Women Priestly Ordination: The Oppression and Discrimination by the Orthodox Churches in Nigerian Nation

By

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Abstract

Ordination is the ceremony in which a priest is consecrated, considered a sacrament in the Catholic and orthodox churches. Oppression is suppression, domination, subjugation and an act of cruelty by the powerful over the powerless. Discrimination is seen as differential treatment of an individual or group to their disadvantage; treatment or consideration based on class or category rather than individual merit. Women are very religious, devoted and spiritual in their relationship with God. They play vital roles in the ministry of Jesus Christ and were promoters of God's kingdom. Women are the highest in population and commitment in all the churches in Nigeria but are treated as second class in the Holy order. Religious men in Nigerian are patriarchal in nature and manifest elements of Jewish tradition where women are meant to be seen but not to be heard. They make women voiceless, oppress, kill their spiritual gifts/talents in Nigerian orthodox churches. Women are voiceless and their spiritual gifts/talents are oppressed by the men/priests in Nigerian orthodox churches who act like the Egyptian taskmasters against the Israelites when they were in bondage. The men are afraid of having

women ordained into the priestly order due to inferiority complex. Anything which involves 'control' or ultimate authority by women was rejected. The priests and other laity are always of the view that Jesus called only the men as disciples and not the women. Today, women are doing the works of God via teaching, leading in prayer meetings, chairing religious meetings and manifesting spiritual gifts more than the men. It has been discovered that the men in orthodox churches in Nigeria have identified various areas as duties for women in the ministry in order of priority as followings: visiting the sick, counselling, helping in the Sunday school, decorating the church hall, chairing meetings, marrying and caring for the children spiritually. Men see women in ordained ministry as a taboo as they are seen as weaker sex. The questions that come to mind are as follows: why are the orthodox churches in Nigeria not ordaining women as priests? Why the Methodist Church Nigeria choose to ordain women as priests? Are there any biblical bases for priestly women ordination? However, this research will view a sketchy Old Testament origin of priesthood, priesthood of all believers in the New Testament, the relevance of women in Jesus's ministry. Women ordination in Catholic church and its limiting factors, the position of Anglican church Nigeria on women priestly ordination, Methodism in Nigeria and ordination of women as priest. This research made used of historical method as well as the utilization of books, journal articles, internet sources, oral interview (which is a one-on-one interaction with heads of Orthodox Churches in Nigeria but limited to the Catholic, Anglican and Methodist Church. Obviously, this research will help women to advocate for priestly ordination into their various denomination. Men will see clearly that gender base oppression and discrimination against women are not godly. This research will be relevant to our theological schools or seminaries to review their curriculums to accommodate women ordination into priesthood. It recommends amongst others that women ordination should be recommended in all the orthodox churches in Nigeria for easy manifestation of the gifts/talents in them.

Keywords: Women, Ordination, Priest, Orthodox, Church, Discrimination

Introduction

During the first millennium of Christianity, ordination meant election by and installation of a person to perform a particular function in a Christian community.

Not only bishops, priests, deacons and sub-deacons but also of porters, lectors, exorcists, acolytes, canons, abbots, abbesses, kings, queens and empresses were all considered equally ordained. Grace Church (2022) posits that there are many famous and notable Christian women in the church. Some famous women of the church include Barbara Clementine Harris. She was the first female bishop in the world. Barbara was ordained as a bishop in the Episcopal Church in the US. Only in the 12th and 13th centuries did theologians and canonists devise, after lengthy debates, another definition of ordination. According to this definition, ordination granted the recipient not a position within a community, but a power that a person can exercise in any community. The central power that ordination granted was the power to consecrate the bread and wine at the altar, and so, over time, ordination was considered to include only those orders that served at the altar, that is, the orders of priest, deacon and sub-deacon. All of the other earlier orders were no longer considered to be orders at all. All of this changed over roughly a hundred-year period between the end of the 11th century and the beginning of the 13th. For many different cultural reasons, women were gradually excluded from ordination.

The ordination of women has been a controversial issue throughout the Anglican Communion. The controversy also divided the Church in Nigeria as some bishops did not see anything wrong in ordaining female priests, while other clergymen considered it an ecclesiastical sacrilege. While the majority provinces of the Anglican Communion ordain women as priests, and many have removed all barriers to women becoming bishops, some have taken formal or informal steps to provide pastoral care and support for those who cannot in conscience accept the ministry of women as priests and bishops. There have been a number of protest groups established by conservative Anglicans who see the ordination of women as representative of a trend away from traditional or orthodox doctrine.

