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Opposition to Women in Congregational Leadership: A Sociocultural Perspective

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Abstract

Although many efforts have been made in time past in demonstrating that women are similar to men, there still appear to be a widespread persistent belief that women are indeed inferior to men even until today. What is even worrying is the theological backing that this sociocultural belief of society enjoys. One notices in the literature that God ordains, sanctions, and upholds the spiritual authority of women today as he did in time past as his official spokespersons and leaders of his people. However, the evidence and discussion presented in this paper demonstrate that problems with women being accepted as leaders by congregations, gender differences in pay and promotions, and the experiences and dissatisfaction of women clergy who feel constrained by these gender discrimination is widespread. The paper discusses this phenomenon and presents an often neglected perspective in the discourse – the sociocultural perspective. It interrogates the various stands on women and leadership in congregations. In doing this, the paper explores the position of women in the Old Testament through to the New Testament and the centuries following.

Keywords: Opposition; Women; Congregational Leadership; Sociocultural; Old Testament; New Testament; God.

Introduction

It is quite curious to know that beginning in as far back as the earliest Christian churches in the first century, and continuing through to today, the religious role of women has been the subject of constant debate. It just does not seem to go away. Church councils, theologians, and religious authorities have sought to time after time deliberate on and define the proper position of women in the church. These have almost always been inconclusive. Even in cases where these definitions appear definite, they only appear so in theory. Practically, one always finds the reality, which sometimes widely differs from council resolutions per se.

One wonders why the case of ordaining women as priests has been a problem for these many decades. This ought to have been a minor problem but it however seems to have been the bane of many churches for years. Why is it that women have still not fully realized their right to follow a vocation to the priesthood after years of struggle? Similar to several other occupations, the male-dominance and control of the clergy has been well documented (Bock, 1967; McDuff & Mueller, 2002).

Evidence suggests that women clergy have had to do with inferior conditions of work and also grapple with workplace inequalities (Chang, 2000; McDuff, 2001; Schneider & Schneider, 1997). In situating the literature well in perspective, one could notice some level of gender discrimination in congregations. Gender is an ascribed status, so when decisions of personnel are based on gender rather than one's qualification, competence or job performance, then gender discrimination is said to have occurred (Ngo et al., 2002). This is often seen in the ensuing grievances, resentment and dissatisfaction felt by those who pursue that course.

Constantly, women who have wishes of dedicating their lives to the Christian ministry have faced the difficulty of the capacity in which they could serve and how far they could go. The manifest basis of many congregations' opposition to women's leadership has been the Apostle Paul's statement that women should not teach or speak in public. The difficulty with this order of organisation however lies in how to reconcile this assertion of the Apostle Paul with his statement that there is neither "male nor female" (Galatians 3: 28). Also, Paul's relation with women in ministry in the early church and women's position in particular in the early church make a reliance on his earlier assertion even more problematic.

Women are in the majority in most religious organizations in Ghana and many societies as in the case of many other social settings. It is common knowledge that a majority of the people or rather, participants in all religious organizations in Ghana are women. This is especially the case in Christian churches or congregations. This fact notwithstanding, women's involvement and/or participation in leadership positions have been abysmal. Rarely does one find women at the very top in congregational leadership in Ghana and Africa as a whole.

The paper discusses this phenomenon and presents an often neglected perspective in the discourse – the sociocultural perspective. It interrogates the various stands on women and leadership in congregations. It explores the position of women in the Old Testament through to the New Testament and the centuries following. Here, we discuss into detail some of the main factors inhibiting (for want of a better word) women from rising to the top of congregational leadership. In this exercise, attention is tilted towards the case of women clergy from around the world with the spotlight on the sociocultural context of Ghana.

Latent and Manifest Opposition

Although many efforts have been made in time past in demonstrating that women are similar to men, there still appear to be a persistent belief that women are inferior to men even until today. What is even worrying is the theo-political backing that this sociocultural belief of society enjoys. Customs, related to the fundamental belief that women are inferior to men are often revered in society which both tend to justify and maintain forms of inequality in institutions of society. In some cases, these customs and beliefs manifest in extreme prejudice and discrimination directed at females in the society.

