana, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for Jesus and his disciples out of their own resources” (Luke 8:2-3). Apparently these women provided money as well as their physical presence. In other words, they enabled Jesus and the twelve (men) to proceed in their ministry.

Jesus’ attitude towards women gives credibility to women and their ministry during his time. Lesely F. Massey contends, “It is quite significant that the attitude of Jesus toward women as represented in the Gospels is not that which is perpetuated in the later Christian tradition. Instead, he appears to have suggested in various ways his rejection of the notion of female inferiority, often boldly challenging tradition.”[[12]](#footnote-13) Jesus Christ, who is God and creator, valued women and their talents and gifts. That can be seen in stories such as the one of a Samaritan woman whom in normal circumstances, Jesus would not talk to, because Jews and Samaritans could not mix and had nothing in common (John 4:9). Jesus used this woman as a missionary to the people of Samaria who because of her message invited Jesus to visit them, listen to him and believed. Samaritans were mixture of the Israelites and Assyrians therefore, the more traditional Jews considered the Samaritans unclean. The only thing which they had in common was the Torah. Jesus, however, as he frequently did, broke that prejudice, asked the woman for water and spoke to her of the “living water” he offered. Listening to Jesus made her to understand herself better and thereafter she did an evangelistic work, after realizing that Jesus was the expected Messiah which Jesus affirmed that he was. “Many Samaritans in the city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, ‘He told me everything I have ever done’. (John 4:39).

One reason why women were so frequently in Jesus’ company was his positive attitude toward and treatment of them. We can see Jesus’ recognition of women in the story of the Canaanite woman, an account recorded by Matthew and Mark, where Jesus honors her faith in her persistent plea for the healing of her daughter: “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be done as you wish.” (Matthew 15:28). And her daughter was healed instantly. The social status of women during the Roman regime was low.

As in the story of the Samaritan woman, the story of a woman caught in adultery proves that, although Jesus did not approve of what the woman did, he knew it was an unfair trial because only the woman was condemned and not the man. Jesus said “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her…Woman where are they? Has no one condemned you? She replied, No one sir,”…Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again” (John 8:7, 10-11). Jesus wanted the woman to be treated fairly. But also Jesus drew from Jewish law in which both a man and the woman were to be stoned if were caught in adultery. But more than that, he saw her essential humanity as well as that of her accusers who, he perceives, though men of authority and power have sins of their own to account for before condemning another to death for her sin. Arthur Freeman contends, “The understanding of women in the New Testament shows the impact of God’s action in Christ, through which it recognized that the existence and identity [of every human being] depend on grace and not societal values.”[[13]](#footnote-14) After the fall of man, all people were condemned and fell short of glory of God, so all needed salvation. Therefore, God decided to redeem the whole of humanity and from there we are all saved by grace.

It is notable that God’s redemption to humanity came through the special call to Mary the mother of Jesus. She is one example of a woman who responded positively to God’s special call by agreeing to give birth to the savior. “Then Mary said; “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1: 38). Mary is an example for all of us who hear the call from God that leads to our respective vocations. “Mary… was obedient to God’s call and brought redemption to the world through the birth of Jesus. She was the spiritual mother of Christians who were participants in God’s new creation.”[[14]](#footnote-15)

Jesus accepted women, and in his ministry he elevated them and recognized their ministry as he did with the woman who poured costly oil on his head: “Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.” (Mark 14:9).

After his resurrection, Jesus himself commanded women to go and tell his disciples that he was alive. That was an apostolic mission by itself. “In view of the great importance of this apostolic witness to the resurrection, it can hardly be wholly inconsequential that the risen Lord appeared first to women.”[[15]](#footnote-16) Jesus’ command to women can affirm his aim to elevate women to the role of preachers. Barbara J. MacHaffie asserts,

The fact that the risen Lord appeared first to women (Matt. 28:9; John 20:1ff.) and even commissioned them to tell his brethren (Matt 28:10) cannot be construed as mere coincidence. It was the result of a deliberate choice on his part. Thus these women became the initial witness to the event which is the basis of all Christian preaching.[[16]](#footnote-17)

In the early church, as is very clearly narrated in the Bible, women also were active in the ministry such as witnessing, offering financial support, planting churches etc. They played these different roles; they worked in solidarity with men without exclusion. In addition, they held roles in the leadership of the church until Christianity became an official religion in the Roman Empire. According to Catherine Clark Kroeger’s research, “women acted in various leadership roles, including bishops (or elders) and deacons.”[[17]](#footnote-18) According to Paul’s letters there were women who participated in leadership roles in the early church; as Paul writes, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and myself as well” (Romans 16:1). Linda Belleville writes,

The number and range of female ministry roles took a leap forward in the early church. Paul’s greetings to the Roman church reflect this. No less than one out of every three individuals greeted is a woman… Women were singled out in the early church as apostles (Rom. 16:7), prophets (Acts 18:21:9; 1Cor. 11:5), and evangelists (Phil. 4:2-3)…[[18]](#footnote-19)

In the debate about women’s ordination, scholars tend to define their roles in two areas: The role of women in leadership and their participation in the general ministry of the church. Just as much as one would want to merge them together and be one thing, also they can be distinctive according to the interpretation and understanding of the bible. “While the New Testament does not tell us specifically what pastors did, we do know that both men and women provided spiritual leadership for churches which met in their homes. In the early church, almost all Christian meetings were held in private homes. Among these house-church’s pastors was Mary the mother of John who later became a missionary.”[[19]](#footnote-20) Complementarians[[20]](#footnote-21) hold that women were involved only in domestic activities within the church; in other words, they were active in service or “diakonia,” which means to serve at the table, but there is no place in the bible that permits women to be leaders.

Hans Kung contends, “This [the role of deaconia] originally denoted serving at the table. Here it was evidently the way in which Jesus himself served his disciples at the table can set the irrevocable standard.”[[21]](#footnote-22) Now if Jesus did a women’s work, then can’t women do Jesus’ work--to bring good news to his people. If Jesus left us the example of serving others as he did, I do not see why we should exclude one another in the ministry of the church. Some arguments say that women played only minor roles, such as providing for Jesus and his male disciples and giving their homes for church meetings, as well as to witnessing, but we should bear in mind that those “minor” roles were roles which established the church which we have today.

Those who argue against the ordination of women see the ministry of the church as hierarchical, and believe the only people who are permitted to be leaders (in this sense to be ordained) are men who are perceived to be superior to women. “Women and men together share the *imago Dei,* and this divine image is a social reality. [We can conclude] that considerations such as these suggest that God intends for women and men to serve together in all aspects of church life.”[[22]](#footnote-23) However, it is worthwhile to think about and analyze the intent of Jesus Christ for the church, as to whether he wanted it to be hierarchical or not. Jesus’ intention for the church can be seen in his reply to the question concerning authority when James and John asked him to grant them to sit one on the right hand and the other on the left hand in his glory. (Mk. 10:35-37). James and John had misunderstood the whole mission of Jesus Christ that the church was not to be hierarchical but rather a mission of service, suffering and martyrdom. That can be seen in Jesus’ rejection of that hierarchical notion in his response:

You know that among the gentiles those whom they recognize as their ruler’s lord it over them and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be the first among you must be slave of all. The son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:42b-45)

Therefore, the intention of Jesus himself concerning the ministry of the church was not hierarchical as it later became. “In part, women found the message of Jesus appealing because it gave them equal status with men and new avenues of religious service. They sensed that the gospel granted women, as well as men, the opportunity to participate fully in the community of God’s new people.”[[23]](#footnote-24)It was due to the fact that men aspired and still aspire to be rulers which caused women to be excluded from the ministry of the church in its early history. The statement from Jesus shows that in his ministry he portrayed the picture of servant hood and not that of hierarchical lordship. Barbara J. MacHaffie asserts, “As the church grew and became more structured, it gradually underwent a process of ‘patriarchalization’ in which women were excluded from positions of leadership and authority.”[[24]](#footnote-25)

Furthermore, Christianity emerged from the Jewish culture and Judaist religion. Being something new to the Jewish society, early Christianity had to undergo different challenges of the time, socially as well as religiously. But “Jesus did not seek to change the structure and nature of society in order to reach individuals, but conversely to change the society by changing the hearts and lives of individuals.”[[25]](#footnote-26) The change which Jesus brought in the society of his time was done through his actions and his relationships to other people, which were and still are the model for the church and society as a whole. It is interesting to see that, “Jesus gave no explicit teaching on the role of women in the church. In fact, he left no teaching at all concerning women as a class of people. This is surprising, for he treated each woman he met as a person in her own right. Yet by observing Jesus in action and listening to his words we can deduce much about his attitude toward women.”[[26]](#footnote-27) In Luke’s account of Mary and Martha, when Martha complained to Jesus that her sister Mary by listening to his teaching was neglecting her womanly duty to serve the men, Jesus told her, “’there is need of one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her’” (Luke 10:42). This shows Jesus’ openness to and acceptance of women as among his followers. So Jesus as Lord of the church he should be a model for all believers in the church to treat and relate to each other equally.