Most Rev. Blessing Enyindah (Oral Interview, September 5, 2023) states that as Evangelical Christians, there is the believe that all believers are priest. But if a woman has believed, she is born again filled with the Holy Spirit and possesses the gifts of the Holy Spirit, then she could be allowed to exercise such gifts in the church but not for Priestly Ordination. Bishop N. O. Nosayaba (Oral Interview, August 9, 2023) avers that the discrimination against women into the priestly

ordination is traceable to the Pentateuch, especially when the priesthood started, the scriptures talk about the sons of Aaron by succession and so on. So, women were not mentioned, daughters were not also mentioned. Aside this, among the disciples of Jesus, how many were women? Christ was a Jewish man in this context and did not call any woman amongst his "priest". The apostles did not involve women because the Bible will always talk of them as weaker vessels.

A Sketchy Biblical Origin of Priesthood

The primary word for "priest" in the Old Testament is the Hebrew masculine noun *kohen* and there is no certain etymology. Here, it refers to the exclusivity, perpetuity, and responsibility of the Aaronic office of "priesthood" as stated in Numbers 16:10. The first occurrence of "priest" in the Old Testament is the reference to the pre-Israelite "Melchizedek king of Salem priest of God Most High" (Gen 14:18). Jethro, Moses' father-in-law and the priest of Midian, was also recognized as non-Israelite priest of the true God of Sinai by Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel (Exod 2:16; 3:1; 18:1, 10-12). Many have proposed the interpreted of Exod 19:6 to mean Israel as a kingdom ruled by priests or a nation whose kings are also priests. In the immediate context as well as in the theology of the Old Testament overall, however, this expression seems to support two main ideas corresponding to the surrounding statements that covenant Israel would become the Lord's "special treasure" and "holy nation". Therefore, Israel was to be a "kingdom of priests" in terms of its corporate participation in the service of worship to the Lord in the sanctuary as well as in its position and ministry toward the nations roundabout them

Ritual in Exodus 24:3-8 actually inaugurated Israel as a "kingdom of priests," that is, a nation that had direct access to God through his presence in the tabernacle and to which they would come and worship. The ritual procedure itself involved splashing the blood of the burnt and peace offerings both on the altar and on the people. There is a striking similarity between this ritual in Exodus 24 and the consecration of the Aaronic priests by putting some of the blood of the ordination peace offering on the right ear, thumb, and big toe of Aaron and his sons, and afterwards splashing some of it around on the altar Exod 29:20; Lev 8:23-24.

That differences between Exodus 24:5-8 and Exodus 29:20 are due primarily to one or both of the following factors: (1) the consecration in Exodus 24 was for the priesthood of the whole nation so that the corporate general splashing of blood was appropriate to the meaning of the ritual; and (2) in the instance of Exodus 24 specific touching of each person's body by Moses was precluded by the large number of people involved. Moreover, the connection between Exodus 24 and 29 is confirmed by the blood manipulation for the guilt offering used to cleanse the leper in Leviticus 14 (presumably the same for all lepers whether or not they were priests). The procedure there is virtually identical to that performed for the consecration of the priests.

In the context of Aaronic priesthood, Moses functioned as the original priest of Israel by initially consecrating (1) the whole kingdom of priests (Exod 24:3-8), (2) the perpetual priesthood of Aaron and his descendants, who would in turn mediate for that kingdom of priests as contained in (Exod 29; Lev 8) and (3) the tabernacle (Num 7:1). However, there are several passages that seem to indicate that Aaron and his sons functioned as priests in Israel even before the official consecration of the Aaronic priesthood (Exod 19:24; 24:1; 32:3-6). However, as brothers and sons of Amram and Jochebed (Exod 6:20), Moses and Aaron were both from the tribe of Levi through Kohath. Therefore, it was natural that the Lord should then choose the whole tribe of Levi to assist the clan of Aaron with all their priestly duties in place of the firstborn of all Israel (Num 8:14-19).

Obviously, all the priests were under strict restrictions to avoid defilement by contact with a corpse (except for their immediate family), or by marriage to a divorced woman or former harlot (Leviticus 21:1-4; 27:7). The high priest, however, could not defile himself even by attending to his dead father or mother, and marriage was restricted to a virgin (i.e., he could not marry a widow, much less a divorced woman or former harlot Leviticus 21:10-14).

Argument on the Position of Priesthood

In the symposium on man, woman and priesthood as stated by Peter (1978, p. 72) "In the strict and proper sense, the only ontologically original and ultimate priesthood is that of Christ; it is identical with his status as son, word and Apostle of the eternal father". Obviously, priesthood belongs to Christ. Peter maintained

that the ordained priest is not exercising a priesthood of his own but is the agent and instrument through which Christ is exercising his priesthood, he too must be male.

