

FEMALE CLERGY AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE EUCHARIST IN THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF GHANA: ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS.

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Abstract

Religious teachings and communities play a role in the context of attitudes and perceptions towards women administering the Eucharist. Religious beliefs, texts and teachings serve as both roadblocks and as resources against female ministers administering the Eucharist. Christian scriptures contain texts of psychological perceptions towards women. Christian texts condone male attitudes against women and the domination of women. For example, in performing their roles the female clergy are faced with some challenges which are based on socio-cultural, theological and psychological factors. This article sets out to investigate the attitudes and perceptions towards women ministers in administering the Eucharist during the post ordination period of women as clergy in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG). This study examines the theory of gender equity using historical analysis. The existing structures within both the church and society are patriarchal and the structures turn to focus more on men than on women in the various sectors of life. The researcher came to the conclusion that though the women ministers are effectively performing the sacraments some of the negative perceptions that were used earlier to keep them from the ordained ministry basing on some Scriptural/ sacred texts and cultural

issues still persist. It is therefore concluded that the ordained women ministers in the PCG will continue to face challenges in administering the Eucharist so long as the socio-cultural, religious/ scriptural texts and psychological perceptions persist about female ministers.

Introduction

Women have for a long time been associated with the thriving of the Christian mission and ministry in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG). They constitute the bulk of the Christian church and their contributions toward the church have, throughout history, been a subject for discussion. Since the 1970s, women have taken such decision making positions in the PCG as Presbyters, Deaconesses, and Catechists and as Ministers. However, some religious beliefs, texts and teachings serve as both roadblocks and as resources against female ministers administering the Eucharist. Christian scriptures contain texts of psychological perceptions towards women and condone male attitudes and perceptions against women. For example, in performing the Sacraments (Eucharist) the female clergy are faced with some challenges which are based on socio-cultural, theological and psychological factors.

The Presbyterian Church of Ghana has a mission which all her members aspire to achieve. It is the overall perception of the church in which women are seen to be part. What the mission statement of the PCG seeks to do is that women, who are more in number than men, contribute directly or indirectly to the holistic ministry, growth and evangelistic activity which increase the membership of the church.¹ The PCG's Mission calls on the church to involve women in the holistic aspects of life. The PCG Mission statement has this fundamental goal: 'to uphold the Centrality of the Word of God and through the enablement of the Holy Spirit; pursue a holistic ministry so as to bring all of creation to glorify God'.

The mainstay of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in terms of numbers and contributions to its growth and achieving the mission statement is women. D. A. Koranteng, a former Moderator of the PCG claims that whenever men and women have been allowed religious freedom to practice on equal basis the latter have been found to be more religious than the former and numerically much more as worshippers.² Even though the PCG preaches an all inclusive Gospel she finds it difficult to

link the same with women administering the Eucharist.

Women leaders in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) encounter some major religious challenges. Women had to struggle before being ordained as ministers. There were several debates on whether women should be ordained in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) or not. However, the church eventually ordained women into the clergy and assigned to them roles as district ministers, administrators, presbytery clerks, presbytery chairpersons and chaplains. In performing their various sacramental roles as ministers, women are entangled with challenges, which are based on religious, socio-cultural and theological considerations. This research investigates the attitudes and perceptions towards women ministers in administering the Eucharist during the post ordination period of women as clergy in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG).

Women leaders are effectively performing their sacramental roles but some of the negative perceptions that were used earlier to keep them from the ministry in the church still persist. In some cases the female clergy are prevented from fully performing their sacramental roles. This is because some members (especially older men) in the PCG continue to have cultural perceptions against women especially with regard to their menstrual periods.

Theory and Method

This study employs the theory of gender equity as a theoretical frame. The main argument is that the existing structures within both the church and society are patriarchal in the sense that they tend to focus more on men while marginalizing women in the various sectors of life. Gender based segregation is largely evident in the religious activities, patterns and roles set for women and men in traditional African societies. Thus, women were not only prevented from occupying certain societal and ecclesiastical positions in the church because of their sex but also assigned different roles that centre on the home. Thus Oduyoye argues that 'in Africa, women make pots which are sold cheaply; men make ritual objects and carvings that are highly regarded.'³ In effect, the social differentiation between men and women was determined just as the wheels of culture were set in motion. Russell is also of the view that the existing system does not encourage women to live their full potentials whether in the church or

society in general. She therefore argues that women and men should act in partnership so that both men and women are given equal opportunity if they have the skills to be leaders in the church. However, scholars such as Gaba argue that in Africa, some women can be diviners and priestesses performing all the functions of priests.⁴

The Debate for Women's Ordination in the PCG

For centuries, women were excluded from becoming office bearers and preachers although there is significant evidence that women took leading roles in the early church. This changed at the beginning of the twentieth century under the influence of women's emancipation and liberal protestant groups that began to admit women as preachers. A long Christian tradition was thus called into question. The development met with opposition in orthodox protestant and fundamentalist circles as well as from the Roman Catholic Church for different reasons.