Another argument against women’s ordination is that Jesus selected only men to be among the twelve disciples, and, therefore, only men can be ordained. Indeed he did, but it should be born in mind that “God is not sexual; the significance of Jesus is not his maleness but his humanness; distinction must be made between the symbolic function of the ‘Twelve’ and the apostles of Jesus who were not all male. “[[27]](#footnote-28) The women who followed Jesus can be recognized as apostles as well, according to the different roles they played and the meaning of the word apostle itself. Hans Kung asserts that, “There are no serious theological objections to women priests. The fact that the group of twelve was exclusively male must be understood in terms of social and cultural situation of the time”[[28]](#footnote-29) Despite the fact that Jesus was a revolutionary leader by bringing in new ways of thinking towards people of his time, he respected the Jewish culture and Judaism. The number of twelve had some significance in Judaism. Furthermore,

The lists of the 12 disciples or apostles are not uniform in biblical sources (compare Mark 3:14-19 and Acts 1:12-13). Many other people, including women, followed Jesus from place to place. Twelve is a significant number because of the 12 tribes of Israel, but there is no indication that these 12 individuals alone are important in Jesus’ life and ministry. As well, one cannot simply make an equation between the choosing of followers and ordination. [[29]](#footnote-30)

Jesus’ selection of only men to be his disciples reflected the culture and social situation of the time. It must be remembered that in Christ there is neither male nor female, even as there is neither Jew nor Gentile. In other words, the same Spirit who inspired the church to eliminate all barriers to accepting Gentiles on the same footing with Jews also inspired her to eliminate all barriers to accepting women on the same footing with men.[[30]](#footnote-31) Gentiles have been included in salvation by total grace from God; it is be a wonder for some of them to try to exclude their fellow gentiles (in this sense, women) from the ordained ministry. Kung reminds us when he asserts;

Not just the Twelve, nor even the Seventy, were apostles, but all those who were regarded as the original witnesses and messengers: those who proclaimed the message of Christ, founded, and led communities as the first witness. We cannot tell whether the title apostle was also given to women in Jewish Christianity; things would be different in the Gentile-Christian sphere.[[31]](#footnote-32)

In the larger picture, all people who proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ can be recognized as apostles. We should not overlook the first people, women, who witnessed and proclaimed the resurrection, which is the core of the Christian “kerygma.”[[32]](#footnote-33)

Another argument against the ordination of women is that God is male and Jesus was incarnated male; therefore, only males can represent Him in the ministry. In contrast to that argument, it is clear that those who argue that God is a male get that concept from the usage of the male pronoun in addressing God in the Bible. Grenz and Kjesbo say, “In the Old Testament, for example, God is the Lord of the universe, the King over all earth, the father of humankind and the Husband of Israel.”[[33]](#footnote-34)But this calls us first to go back to the creation story where God said, “‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our image likeness; … So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female’” (Genesis 1:26-27). From there we have the concept that male and female together make “the image of God.” That means God has no gender and is, therefore, neither male nor female. Besides, we read in the bible that God is spirit; definitely the spirit cannot have a gender.

Looking at God as our creator and we, as creatures cannot know God thoroughly because as human beings we have a limited comprehension. We cannot comprehend who God is; therefore, we try to speak of God in the relational language that is all we know. The way we relate to each other is the only way we can try to relate to God. We do not want to define our relationship to God as an impersonal, neuter “it,” so we use pronouns with gender to refer to God, but these pronouns, conferring human limitation on the Spirit of God, are metaphors for what God is. The writers of the Bible, probably all male in a patriarchal culture, found it natural and convenient to refer to God in the masculine.

But the masculine language in the Bible is metaphoric, which shows the human limitation in understanding God. A function of human intellect and human language cannot encompass God, so we need metaphor that is understandable to humans to approximate what we know of God. Sallie MacFague asserts, “The assumption here is that all talk of God is indirect: no words or phrases refer directly to God, for God-language can refer only through the detour of a description that properly belongs elsewhere.”[[34]](#footnote-35)

I like the understanding of God in African traditional religion especially in my tribe, I come from the tribe called Nyamwezi in Tanzania, where it is held that God is the “other” as human beings we cannot even try to speculate about God’s gender, because if we do that then God will cease to be God, and then becomes one of us, and as human beings we will want God to be in a box somewhere under our control, now that cannot happen. In the Tanzanian national language which is Swahili, God is genderless; God is called “*Mungu”* the name *Mungu* is used by several tribal languages in Africa. Some of those tribes are found in Tanzania, Kenya, Mozambique, Malawi, Zambia etc. There are some differences in pronunciations such as *Mulungu.[[35]](#footnote-36)* The connotations of God as male come from the use of pronouns, while in Swahili the pronoun for male and female is the same. That is where I suggest it would have been better to have the understanding of God without gender.

What is known of God in African religion is that God loves, is merciful, ever-present, all knowing, and always good. When Christianity developed the concept about the gender of God came along, through the metaphors of the Bible. Still to this day those African traditionalists hold that no human being can name God properly. That is why it is important for them to address God through their ancestors, because they believe that only after this life can a human being know who God is. John S. Mbiti asserts, “Above all, it is believed that God cannot be explained, he cannot be fully known. African peoples have long known this, and God has names which mean ‘the Unknown’, the Unexplainable’, the Fathomless Spirit…people know very little about God. God is God: no more, and no less.”[[36]](#footnote-37) It is notable that Jews do not even write the name of God. Though they use the masculine pronoun to refer to him, they demonstrate their limitations of possessing God’s nature by never giving the divine a name.

Though God possesses no gender, Jesus was clearly male, but the argument about the maleness of Jesus ignores the reality that Jesus’ mission was to bring salvation in to this world, through his birth, death, and resurrection. That means Christians ought to have a good understanding of who Jesus is. Jesus is God the savior; his ministry was successful not because of he was male but because he was/is God. Laurenti Magesa contends, “

The maleness of Jesus Christ has been used in the history of Christianity to denigrate women in the church. Jesus’ maleness has been taken to be determinative, not only of the theology, but consequently also of the structure of the church….here we have a *biologistic* fallacy which fails to take into account the integralness of male and female, which, for Christians, is made real in Jesus.[[37]](#footnote-38)

We should remember that Jesus was not only male, but also Jewish, and a carpenter. If we are to say women cannot be ordained because Jesus was male, then shouldn’t all male pastors be Jews? Moreover, carpenters? We know that idea is absurd, so then why should women be denied the ordination?

Another biblical based argument is the statement in 1Timothy 2:9-16, where he forbade women to teach, or to have authority over a man.

The first problem with this text is its disputed authorship. Some scholars have doubted the authorship of these pastoral writings, because it seems there is contradiction between Paul’s declarations of equality in “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ, then Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:28) and his exclusion of women in the ministry of the church in 1 Timothy 2. “Paul [in Galatians] abolishes classes, discrimination, and racism within the church. He offers a perspective of the human person as anchored beyond oneself, in Christ. “The event of the incarnation is the true model of any genuine enculturation.”[[38]](#footnote-39) Therefore, after reading his assertion in Galatians, and reading 1Timothy 2:9-16, one is drawn to wonder whether it is the same person writing.

It is probable to think that that statement was addressing a specific problem in the specific church of Ephesus when he wrote 1Timothy 2, not laying a rule for all churches, because we all know that Paul respected women and worked with them. He reckoned them as his co-workers. In Philippians 4: 2-3 Paul writes of Euodia, and Syntiche who “have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel…,” not to mention Romans 16:1-7, which allude to all who labored with him for the Lord. The verse in Timothy suggests that he was addressing a specific problem which seemed to distract from the order in the church of Ephesus. Therefore, these verses cannot be taken as an instruction for the universal church. It is important to read these verses within their context, which shows a local problem and not take as a universal guideline for the whole Christian church. Protus O. Kemdirim asserts,

In mainstream Christianity though, the comparative freedom of New Testament times was followed by a period of some restriction with regard to women’s leadership, with more attention paid to scriptural injunctions to female silence that to Jesus’ recognition of women or even Paul’s proclamation of equality in Gal 3:28. The fact, however, is that such scriptural injunctions as are seen in 1 Cor11:2-11 and 1Tim 2:11-15 must be read in their proper context. For one thing the pastoral epistles was concerned with a problem of heretical groups developing in the early church.”[[39]](#footnote-40)

It is possible that those restrictions on women in those verses were simply his “responses to waywardness of young widows in Ephesus and not instructions intended for all Christians in all churches, in all times.”[[40]](#footnote-41) The church in Ephesus at that time was suffering from false teachers and, since that church was in the area where pagans worshiped the goddess and also there were many Greek women who were educated probably they wanted to speak and teach in the church as well. It is possible that the writer saw that, they did not have enough Christian knowledge to be able to teach. Grenz and Kjesbo contend; “Whatever the actual situation, it occurred in the context of a city known as a center of pagan religion. Ephesus boasted the largest temple in Asia Minor, which was dedicated to Artemis, the goddess of fertility. The rites surrounding this place of worship endangered the purity of the church.”[[41]](#footnote-42) Many people had accepted Christianity at that time, but still it is possible that the writer felt that they were not capable of teaching sound doctrine.