It has been suggested that women face some form of gender discrimination in religious congregations in most parts of the world including Ghana. How does one assess such a claim? Gender discrimination is said to have occurred when personnel engagement (or employment, in the case of organisations) decisions are based on gender, which is an ascribed status, rather than on one's qualifications, technical competence or job performance (Ngo et al., 2002). To assess this, we use what is called social comparisons. This gives information on the types of treatments and/or outcomes (such as increases in salary or promotions, etc.) that are possible to be achieved by each of the sex groupings (Major, 1994).

According to Sentilles (2008), "women endure sexual harassment, individual discrimination, and systemic discrimination on a regular basis (Sentilles, 2008, p. 17). Although the fear of harassment has been a constant reality for female clergy (Lind, 2005), there appear a dearth of information in terms of empirical literature concerning sexual misconduct, especially as it relates to sexual harassment within churches (Birchard, 2000; Frame, 1996). These are recent reports,

presupposing that there is deepening discrimination against women and that also, many women have become silent sufferers in the church.

From a unitary perspective, many have expressed their desire to see women as priests and bishops for the sake of the church becoming one whole church where women are allowed to fulfill their pastoral gifts, spirituality and leadership (Key, 2012). This wish is yet to be realized in full.

In a directive of the preparatory committee of the Bishop's Conference of Finland's Evangelical-Lutheran Church (Helsingin Sonamat, 2007), no minister of the church is allowed to refuse cooperation with female colleagues; and it is mandatory to conduct church services with all fellow colleagues. The committee also shared the opinion that ministers who dissent the ordination of women can be obliged to execute duties that infringe on such convictions.

In Finland, the controversy to the opposition of the ordination of women stemmed from the interpretation of a provision that was enclosed in a 1986 decision by the Synod of the Finnish Lutheran Church. The synod opened the ministry to women and also declared that those who stood in opposition shall continue to have freedom to operate in the church and possibility to be ordained and appointed to different posts in the Church. This resulted in discriminatory practices in some congregations; in such congregations, the priest allots shifts at work as per gender. These female priests are sometimes rescheduled when a churchman who opposes the ordination of women visits the church.

There is a much more complex variety of reasons aside from mere theological convictions (especially in churches which have passed resolutions to ordain women ministers) why there are not more women leading churches. Women are said to often find it difficult to get the opportunity to be curates in larger churches, or hold associate posts for which reason many of them lack the relevant experience when it comes to appointments to heading larger churches. While there exist a general and open acceptance of women in many churches today, as in the case of Finland's Evangelical-Lutheran Church, there is equally some residual conservatism and a prevailing unwillingness to upset the status quo (Leimon, Moscovici, & Goodier, 2011, p. 110) weighted with an aura of sacred tradition when it comes to appointing an incumbent to lead a congregation. Sometimes these recruitment processes do not follow best practices. This is because there are often strong opposition even among the laity in the church. These are powerful conservatives who wield a lot of authority in most local churches.

The related concern is that only few women are found leading larger churches. This is so in many churches including the Anglican Church worldwide. Research reports on the Episcopal Church in USA reveal among other things that while women are assigned priests in charge of relatively larger congregations, they are yet to be considered candidates of many of the large parishes in most dioceses (Sullins, 2000). It is important to note where these reports are coming from; the USA is a place where women have been ordained priests for so many decades. This leaves the effects of the many advocacies today shrouded. Why are women still not leading larger churches? One would be quick to point to their lack of experience; but many women have served in various positions in the diaconry before moving on to become priests in many of these churches. There are reports that some of these women have had over 18 years of working experience as priests in charge of smaller and medium sized churches. This is far more than the experience many men have had before taking charge of larger churches.