The issue of women's ordination was not different in any part of the world where the initiative was advanced but comparatively, the debate for women's ordination in the PCG was shrouded in a bit of secrecy. The issue had been influenced by both external and internal factors and was discussed at various Synods of the church. However, it was at the forty-second Synod held in Kumasi in 1971 that conclusions were made on the ordination of women by the PCG.

At a point in time in the 1970's, a decision of a sort was taken that authorized the Moderator and Synod Committee to proceed with the ordination of women in the ministry. It was clear that, there was a long forward and backward debate at synod meetings like it happened in other countries mentioned. The women at that time were in the minority; they had been deaconesses and catechists but their voice was not heard. According to Prempeh, the reason for ordaining women in the PCG was that the Church of Scotland, Presbyterian Church of United States of America, Holland and a few others had ordained women.⁵

In 1970 there was there was a discussion on the issue of ordination of women by the Synod Committee. A memorandum on the question of ordination of women in the church was prepared by Kwansa⁶ which was circulated before the meeting but the discussion was deferred for thorough study. According to Kwansa, there was a very long argument over women's

ordination at synod. There were reports and investigations and it took three synods (ten years) to take the final decision.⁷ At the 42nd Synod in 1971, Kwansa presented a paper to Synod on the need to ordain women. At the 1971 Synod, Kwansa⁸ commented that education; science, social and economic opportunities had placed Ghanaian women at par with the men. He thought it essential to provide equal training facilities to women who had academic and moral qualification. At the same 42nd Synod, with the late Sintim-Misa as the Moderator, the issue was debated and accepted. But the issue resurfaced at the 47th Synod held at Sunyani in 1976.⁹ At that Synod, delegates agreed that women could be ordained but for the time being, women ordained into the holy ministry were not to be leaders of congregations but were to serve in institutions such as hospitals, prisons and churches as chaplains. However, Dora Ofori Owusu who had obtained a Master of Divinity (MDiv.) degree was commissioned as the first woman minister in 1976 when the church had not agreed fully on women's ordination.¹⁰ She was commissioned under a special dispensation as the first African woman minister to work for the Atlanta Presbytery in the USA. Even though she had been commissioned, her status and functions in Ghana were deferred till a later date. It was stated that if by the time she returned and the church had not ordained women, she would be a lay person.¹¹ According to Alice Kyei-Anti, her commissioning generated a lot of arguments. But this opened the door for further discussion on women's ordination.¹²

In 1979, at the Synod in Koforidua, the first woman, Gladys Maku Nyako, was ordained and Alice-Kyei-Anti commissioned; that was the time the PCG had approved women's ordination.¹³ Some elders in the PCG argued about who the first female minister was, looking at the conditions under which Dora Ofori Owusu was commissioned at a time that the church had not agreed on women's ordination. Some members of the church therefore said that a technical error had been committed.¹⁴ Gladys Maku Nyako had been a deaconess and a tutor at the Presbyterian Women's Training College at Aburi and she could not be called a chaplain. She had a theology degree from Canada and so Kwansa recommended her ordination arguing that if a woman could be trained, preach, have education, good character, then she could also be ordained.¹⁵ Gladys Maku Nyako was invited by the highest governing body of the PCG for ordination into the

priesthood. She was not given the gown to wear; she wore an ordinary *kaba*¹⁶ and sleet among her male counterparts who were in their gown. In 1981 at the 52nd Synod at Abetifi, Alice Kyei-Anti was ordained and from then, the church decided that women could do all that the men do. When Sintim-Misa commissioned Dora Ofori Owusu for Atlanta in the USA, people agitated for his removal for what he did. But the ordination rather encouraged church leaders in Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Kenya to follow suit.

The arguments about the ordination of women in ecumenical dimensions focused on a number of theological, socio-cultural, and psychological arguments which the PCG followed. These arguments were used to keep women out of the ordained ministry for a long time. But counter-arguments from the same perspectives were used to justify the ordination of women.

Theological Argument

Several theological arguments were used against women's ordination in the PCG. These arguments included both biblical and non biblical texts. Some pointed out that no female served in the priesthood of the old dispensation.¹⁷ The functions of the female in the Old Testament were curtailed; because they lived in a patriarchal society. People claimed that the tradition restricting priestly ordination to only the male was 'found on the written word of God'. It was twofold; first, that Christ did not call women to the apostolic ministry since he selected only men as members of the twelve; and secondly, that the apostles themselves, faithful to the practice of Christ, chose only men for priestly offices, those of Bishop, Presbyter and their equivalents. Biblical evidence used to support the view that Jesus chose only men argued that the words at the last supper 'Do this in remembrance of me' (I Corinthians 11:24) were addressed to only men and, therefore, the Priesthood was restricted to men.