Another troubling portion of 1Timothy 2:11 is the statement that women should “learn in silence with all submission.” Some scholars find the word “silence” to have a variant meaning: “Despite the negative connotations this phrase brings to our ears, in the first century “silence” (*hesychia*) was a positive attribute. It did not necessarily entail ‘not speaking’, as is evident in Paul’s use of the word earlier in the chapter (1Tim 2:2; compare 2 Thess 3:12). Rather, it implied respect or lack of disagreement (as in Acts 11:18; 21:14).”[[42]](#footnote-43) Moreover, William Barclay points out that, “the real problem for the church today lies in thinking that the advice in 1Timothy 2, regardless of its specific nature, constitutes a divine prescription for our practice today. It is simply wrong to make this teaching a universal rule for the church.”[[43]](#footnote-44) The church today cannot take that advice and put into practice, because these words most likely were addressed to a specific problem of the time.

On the other hand Freeman suggests, “Scriptures such 1 Timothy 2 must be interpreted in the light of their local historical and cultural context, as well as in the light of all Scripture. Upon further investigation, it seems that these Scriptures have direct local application to situations where women were causing unrest within the local congregation.”[[44]](#footnote-45) Paul also said that he gave no permission for women to teach or to have authority over men. Freeman contends,

Paul had generally encouraged the ministry of women in the life of the church, so it was only when the behavior of some women threatened the well being of the church that Paul’s prohibition on women teaching or exercising authority is historically and culturally limited to the context in which they were addressed.[[45]](#footnote-46)

A German scholar of the Moravian Church Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, who lived in the eighteenth century, held a different view on these verses, “The view of women in 1Timothy is transformed by the fact that Christ was born of a woman, and if a woman can bear the savior so can she be trusted to minister to the church.”[[46]](#footnote-47)

Another argument against women’s ordination is the statement that ordered women to be subject to their husbands, in Ephesians 5:22, leading to the (self- serving) conclusion that women cannot be ordained because their role is to be subject to male authority.

In reading that verse it is important to read the whole chapter five and chapter six, where those household codes end, and in these verses we see that they addresses all sorts of relationship and behaviors in the church of Ephesus. Then one can ask that, if we are to stand today with the assertion that wives are to be subject to their husband’s authority, shall we then also affirm that slavery is acceptable because Eph 6: 5 says, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ;” Should we discriminate against women and say no to slavery? As Christians over the centuries have come to see slavery, offensive warfare, contempt for the poor and child abuse as against the love of Jesus Christ, the time has come for them to accept women as equal partners in spreading the gospel of hope, reconciliation, and salvation for all. We need to read the scriptures from behind, within, and in front of the text. That way we can come to a more understanding and get the proper interpretation of this text. Again, this passage suggests that was addressing a particular issue, not to the church as a whole.

Some who argue against women ordination contend, it was only men who were commended to minister sacraments by Jesus himself. When he told those gathered with him, “’this is my body which is given for you...This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood’” (Luke 22:17-20).

Mercy Amba Oduyoye has an interesting thought on this matter when she contends,

In debates on the ordination of women to the priesthood, it has been argued that the maleness of Jesus of Nazareth and his twelve disciples precludes women from representing Christ at the Eucharist. (I’ve always found it curious that the ethnic factor has not been similarly used against Gentiles.) Maleness, however, has not been used to hedge the table from women. Women can receive the ministration of men, but they themselves cannot ‘serve at the table.’ Does the fact that men serve ‘at table’ in church (spiritual) and women serve ‘at table’ in the home (material) mean that the church has succeeded in making motherhood incompatible with priesthood?[[47]](#footnote-48)

The important factor here is to think about the cooperation of Gentiles in the grace of salvation and a chance to minister in the ordained ministry. Most of arguments of this debate have been over issues from different people’s understanding or interpreting of the bible. The bottom line is, if we want to do the ministry as it was done in the time of Jesus, then we have to take everything back to Israel and then no one will be eligible for the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Many complementarians argue that Jesus gave instructions for the Eucharist only to his male disciples, so women cannot consecrate the elements. Again it must be remembered that Jesus ordered the twelve to do the Eucharist in his memory, and none of the twelve is alive today. Therefore, the practice of the Eucharist would have ended at the time when the last of the original apostles died. This argument is really about maleness, but we have seen that the maleness of Jesus or his disciples is not a factor to deny the ordination of women.

The example of Jesus himself argues against the exclusion of women from any portion of the ministry of the church, including ordination. Biblical passages that have been used to support that exclusion are often taken out of context and used to reverse the meaning of the dignity and worth of all persons that was Jesus’ primary message.

**Chapter Two**

**THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN FROM HISTORICAL/TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

The debate on women’s ordination today often rests on whether women were permitted to be leaders in the early church and through the ages or not. In the first chapter we have seen women’s active participation in spreading the gospel as well as the egalitarian attitude of Jesus towards women. We can agree with Lessly F. Massey, who asserts,

It appears that Jesus attempted to elevate women in such a way as to demonstrate the remarkable change the kingdom of God would effect in a human life and in society. Both the Synoptic tradition and the fourth Gospel offer strong evidence that within the broad framework of his ministry Jesus sought to elevate the status of women, in fact to teach principles by which all forms of discrimination against women might be abolished.[[48]](#footnote-49)

After Jesus laid that foundation of equality, one would expect the church to do the same. In the early church, women were respected and their involvement and was outstanding, but not for long. As the church grew, things changed, not only because of new converts but also because, in the process of establishing and structuring the church, women were left out. Hans Kung contends,

There were also forces at work which always sought to limit the equal treatment of Jews and Greeks, freemen and slaves, men and women. This tendency finally gained the upper hand, so that gradually even the women mentioned in the New Testament came to be forgotten, or their significance was played down.[[49]](#footnote-50)

This diminution of women’s place in church history has been used as an argument that women should not be ordained because women were not leaders in the early church and after. Paul Jewett says, “Throughout Christian history it has been more or lesstaken forgranted that women should not be admitted to the ranks of the ordained clergy for the obvious reason that they are women.”[[50]](#footnote-51)

However, according to the early church history we have many women who played leadership roles. There were women evangelists, teachers, and apostles as well as deaconesses and in some cases maybe bishops (elders).

During the first century the new Christian community eventually developed a twofold office structure to provide leadership for God’s people as they lived out the Lord’s mandate. This structure divided between leadership in oversight (bishops or elders) and leadership in service (deacons).[[51]](#footnote-52)

In Romans 16:1 Paul mentions Phoebe as a “deacon of the church at Cenchreae,” a role of leadership. Massey asserts, “According to the apostolic Constitutions, deaconesses were ordained by the laying on of hands, as were deacons.”[[52]](#footnote-53) From what we have seen in the first chapter the definition of “Ordination” is “to order or decree, or to confer a sacred office for the purpose of ministry.” Therefore, according to the Apostolic Constitutions, Phoebe was ordained as a deaconess of the church. Phoebe was a leader who was in charge of the church or a congregation. She is also reckoned as a “benefactor” a title which further supports that she was a leader or a minister. Massey joins other scholars to say that, “At that time it seems that deaconess was the highest office in the church obtained by a woman. This ministry involved numerous practical duties in daily life of the community and certain religious ceremonies, but appears to be confined almost totally to caring for needs of other women.[[53]](#footnote-54) However, Paul in his address to these women leaders speaks to them as leaders not only to other women but to the whole congregation, and not only to women. Looking at a broader picture, we have these new converts who meet regularly as new Christian communities. Definitely male apostles alone could not take care of every new Christian community, so we have leaders who had been converts for a longer time including or maybe especially women as so many of them had accepted the gospel at that time, who would guide new converts in their spiritual walks.

Paul addresses several women as his co-workers. In Romans he instructs “all God’s beloved in Rome who are called to be saints: “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the church of Gentiles” (Romans 16:3-4). In Acts a young convert named Apollo “began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately” (Acts 18:26). In other words, they instructed or taught him.