The point is that many of these orthodox churches fully recognize female priest but put restrictions on their rising to the top. Some have referred to attitudes exhibited by the Synod as reacting to bully tactics (Charman, 2012). In case you have a difficulty with the use of the synod – the synod comprise of delegates, who are not to act as representatives (either of themselves or views of groups they belong to) but play significant assignment of discerning what God is calling the church to be and do (Charman, 2012). To this, the important question asked is 'What does it mean spiritually for us as individuals and as a Church if, after having prayed for guidance, we now refuse the clear prompting of the Holy Spirit?' This long struggle of accepting women in the ministry has had enormous and unquantifiable consequences on the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of these women (Charman, 2012).

Women who were ordained in recent times, according to a report by (Charman, 2012) were more confident that the church is on the course of progressing to a full recognition of women's ministry. This revelation is worth an intellectual interrogation. This is because in contrast, women

who had been ordained longer had their reservations about the church accepting women's ministry fully. The latter view might clearly be due to the experiences of these women clergy in the ministry.

Many women clergy have called for people to recognize their God-given talents and qualities instead of their gender. Many of these women have been disregarded and branded to be the curate or priest's assistant (Charman, 2012). Although, women were first ordained to the office of priesthood in the Church of England in 1994 (Key, 2012) fewer women move from priests to becoming bishops. Also, despite the fact that consecrating female bishops have been permitted in Northern Ireland and in Scotland, reports indicate that none has yet been elected to the high office. An admission made by the Right Reverend Gregory Cameron is particularly worth noting: "The Church changes very slowly and you have to learn to live with that." One would however wonder what the real reasons for these very slow changes are. Bishop Cameron is said to have acknowledged that the changes come into effect with time, since this allows for pastoral care to be drawn up for those who are still opposed to women bishops.

It is quite interesting to find that even though The Church of England is headed by The Queen who holds the title of "Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England", the consecration of women to the office of bishop has become years of never ending struggle. Worthy of note in all of these is the challenge posed by lay people in the church. Evidence suggests that the opposition to the leadership of women is even high among some laity than the councils. In many cases, powerful congregants have resisted the appointment of women priests in their congregations. These conservatives unfortunately have sometimes been the biggest financiers of church activities in their regions, thereby making their positions quite enduring.

It would be quite erroneous to think that the strong opposition to the leadership of the female in Christian churches has solely come from men. There are many women who also vehemently oppose the ordination or consecration of women for the high jobs in the church. Zoe Ham, a female from the Church Society is reported by Siobhan (2012) a freelance journalist as saying: "I believe that God teaches us in the Bible that men and women are completely equal in value and dignity (both made in the image of God, both can be saved through faith in Jesus Christ) but different in the roles God has given them to play in the home and the church. I believe that men are to sacrificially lead as the head and that women are to lovingly submit, that's why I love playing out my role as a woman in the church".

From the above quote, and in the pool of many such positions, it is not surprising that this opposition continues to be steepened in many congregations all over the world. Women were first ordained as clergy in the Finnish Evangelical-Lutheran Church in 1988 (Helsingin Sonamat, 2007). Nonetheless, a marginal minority comprising mainly of male clergy continue to contest the ordination of women (Helsingin Sonamat, 2007). Fortunately, opposition to the ordination of women is unconventional in the parishes of Greater Helsinki area. According to this report, no cases have been reported in Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, and Kauniainen about the refusal of a male conservative minister to carry out services with a female minister. Forecasts released by the Union of Finnish Clergy indicate that the gender distribution of clergy in the whole country is likely to skew towards a female majority by the end of 2015 (Helsingin Sonamat, 2007).

Contrary to this however, an incident was reported in Vammala, Western Finland where a conservative male assistant vicar rejected to work with a female pastor at the altar (Helsingin Sonamat, 2007). Many lady pastors have given many remarkable and well written sermons which never sunk in (Carroll, Hargrove & Lummis, 1983). Such pastors are not able to effectively perform their roles due to the fact that they receive little or no cooperation at all from their congregation. A parish lay leader was of the opinion that a "handsome, outgoing, friendly energetic, magnetic-type man is what it takes to get the hard-to-get people to participate" (Carroll et al., 1983).