Mascall (cited in Ogba, 2002) said that priesthood belongs to Christ the eternal Father. He became man as male, not by accident because he is Son not Daughter: because what was to be communicated to the created world in human form in the incarnation was the relation which he has to the Father. It appears that Mascall sees priesthood to be individualistic rather than the priesthood of all believers as found in the New Testament. Priesthood in the New Testament speaks of the people of God who are the redeemed by the blood of Christ. The New Testament sees Christ as the Great High Priest (Hebrews 10:19-25). Priesthood in the New Testament is seen to be kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:5, 6; 5:10).

If we see priesthood to be strictly for man because Christ took a male form, then his redemption is not meant for the females. The masculinity of priesthood as upheld by so many believers is misleading. Richard (1979) understood ministerial priesthood with the Christian church, in the New Testament thus "priesthood consists of a ministry of men or women who stand for God to their fellow-men and represent their fellow-men to God". (p.10). Richard's perception of priesthood is a true expression of Christ priesthood and a vivid proof that it is on representative basis. Gary, William and Phyllis (2011) hold that there is no valid argument, theological history, or sociological view that should prevent women in our contemporary world from exercising her calling as a priest. A priest derives his/her delegated authority from Christ the Great High Priest and the priestly calling of His body, the church. Why should men out of jealously prevent women from answering the call of God?

Women in the New Testament Church

In the prophecy of Joel, 2: 28-29, the age of the Spirit was to be an age when all, from the least to the greatest, would love the Lord, and sons and daughters would prophesy. According to Diehl (1985), "before and during the time of Christ, Jewish proselyte initiation required three things from man: circumcision, baptism and sacrifice" (p. 74). In the view of Malcolm (1985), Christian baptism which did not require circumcision, seemed to signal the fulfillment of that hope, as for the first

time, men and women alike became full initiates. There was no distinction in Christ: no male and female, all alike were full members of the new community. Imagine the liberation felt by women, as the priesthood become a priesthood of all believers! (1Peter 2:9).

By way of the revelation received from the Acts and the Epistles, women began to take full advantage of their new status. However, Louis (1976) presented two critical factors in relation to women in the New Testament:

(1) There was precedent for certain liberties in Greco-Roman society as well as among upper class Jews. For example, when Paul visited Philippai in (Macedonia, already well known for granting its women more freedom and prominence than elsewhere in the Greco-Roman World) he spoke to the women gathered for prayer at the river–side and Lydia and her household were baptised.

(2) There are indications that women's behavior in churches, for example, in Corinth, reveals symptoms of a spirit-possession movement arising from their marginal status in society at large. Such movements are often fueled by rapid and unsettling social change.

Women were witnesses to the resurrection of Christ and they were commissioned by the resurrected Lord to tell others. They fulfilled the credentials of apostle-ship and it is much more natural (in Romans 16:1-27) to read of Junia as a female name than to understand it as a shortened form of the male, Junianus. Andronicus and Junia would then appear as a missionary couple like Aquila and Priscilla.

Gary (2008) states that women were found in the prophetic ministry (Acts 2: 17f). Paul specifically mentions the four daughters of Philip as renowned Christian prophets (Acts 21:9). Also, Luke and Paul stated clearly that women engaged in missionary work and leadership in the early church. Women were found to be among the wealthy and prominent converts and patronesses (Acts 17:4, 12) and must have exercised leadership in the house churches. Fiorenza (1982) avers that many house churches are associated with the names of women: Apphia in Colossae (Philemon 2), Nympha in Laodicea (Colossians 4:15), Prisca and Aquila in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome (1Corinthians 16:19, Acts 18:18, Romans 16:5) and Chloe in Corinth (1Corinthians 1:11). Paul commended the mission labours of

women like Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persia in Rome (Romans 16:6,12) and Euodia and Syntyche in Philippai (Philippians 4:2-3). Phoebe of Genchreae was called a deacon, deaconess and leader (Rom 16:1). Prisca together with her husband was a commissary of Paul, Barnabas, Titus and Appllos – since her name is mentioned before her husband's four times out of six she must have been the leading figure.

In Christ, there is liberation and equality because there is no gender bias, no gender neglect and no gender discrimination.

> For in Christ you are all children of Christ through faith. As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 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 (Galatians 3:26-28).

The above biblical passage is Paul's "freedom manifesto" as stated by (Margaret, 1962).

According to Ogba (2002), Tertullian for example claimed to be the successor of the Pauline communities and rails against women thus:

> What effrontery; we find amongst their female heretics! They actually dare to give the church's teaching, to engage in disputations, to practice exorcism, to promise cures, perhaps even to baptize!... women are not permitted to speak in the church, but equality they are forbidden to give official teaching, to baptise, to make offering or lay claim to any function (munus) of men, or of the sacerdotal ministry (officium). (p.136-137).