Many scholars contend that mentioning the wife Priscilla, first shows that Paul respected and acknowledged her ministry, because this kind of address was unusual at that time. “In the same chapter, he pays tribute to the outstanding missionary work, including teaching doctrine to Apollo, of Priscilla (or Prisca) and her husband Aquila. Priscilla’s significance may be highlighted by the fact that she is mentioned before her husband in four out of six references, a literary device to suggest importance.”[[54]](#footnote-55) Priscilla and Aquila probably had a church in their house, but “teaching doctrine” requires more than that; it requires having a good knowledge. Paul’s addressing her first, which he does not do for other co-workers, indicates that he recognized special gifts in Priscilla. It must have some importance with regard to Priscilla’s role as a teacher, because Paul not only mentions her in that order but so does Luke in Acts 18:18, 26; Paul mentions her that way in Romans 16:2 and in 2 Timothy 4:17. In fact, some scholars suggest that this woman was the author of the book of Hebrews, a book that “contains the longest sustained arguments of any book in the bible.”[[55]](#footnote-56) “Harnack was the first to suggest Priscilla as the author of Hebrews, a theory which might explain why early church tradition left the author anonymous.” [[56]](#footnote-57) Priscilla’s ongoing ministry cannot be overlooked, and her ministry contrasts the argument of complementarians that women ministered only to their fellow women, because she and her husband, possessed sufficient biblical knowledge--and authority--to instruct an important male evangelist. By including this story, Luke reveals the new roles women ought to be assuming in his view in the Christian community. The New Testament authors portrayed Priscilla as someone that Christians ought to emulate.[[57]](#footnote-58)

Another woman leader in the early church is Junia. Paul wishes the saints in Rome to “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and were in Christ before I was” (Romans 16:7). Traditionally the second name was translated as Junias, which is a male name, but later scholars have agreed that actually “Junia” is a woman’s name. There is a possibility that most interpreters wanted to present Junia as a man, Junias, because they thought it could not be possible for a woman to be an apostle. But it has been discovered that Junia was a woman and she was an apostle. A Biblical scholar Eldon Jay Epp contends,

During the past few decades Rom 16:7 has been recognized as of pivotal importance in determining what leadership roles women assumed in earliest Christianity. This case is of special interest also because of striking changes over some seventeen centuries in the way this passage has been understood, including--for a significant portion of that time--an interpretation that obviously reflects gender bias.[[58]](#footnote-59)

Indeed for a long time Bible readers as well as interpreters have not paid much attention to the fact that Paul recognized her among “prominent” apostles. “She is also called an apostle, and this means that in the early church some women were given that title in addition to the twelve apostles appointed by Jesus. In Acts Paul and Barnabas are called apostles in this wider sense (Acts 14:14). This is a reminder of the place of women in church leadership.”[[59]](#footnote-60) Epp suggests that Rom 16: 7 has been chief among several passages prominent in the exploration of and debate over the appropriateness of full ordination for women in various Christian communions,[[60]](#footnote-61)

In several extra-biblical sources including apocryphal books we have other women who participated in some kind of leadership roles within the church. During the early centuries of Christianity there were many women of renown in the church whose lives and deeds represent the spirit of freedom and equality evident in the Gospel. Thecla of Thamyris does not appear in the New Testament, but she does feature prominently in the apocryphal work The Acts of Paul and Thecla, ascribed by Tertullian to a presbyter in Asia.[[61]](#footnote-62)Upon hearing Paul’s preaching, she was moved and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. “And while Paul was speaking in the midst of the church in the house of Onesiphorus, a certain virgin Thecla, the daughter of Theocleia, betrothed to a man named Thamyris, sitting at the window close by, listened night and day to the discourse of virginity and prayer, and did not look away from the window, but paid earnest heed to the faith, rejoicing exceedingly.”[[62]](#footnote-63) Legend says that she went through persecution but she survived because of her faith. Thrown in a place where there were lions and other wild beasts, she prayed, and not one beast touched her. Finally,

The governor summoned Thecla out of the midst of the wild beasts, and said to her: who art thou? And what is there about thee, that not one of wild beasts touches thee? And she said: I indeed am a servant of the living God; as to what there is about me, I have believed in the Son of God, in whom He is well pleased; wherefore not one of the beasts has touched me. For he alone is the end of salvation, and the basis of immortal life.[[63]](#footnote-64)

We would not probably call her a leader in the sense of being ordained in a human manner, but she was ordained by God to do what she did, and her witness led many to believe in Christ. She was an example of witness and faith in Jesus and the living God. She later chose to live an ascetic life and lived in a cave for years until her death.

Another woman who is worth mentioning is Perpetua who lived in the Northern part of Africa in Carthage. Her martyrdom in c. 203 was a witness to all who heard her story as well as to those who read it. “In the account of her martyrdom, we learn that she provided leadership for other Christians in Carthage, offering prayers and inspiring them to courage. Felicitas, her slave, was also arrested and imprisoned…The witness of these two women was legendary, and it represents an important pattern of Christian life in North Africa.”[[64]](#footnote-65) Perpetua showed her strong faith in the middle of persecution. It has been said that her father, who was not a believer, but was well to do, after hearing of her imprisonment went to “jail to plead with her to give up this nonsense, at least for the sake of her infant baby,” but she responded, “I cannot be called anything else than what I am, a Christian.”[[65]](#footnote-66) She was well educated young woman, because she was able to write her experience herself.” She was educationally as well as …economically privileged; Perpetua left a remarkable written record…her work later was given an introduction …and circulated for many years among congregations.”[[66]](#footnote-67)

When Christianity became the official religion in the Roman Empire in the fourth century, it was profoundly affected by the beliefs and customs of pre-Christian religions that had been practiced by the new converts.[[67]](#footnote-68) There is no doubt that some of those customs and probably practices were brought into Christianity, Jewish, Hellenistic and Roman cultures that surrounded it.

Being the official religion in the Roman Empire called for an organizational structure. In order to make that structure, official, leaders probably had to be men as it was the case in the surrounding social structures. Grenz and Kjesbo contend that “As the church institutionalized and absorbed the surrounding culture, it adopted a negative view of women generally and [in] leadership in particular, something it did not have prior to this time.”[[68]](#footnote-69) It is difficult to know for sure when this happened, but it probably happened gradually. According to Anne E. Carr, “As early as the second century, ministerial forms took on the pattern of the Roman civil service, with the bishop as the civil head of a region and presbyters and deacons as lower officials.”[[69]](#footnote-70)

That was the beginning, but later we have all the misogynistic thoughts from several church fathers which have influenced our tradition up to this day. It is the very reason we are still having these discussions. For example, Tertullian (c. 160-220), in his writings about “Adorning Women” where he spoke about the appearance of women and their need to wear and go in humble garb, he condemned women [saying] that they destroyed God’s image in man and caused the Son of God to die because they are the devil’s gateway.[[70]](#footnote-71) It seems that those kinds of teachings went on around churches. That was a start for people to think that women were evil. Furthermore, Tertullian wrote, “you give birth in pain and anxieties; and that the woman’s desire will be to her husband, and he will lord over her, he also held that all women were Eve therefore, God’s judgment over this sex continues in eon; you are …, the traitor of the tree, the first deserter of divine Law;…[[71]](#footnote-72) (It makes one wonder with what reluctance he must have been forced by her outstanding ministry of Thecla, a “devil’s gateway’ as “a presbyter”!!!!!) Once again we have these writings which became influential within the church during the early centuries.

Marie-Henry Keane contends, “The church fathers strongly resisted the leadership of women and interpreted scripture in direct opposition to the spirit of the earliest Christian community.”[[72]](#footnote-73) That idea can be seen in thoughts of Tertullian, who held that the curse of the first sin lives in very woman to this day (his days). From that time on the Bible hermeneutical did not favor women. Another writer from the early church by the name John Chrysostom wrote: “Among all the savage beasts none is found to be as harmful as woman”[[73]](#footnote-74)

One particular aspect of Jewish tradition that contributed to the view of women’s evil was the view from the law which prohibited menstruating women from participating in social activities “When a woman has her menstrual flow, she shall be in state of impurity for seven days. Anyone who touches her shall be unclean until evening” (Leviticus 15:19).Origen’s second successor at the school in Alexandria by the name Dionysius the great (A.D. 190-264), taught that women, during their menstrual period, should be prohibited from approaching the Table of Lord and partaking of his Body and Blood, because they were physically impure.[[74]](#footnote-75) However, during the ministry of Jesus we do not encounter such a problem, despite the fact he was a Jew, but instead he healed a woman with hemorrhage (Mark 5:25-34), an intentional act of breaking all barriers of gender, race, class, impurity etc, in the society of his time. When Church fathers brought up the impurity of menstruation, it shows they were going backwards. What Jesus had abolished, when he brought all people to the same level, they re-stated, creating another demarcation among people. It seems that whatever those church fathers could not understand about women, they decided to demonize in order to suppress women and their gifts. Menstruation is still a taboo in many ethnic groups, as we shall see in the coming chapter in the discussion of African culture. John Chrysostom one of early church scholars wrote, “Among all the savage beasts none is found to be as harmful as woman”[[75]](#footnote-76)

In medieval Christianity, “Thomas Aquinas, a thirteenth-century scholar whose influence is still evident today, claimed that woman was created as subordinate and inferior to man. Not only was she the second in the order of creation, but also endowed with less intellectual capability and, consequently, less ability to make right moral decisions.” [[76]](#footnote-77) One can ask, if women are endowed with less intellectual capability, why are they able to give birth and sustain life? Great reformers like Martin Luther thought that a woman’s subordinate role came as the result of the fall and sin. He also thought that a woman was weaker than a man and full of vices, but the good evident in her childbearing capabilities compensates for it all.[[77]](#footnote-78) These are thoughts which influenced the church and therefore, shaped our tradition.

As we have seen, many scholars from the early centuries up to the late medieval period were against women’s leadership in the church. Their interpretation of scriptures had gender bias in it, which was transferred from one generation to the other. Sexuality seemed to be a problem for early church fathers and many scholars who followed after, marriage for many was impractical, and various church fathers exalted virginity and celibacy as a more spiritual level of consecration to God. Eventually it came to be commonly accepted that anyone who wanted to devote his/her life to God had to vow to live in chastity.[[78]](#footnote-79)

The alternative to ordination for women as a response for their call in the medieval period was monastic life. Starting in the end of the third century, “Many women as well as men adopted the ascetic way of life in the Christian community. Abstinence from sexual relations was the defining characteristic and only later was invariably accompanied by giving up personal wealth.”[[79]](#footnote-80) Monasticism was, however, the only way women, unlike men, could respond to God’s call, but, as Nancy J. Duff contends, “Identical roles cannot be assigned to all members of any one race, class, culture, or gender. Not all women are called to be mothers, nor all men to be fathers; some women are called to the ordained ministry, and some men into full-time child care. God calls each individual into a vocation which matches that person’s gifts and graces.”[[80]](#footnote-81)All of us have been called by God to do ministry, but in different vocations.

