

The issue of ordination of women essay



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The issue of ordination of women into certain church positions is an issue that has dogged the Church constantly, especially after the Renaissance age. After the Renaissance age, came solidifications of states and politics- an affair which later culminated into inter state competition. The interstate competition brought about the two World Wars that totally changed the course of world history in the sense that the wars were succeeded by the extinction of the Victorian age.

The Victorian age was marked heavily by moral conservatism and a formidable stressing on male domination and female submission. However, after the two World Wars, came the Great Depression which virtually forced every family to change the way in which daily provisions were met. This means that women began to also tinker with the professional and corporate world that had been then inundated by the male counterpart. Women ever since have debunked a lot of myths that some tasks were not meant for them by performing well in these fields.

The after effects of these states of affairs are that the world changed its perceptions so that women have been vastly incorporated into all job sectors. A testimony to this is the fact that during the 1950s, the professional areas that were occupied by women was 10%, while as at the present, over 46.78% of the corporate and professional world is being managed by women (Byrne 1994, 120). However, when it comes to religion, particularly the Church, the situation has not been any accommodative towards the concept of liberalizing the Church positions to integrate women into any clerical positions.

Ordination refers basically to the process of consecrating a lay person for priestly orders. Some of these orders include the deacon, priest, or the pastoral duties, as far as the pentecostal movement is concerned. The coming of the 19th century has witnessed the allowing or the consecration of female preachers and office bearers. Presently, about half of all US Protestant churches consider women for ordination. Over half of the seminary students are women, with other seminaries having more than half of if its population being made up of women (Ibid, 78).

The stand of various denominations on women ordination. The Catholic Church. The Catholic church has laws that specify on these matters in the Canon law and the catechisms of the Catholic church. These sources of laws maintain that only the baptized man is in a position to receive sacred ordination. The Catholic church maintains that this stipulation is divine, and therefore doctrinal. Due to arguments that were raised on this issue, the Catholic church met in 1976 to come out with a ruling on the issue.

The outcome of this undertaking was that the church came out with the same position, only that it sought to make the reasons for her stand more formidable. The Catholic church maintained that the Church was not in any way authorized by Christ, her founder to ordain female clergy. To this effect, the church maintained that there is no place in the scriptures where there was ordination of women. Secondly, the Catholic church maintained that as a church, she wanted to remain faithful to the traditions that had been handed down to her by the apostles who had in turn been taught by Christ Himself.

In addition to this, the church maintained that her stance to lock out women from ordination was not in her own volition, but was out of her will to maintain fidelity to Christ's teachings (Avis and Avis 1998, 121). Deep philosophical and theological propositions and ideological arguments were also put across by the Catholic church to defend her stand. For instance, the church maintained that the man and the woman ontologically represented different worlds, and therefore, this is why some of their roles remain non interchangeable.

Just as Christ chose by demonstration, water for baptism and wine for Eucharist, although these elements were equal to each other, yet, each had a unique role to play. So likewise, a man and a woman are equal, but are of different essence, so that each has a specific role to play. The Catholic church still holds on to her position, saying that there is a deep association between the priesthood and the priest himself. Pope in 1994 in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, maintained that it was not accidental that the Christ was in His personhood, masculine- and that Christ confirmed this by choosing the twelve apostles who were male.

Ordinatio Sacerdotalis in order to underscore the validity of its ruling, maintains that the twelve male apostles were chosen by Jesus Christ after a whole night of prayer, and therefore, this was not a coincidental matter that can be sidestepped (Jewett 1990, 139). In the same wavelength, the Catholic church cites the early church fathers as having dismissed totally the prospects of female ordination. Some of these church fathers include Irenaeus, Tertullian, Epiphanius, Chrysostom John, Hippolitus and Augustine.

In addition to this, the Catholic church maintains that the Synod of Laodicea had also proscribed the act of women ordination. As touching on the deaconesses, the Catholic church has been subject to controversies since it is evident that the early church condoned the ordination of women. This has led to three dominant questions that have been raised such as; whether the positions were true sacramental ordinations, or for honorific and functional purposes.

The last question (but not in the order of importance) inquires whether this signified or intimated the mutability of the divine law. The Catholic church still quotes the Nicean Council of the AD. 325 as having proscribed the impartation by the laying on of hands on the deacons. However, even this does not satiate the explanations due to the fact that the Council of Chalcedony in AD 451 condoned the ordination of women as deaconesses on condition that they had to have attained age 45, and must have undergone Cheirothesia, thorough examination (Ibid 123).

Counterarguments. By locking out women from ordination, the Catholic church seems to be passing out an insidious message about two baptisms, and this being diametrically opposed to the teaching of St. Paul. St. Paul said that there was not to be any wall of segregation to put the human race asunder within itself, on the basis of sex, race, or geographical leanings, of any other form of curtain. In addition to this, other theologians posit that there is always a fundamental unity that bonds partakers of the holy orders.

This group maintains that the fact that women are allowed some portfolios in the catholic church (for instance, lecturing, leading prayers, being an

abbess) already makes the women one with their male counterparts, and therefore, all these portfolios should be equally shared. In a nutshell, these theologians posit that all these parties are serving one Lord and therefore should not discriminate against each other. This also means that this segregative approach intimates that even the Catholic church in herself is not united. On the contrary, a chasm exists within the Church, based on sex and gender.