In same vain, the Council of Laodicea in her meeting in AD 343 declared that "in future time, women might not be appointed elders (Presbyterae) in the church" Raming (cited in Ogba, 2002, p. 137).

On the contrary, Brooten (1982) posits that female deacons were to be faithful in all things, serious, no slanderers, but temperate (1Timothy 3:11). Their calling was to serve. Origen used Phoebe's position as a female deacon at Cenchrea (Romans 16:1) to argue for women of like caliber to be admitted to the church's ministry. Clement likewise appealed to Paul's directions about women deacons.

Women Priestly Ordination in Catholic Church and its Limiting Factors
Pope Francis's Response on Women Ordination

According to Pope Francis (2023), when St. John Paul II taught that we must affirm "definitively" the impossibility of conferring priestly ordination on women, he was in no way denigrating women and giving supreme power to men. St. John Paul II also affirmed other things. For example, when we speak of priestly authority, "we are in the realm of function, not of dignity and holiness" (St. John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 51), words that we have not sufficiently embraced. He also clearly held that while the priest alone presides at the Eucharist, the tasks "do not favour the superiority of one over the other" (St. John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, note 190; cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Inter insigniores*, VI). He also stated that if the priestly function is "hierarchical," it should not be understood as a form of domination but "is totally ordered to the holiness of the members of Christ" (St. John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem*, 27). If this is not understood, and practical consequences are not drawn from these distinctions, it will be difficult to accept that the priesthood is reserved only for men, and we will not be able to recognize the rights of women or the need for them to participate in various ways in the leadership of the Church.

On the other hand, to be rigorous, let us recognize that a clear and authoritative doctrine on the exact nature of a "definitive statement" has not yet been fully developed. It is not a dogmatic definition, and yet it must be adhered to by all. No one can publicly contradict it and yet it can be a subject of study, as with the case of the validity of ordinations in the Anglican Communion.

Controversies in Anglicanism over Women Priestly Ordination

According to George (2014), leaders of the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion have voiced their displeasure with the vote by the Church of England's General Synod to permit the consecration of women to the episcopate. While the Nigerian House of Bishops has not issued a formal statement in the wake of the 14 July 2014 vote, the Bishop of Ngbo, the Rt. Rev Christian Ebisike, told the News Agency of Nigeria the Church of England was being unfaithful to Scripture. "The Archbishop of Canterbury and by extension the Church of England did not do their homework very well and I do not think they consulted widely with other Provinces of the Anglican Communion," the bishop said,

adding the Church of England "should see itself as a role model for the Anglican Communion but unfortunately, it is not living up to that role." Bishop Ebisike (2014) observed that while women served as evangelists and teachers in the early church according to scripture, there were "no women apostles." He added that "when you ordain a bishop and he is not recognized by some parts of the communion that is not a bishop." After a wide consultation within the church among clergy and lay leaders, in 2005 the Church of Nigeria's standing committee permitted women to be ordained to the deaconate, but not to the priesthood and the episcopate. Recalling back, in December 1993 the Bishop of the Diocese of Kwara in Central Nigeria, the Rt. Rev. Herbert Haruna ordained three women to the priesthood over the objections of the Primate, the Most Rev. Joseph Abiodun Adetiloye, Archbishop of Lagos (pictured). The Standing Committee of the Church of Nigeria subsequently nullified the ordinations and sanctioned Bishop Haruna. Looking at the above scenario, women ordination has been a great crisis in the Anglican Church of Nigeria.

The retired Archbishop of Province 2 of the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), Archbishop Maxwell Anikwenwa, has fueled the controversy trailing the argument on the ordination of women as bishops in the church, saying he did not find anything in theology against the ordination of women. Anikwenwa, who also served as the Dean of Church of Nigeria and Bishop of Awka Diocese before his retirement, said though the Church of England had voted in support of women ordination as bishops, he still stood on the side of the Church of Nigeria on the matter. Anikwenwa (2014) states thus:

> As an Anglican priest, there is no stand point of theology against women ordination. Jesus never said a woman should not serve him. The Bible tells us that women followed Jesus all through his ministry. Why won't they then serve him? "So there is nothing wrong in ordaining women. But I have to abide by the stand of the Church of Nigeria on the matter because they are not on the same page with the Church of England on the issue.

In Awka - Primate of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, Most Reverend Nicholas Oko endorsed the ordination of women as deacons in specific areas in Anglican Communion. Archbishop Oko said women ordination for now would stop at deacons for specific purposes like hospital work and school services,

though, most clergy are against Women ordination. Ordination is not only a response to God's call on an individual but it is also an action of the church. Most Reverend Nicholas Oko (cited in George, 2014) avers:

> At this time the Church of Nigeria, to which we owe canonical obedience, has no provision for the ordination of women although there has been acceptance of women in the order of deacons. At their most recent gathering the Church of Nigeria's General Synod tabled discussion about ordination of women to a future date.