According to clergywomen, seminary faculty, and denominational executives, one set back women pastors are confronted with in getting good job placements compared to their male counterparts after the first couple of parishes is opposition to women pastors from lay people in parishes. The oppositions vary from being subtle to latent; obvious and then deliberate demonstration of sexist attitudes.

A cursory look at the literature reveals expressions such as the following used by people (mostly men) who stand in opposition to the ordination of women to ministry: "Women's place is in the home, not the pulpit"; "women are temperamentally unsuited for ministry"; "I simply can't conceive of having a woman as a minister"; "I believe that religious leadership has been given by

God to men and therefore would not favor a woman as a pastor of a church”; “Of course, women are subordinate to men and therefore cannot rule over men in the church” (Carroll et al., 1983, p. 139).

According to (Carroll et al., 1983), lay leaders are sometimes unwilling to engage female pastors or priests because they are of the opinion that the mass of their congregation are against women in the pulpit. Carroll et al. (1983) cites Lehman (1981) who postulates that a major block to parish hiring of women pastors is their fear that hiring a woman might upset other parishioners, with ensuing, deleterious effects on the whole congregation.

Another worry to having a female clergy stems from the issue of the public image of the church. It is observed that a number of churches have a larger portion of their regular members as women and therefore having a female clergy will portray the church as a woman’s organization even though a female leadership would have been suitable (Carroll et al., 1983). According to Carroll et al. (1983), three-fourths of Lehman’s American Baptist sample in 1977 perceived that, for most persons, there was a general incompatibility between the image of minister and that of woman. Interestingly, the 1981 data, replicates this proportion generally, not only for American Baptists, but for all other denominations as well.

At this point, a look at women’s position and activity in the Old Testament and in the early church will do our discussion a lot of good. In the following subsections, we consider women’s authority and position in the Old Testament through to the beginning of the early church and beyond. This is followed thereon with the place of sociocultural considerations in the present discourse.

Women’s Position in the Old Testament

The enormity of evidence on the authority of women in Christian history makes the present challenge and debate on women’s priestly position quite difficult to comprehend. In the Old Testament, God ordained and anointed women to represent him among his people as much as he did with men (1 Kings 19:16; 1 Chron 16:22). In Deuteronomy 18:19, we find that not abiding by the words or instructions of the Lord’s prophets has terrible implications. Failure to obey the words of God’s prophets represents a rejection of the sovereignty of God. In the same book, posing as a prophet without the sanctioning of God has equally dire consequences.

Where is this discussion heading? God sanctioned women as prophets who exercised spiritual authority over the whole of Israel. These women functioned as leaders of Israel under the unction of the Holy Spirit, the evidence of God’s sanction (Micah 6:4). Moses’ sister, Miriam was prophet of Israel and exercised spiritual authority over both men and women in the whole of Israel. I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. (Micah 6:4). While some would be quick to point to Miriam’s punishment for opposing her brother (Mose’s) marriage to Cushite, it is important to note that there is no evidence to the effect that her calamity was linked to her divine authority over Israel (Num. 12:2).

One can speak of many other powerful women, examples being Huldah (2 Kings 22:14) and Deborah (Judges 4 & 5). Looking at Deborah, her power and authority over Israel as God’s prophet and judge is well documented. Although a woman, Deborah exercised spiritual, civil, as well as judicial authority over the whole Israel (Judges 4:4-5). Her leadership and jurisdiction included even the military leaders of Israel. The unction of God was on Deborah so much so that the commander of Israel’s army at the time, Barak, would not want to go to battle in her absence. In the case of Deborah, there was no failure recorded for which anyone could attack the success of her leadership in Israel.

The Position of Women in the Early Church and Beyond

Following from the evidence discussed earlier, women continued to operate with authority and prophesied (Luke 1:46ff; Luke 2:36ff). The important place and roles of women in the early church is equally not in doubt.