From the discussions, the author thinks members of the PCG Synod who were against women's ordination thought about the negative biblical statements against women's ordination before 1976. They argued that: 'Among the twelve disciples there were no women and not among the seventy disciples'. One of the main reasons given for the incapacity of

women for orders was the fact that there were no women among the apostles. Epiphanes used this argument as far back as the fourth century: 'Never has a woman been appointed among the bishops and priests.'¹⁹ It later became evident that such a premise could not be a basis for a theology excluding women from the sacerdotal ministry. If it is a historical fact that Christ did not ordain any woman, it seems difficult to see how any but a historical conclusion could justifiably flow from the premise. Christ did not ordain any woman, but can we justifiably affirm from this that he willed to exclude them forever? If the new status of women today is an obvious fact, in the time of Christ her position was obviously inferior. The arguments deduced from scripture for the observance of silence by women in church were based on Pauline reasons: 'the custom of all the churches; the creation of woman from and for man; her seduction by the serpent and her subjection to man by divine command.'²⁰ Women were thought to lack logic and they were thought to be fragile and needed to be silent in public gatherings. The injunction of silence automatically excluded her from the priestly ministry. Men thought of women as incapable to receive holy orders. The fathers, Tertullian and Epiphanes thought 'if Christ intended women to share his priesthood, many would have been invested with the privileges. Tertullian was convinced that women were totally excluded from the priesthood. 'It is not permitted for women to speak in church, or to teach, or to baptize, or to offer, or to lay claim to a man's function or to the priestly office. Anne Clifford refutes the arguments, 'according to *Inter Insigniores*, that the New Testament provides no evidence that Jesus considered any woman for the priesthood. The apostles, all of whom were ordained by Christ, were all men. Not even Mary, Jesus' own mother, is numbered among the twelve apostles'.²¹

Anne Clifford draws reader's attention to other long-held positions that influenced them, including the argument that 'God is revealed in predominantly masculine imagery as father in the scriptures'.²² She points out that God is not a sexual being; God as spirit transcends human sexuality (this, of course, is widely held in feminist theology). Carr responds again to the argument that priests must be male because Jesus is male, as were the twelve apostles. In the Gospels, there is a connection between the number twelve and the Old Testament regarding the twelve tribes of Israel. Twelve symbolically underscores the inclusiveness of Jesus' community. She argued

that, the number twelve is what matters, not the sex of the apostles. She thinks Jesus and the twelve apostles being male do not rule out women sharing very closely in the ministry of Jesus. She cited evidence in the Bible where women shared in Jesus' ministry; Mary Magdalene was an apostle sent after Jesus' death to inform the other followers of Jesus that his tomb was empty.

Women were not nominated when lots were drawn to replace Judas, although they were present, and also they fulfilled the sole condition referred to: 'have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us' (Acts 1, 14, 21-22). Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 makes no reference to the participation of women in the ministry of the church. But actually 'forbids' it, when that ministry was public. Paul asked the women to be 'silent in public gatherings and to wait till they returned home before they posed questions to their husbands' (1 Cor. 14 34-36). In 1 Tim. 12, 11-12, Paul strengthened Timothy in his mission to Ephesus. But, as in 1 Cor. 14, he asked the women to 'listen in silence' (1 Cor. 14, 11-12) and as in 1 Cor. 11, he 'exhorts them to persevere in the dignity of marriage'.²³ Women shared in the universal priesthood of the people of God and in the evangelism of the world, but they did not seem to share in the regular 'ministry of the church'.²⁴ Christian men were using issues with reference to Paul's statements forgetting that, women especially in Africa had been priestesses (akomfo). But when it comes to the church they said women could not be priests.²⁵

Others argued that

If God is creator and Redeemer, then the sign of sexual difference, so obvious and essential in the creation must also be evident again in the Eucharist, which is the symbol of the Redemption, we have the sign of the importance of sexual difference in the celebration of the Eucharist, if we assume that those receiving the communion are regarded as God's church, the bride, and therefore as female, it then follows that the ministering priest who represents Christ, the bridegroom must be male, How can we express a sign of the importance of this sexual difference in God the Redeemer if women are ordained in an equal manner as men.²⁶

Some people quoted the Marcionites, who were the successors of the Pauline Communities and said women were not bold to give church teaching, take part in disputes, exorcize, promise cure or baptize. 'Never

anywhere has any woman, not even Eve, acted as priest from the beginning of the world.²⁷

The scholastics and post-scholastics gave lengthy arguments on the question of women and holy orders.²⁸ St Thomas argued that, women were incapable because of the impossibility of their sex to signify eminence of degree, which orders necessarily confer and signify. Scotus and Durandus held that the male sex was an absolute requirement for the reception of holy orders. St Thomas thought boys and male 'imbeciles' could receive valid orders because masculinity was a decisive factor. A second major argument of the scholastics following Epiphanes was that 'if Christ intended the priesthood to be conferred on the female sex, he would have ordained the Virgin Mary. But he rather gave the power of consecrating and absolving to men only, although his mother was most worthy of all.' That woman was seen as confirmation of the incapacity of the female sex for orders. Scotus said women never, even among pagans, offered sacrifice to God; that the Levites in the Old Testament were men only and that Christ the mediator was man; from all which he inferred that woman could not be a priest.²⁹