In conclusion, the following points are observed in the above conflict by many bishops, priests and scholars.

1. The faith and order of the Anglican Communion are the faith and order of the Church Catholic. We have no authority to change that order by admitting women to the episcopate and priesthood without a consensus of historic Christendom.
2. The sexuality of Jesus is no accident; it is the flesh of his incarnation by God's own act. This male image is continued by Christ's choice of male apostles, and their choice of apostolic men to succeed them. This cannot be dismissed as "cultural conditioning" without disparaging the Jewishness of Jesus.
3. The persisting tradition of two thousand years in church order reveals the mind of the Spirit for the future of the ministry of the church. Christian priesthood has consistently been male through cultures of varying sexual patterns. To obey the Spirit, we must be faithful to this history.
4. The priests of the church have no priesthood of their own; they participate in Christ's priesthood. Ordination is a gift of the Holy Spirit which bestows this participation. It is not the creation of the church to do with as it will. It is to be given only to those congruous with the example of Jesus Christ, the authority of Holy Scriptures and the witness of Christian tradition. There is no *right* to priesthood.
5. If women ordination is allowed in the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion, it will make the priesthood office a family affair, and that will cause a split and a lot conflict in the Church.
6. With the uncertainty of the stand of Church of Nigeria and divergence of perception and opinion, if the Church of Nigeria through her leadership approves the ordination of women as priest, definitely it will erupt serious conflict in that

some will quickly ordain women, while others will threaten to pull out or even breakaway from Church of Nigeria in disagreement; because it might result also to bishops ordaining their wives with other discrepancies in order to get the Bishopric throne. It will chaotic and serious conflict will be the end point.

Women in African Traditional Culture and their Value

Women in African culture are under their husbands or the men. Ogba (2002) says "Generally, under culture perspectives Africans believe that women are meant to be seen and not heard" (p. 92). They are taken to be dependent oriented and this explains why the Igbos in particular address their wives as "Oriaku" or "Ndi Oriaku" that is consumer or the consumers of wealth. Every African society see the man as the head of the family and women depend on them for economic and social welfare. On this premise, Oduyoye (1986) posits:

> The man who is usually the head of the family and breadwinner has the responsibility for the welfare of its members. In order to achieve this goal, he is expected to exercise complete control over such members. He has the final say, on their movements and actions. Women and young people are not expected to participate in activities outside the home without the knowledge and permission of the head of the family (p. 34).

At the death of any man, his son automatically takes over the headship of the family no matter his age. If the man died without a male child, it is expected of the next of kin closest to him to take over such position but not a woman. Kola nut is not presented to a woman in African tradition even if she goes out with her youngest son. The youngest son in that instance receives the kola nut and pure libation on it and then picks his own. It is that boy that will dip his hands in the sacred plate and pick one of the kola nut for his mother.

Ogba (2002) says in contemporary African society, it is believed that nothing good can come out of a woman excepting being a procreative machine. Hence, women are regarded as second-class citizens that are subject to subordination at any time, any place and anywhere. Ezeaku (1990) avers:

> History and religion have made mankind look at woman as passive human persons. History as placed woman; particularly the pre-modern (primitive) women as passive as it has never shown them as active in the world's

> economic, political, military and social activities. Religion which has recognized the world as divinely ordered has recognized them as the causes of all calamities, bad omen… (p. 104).

In the words of Napoleon Bonaparte (cited in Onuoha, 1995) avers that nature intended women to be our slaves. They are our property, we are not theirs, they belong to us, just as a tree that bears fruits belong to a gardener. What a mad idea to demand equality for women. Women are nothing but machines that produce children. It is amazing to hear how great men of the Christian faith (Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas) considered women as cited in (Onuoha 1995) thus:

> … an insufficient or defective creature whose entire psycho-sexual life was shaped by her having been deprived of a penis, and whose mortal and social existence was marked by every insincerity, and under developed sense of justice and honour, and incapacity for the higher human tasks. (p. 2).

So many Africans who are anti-women believe that women's brains are not mature enough to think positively of ideas that can help in the development of any society. Their opinions are not considered as worthwhile. In the context of African culture, women are supposed to play minimal role in decision making within the society. This is inhuman attitude. Practically speaking, Ezeaku (1990) holds, "Even when they hold any religious position in the society, they do not hold it over-and-above their male-folk."

Women are severely discriminated against in public and private life. They can be divorced at will by the men. Only in rare cases could women bear witness or exercise their rights. All these and even more are the contributing factors to the neglect and discrimination meted against them in the area of priestly ordination especially in some orthodox churches in Nigeria.