It is quite interesting and a seeming contradiction to find that women were instrumental in Paul’s ministry. Paul recognized the role of these women and acknowledged their service to the church as ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In Romans 16: 1-2, St. Paul praises Phoebe, the deacon, for her exemplary leadership in the church of Cenchreae. The congregational leadership of Mary (the mother of John Mark), is also mentioned in Acts 12:12. Prophetesses were referred to in

general by Paul at 1 Corinthians 11:5. Luke also mentions several specific female prophets, such as Anna (Luke 2:36) and the four daughters of Philip of Caesarea (Acts 21:9), Elizabeth (Luke 1:41-45) and Mary, the mother of Jesus in Luke 1:46-55 (Eisen, 2000).

For example, at Acts 18:26, we read about Priscilla, who functioned as the theological teacher of Apollos, a man who, by the time he met Priscilla, had already converted to Christianity and been educated in the Scriptures (Eisen, 2000). In Romans 16:7 the Apostle Paul also identifies Junia as a senior in the faith to himself and labels Junia and her husband, Andronicus, as “outstanding apostles”. It is the only time that Paul refers to anyone other than the twelve (apostles) or himself as ‘apostles’. This is quite significant if we are to engage in fruitful discussion of what Paul said or did not say.

This is not to suggest that one is unaware of the secondary position of women to men in the early church. However, there were also settings in which women served as presbyters and even bishops. Evidence available suggests that women in the early church served as prophets, instructors, apostles and deaconesses. These were the times preceding and following Apostle Paul’s assertion in 1 Corinthians 14: 34–35 and 1 Timothy 2: 11-12. While there exist a traditional position among some historians that women exercised no authority in the early church, recent studies reveal that women had as much authority as their male counterparts within the early church in the first three centuries. It is important to note that these roles held by women in the early church were much in line with the teachings of Christ himself and with guidelines set out by the Apostle Paul.

Although some of these early scholarly works held that women in the first five centuries of the early church only served as widows and deaconesses, the recent studies show that women held many more religious positions with greater authority than earlier assumed in literature. Women in the early church (especially, as widows) taught, anointed women during baptism, cared for the sick, vetted deaconesses and also received offerings. Some of these women provided assistance to bishops at baptisms and the Eucharist. They also administered communion and instructions on theology to the homebound or the sick.

The role of the “apostle” traditionally reserved for men were also held by women in the history of the early church. These apostles proclaimed with authority the good news of the resurrection of Christ and the forgiveness of sins. They were respected and held in high esteem as bearers of the message of Christ (Romans 16:7). There were powerful women recognized in the early church. They include the Samaritan woman (John 4:5-30), Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9-10), and Priscilla (Romans 16:3) among others.

The earliest bishops in the New Testament are generally mentioned without any particular gender description. These bishops were also community administrators. Given that this was the case, women could be said to have served as bishops in those times. Knowing that women were leaders of house/community churches, it would be correct to suggest that Priscilla, Lydia, Nympha, Tavia, and the widow of Epitropus were examples of females who functioned as bishops. Some scholars have also maintained that some of these women also functioned in the more traditional sense of a ‘bishop’ overseeing the metropolitan church communities in both Montanist and mainstream Christianity (Eisen, 2000, p. 209).

There are many other instances after the Bible days that women held very high and important positions in the church. The episcopal ordination of St. Brigit of Kildare is one case in point. Bishop Mel of Ardagh is said to have consecrated Brigit in Ireland in the fifth century. Bishop Mel in a report is said to have been “... intoxicated with the grace of God there, did not know what he was reciting from his book”, and ended up consecrating “Brigit with the orders of a bishop” (Davies, 1999, p. 33).

Inscriptions from second through fourth century tombstones mention female presbyters named Ammion, Epikto, Artemidora from Asia Minor, Greece, and Egypt, respectively. It is worthy of mention also that we also have literary evidence from Epiphanius who wrote of and criticized Christian communities that allowed women to serve as presbyters and bishops from the fourth century (Eisen, 2000, p. 116-128).