Despite all the attempts to quash their importance, women continued to rise to positions of influence and authority because of their faith. In the late medieval period appeared another woman who can be regarded as a leader and reformer in her own way in the late medieval was Catherine of Siena. At the age of twenty-four she had a special experience when she received unusual spiritual gifts. “She became a Dominican tertiary, remaining at home in a solitary life of prayer. Soon however, she found her household growing with kindred spirits, interested in prayer and service to others.”[[81]](#footnote-82) She was full of compassion for the people and their spiritual as well as physical needs. More and more she became influential in the church, concerning herself with issues such as the Crusades, civil war, the Avignon papacy, and ecclesiastical reform.[[82]](#footnote-83) Being a mystic she experienced the presence of God, and her prayers were answered. Her secretaries recorded all her experience and her petitions to God and all the replies she received from God.

Her first petition …was for herself. The second was for the reform of the holy Church. The third was for the whole world in general, and in particular for peace of Christians who are rebelling against holy Church with great disrespect and persecution. Her fourth petition she asked divine providence to supply in general and in particular for a certain case which had risen.[[83]](#footnote-84)

Catherine argued for the princes to quit their civil wars. She is credited with persuading Pope Gregory XI to return to Rome during the papal schism. Distressed about the divisions and corruptions within the Church, she worked for reform until the end of her life in 1380. She was declared Doctor of the Church in 1970.[[84]](#footnote-85)

In the account of Catherine of Siena we have this courageous woman who received power from God and was able to have voice and authority over those powerful men, and they complied with her petitions. “She was renowned for her saintly life and gifted with power of persuasion.”[[85]](#footnote-86) Through her humble address to the pope, she was able to persuade him to move back to Rome. Her influence in the church, and what she was able to accomplish was helpful for many who knew her or read her writings. It must be remembered that in the late medieval period the papal authority was very strong; it would take the power from above to persuade the pope. This can bring the question concerning authority in which is written, “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man,” (1Timothy 2:12a). Whose authority is he talking about? Does any human being possess authority in himself or herself? It is clear that the word of God is authoritative not because it was written by men but because God gave authority. God entrusted human beings with Godly authority, therefore, no one can claim to have authority except that which comes from God. Watchman Nee asserts, “Authority is of God, not of us. We are merely stewards of His authority…Whenever we attempt to exercise authority as if it were our own; we are immediately dispossessed of any authority.”[[86]](#footnote-87)All Human beings when they were created were given the authority to rule and subdue all creation, not that they own it but rather have been given as stewards of God’s authority. According to Migliore “The authority of the ordained minister is based not on his or her person but solely on the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is authority that is always exercised in partnership with the whole people of God.”[[87]](#footnote-88)Catherine of Siena’s words were authoritative not because of whom she was, but rather God gave her the authority that was needed for those powerful men of their time. That is the ministerial authority inherently collegial rather than monarchical in nature.

From the early centuries, women were suppressed not to participate in church leadership or to have authority. Despite of many examples like that of Catherine of Siena, women with immense influence and authority, the tendency against women’s leadership went on within the church. That resulted in the fact that most missionaries who were sent out in mission fields were men. A factor that brings us to another argument that, women should not be ordained because that will be going against church tradition, for the missionaries who came as pastors were only men.

Indeed most missionaries were male, but they also represented their Western churches which did not ordain women at that time. The Moravian Church believes in the priesthood of all believers, that men and women are both called to serve in the ministry of God and that their vocation is holy and based on a biblical foundation. It was the Moravian Church which started to ordain women in the eighteenth century, when other denominations had not yet decided to do so. Due to the open minded leader of that time, Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, the Moravian Church sent out both men and women as missionaries. As Jon F. Sensbach contends, “Women held a central place in the identity of the church. In Moravian doctrine, women were considered spiritually equal to men…the Brethren exalted women’s spirituality, referring to their congregations in the feminine as the bride”[[88]](#footnote-89)

In Moravian Church history women were much involved in the ministry of the church before and after the time of Zinzendorf, the leader during the 18th century who saw that it was appropriate to ordain women as deaconesses as well as presbyters. The ordination of women in the Moravian Church took place for the first time, under Zinzendorf’s leadership. Thus the issue of female ordination was not something strange, at least not to Zinzendorf.

Freeman contends, “During the time of Zinzendorf’s life women played a public role, not just with other women but in the general life of the church.”[[89]](#footnote-90) The community in which Zinzendorf lived was divided into choirs, different groups such as young men, who were called brothers, young women sisters, children, and married couples. Each group had a leader who was ordained and carried all the responsibilities of a deacon or presbyter in their respective groups. Therefore, women who were ordained ministered to their fellow women as well as the church in general. But, as MacHaffie points out, “Zinzendorf gradually came to believe that, while women were subordinate to men in temporal affairs, female preaching was not unacceptable. He argued that Jesus had restored male-female equality and the Holy Spirit could call women.”[[90]](#footnote-91)

After his death, however, things changed. As years went by the ordination of women became an issue to be discussed from the sociological point of view. His successors thought that, since the Moravian church was the only church ordaining women at that time, they should stop the ordination. It was not until the General Synod (International) which took place in Bethlehem, PA in 1957, that Moravians agreed once again that women should be ordained.

The Moravian Church throughout history has shared ministry among women and men. This can be seen in almost all areas of the life of the church. In the mission field, for example, when they sent people, they sent both men and women and commissioned them together. Also in the ministry of the word of God, both women and men were saved together.

Vernon Nelson asserts, “The Moravian Church in Zinzendorf’s day ordained women as well as men.[[91]](#footnote-92) That is, the women’s ordination took place alongside the ordination of men. According to Nelson,

To begin with there was two orders [of ordination] only to *Ordinarius* and *Bishops*, but in the period during which women were ordained there were three orders. The first order was *Deacon* and the people who were ordained served in their respective groups. The developing organization of congregations necessitated extensive use of lay leadership, both men and women.[[92]](#footnote-93)

In other words, women and men worked in solidarity, and in so doing they were living the theology of the priesthood of all believers. Because the leader (Zinzendorf) had an open mind and realized the gifts which women had, he saw that it was important for women and men of God to work together for the sake of the Lamb; he had no objection to the ministry of women and their ordination. “Much more open to new ideas and unconventional methods than his successors, Zinzendorf recognized the spiritual gifts of many women in the Moravian church and utilized these gifts.”[[93]](#footnote-94) History does not tell us anything as to when the synod decided to ordain women or if there was any kind of a problem in their ministry. A woman who is worthy to be mentioned here is Zinzendorf’s wife, Erdmuthe, a very intelligent woman. She gave herself as a servant of God and decided to serve God alone. What is even more impressive is the fact that she was a counselor to many brethren who went to ask for her advice according to J. Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth G. Hamilton who have this to say: “Her ceaseless toil and constant anxiety in behalf of the church …. From the first she had entered heart and soul upon her husband’s projects. For years she had managed their property under trying circumstances, leaving him free to devote himself to his chosen work.”[[94]](#footnote-95) This woman of God ministered among her people in her unique way, what she did was a total ministry of God. There is much to learn from her dedication to God and the people she was serving.

Women have been silently active in the church for a long time, but as they have become active in secular sectors they were able to discern and understand their role in the church. It has been the development of women’s roles in secular professions that has helped women to discern their call for ordained ministry. We also need to note the Moravian Church from the beginning has been a frontier in sharing in ministry in solidarity between men and women.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**THE WOMEN’S ORDINATION from CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES**

The ordination of ministers in African churches and especially in Tanzania has a long history. At the beginning of Christianity in Africa, no Africans, men or women, were ordained as pastors, although that situation changed gradually as major denominations began to ordain African pastors. Klaus Fiedler asserts, “As a whole, the Lutherans and Moravians in Tanzania were very slow in ordaining African pastors. But with growing membership and education, even Lutherans could not keep their eyes shut any longer.”[[95]](#footnote-96) Ordination was not something easily obtained even by male Africans, and those African men who were ordained had to be under the supervision of missionaries. It is important to note that for the ordination course the only men who could be chosen were those who had proved their worth in the service of their congregation, and that, of necessity, meant older men.[[96]](#footnote-97) One good example of a woman in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ is Rebecca, a slave in St Thomas. Rebecca was a woman who loved the Lord and was eager to share the gospel with others. Sensbach, who quotes Friedrich Martin says, “She has done the work of the savior by teaching the Negro women and speaking about which the Holy Spirit himself has shown her.”[[97]](#footnote-98) Rebecca received her call to serve and she was confident to respond to that call despite her social situation as a slave, she was able to share the good news with her fellow slaves. Her ministry was confirmed by the Bishop Spangenberg who recorded, “She had already made a role for herself as a teacher, but Brethren’s encouragement helped her widen that vision.”[[98]](#footnote-99) This is a good model of a motivated woman who worked for the Savior and through her many people of African descent in the Caribbean received Christianity.