The Value of Women in Orthodox Churches in Nigeria

Kenneth Cooper (cited in Megan, 2021) states:

> I was quite disappointed when I read this article. The "Roles" described, both positive and negative, apply equally to both men and women. This article completely avoids the issues that must be addressed if the Christian

> Church is to continue to be relevant in our Western culture. We are turning people away from the church with our outdated and discriminatory view of women based on a few misunderstood and incorrectly interpreted Scriptures that are used as isolated proof texts, and we are ignoring Scriptures that clearly describe women in leadership roles in the kingdom of God.

Andrew (1993) avers that when Jesus was still tender, Anna, in (Luke 2: 36) played a pertinent role in making known His mission. When Jesus entered on His public ministry, He counted among His friends, supporters and followers many women. According to Grace Church (2022), Jesus' images, illustrations, and teachings were all examples of how women were treated equally and loved by Him

Anglican Church Nigeria Position on Women in Ministry:

The Archbishop, Province of Niger Delta and Bishop of Ikwerre Diocese, Anglican Communion: Most Rev. Blessing Enyindah (Oral Interview, September 5, 2023) emphatically states that Anglican Communion place very high value on women as Nigeria. For example, the Anglican Church Nigeria have department fully for women called women's gild. Mother Union is made up of women who are officially married in the church and women's gild is made up of women generally. In the church today, the majority of membership are the women. They make up to 60% to 70% of attendance in the church and other religious programmes. They encourage their husbands and children to be active in the church.

Most Rev. Blessing Enyindah (Oral Interview, September 5, 2023) said in terms of ministry, the Anglican Church of Nigeria commission and license women as lay readers to preach in the church. Gone are the days when they say women should not talk in the church. The licensed women are allowed to conduct services. Women are also Commissioned to become evangelist and their license is been given by the Bishop. What the Anglican Church has not done for them is to ordain them to wear collars even though some Anglican churches all over the world have done that but here in Nigeria, it has been discussed but it did not work out. The Archbishop, said that it was even the women themselves that worked against the Ordination of women as priest. Women for now in Anglican Church Nigeria do not do any pastoral work as it relates to Ordination but the ministers' wives who

are “the pastors of women in the church" take oversight about everything concerning women; visit them and do other jobs that the pastor can do. So, they have that pastoral role but not official.

Women in the Methodist Church Nigeria:

The Methodist Church Nigeria took notice of gender sensitivity and created the deaconess order with limited powers/functions. Rt. Rev. N. O. Nosayabaa, Bishop of Edo-Delta Diocese, Methodist Church Nigeria, (Oral Interview, August 9, 2023) said women were not allowed to take function of the priesthood from the beginning. The women work/function as deaconesses in Methodist Church Nigeria with the following responsibilities:

1. Coordination of women work
2. They were in-charge of the children ministry
3. They were in-charge of specialized professions such as the medical (Nurse)
4. They were in-charge of entertainment and welfare which the priest may not function properly in that office such as decoration, coordinating programmes, etc.
5. They were seen as bridge between the ministers and the women especially when the minister is not yet married. They coordinate the women and handle counselling session especially when there are sensitive issues which the minister cannot handle amongst the women.
6. Deaconess were also in-charge of Sunday schools
7. Teaching in the mission schools and serve as chaplains in schools especially where boys and girls are mixed-up, they handle the females especially sensitive issues.
8. They were also in-charge of churches and take pastoral oversight especially when there are few ministers and more local churches.

It is worthy of note that they have limitations, is that, they cannot or not allowed to perform the sacrament of Baptism, administering the Holy Communion and joining of couples during marriages although, they can preach.

Methodism in Nigeria and Gender Sensitivity on Women Priestly Ordination in Contemporary Times

Bishop N. O. Nosayaba (Oral Interview, August 9, 2023) said the church is trying to borrow what is happening in our today's world such as women's right, women equality with men etc. When the late Prelate was the Vice President of the World Methodist Council and was aspiring to become the world Methodist Council President, as at then, Methodist Church Nigeria was not ordaining women; Prelate Sunday Mbang started championing women ordination so that will be universally accepted as a practice. In his second tenure, he had a woman who was president over him and she came to Nigeria and a service was held in Sagamu and by the Methodist order, our Prelate Sunday Mbang was in her front in the order of procession. During the consecration of the element she consecrated the Eucharist. Prelate Sunday Mbang said "if a White woman can consecrate a communion for me to take, why am I discriminating against the black women. That is when the first woman Dr. Mrs Nkechi Nwosu joined the ordained ministry in the Methodist Church Nigeria and she was accepted and celebrated. She has currently risen in the ministry to the echelon of episcopacy. She is the first female Bishop of the Methodist church Nigerian taking oversight of the Diocese of Jos. Today what you discriminate against is being celebrated elsewhere.