The specific reference is traced to Genesis 3:16 'Your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you'.³⁰ Were the words of this text directed to Eve personally or to women as such? Geoffrey thinks the result of the punishment imposed after the fall has been felt in child-bearing down through the ages.³¹ It must, however, be stated that hardly is there any proof that this law was imposed upon women in general for the simple reason that not all women choose to marry. The whole context is matrimonial as the word 'husband' and the punishment, 'in pain thou shall bring forth children' indicate. Today Christians think instead that the image of the rib taken from Adam's side to form Eve was intended to typify the equality of the sexes and the indissoluble bond which existed between husband and wife. The creation of Eve from the rib of Adam did not conclusively prove her subjection.

The PCG before 1976 did not ordain women on the grounds of the prevailing patriarchal, social, cultural and religious environment of the nation in which the church existed or came out from. Christian ministry fully included and supported the ordination of women. The ministry, in the reformed tradition of the PCG, included all members of the church to participate in Christ's ministry on equal footing. Paul's argument on

women's ordination was simply reinforced by the prevailing cultural traditions of the time and he would not be faulted because he considered women and men together. In Colossians 3:11 it is stated that there are no men and women; we are all one in Christ.

Phiri thinks that a study of the Bible revealed that the creation stories were folktales told orally for a long time from generation to generation. They were written at different times in the history of Israel by different authors who had different purposes, faced with two worlds, the author's world which is the point of reference and the distant past of folktale which reflects what was happening during the time they were written.³² Scholars like Phiri maintain that these stories were written and interpreted from a male dominated position. Women in the Jewish society from birth belonged to a father as a daughter or to a husband as a wife. She had no control over her body. Those who agitated for the ordination of women into the PCG counter argued in favour of women into priesthood because 'In Christ there is neither male nor female.' The question was 'Did the doctrine of the PCG adequately express this biblical statement?' 'For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Jesus' (Galatians 3:27-29).³³

There was a growing insistence that women should assume more responsible function in the life of the church. This demand grew strong within the ecumenical movement, in which many women were playing important leading roles. In their ecclesiology and understanding of the scriptures some churches, the Reformed churches in Switzerland and Germany, the Lutheran church of Sweden and many others were convinced that the form of the church order could never claim to be final unless it was modified in obedience to Christ in a new age where the situation changed. They were prepared to consider changes which involved a great change from the traditional forms. Some churches drew careful distinction between different forms and grades of religious office, and allowed women certain restricted place, with careful reservations.

The Synod Committee of the PCG referred to New Testament passages indicating the role of women as witnesses in the fellowship of Jesus. 'The woman of Samaria', by her discussion with Jesus and her spontaneous witness to him in the town of Samaria, called out many Samaritans who

came to see Jesus and pleaded with him to stay with them, (John 4:27). There was the Canaanite woman whose faith Jesus confirmed as 'great' (Matthew 15:28). The woman with the precious ointment of whom Jesus said 'wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her' (Matthew 26:13). This passage, although refers to a particular woman, it also demonstrates the significant role of women in the ministry of Jesus Christ. According to the Bible she was the only person whose action led to the foretelling of the death and burial of Jesus. Women were also the 'Evangelists of the apostles.' They were the first to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 28:1, 8). The Galilean women who accompanied Jesus to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, reported what they had seen to the disciples (Luke 23, 55; 24, 11).

These references showed that women also received the grace and they were recognized to bear witness to it and proclaimed it; as co-heirs, women were co-announcers of the good news. That is why Peter on the day of Pentecost, quoted the prophet Joel (Joel 2:28-32) who emphasized that the prophecy had nothing to do with sex or age. St. Paul affirmed that the believing wife could consecrate the unbelieving husband, just as the unbelieving husband could consecrate the unbelieving wife (1 Corinthians 7:14). This authority was exercised by both men and women, without distinction of sex.³⁴ The possibility for everyone to evangelize on the basis of the royal priesthood of all believers is confirmed by Paul in his closing salutation to the Romans (Romans 16:1-16), in which he mentions eighteen men and eight women among the leaders of the church in Rome. Priscilla with her husband Aquila 'expounded the way of God to Apollo's' (Acts 18:26). Priscilla's name is frequently mentioned before that of her husband and it indicates her position in the ministry of the church.³⁵

The Socio- Cultural Argument

One of the most important factors that kept women out of the ordained ministry was the lack of formal and theological education for women to qualify as candidates for ordination in the PCG and the church as a whole. Women were barred from priesthood³⁶ and those who spoke against women's ordination thought women were not clean.