In the African tradition where most areas of leadership were held by men, the act of ordaining only men was justified by the fact that women could not be leaders much less to be ordained. Africans were on the receiving end of missionary interpretations of Christianity, and Africans took everything they were taught by missionaries as a church norm. Therefore, African men who were ordained adopted the concept that only men could be ordained. At that time the idea of ordaining women probably was also revolutionary to the missionaries as well, but either way the prohibition of women’s ordination shaped the church tradition in Tanzania and specifically in the Moravian Church.

In African culture, women’s traditional role has been that of homemakers and mothers, the cultural gender roles that are assigned to them by the society. In taking one example of gender roles in African tribes, Leon Clark, in his research in the Acholi tribe in Uganda, asserts,

Within each village family in Acholi, there is a strict division of labor between the father and the mother, or husband and wife. The husband is the head of the family. He has the decisive voice on all matters concerning the family. The women’s work is to cut grass for thatching the roof. ..But it is the work of the woman to keep the garden clear of weeds and to harvest the crops like millet, simsim, peas, and beans. All domestic work concerned with cooking is the work of a woman.[[99]](#footnote-100)

What Clark explains applies to the majority of tribes in Africa. Gender roles have been assigned to women by in the real sense by men, because men are heads and decision makers within the family as well as within society. As a result, even children grow up believing that gender roles have to function that way. Gender roles became oppressive to women. Even though probably the original plan had good intentions, along the process things changed. Fr. Lautenti Magesa asserts, “The fact of the matter is that in the process of preserving the existence of society, these principles of the division of labor between the sexes did indeed, and to a very considerable degree, oppress women.”[[100]](#footnote-101) It is undeniable truth that African women have been oppressed for a long time.

During the colonial era they suffered what we can call double oppression: as Africans they were oppressed by colonizers and as women they were oppressed by men. “Thus in colonial times African women underwent a twofold oppression: being violated against by the culture for being members of a dominated gender on one hand, and on the other hand they were oppressed by the colonial system for being members of a dominated race.”[[101]](#footnote-102) The hope for African women to overcome this oppression remains the church. One would think that male African Christians would recognize the similarity between their own oppression by colonizers and their oppression of women, but that has not usually proven the case. In general, the oppression of women continues even in the churches. As women toil at menial tasks in the fields and at home, they are limited to toiling in the churches. It is vividly seen in many churches that jobs such as cleaning the church and catering for people at church are women’s jobs. If a woman works hard and maintains her home and family in the traditional manner, she may be invited to attend some leadership meetings at her church (especially in villages), but only with the limited permission of male leaders. As Clark says,

Likewise, a woman whose house is well smeared with black soil and kept clean; who has a lot of food in her home; who cooks and gives generously to visitors…; a woman whose garden is well kept; who freely mixes and happily with other women, who has children is considered a good woman. Such woman may be called to join a meeting of village elders to give some talk and advice. ‘Such a woman is called is’ a woman and a half.[[102]](#footnote-103)

As if a woman in and of herself is not enough for a role in leadership. “About three-quarters of the people in the church are women, but decisions affecting the church are made by men alone (with very few exceptions). Women are treated as minors, inferior to men, just as they are in society.”[[103]](#footnote-104) The demarcation created by gender roles does not allow a sense of unity or room to work in solidarity between men and women. Moreover, these gender roles are oppressive to men as well, in the sense that women cannot help men even in those tasks where they are capable. I believe it is due time for African women in the church to experience freedom in faith in Jesus Christ and for those who feel called to the ordained ministry to be allowed to respond to the call.

I believe that it is due time for African women in the church to experience freedom in Jesus and for those who feel called to the ordained ministry be allowed to respond to that call. The major fear of men having women as pastors, they feel that women will rule over them and that women will have power over men.

In trying to address the condition of women in African societies the first President of Tanzania, who is also reckoned as the father of that nation, Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere, said, “It is true that the women in traditional society were regarded as having a place in the community which was not only different, but was also to some extent inferior. It is impossible to deny that women did, and still do, more than their fair share of the work in fields and in homes.”[[104]](#footnote-105) The idea of regarding women as inferior to men has influenced many people in Africa, in the secular world as well as in the church. In reflecting on the inferiority of women in Africa B. N. Kunambi contends, “The general attitude of man to woman, not only in Africa, has made a woman in many cases unable to take her rightful place as a complete human being both in the family and in society at large.”[[105]](#footnote-106)

It has been due to that kind of understanding which made people think that African women cannot be leaders, especially in matters of faith. In an interview with a woman pastor by the name of T. S. Kabigi, when asked why women in other professions are accepted well by the society, but not those in the ordained ministry, she replied, “A belief is something very strong within every person. Most of our people believe that an ordained person represents male God. Therefore, to change that is very difficult. Many people take the issue of women’s ordination as something distractive in their beliefs, while any other profession does not interfere with this life and afterlife.”[[106]](#footnote-107) What we can make from that statement is that people are afraid to trust women in matters of faith. The reason for that belief probably stems from the idea of the maleness of God and of Jesus.

The hope for African women to overcome this oppression remains for the church. As it is due time for African women to experience freedom in Christ, freedom that is supported both by the New Testament and by the history of the early church, it is also due time for those who feel called to be allowed to respond to the call to ordained ministry. If the church does not seem to bring hope for the freedom that is available in Christ, where should African women go?

It is worthwhile to go back to Africa traditional religions to see if women participated in some roles of leadership. John S. Mbiti contends that “Diviners normally work also as medicine men [in African traditional religion]. They can be either men or women….Diviners, like any other religious leaders, often have their own language. Sometimes they get in touch with spirits directly or through the help of mediums who often work with them.”[[107]](#footnote-108) In agreement with that understanding, another scholar, Protus O. Kemdirim, asserts, “In the religious sphere, however, there was a seeming recognition and respect for the dignity of womanhood. This is perhaps due to the fact that in traditional societies religion was not an affair of the individual, but was viewed as a matter for the entire community.”[[108]](#footnote-109) Although women’s roles in rituals and other areas of African religion were those that concerned them as women, mostly in matters of procreation, their participation is clear. Oduyoye thinks, “African societies have more rituals for women than for men, perhaps reflecting their view of the greater spiritual strength of women. It seems, though, that many of these rituals are aimed at curbing the use of this strength, unless its use may benefit men.”[[109]](#footnote-110) It seems that the strength of women remains a threat to men, and that they try to find some ways to control this strength in women. Whatever the purpose of these rituals, it is clear that patterns do exist in which women were leaders in traditions of African society.

From the African point of view, the ordination of women has been a challenging issue from two angles, culture, and church tradition. Despite women’s power in African traditional religion, most of African cultures have been and still are discriminative against and oppressive toward women; yet women are the backbone of society. Moreover, it is an undeniable fact that the majority of the people who have contributed to the rapid growth of the church in Africa are women. Complementarians have argued that a woman’s place is at home according to gender roles; therefore, if a woman is ordained then she will be doing men’s work, because working outside the home is not woman’s work. They believe this is against the law of nature and will lead to the neglect of the home.

In an interview with a retired Moravian Pastor by the name of Paul Misigalo, when asked about cultural arguments against women’s ordination, he said,

In our tribe [Tutsi] a woman is vessel of pleasure[or a sex symbol]; men will look at a woman with admiration and probably be attracted to her, and think that she is supposed to be at home caring for her children and husband. Now to be a pastor will mean she will have to live her responsibility and do men’s work. Furthermore, when a woman becomes a pastor she will have authority over the board of elders, who mostly are men. That is not our culture. In our culture a woman has to be under the man. If she happens to be the pastor, she will glorify herself by ruling over men while she is to be ruled over.[[110]](#footnote-111)

Reverend Misigalo represents the thoughts of many in his society and tribe and throughout Africa (as well as many other parts of the world). For many, women are sex objects. They fail to see women as human beings created in the image of God and free to worship and serve God. So it seems that the problem here is the sexuality of women. N. P. Williams, as quoted by E. L. Mascall, said,

Men as such are very less likely to be an involuntary cause of distraction to women, under the circumstances of public worship, than women are to men; and that this is a permanent fact of human nature, which can no more be abolished by modern progress than the law of gravitation can be abolished by modern progress.[[111]](#footnote-112)

This is absurd; women must eternally be regulated to the confines of the home because men cannot mature beyond their own adolescent hormonal reaction? Men who have this problem need spiritual as well as physical healing. Furthermore is the issue of authority: who rules over whom and who has power? Paul Jewett contends,

In truth, the argument against women ministries taken from “male weakness,” disarming as it may seem, is just about as bankrupt as an argument can be. It is but thinly veiled admission that the woman is still regarded as a sex object rather than as a person. And if this is so, rather than limiting the woman in her freedom as a child of God, men ought to redeem the man/woman relationship in the church by repenting of their sins.[[112]](#footnote-113)

Rather than pursuing this natural redemption, men decided to put some sort of demarcation between them and women. In trying to find a place where women can be easily controlled by men, they came up with gender roles.