Factors that Enhance Discrimination Against Women Ordination in Orthodox Churches in Nigeria

Patriarchy as an Infringement to Women Ordination:

Most Rev. Blessing Enyindah (Oral Interview, September 5, 2023) said Anglican Church Nigeria does not have discrimination against women but that the church has not deemed it necessary to ordain women for now. It may be done in the future because in the house of Bishops of the Anglican Church Nigeria, some have written for women to be ordained while others objected to it, but it has not come to a consensus in favour of Ordination of women into Priestly ministry. The reasons for not ordaining women in Anglican Church Nigeria are:

1. Women will always be women in pastoring, there are things women cannot handle and if they are allowed to go into that, there might be fighting, quarrelling, and cause misunderstandings.

2. Men will not regard them to take pastoral oversight or leadership over them. For example, if you are my wife and my pastor, you must understand that you are my wife in the house.
3. In the New Testament, there was no ordained woman.
4. When Jesus commissioned the twelve Apostles, there was no women among them. All others including women were adjuncts. Most of the activities were carried out by the men except Aquila and Pricilla but even at that Pricilla was not ordained as priest.

According to Rt. Rev. N. O. Nosayabaa, Bishop of Edo-Delta Diocese, Methodist Church Nigeria, (Oral Interview, August 9, 2023), the deaconess order/ordination right from the Methodist Theological Institute, has been a burning issue of serious debate because women who are deaconess studied together with same curriculum in the same school and class with men who are trained to be priest. In the Bible, the person of deaconess Phobe and other women in ministry propelled the Methodist Church Nigeria to encourage women into the deaconess order and not into the full priesthood ab initio, unlike in the priest or Aaron and their Levites where sons were priest and daughters were not ordained. The deaconesses where always challenging the ministers in training that they pay the same amount (fees), spend same numbers of years, stay in same class, and at the end, they are segregated with deaconess certificates and the men minister (Reverend). This segregation follows them to the field. Hence, the women started opting for ministerial training when the Methodist Church initiated it, instead of Deaconess order due to discrimination and neglect by the ministers. Those who were deaconess started going back to the theological school for a one-year conversion course to ministerial. In the Deaconess order, a woman cannot talk when the minister is talking. In the Methodist Church Nigeria, a male who is admitted into the ministerial order in the theological school is automatically a senior to any deaconess in the field for years. Also, stipend of the minister is higher than that of a deaconess. The deaconess order is dying a natural death.

African Culture as Infringement to Women Ordination:

Bishop N. O. Nosayaba (Oral Interview, August 9, 2023) states that when the Methodist female ordination first started, many priests (male) refused to take communion from any woman (priest) due to discrimination and neglect but

overtime, they have no option than to receive communion from them because the church has given them such dispensation. We now have so many women ordained priest even to the point of a female Bishop. But this is still a problem in some places due to Cultural issues. The second woman that was ordained is from Edo–Delta Diocese of blessed memory had a challenge of being posted to any church due to gender discrimination but remained in the church her family founded and funded till her retirement and death. If she was posted to any other church, the Benin and Delta worshippers will dissert the church because they have common practice concerning women ordination.

In this context, everybody is born into culture, but from the Benin culture, it is a taboo for the woman to take leadership over the man. Bishop N. O. Nosayaba (Oral Interview, August 9, 2023) posits that in Benin traditional religion, women are not allowed to reach the sacred places in the religion and that has to do with "menstrual flow" with permission from the women. In this tradition, blood is seen as very important and its presence can destroy a lot of charm and that is why before anyone performs some ritual functions, it is ensured that such is not deformed, no injury, fluid etc. Before anyone carries the masquerade, such must be fortified for two weeks in the forest with seclusion and consecration. Even the Olukun which is the feminine in nature, women are still not allowed to enter the inner chamber. This is what will also affect women ordination in the Orthodox Churches in Nigeria and in Benin. Till date it is a challenge.

Most Rev. Blessing Enyindah (Oral Interview, September 5, 2023) holds that women are seen to be down trodden in terms of cultural values are also seen to be second class in affairs, they are married out of the family, they are not regarded at all and they have no say. In Ikwerre culture, you cannot share land to women. This also reflect in the church and women are not given powers to equate the men or operate in the church. Women are to be cared for and not to be given the responsibility of caring for people.