According to Gyimah,³⁷ the basic belief that underlines most of the views, particularly on menstruation was that, the menstrual flow of blood was considered as dangerous and potent, that any direct contact with it was believed to render all powers weak, impotent and inactive (Leviticus 15:19-20). A woman's regular menstrual blood makes her unclean. Her impurity could be transmitted to other persons and objects either directly or indirectly. Anything she lies on or sits on becomes impure. Touching her or touching an object she slept on or sat on makes one impure. Menstruation represented a clash of two states, and among the Chewa in Malawi, they always rejoice when a girl menstruates for the first time because society is assured of progeny.³⁸

In Africa, menstrual blood was a source of joy but a number of taboos were imposed on the girl, as if the menstrual blood was something dangerous.³⁹ Most priestesses in traditional religions were not allowed to minister to their gods in their menstrual period. Ordinary women were also not allowed to enter a shrine for consultation during this period, nor even to cook and sometimes speak to their husbands in this period. This cultural view was transferred into the Christian religion. They saw the sanctuary as a sacred place and like the traditional shrine that women were not to enter when in their menstrual period. As a result, most women in their menstrual period were not partaking in the Eucharist. The sceptics thought female ministers would be considered 'unclean' to handle the Eucharist when they menstruated.

Those who were in favour of women's ordination, on the other hand, said in God's sight, everyone was clean (Genesis 1:31). Women were not inferior to men and neither were they impure when the body was performing its natural function. Both men and women were equally created, although, they are physiologically different (Genesis 1:27). The monthly issue of blood flow prepares the woman for procreation and as such it is not a filthy thing. In the cultural system, numerous restrictions were put on women, such as undergoing purification after menstruating before they could take part in worship and sacrifice in the temple or shrine just like the men. However, women ordained in the indigenous (spiritual) African Christian churches were performing all rituals adequately in spite of the menstrual restrictions.

The Psychological Argument

The PCG at its 42nd Synod in 1971 again argued on the psychological aspect of women and their ordination.⁴⁰ They thought the role of women in the church, with their overriding predominance, needed serious psychological re-thinking. In the Ghanaian society the role of women urgently necessitated redefinition of women's role in the ministry of the church. It was argued that psychologically women were thought not to have the right intelligence, temperament and verbal skills to make them good candidates for the ministry. It was pointed out that: 'A person's sex will also affect her temperament particularly in the realms' of emotions. Women are considered to be more emotionally expressive than men and the hardest can make women empathetic in a wrong way. In this respect, for example, if a woman minister is to counsel a person, such emotional aptitude could easily infiltrate into sermons and instead of preaching to bring people to Christ, people will only emotionally admire the sermon.⁴¹ Women have proved themselves to be psychologically sound and better than men in certain fields. In a report on ordination of women, Roland Johnstone, a psychologist, in his background paper said;

Women even in professional roles and task-oriented interaction situations tend to initiate acts of socio-emotional supportive, healing type, whereas men initiate acts of a task fulfilling type. Men try to get a job done; women try to see that people are happy doing the job, that feelings are not unduly hurt'.... As the number and proportion of ordained women increase, right knowing will recede before the advantage of well being; the idea of saving people for the church; evangelism in the classical sense, aggressive male type activity will wane in the face of healing and supporting in the here and now.⁴²

From this extract, it can be ascertained that based on the answers given, different kinds of counselling will be given, and it is obvious that the woman minister's answer will lead to better and a more satisfying counselling of the patient.

Administration of the Eucharist: Attitudes and Perceptions

The administration of the Eucharist is an area that poses a challenge to the ordained female clergy in the PCG. The Eucharist is another name for Holy Communion.⁴³ According to Richert the term comes from the Greek by way of Latin, and it means 'thanksgiving' which is used in

three ways to refer to 'the Real presence of Christ, Christ's continuing action as High Priest. (He 'gave thanks' at the last supper, which began the consecration of the bread and wine); and the sacrament of the Holy Communion itself. It is re-enacted in accordance with Jesus' instruction at the last supper as recorded in several books of the New Testament, that his followers do in remembrance of Him as when he gave his disciples bread saying, 'This is my body' and gave them wine, saying: 'this is my blood, the new covenant.'⁴⁴ As stated in the Encyclopaedia Britannica the Eucharist is a ritual in commemoration of Jesus' last supper with his disciples.⁴⁵ Most Christians recognize a special presence of Christ in the rite and the Reformed Churches like the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, who follow the teachings of John Calvin, believe in an immaterial, spiritual (or 'Pneumatic') presence of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and received by faith.⁴⁶

Roman Catholicism, Eastern orthodoxy, oriented orthodoxy and the church of the East teach that the reality ('the substance') of the elements of bread and wine become, in a way surpassing understanding, the Body and Blood of Christ.⁴⁷ The Catholic Church teaches that when the bread and wine are consecrated in the Eucharist they cease to be bread and wine, and become respectively, 'the body and blood of Christ each of which is accompanied by the other and by Christ's soul and divinity'.⁴⁸