In arguing against these gender roles in African church and society, Mercy Amba Oduyoye asserts,

In assigning roles based on gender, the theory of complementarity plays a negative role for women in domestic organization and in the church. In practice, complementarity allows the man to choose what he wants to be and to do and then demands that the woman fill in the blanks. It is the woman, invariably, who complements the man. Generally, the woman has little or no choice in the matter- she has to do “the rest” if the community remains whole and healthy.[[113]](#footnote-114)

The assertion of Oduyoye explains how gender roles are assigned to an African woman and how the same concept has been used to deny women ordination. In the same line Magesa argues, “Gender roles or division of labor in Africa was founded on the culturally assumed collective inferior status of female sex. The biological factor, as is easy to see, was decisive in this. Because the woman was perceived as generally physically less strong than the man, it was concluded that she was inferior in every way.”[[114]](#footnote-115)

Two things happened as results of this division of labor in Africa. First was in that division women found themselves with too much excessive responsibility for hard labor around the house as well as in the fields. Second, whatever the women did was not valued by men or any other person. Women were never appreciated for what they did and still do by people around them. What has sunk into women’s minds was never to think about their own well being because they feel they are responsible for the well being of everybody else around them, and, if they fulfill that, then they are supposed to feel content.

Consequently, it has been argued African women are supposed to be submissive to men; therefore, they should not be ordained because, if they are, it will mean that they will have authority over men. “The same is true of the call to African women to be African, especially when that connotes submissiveness.” [[115]](#footnote-116)

However, a woman is still a human being who is created in the image of God, and is fully capable of worshiping her creator. Thus, if a woman feels called to ordained ministry, she should be able to accept that call. It is obvious that not everyone is called to be a minister or to be a fulltime homemaker; but those who are called to do so should be allowed to respond to God’s call. That obligation calls for cultural change and transformation.

The traditional concept of women’s inferiority and submission in Africa was unfortunately strengthened by the coming of Christianity. Scriptures were read literally, especially the Pauline letters, where he called women to be submissive to their husbands. But, one can ask, should women be submissive even when husbands (men) hinder their call to serve in the ordained ministry? Who should be obeyed first, God or man? Definitely God has to be obeyed before men; in Acts Peter himself asserts that, “We must obey God rather than any human authority’ (5:29b). In Africa the majority of men demand women be submissive not only to their husbands but also to all men. Men see it as their right to have authority over women because it has been so for ages. Somehow they inherit this right from their forefathers, as Warren L. d’Azevedo contends:

In male-dominated Gola society the ideology of political power derives its essential cogency from ancestral dicta that prescribe the patriarchal order and integrity of ruling patrilineages. All symbols of authority, whether in the secular or sacred spheres of action, underscore the privileged status of males and the adjunctive idealized statuses of women as wives, child bearers, and nurturers or, in their semiclandstine romantic roles, as “lovers.”[[116]](#footnote-117)

One of the most potent but absurd arguments made against women is their biology. Women’s menstruation is a taboo subject for most African men. There are different myths around it which have led people to come up with all sort of restrictions for women in that period. In most of African cultures, when a woman is at this state she is unclean; she cannot touch or come in contact with people. D’Azevedo contends,

Menstruation is a profounder mystery, the noxious flow of a substance so potent that contamination can diminish the fertility of the land, confound male virility, and interfere with the successful pursuit of goals in war, hunting, litigation or other crucial tasks…. A menstruating woman must not go to farm, cook for any man, or handle the implements of males.[[117]](#footnote-118)

Complementarians argue that, therefore, if women became ordained, they might defile the church. Menstruation is a mystery not only now in African culture, but it was also in the early Christianity. MacHaffie asserts, “A less frequently articulated but nevertheless real concern of early churchmen was the fear that menstruating women would somehow pollute the worship services and sacraments of the church.”[[118]](#footnote-119) The same kind of fear is seen in African culture because men do not seem to understand why a woman would bleed and remain alive. But one thing they forget is that God created women in this way for his glory. Men as well as women ought to celebrate menstruation because it symbolizes the glory of God in creation through the renewal of life in a woman’s body.

Looking positively to the issue of menstruation, Magesa contends, although, today, the female sexual biological makeup has been shorn of much of its magical misconceptions and fear even in rural Africa, some of which, like menstruation, used to set women apart as mysterious, fearful creatures, the power of the woman as woman remains formidable.”[[119]](#footnote-120) Analyzing the same issue in its practicability within the church, Oduyoye asserts,

In the Aladura church, for example, four categories of people are not allowed into the house of prayer for fear that their presence might desecrate the holy place. They include a woman who has just delivered a baby, a menstruating woman, men and women who have remained unwashed after sexual intercourse, and a woman with uncovered hair. The influences of African and Hebrew religions are obvious.[[120]](#footnote-121)

Within the four categories, three of them fall on a woman, but the man is excluded only once. But this is how it happens in many African churches. Some women just decide not to go to church during their menstruation. It seems that some rules in the traditional orthodox Jewish culture are very similar to those in Africa. Probably that is why Africans try to build the exclusion of women on the Bible. That is where they go wrong, I believe that we need to read the bible in its context and interpret it accordingly. Male and female have been created in the image of God, and both were commissioned to subdue the rest of creation and multiply. How then could a woman be evil in this process? Menstruation is part of God’s plan for women’s bodies. “Women’s subordinate roles in the church have been shaped by social and political views of female inferiority and subjection; woman’s sexuality is not evil or unclean but good in the goodness of creation and sanctified in the sacramental life of the church.”[[121]](#footnote-122) Women and men together represent the image of God, and the task of responding to God’s call should be equal to both of them, according to the particular vocation to which each has been called.

Another African complementarians’ argument against women’s ordination is that women should not be ordained after marriage; a woman becomes property of the man, for the fact that a man pays dowry or bride price to a woman’s parents, and, therefore, she becomes the legal property of a man she is married to.

The dowry has been a problem since the arrival of missionaries. It is a tradition which no one seems capable of stopping for any reason. Fiedler says, “Then the Moravian and Berlin Missions still held the view that the giving of bride-wealth or working for the parents of the prospective wife was ‘buying a woman’ and could therefore not be tolerated in any Christian church.”[[122]](#footnote-123) That proscription, however, was not accepted by Christians at all. They continue to practice it up to this day. The major reason for its continuation is because life in Africa is communal: when a man wants to marry he informs his whole family and, therefore, the dowry becomes a family issue. In some cases many people contribute to the money given as bride-wealth, which compensates the family for the work which was done in raising the bride. It brings a sort of a pride to both sides. The groom’s side can boast that, yes, we paid this much for her. And the bride’s side can boast we raised our daughter so well she is worth this sum. But the problem comes in the real life a woman becomes like a possession to her husband as well as of his family. When it comes to a woman’s accepting the call to ordained ministry, even if her husband might be willing, his family may not, arguing that we did not marry her to go and work for other people and herself in front of people every day. When is she going to be home for you? There is a fear that women in the ordained ministry will become used to having power and authority over people in the congregation, and that she will bring that attitude into house where the man is supposed to be the boss.

Although a major exception to the norm a good example of a shared ministry can be seen in African Independent Churches, where women have been working in solidarity with men; these churches have many ordained women, and I can say that probably because of the shared ministry these churches are growing fast. John B. Ngubane in his explanation of these churches asserts, “African Independent Churches denote a group of churches that began as a protestant movement against the white-male-only leadership in the missionary-founded churches of nineteenth century.”[[123]](#footnote-124) These churches began as a way for Africans to seek liberation from churches, which were begun by non-African missionaries, with the intention of trying to guard some of African traditions in free worship. “African Independent Churches connotes a specifically religious vision of the wider African struggle for liberation from colonialism, capitalism, racism, and cultural chauvinism.”[[124]](#footnote-125) It is wonderful to see women in these churches play roles of leadership without any problem. “Interestingly, women have always played a central role in these churches as founders, bishops, archbishops, prophets, faith healers, preachers, and ministers.”[[125]](#footnote-126) In these churches, members insist on hearing the Holy Spirit, and since the spirit can inspire anybody, there is much freedom to have a shared ministry all the time. These churches should be the example for the Moravian Church in Tanzania. We are more likely to lose members in our churches because some of our members are joining those churches.

The Moravian missionaries from the beginning were very keen on respecting people and their cultures wherever they went. They attempted to evolve an African culture to the Moravian Churches tradition of converting native peoples without eradicating their own cultures. Some traditions and cultures must change: slavery, members of other tribes, superstition, and the oppression of minorities, such as women, slaves etc. But they retained elements like language, art, reverence for their history, and other aspects that are in perfect concert with scriptural authority.