Most orthodox churches in Nigeria has perpetually put a ban on women participation in the sacred ministerial functions in Nigeria. This has created tension and disagreements which has led to scorn between husbands and wife, friends and relations. Women who are advocate of women ordination are kept

away from some sacred functions/leadership positions in the church. Christianity emanated from the Jews, Greek and the Roman world where women have been habitually disposed and demeaned by men. It is clear that women in these cultures which had been long established before Christianity were regarded as simpletons and inferior things.

Women seen as Second Class Citizens in Africa

In the era when Christianity came into Nigeria, women were seen to be second class citizen only meant for procreation. This attitude of negligence and high level of discrimination has over time built in women inferiority complex. Even with the context of culture, men were using women for ritual sacrifices to the gods which is believed needed blood through human sacrifice. The philosophy that women office is in the kitchen" shows the level of degradation of women by African men. All these derogatory statements make women never to involve themselves in any form of authority that will tend to place them over the men especially as it concerns involvement in the sacred functions of the church. Ogba (2002) says at present, it seems that the church has begun to accept the involvement of women in the ordained church ministry, yet in most cases they have been brain-washed to still have the impression that men only have the right to take any useful decision in the church. The contributions by women at times are not taken seriously even by their fellow women. In this way, the church more or less supports the oppressive culture against women.

It is a big shock that even the educated women who are very influential are in opposition to women ordination. Reflections on the attitude of women at 1988 Lambeth conference, Marshall (1988) said:

> Yet not all the women at Lambeth were in favour of the ordination of women. Women Against the Ordination of Women (WAOW) distributed packets of materials to Lambeth participants; yes to the ministry of women – No to women priests' was their succinct slogan (p.40).

Some women groups that are prominently anti-women ordination include: National Council of Catholic Women, Catholic Daughters of American Women's Christian Temperate Union, Women in Industry etc. Some of these people are

either ignorant or jealous/envious of those of their member who have been so "called" into the ordained ministry of the Christian church.

Woman was Responsible for the Fall of Man:
Another challenging factor why orthodox churches in Nigeria has refused to ordain woman is due to the fact that woman was responsible for the fall of man (Adam), thereby putting the rest of mankind in perpetual suffering. On this premise, women are seen the devil's gateway. This has caused the men to put them in serious check with intimidation, exploitation, unacceptability of their services and rejection of their contributions both in private and public life.

Menstruation (Uncleanness) as Infringement to Women Ordination:
Bishop N. O. Nosayaba (Oral Interview, August 9, 2023) said in the conferences of Methodist Church Nigeria, it was resolved that any woman that must be ordained must be forty years and above with the believe that at such age, the woman may be in her menopause. Unfortunately, today, we have young ladies who are in the priesthood in their twenty's in age, unmarried ones, young secondary School leavers etc. The Bishop mentioned how he pastored a church in Edo–Delta Diocese and had a Children annual harvest. He selected male and female who will handle the programme to be on the altar and one of the elders of the church called him outside and said "look for a way to find out if those female children in the altar are in their 'menstrual circles'. So, I told him to do that since he was very elderly and the man walked away.

Most Rev. Blessing Enyindah (Oral Interview, September 5, 2023) avers that the altar is a holy place. In the Jewish culture, when a woman is menstruating she is not expected to come out, not expected to touch holy things in the holy order due to the fact that blood is flowing out of her (regarded as unclean), she is expected to stay away until the flow ceases. So, the woman in this condition cannot or is not expected to offer Holy Communion or climb the altar.

Women against Women Ordination:
In Nigeria, most women do not want their fellow women to take such sacred, revered and prestigious position over them. Generally, most women are impatience and intolerable among themselves. They undermine themselves and

would not want a fellow woman to reign over them or lead them in the sacred order. Instead, they preferred the men whom they see as the head of the family who possess leadership role and responsibilities to be ordained as a priest.

Recommendations

Conclusion

Corporate Israel in the Old Testament functioned as a kingdom of priests in both its mediation between God and the other nations and in its service of worship to the Lord in the sanctuary. Similarly, the priesthood of the church has mediatorial features as well as aspects that correspond to the sanctuary worship of the Old Testament, sometimes expressed separately and sometimes jointly in the various New Testament passages related to the priesthood of believers. One Franciscan theologian, Duns Scotus (1266-1308), states that women were the equal of men in all ways, but since Jesus had never ordained women, the church could not do so. This is, of course, the position of the many scholars and Church leaders even in the present.

The challenge of giving women equal opportunity with men to function in the ministry is increasing everyday as there is constant threat from the men against women and due to selfishness and egoistic reasons. Ogba (2002) said a colleague clergy once asked:

> You mean to allow women for ordination so that they will start manning churches like us? And concluded, thank God I am not just joining the ministry otherwise how would it sound to say that I am under a woman presbyter or woman Bishop? God forbid!

Also, some church influential and prominent leaders lack the courage to stand up to support women ordination.

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