In the PCG liturgy and service book, the part on the Eucharist begins with the presentation of the offerings which are brought into the church together with the gifts of bread and wine to be set apart for the sacrament.⁴⁹ The Presbyterians through this remind themselves that their gifts are tokens of man's daily labour which symbolize the dedication of God of their corporate as well as their individual lives. It is stated in the PCG liturgy and service book that the solemn procession by which the elements are brought in by the presbyters (elders), known in the Eastern churches as the 'Great Entrance' reminds them that in receiving the Eucharist 'they are to take up their cross and follow Christ to be partakers of His sufferings'. During the time there is always a reminder of Christ's presence with the 'Sanctus (the Holy, Holy, Holy...) and their unity with Christ and the host of heaven who will be worshipping with them, giving thanks for the great acts of God in creation, salvation and redemption and looking forward in expectation of Christ's coming in power and in glory'.⁵⁰

The members of the PCG understand the Eucharist to be so special, holy and sacred that only the commissioned and ordained female and male clergy can administer it. Some men of the PCG refuse to take the Holy Communion from the ordained women ministers for fear that they might be menstruating thinking about the sacred nature of the Eucharist as discussed above. This can be seen in the answer to the question 'Have you ever refused communion from an ordained female minister? And if your answer is yes, 'why did you behave that way? The responses indicate that majority of the male respondents claimed they refused communion from a female minister because she was a woman and they did not know whether she was menstruating or not. Respondents claim that the issue of the woman minister and the Eucharist is another area that poses a challenge. This is because of the perception that menstruating women are unclean.⁵¹ Many congregants are not comfortable with women administering the Eucharist and some have assigned reasons to the strands of the debate on the impurity of women due to menstruation. This attitude of some PCG members is reflected in an article published in the Christian messenger, a newspaper of the PCG. The author writes:

'Paul would not have liked to hear of a woman teaching the word of God. It is therefore unfair for a woman to give communion or the Lord's Supper to men and to settle cases in congregations. Their menstrual periods make them unholy to preach in the pulpit and bury the dead...'⁵²

The writer extends the issue beyond the Eucharist to 'preaching' in the pulpit and 'burying' the dead. The PCG is also in the cultural context which sees the menstrual blood as being unclean and polluting that getting close to anything is considered sacred. Again, culturally, the menstrual blood is also seen as so powerful and potent that it has the power to render powerless sacred and powerful personalities or objects. This is why in the traditional set up the menstruating women are separated from what is thought as sacred and powerful. These reasons do not hold in the changing Ghanaian context because women handle the articles of the Eucharist and they cannot render it impure.

Such cultural perceptions on the menstrual blood are so deep rooted on the minds of some Ghanaian Christians that they will not allow women especially the non-menopausal women to handle or officiate the Eucharist

in the church. Thus many congregants are not comfortable with accepting young ordained women who are still menstruating to administer the Eucharist. It is an indication of the strong views held by people on this issue. Some congregants refuse Holy Communion from women ministers, forgetting the fact that it is women who get the communion cups ready, fill them with wine and get the bread or wafers ready, so that if it is a question of defilement then it should have been from this stage. This is another clear example of how traditional or cultural construction and perception of women and their bodies influence the PCG and some perceptions of women in the church. Again, such people seem to be ignorant of the indigenous traditional culture in which blood is seen as the symbol of life and that without menstruation, there is no life.

Sackey writes about the position of the menstruant in the Jewish religious tradition which looks similar to what pertains in Ghana and members of the PCG's attitudes. She comments that the phenomenon of menstruation has been major referents of female/male inferior/superior dichotomy.⁵³ She claims that in the Jewish culture, the concept of menstruation transcends an 'apparently ordinary biological event' or a criterion for gender distinction. Menstrual impurity is the focal point for the exclusion of women from the sacred in Jewish and Christian religions.⁵⁴ Inequality of male and female in Jewish tradition comes out from Leviticus 12 that regulates the length of impurity and blood purification required by the mother after delivery of a child. Varied duration of blood purification post-partum and the period of impurity for a parturient on the birth of a baby boy are seven days and thirty-three days for purification. The regulations on the birth of a baby girl is double that for a boy, which is fourteen and sixty-six days respectively. There is severity of blood purification in the case of a baby girl. B. Sackey thinks the Leviticus impurity laws are sheer arbitrary enactments' and 'legislative rigidity of the priestly authors'.⁵⁵

The researcher disagrees with Douglas that, 'menstruation could be assumed to have a priestly and divine source'.⁵⁶ Delaney, Lupton and Toth regard menstruation as a curse whose 'origins' begin indirectly in the book of Genesis 3:16, where God tells Eve He will 'multiply her sorrow and her conception'.⁵⁷ Delaney et al cite the book of the Prophet Micah 4:10, which they claim 'refers more directly to menstrual pain' 'be in pain and labour to bring forth' Again in this verse the act of labour is being

equated with menstruation. The pertinent question here is whether the first woman, Eve, did menstruate, if yes, when did she begin the process? From the assumptions made by Delany et al., menstruation must have begun after the fall of Eve and Adam considering the belief that the Garden of Eden must have been a sacred place, being as it were, full of Yahweh's presence and also the idea that menstruation and contact with the divine are incompatible. This means it would have been unlikely for Eve to have been menstruating while she was resident in the garden.⁵⁸