**CHAPTER FOUR.**

**SO WHAT?**

After discussing the ministry of women from the biblical, historical/traditional, and African cultural perspectives in relation to the ordination of women in the Moravian Church in Tanzania, one may ask, so what? Because women are capable of playing several roles within the church as well as in society, why should they take on the role of an ordained pastor as well? Shouldn’t they be content in more subsidiary but important ministries within the church and beyond? But when women experience a genuine and divinely inspired call to ordination, denying them that role perpetuates the historical patriarchal stereotype--anathema to the entire mission of Jesus Christ-- that women are somehow lesser than, inferior to men and are not full and complete human beings created in the image of God. Therefore, it is high time for the church to take seriously the equality of women and their role in ministry of the Christian church. I believe that, if the church accepts women in the ordained ministry, it will be easy to reach more people including the next generation. Women have a big role in raising and nurturing children and society as a whole. Peter Batchelor asserts, “Women are, for example, generally far more sensitive than men to the inner ‘pulse-beat’ of the community. They are able to sense what is going on behind the scenes; they often know more accurately what the genuine felt need of the people.”[[126]](#footnote-127) Africa has been torn by horrific violence, whose victims are so often women and children. Surely, Christianity should offer an example of a way of thinking that supersedes tribal, ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences.

The mission of the church is not just a matter of converting people to Christianity, but rather to serve as an example that at least one group of people can treat others, regardless of their religious or tribal affiliations, with the dignity and respect with which Jesus treated all people. Acceptance of the ordination of women is one step toward that goal of showing Africans that there are ways to resolve differences that do not require the destruction of the other. The current violence in Darfur, Kenya, etc, often flows from tribal rivalries promoted by Western neocolonialism and exacerbated by conflict over land, power struggles, and resources. This hate can continue from this generation to the next. However, having women in ordained ministry will help to teach their fellow women and children about love and inspire them to resist all forms of destruction and look for solutions from within themselves and not outside. Christians should cross over divisions by tribe, ethnicity, or language and even by different religious faiths. African traditional religionist, Muslims, and others must see Christians as a people who seek peace and reconciliation, regardless of differences in belief or culture. God entrusted women and men with different gifts, so, if these gifts are put together, the ministry of God will be more effective.

The Moravian Church’s model for ministry from the beginning has been Jesus Christ himself. Thus the church has been conducting its ministry without exclusion of any believer, because it believes “Persons feeling a call to ordained ministry in the Moravian Church shall be given equal consideration without reference to their sex.”[[127]](#footnote-128) The Moravian Church in Tanzania (as well as all denominations that consider themselves Christians) needs to put into action what the Ground of Unity says.

There are five areas in which I believe the Moravian Church in Tanzania should consider and implement the empowerment of women in the church. First, Christ is the hope for all humanity. Therefore, his church is the only hope for women as part of humanity. Women in Tanzania need to overcome their oppression within the patriarchal system in which they live. Women come to church to find comfort from the hardships they face in their daily lives where they often feel like second-class human beings who live only for others. The church should help them understand that, in contrast, they are created in the image of God who values them each as an individual, precious child of God. When Christ was in this world, women followed him because they saw hope for wholeness as human beings.

It is in the same hope that Moravian women in Tanzania come to church hoping to be valued and respected as full humans. Most women who toil in their daily hard work and yet suffer oppression are found in rural areas. Despite their endless toil in their homes and fields, they are very faithful Christians whose contributions in the growth and life of the church cannot go unnoticed. There are many women who are not educated but who use their gifts and talents for the church. The church needs to educate women in secular as well as sacred education. Women are in the church “because they expect to bring joy and abundant life. Their hope is that God will liberate the church from gender dualism and make all real participants in this household of God.”[[128]](#footnote-129)

Second, the church has the best chance to improve women’s self confidence and empower them to believe in themselves. The church needs to educate the society about women and their capability to serve their savior because, due to cultural traditions many women have such a low self esteem that they believe that they have no right to fulfill certain things in the church.

As far as attitudes are concerned, this way of viewing women in the Church is found not only among men but among women too. Often one finds that African women have so internalized this low esteem of women in the church and other prevailing values that they become accomplices in suppression of their own gender. This is most obvious in the question of ordination.[[129]](#footnote-130)

Thus the church has a chance to change their thoughts and empower them to believe in themselves.

Third, Christ came so that everyone may be free in him. The church should bring the good news to women, to help them understand and value themselves and the freedom that they have in Jesus Christ. Women as believers should be given freedom to participate fully in the ministry of God. If they feel called to the ordained ministry, they should be allowed to respond to that call. Denying women the right to be ordained restricts Jesus’ freedom which was and still is for all. Jesus set an illustration in his attitude towards women by treating them with respect and dignity, breaking the barriers of gender as well as race, class, or ethnicity. The only hope for Moravian women in Tanzania to experience full redemption in Christ, as well as their dignity as human beings is in the church.

Fourth, Christianity is expected to transform cultures, which are discriminative, oppressive, and exclusive. Since the African culture is very important for all Africans, therefore, the church needs to find a good way of enculturation of Christianity. African culture is not static; it can change as generations go by. Mercy Amba Oduyoye asserts, “Christianity offers a way of life. It is therefore a global culture, albeit one that varies a great deal because it evolves in relation to existing ways of life. It opposes, it adapts, it adopts and it transforms, while it is itself opposed, adopted, challenged and transformed by the host cultures.”[[130]](#footnote-131) The church should work to bring about the change which is needed instead of contributing to cultural discrimination against women by denying them a right to serve in the ordained ministry. Just as much as the Bible needs to be interpreted in light of our growing understanding of the nature of discrimination and exclusion, so does the African culture. We need to interpret it so that we can transform it if we want Christianity to be dynamic. From the beginning Christianity has been dynamic, a fact that explains why it was able to spread to the whole world. If it were static none of us would have known the Christianity.

Protus O. Kemdirim reminds us about the invitation to proclaim the gospel, the “Good News of Jesus Christ. By virtue of the primary meaning of the word *euanglion*, evangelization always entails a divine invitation. It is an invitation to those (male and female) that have experienced Christ and his salvific, to bear witness to Christ in word and deed.”[[131]](#footnote-132) Every believer has an obligation to witness, and those who are called to ordained ministry should be able to do so without hindrances because of their gender or any other reason. I believe that the church needs to go back to the original tenet of the shared ministry between women and men. Accurate interpretation of scriptures is needed in order to understand the establishment of the early church and how the ministry was carried on in an alliance between women and men. “Women and men are of equal value before God, both created in the image of One God, or else we declare Genesis 1:26 a lie. If we stand with the text, then the male alone cannot stand for God if the female cannot also do so.”[[132]](#footnote-133) Both the ancient antecedents of the faith and our modern understandings of biology and sociology, and ministry should support and promote the ordination of women.

It is an undeniable truth that the activities of women in the church always bring long-lasting fruits for the kingdom of God.

The greater involvement of women in Church life arguably has far-reaching implications both for women and for the African Christian Churches. For one, the participation of women in the mainstream of the Churches’ ministry and administration would mean unequivocally that the womenfolk would be adequately conscientised about the demands of Justice especially as it pertains to such customary norms as inheritance, dowry, betrothal, polygamy, widowhood, etc. which painfully affect the status of women in Africa today.[[133]](#footnote-134)

Thus the church needs to empower women to recognize and deny cultures which are discriminative against them, against children, or against men of any tribe or ethnic group. Jesus brought a social change in his society not by force but rather by teachings. The church needs to teach about the equality and dignity of each human being has in Jesus Christ. The teaching task should begin with children and continue to men and women; they all ought to know that they are all created in the image of God.

Reading church history we come to realize that even some early church fathers deserted the original model for ministry and were influenced by their own prejudices and experiences. However, women were not silenced completely, because there were some women who were able to influence the church throughout history. That proves to all of us today that women are able to bring spiritual and physical change to the society as well as to the church. By incorporating women in ordained ministry, the work of church will be less stressful for men, and we will have stronger relationships within the church and outside because women will participate in leadership and decision making for the furtherance of the gospel and for the betterment society.

Finally, there is a need for cultural change and transformation for women in Tanzania and Africa as a whole. Oduyoye suggests that,

Cultural hermeneutics in the African women’s way is taking seriously the issues of continuity and change. The pain of the depth of exclusion and victimization is placed before the plumb line of the Good News of Jesus Christ which begins with the invitation to change, which will put people on the same course as that of the values in God’s Great Economy.[[134]](#footnote-135)

In colonial times, women suffered a double oppression, from colonizers and from the patriarchal system in their cultures. As African theology seeks to Africanize Christianity so that it can have roots in African people, it is important to include women in this process. African women theologians have realized that in the process to harmonize Christianity and African culture, African Christian theology has often left women out. So African women theologians have decided to explore and develop theology from women’s experience. Nevertheless, I believe that Christians should work together in the enculturation of Christianity.

I suggest that women and men have to work in solidarity within the church to enhance the body of Christ for his glory. The integration of women and men in the ministry should not be a problem in Christianity because it was made so real in the ministry of Jesus and in the early church. I believe that it is due time for the church to go back to the original core, to the shared ministry which the Moravian Church has traditionally held to. “Sharing fully in the life of the Church, its mission and ministry is the calling of all who are in the Church.”[[135]](#footnote-136)The Christian community, as the representative of Christ’s body, ought not to be exclusive but rather inclusive. Since the role of women in the life of the church is so vital and meaningful, the church needs to encourage women to respond to God’s call to the ordained ministry.

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