Moreover, evidence in the Celtic Church shows that women and men equally preached the Gospel. They all presided at Mass and administered other sacraments. In the sixth century, it is reported that three Roman bishops at Tours wrote a letter to two priests of Breton, Lovocat and

Cathern, in which letter they expressed their disgust at the fact that women were permitted to preside at Eucharist (Ellis, 1996, p.142-144)

Mention is also made of other women, like Catherine of Siena and Birgitta of Sweden who confronted the corruption and abuses of the institutional church of their time. According to a report by Ellsberg (2005), Birgitta, acting on her “authority as God’s messenger”, insisted that the pope leave the comforts of Avignon and return to his proper seat in Rome” (Ellsberg, 2005, p. 135). One time, she denounced the pope as ‘a murderer of souls, worse than Lucifer, more unjust than Pilate, and more merciless than Judas.’ The pope did not respond to her calls for reform of the church, but he did approve the Rule of her new religious order, which is The Brigettines, or Order of the Most Holy Saviour.

Some of these courageous women including Joan of Arc, endured condemnation and in some case excommunication during their lifetimes by the church for what can be termed as their holy disobedience.

The place of Sociocultural Considerations in the Discourse

Women in the early church were respected as apostles, prophets, and teachers. These women according to available literature performed liturgical duties alongside men as deaconesses, widows, and as presbyters and bishops on some occasions (Wemple, 1981). As Suzanne Wemple puts it, when it became profitable to be a bishop or priest, traditional Roman and Germanic misogyny enabled Biblical passages to be easily taken out of context and used to subjugate women.

Wemple presents the transformation of the position of women in the early church in such brevity with clarity: In the early Christian communities, men and women were subject to the same moral precepts, and women served as auxiliaries to men in the propagation of the faith, pastoral care, and the administration of the sacraments. Only in the fourth century, when Christianity became first a favoured and then an exclusive state religion, did the male hierarchy begin to disqualify women from auxiliary ecclesiastical functions. Particularly in the West, where the active participation of women in religion came to be associated with heresy, Eve’s role in the Fall and the ritual impurity of women were used as excuses not only for excluding women from the diaconate, but also for enforcing celibacy on the ministers of the altar (Wemple, 1981, p. 191).

The position of women in the church from the above quote and the discussions so far, has been a fluid one. It has changed over time; but these changes could be linked to the desires and ambitions of powerful men. Following Hofstede’s (1980 & 2001) revelations, a society’s level of masculinity or femininity can be seen in relation to the gender role differences in values of that society. Men in masculine societies are considered assertive, competitive, and focused on material success, while women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life in society (Hofstede, 1980, 2001).

Ghana is culturally a masculine society. Gender roles socially appear clearly distinct in such societies (Hofstede, 2001). Gender differences in work attitudes and behaviours are largely influenced by several other organizational contexts which may include role expectations associated with one’s gender and position which is most often than not, culturally contingent. Research has revealed the existence of both latent and manifest cases of gender discrimination against women in many Ghanaian organisations (Akuoko, 2008; Amoah, 2013). The patriarchal nature of the Ghanaian society and its implications for leadership in organisations has been well acknowledged by these authors.

Resisting the “rule” or the leadership of the woman is fond of many men. This has generally been blamed on “the problem of the male” –the fear of the feminist retribution (Amoah, 2013; 2014). This situation defies organisational type or outlook. It is therefore important to put the debate on the position of women in congregational leadership in the right perspective. Once we understand that the woman’s position in business and their professional pursuits in organisations have generally made the headlines in many discussions, we would not find it too surprising what is happening in the church. The case of the church which comes with additional barriers of theological issues coupled with the patriarchal history and residual conservatism noted earlier by Leimon et al. (2011), makes the struggles even more pervasive and challenging for women.

Amoah reports in a recent study, the observation of a Reverend Minister of the Presbyterian church of Ghana as follows: It happened in the Presbyterian Church, when they were thinking of ordaining women, they came out strongly that they don’t want any woman to come and be

administering communion. It has still not been solved though we have female ministers now. In fact, I dare say that some congregations would never accept a female minister in Ghana” (Amoah, 2013, p. 97).

The above quote summarises and puts in proper perspective the case of women clergy in Ghanaian churches which have succeeded in ordaining women ministers. It is important to note that while some are struggling to have their female clergy accepted by congregations, many other churches are still grappling with the question of whether to accept the ordination of women or not. In Ghana, the church of Pentecost still does not ordain women as pastors. Although, there are deaconesses and many prophetesses in the church, there appear to be a glass ceiling, well stained, to prevent women from looking any further in their quest to serve God and humanity.