The taboos on menstruation are cultural constructions intended to restrict the behaviour of a particular group of people, in this case women. Douglas attempting to conceptualize the significance of these restrictions argues that they are beliefs to reinforce social pressures, or to uphold certain moral values.⁵⁹ She thinks they are also used as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order, for example, that the issue of sex as endangering can 'express symmetry or hierarchy'. The distinction between public and private domains exists in all cultures and the fact that women give birth and spend most of their time in domestic sphere has led to the dichotomy of placing the woman in the private and men in the public of which the PCG ordained women ministers are no exception.

Phiri concludes that Africans are thinking that the fact that God created women with the ability to bear children is looked at as a curse which can prevent the spirit of God being present in the church if women were to be ordained ministers. Phiri says ungodliness is connected with being pregnant.⁶⁰ This type of thinking, according to Phiri, may be connected to the influence of Old Testament practices where women who have just borne children were treated as unclean.⁶¹

When the ordained women were asked about their feelings when congregants refuse their administration of the Eucharist, they claimed as stated in the literature above that such congregants doubt their integrity basing their argument on cultural, biblical and psychological factors on impurity. This is a challenge because cultural and biblical factors continue to shape attitudes and perceptions in the PCG. However, despite these attitudes and perceptions, some congregational members do not think negatively about women ministers. After all, the blood of Jesus has cleansed everybody and old things have passed away.⁶²

Conclusion

One wonders if congregational members are aware that women are normally the ones who prepare the elements for administration of the Eucharist and again whether in the homes of such sceptics they still isolate menstruating wives and daughters.⁶³ Are they saying that the blood of menstruation is more powerful and potent than the blood of Jesus? The answer is surely not in the affirmative and implies therefore that it is the attitude of the patriarchal system which tends to marginalize women.

Endnotes

- ¹ The 2011 statistics presented to the 12th General Assembly indicated that total membership of PCG was 721,599. Women were 438,725 and men were 282, 87 respectively.
- ² The then Moderator Rt. Rev. D.A Koranteng said this at the 50th Anniversary Celebration of the Women's Fellowship of the PCG in 1993.
- ³ Mercy, Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa*. (Accra: SWL, 2000), p.123.
- ⁴ PCG, Minutes of the 42nd Synod, 59.
- ⁵ Rev Dr Samuel Prempeh in a former moderator of the PCG.
- ⁶ A.L. Kwansa, an advocate for women's ordination in the PCG was the then Synod Clerk.
- ⁷ A.L Kwansa, interview, 8 April 2011, Aburi, at his residence behind Kom Clinic. He was the Synod Clerk at the time of debate.
- ⁸ The then Secretary to the Inter-church and Ecumenical Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.
- ⁹ A Report in the *Christian Messenger*, 'Women's Ordination', March 1976, IV.34. PCG Ordination Chronicle p. 90.
- ¹⁰ A Report in the *Christian Messenger*, 'Women's Ordination', March 1976, IV.34. PCG Ordination Chronicle p. 90.
- ¹¹ Rev. Alice Kyei- Anti, Interview, 20 December 2010, PCG Head Office, Accra.
- ¹² Rev. Alice Kyei- Anti, Interview, 20 December 2010, PCG Head Office, Accra.
- ¹³ A.L Kwansa, interview, 8 April 2011, Aburi at his residence. That was the first time a woman was allowed to participate in the administration of the Eucharist.
- ¹⁴ Samuel Prempeh, interview, 18 November 2010, Ramseyer Training centre, Abetifi Kwahu. He was the Former Moderator of the PCG; at the time of the Debate, he was a recorder at Synod.
- ¹⁵ A.L Kwansa, interview, 8 April 2011, Aburi at his residence.
- ¹⁶ Kaba and Sleet is a traditional cloth attire worn by African women especially Ghanaians, Nigerians, Ivorians etc.
- ¹⁷ Methodist Church, Ghana, 19th Annual Conference Agenda Representative Session,

Winneba, 1980, p.102. Dispensation refers to a prevailing religious system at a period, thus, the old dispensation refers to the Old Testament times.

¹⁸ Geoffrey Chapman, *The Question of Women and the Priesthood: Can Women be Admitted to Holy Orders?* (London: Willmer Brothers Limited, 1967), 21.

¹⁹ Chapman, *The Question of Women*, 21.

²⁰ Chapman, *The Question of Women*, 33.

²¹ Anne Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (New York: Orbis, 2002), 143.

²² Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 143.

²³ PCG Minutes of the 42nd Synod, Kumasi Sept 1971, 56-57.

²⁴ In the New Testament accounts, many women such as Mary Magdalene, Phoebe, Lydia were said to have played many significant roles in ministry of Christ but they were not regarded to have played any leadership roles.