What is even more curious in the church of Pentecost in Ghana is the practice of restricting pastors’ wives in the kind of profession they could engage in or pursue. Once a woman’s husband is ordained a minister of the church, the regulation requires that she quits all her professional and occupational pursuits (except in cases where she is a nurse or teacher). The teaching and nursing professions are the only professions permitted for the pastor’s wife in this church. Clearly, one finds an institutional attempt to keep women subservient to men in and out of the church.

Anthropologist George Murdock did a cross-cultural survey of 324 pre modern societies around the world (Murdock, 1937). He found in this study that work activities in all the societies were sex typed. Example, in Somalia, women tend the livestock which was not the case in other societies even on the African continent. Clearly, from the said study, one can argue that there is nothing in the anatomy of women and men that require that they be assigned different works in society. In other words, anatomy does not on its own sort men and women into different occupations. It has been proven in Murdock’s cross-cultural research and many other works that pursuits which are deemed masculine in one society may be considered feminine in another sociocultural setting and vice versa.

Patriarchy has variously been blamed for sex discrimination and sex – role stereotyping in society. Patriarchy is basically used to describe a society in which men dominate women. In such societies, there is the assumption and believe in human hierarchies based on gender and military might. Although patriarchy may be universal as put forward by many scholars, its effect in society can be said to be varying in many respects. Coming back to our primary subject of women in congregational leadership, evidence show that women clergy in Finland are much more, compared to other places in the world. This leaves us with the question of ‘what accounts for these variations around the world’? Your guess after reading these pages is as good as ours. The variations, in our view are due to the different sociocultural contexts.

Following from the evidence presented so far, one cannot but notice that God ordains, sanctions, and upholds the spiritual authority of women today as he did in time past as his official spokespersons and leaders of his people. However, the literature and discussion presented here show that problems with women being accepted as leaders by congregations, gender differences in pay and promotions, and the experiences and dissatisfaction of women clergy who feel constrained by these gender discrimination is also well documented.

In the text below, Jesus appears to be very clear in showing that the place of the woman is not only in the ‘home’. On the chosen role of Mary, the master makes it explicitly that this role is what is most needed and that no one should take it away from her: As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10: 38-42 NIV).

Notwithstanding the call above by the master, the discussions point to years of attempts to prevent women from taking their rightful places in the church. As was well acknowledged by some scholars, the cases of Deborah and Huldah in the Bible call to question the assumption of human hierarchies on the basis of military might and gender. These women ministered by the authority of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. In this respect, to suggest for example that the ordination of women as ministers is not biblical is to suggest that the calls, sanction and unction on

these women in ministry and their exercise of authority over men and women were at odds with God's own will. This would appear scandalous since it casts doubt on God's consistency.

Conclusion

We side with the argument that rather, the church is not harnessing its God-given talents by opposing women in the ministry. As such, the church has been illustrated as the fearful steward in the Bible who instead of working with the talents given to him, decided to bury it (Charman, 2012). Over the years, many gifts have been frustrated and restricted and competent leaders have also been lost to churches that appreciate women's ministry all over the world. So, rather than trying so hard to silence women, we need to support and encourage their recognition as ministers of God called to serve in his vineyard.

While acknowledging the changes the hitherto traditional field of ministry is undergoing through the ordination of increasing number of women into the ministry of some Protestant denominations (Carroll, et al., 1983), we equally note how difficult it is to change cultural images formed on the basis of sacred traditions. Similar to the many cultural traditions that have persisted worldwide, many people still see the ordained ministry in Ghana as a masculine one. As such many women despite contemporary efforts, both in and out of the church, still face several difficulties in breaking through this traditional glass ceiling. From a sociological viewpoint, one must understand the struggle of women to gain entry into the ordained ministry as part of the larger movement of women into traditional male occupations and professions. This is essentially what the present paper represents.

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