²⁵ Christian R. Gaba 'Presbyterian Church of Ghana Minutes of the 42nd Synod', 28th August- 1st September, 1971, 59.

²⁶ Constance F Parvey (ed.): *Ordination of Women in Ecumenical Perspective*, World Council of Churches, 1980, 8. This is an Old Catholic argument, and it is not a reasonable argument, I have presented it to indicate the extent to which the theological arguments on the ordination of women have been extended. It was noted that the writer did not think much of this argument herself. But a similar argument is recorded by Anthony Hanson in *Church Sacraments and Ministry*, London 1975, 108-110.

²⁷ Chapman, *The Question of Women*, 33.

²⁸ Chapman, *The Question of Women*, 33.

²⁹ Chapman, *The Question of Women*, 33.

³⁰ Chapman, *The Question of Women*, 97.

³¹ Chapman, *The Question of Women*, 97.

³² Isabel Apawo Phiri, 'The Proper' Place of Women : (Genesis 1/1 Timothy 2) Biblical-Exegetical Study from a Malawian Chewa Presbyterian Woman's Perspective' in Ursel Rosenhanger & Sarah Stephens (eds.) *Walk my Sister*, 25.

³³ PCG Minutes of the 42nd Synod, Kumasi 1971, 53.

³⁴ PCG Minutes of the 42nd Synod, Kumasi, 1971, 55.

³⁵ PCG Minutes of the 42nd Synod, Kumasi, 1971, 55.

³⁶ If Christianity is to be contextualized, that is adapted to suit our culture.

³⁷ Sheila Nyantekiywah Gyimah, 'Women and Priesthood: A case study of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches of Ghana,' *B.A Long Essay* (University of Ghana, Legon 1987), p.19.

³⁸ Tokunboh Adeyemo (ed.) *Africa Bible Commentary: A one - Volume commentary Written by 70 African Scholars* (Kenya: WordAline, 2006), p.154.

³⁹ Adeyemo (ed.) *Africa Bible Commentary*, p. 154.

⁴⁰ 'Presbyterian Church of Ghana Minutes of the 42nd Synod', 28th August-1st September, 1971.

⁴¹ 'Presbyterian Church of Ghana Minutes of the 42nd Synod', 28th August-1st September, 1971.

⁴² Sirkka Syvanne, 'The Psychological Factors Relating to the Ordination of Women and the Question of Women and Ministry' in Brigalia Bam (ed.), *what is Ordination Coming to?*

Report on the Consultation on the Ordination of Women held in Cartigny Switzerland (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1970), p. 23.

⁴³ Scott P. Richert, 'The Eucharist' www.About.com (Accessed on 28.06.12).

⁴⁴ Scott P. Richert, 'The Eucharist' www.About.com [Accessed on 28 June, 2012]

⁴⁵ <http://www.britannica.com> [Accessed 20 July, 2012]

⁴⁶ Scott P. Richert, 'The Eucharist' www.About.com [Accessed on 28 June, 2012].

⁴⁷ <http://www.britannica.com> [Accessed 20 July, 2012].

⁴⁸ <http://www.britannica.com> [Accessed 20 July, 2012]

⁴⁹ Presbyterian Church of Ghana: Liturgy and Service Book, Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1987, 43-45.

⁵⁰ Presbyterian Church of Ghana: Liturgy and Service Book, 43-45.

⁵¹ Grace Sintim-Adasi, 'Ordained Women Ministers in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana: Roles and Challenges' PhD Thesis University of Ghana, Legon, 2012, p. 173.

⁵² *Christian Messenger*, IV. 1976, 2. In Acts 10:15, God told Peter that no one should call unclean what God has made. As was stated in a reply to this particular letter if one felt very strongly about it, then he can simply keep away during the period, 200.

⁵³ Brigid Sackey, 'The Position of the Menstruant, in *Jewish Religious Tradition: Women's*

⁵⁴ Sackey, 'The position of the menstruant, in *Jewish Religious Tradition*,' 33.

⁵⁵ Sackey, 'The position of the menstruant, in *Jewish Religious Tradition*,' 33.

⁵⁶ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 46.

⁵⁷ Delany and Jarice (eds) 2nd ed. *The Curse: A Cultural History of menstruation*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 37.

⁵⁸ Delany and Jarice (eds) 2nd ed. *The Curse: A Cultural History of menstruation*. 37.

⁵⁹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 3.

⁶⁰ Phiri Isabella, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy* (Malawi: Claim, 1997), 96.

⁶¹ Phiri, *Women, Presbyterianism and Patriarchy*, p. 96. See also Olajubu, *Women in the Yoruba Religious Sphere*, p.24

⁶² See Revelation 21: 4-5.

⁶³ An ordained female minister Rev. Alice Kyei-Anti claims in an interview with her that her mother went to her grandfather when she was menstruating and she once asked her father whether the food vendors that they bought food for their father were also not menstruating.