This means that what Christ did on the cross was not sufficient in itself: Christ Jesus through His vicarious death wanted to tear down the wall that existed not only between God and the human race, but also among the human race themselves. There is also the *Humani Generi* principle which seems to be the antithesis of Popes' *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. *Humani Generi* principle states that even the Roman Pontiff has still, the inherent human nature that can make the Pope terminate or conclude a theological controversy in a wrong manner (Ibid, 34).

These theologians maintain that the *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* that rules out on the prospects of female ordination might have been a blunder. Historical arguments have also been put across, against the stand that has been taken by the Catholic church. Church history reveals that there could have been ordained women priests and bishops of old. For instance, Pope Gelasius refers to "presbiteria" which is in a feminine form. In addition to this, there is a Sarcophagus dating AD. 425 that has inscriptions referring to the Salona burial sites.

It has been found that the selling of the plots was work that had been relegated to the presbiteria. There are also utilitarian type of thinkers who posit that in order to have a sufficient number of ministries to serve in the the administering of the masses and the sacraments, especially in areas of shortage such as North America and Europe, there should be the ordination of female clergies. The Utilitarians point at bishop Felix Davidek as an example who in the 1970s ordained 5 female priests to work in an underground Catholic church. This happened in Czechoslovakia. Recent developments that have been achieved.

As far as the mainstream Catholic church is concerned, women have been allowed to conduct and lead prayers outside the mass. In addition to this, they are being allowed to help in giving holy communion, and in the ministry of the word (scripture). Further ameliorations have come, being marked by the allowing of women to be abbesses, and thus leading monasteries, and all that are within them (including the male clergy). While in this position, the abbesses can preside over the running of catechisms, parish programs, minister the Eucharist, teaching and lecturing on theology.

In 1994, the Vatican Congress for Divine Worship was convened, with the effect that women were allowed to act as auxiliaries to the altar servers. On the other hand, other sects have sprung from the Catholic church so as to have the freedom to carry out the ordination of women. Some of these groupings are; the Roman Catholic Women Priests, the Brothers and sisters in Christ, and the Catholic Women's Ordination and Corpus. The Eastern Orthodox Church. The Eastern Orthodox Church takes the same mind form

with the Catholic Church. However, the Eastern Orthodox Church takes more flexible stance, and this was shown when Prof.

Evangelos Theodore maintained that female clergies (priests) had been ordained in the times of old (op ct 12). However, traces of discrimination are seen in the sense that this wing maintains that women priests were regarded lay ministers. A ray of light flickered at the end of the tunnel, when on October 8th 2004, the Holy Synod of the Eastern Orthodox Church voted in and ratified the ordination of women into the Diaconate. The Anglican Church. The Anglican church is very encouraging in the sense that majority of her dioceses and provinces ordain women as both priests and deacons.

However, elements of discrimination are still evident in the sense that only a small number of provinces allow the consecration of female bishops. The Episcopal churches on the other hand tolerate the ordination of both women priests and bishops. However, like all other denominations, this issue has remained a controversial one. In the face of these controversies, developments have been made in the sense that in 2008, out of 35 provinces, 27 communions have been able to actualize the ordination of women as priests (The Church of England House of Bishops 2004, 130).

Within this same rubric, 16 communions have extirpated the hindrances that bar women from acting as bishops. However, this issue is so divisive to an extent that provinces have been set at logger heads with their dioceses. This case is evidently being seen in the Diocese of Sydney which repels the practices of the Anglican Church of Australia, and Quincy in San Joaquin

against Fort worth in The US. The first woman bishop in the Anglican church is Barbara Clementine who was ordained in Massachusetts in February 1989.

Later developments and improvements were also realized as more female bishops such as Jamieson Penelope of New Zealand were consecrated the bishop of Dunedin. Later on in 2005, a vote was passed to eradicate barriers that barred the ordination of women into the bishopric by the Church of England's General Synod. The meeting for the finalization of this process that is to see through its ratification was slotted for February 2006, but its reconstructions are still underway due to the fact that there are still dissidents who are opposed to these developments and are still the movers and shakers of these conferences.

More good news hinting at more accruals keep on coming following the Appellate Tribunal of the Church of England's ruling on September, 28th 2007, that there was no constitutional reasons whatsoever, that were to be used to thwart or to keep away the ordination of women bishops to give them the authority of diocesan bishops. The tribunal maintained that it made this ruling following the adoption of the Church of England's law of Clarification Canon. This was in 1992. The passing on of this law gave a green light for the ordination of females as priests(Ibid, 39).

On 11th April, 2008, the developments started to be ratified , with the Right Reverend Herft Rodger and archbishop Perth announcing Kay Goldsworth's nomination as the first woman who was to be ordained as the bishop of Australia. This culminated in Goldsworth on May 22nd, 2008 being ordained during the feast of Corpus Christi. Unlike the rest of the denominations, the

Anglican church seeks to display modesty and dexterity by preserving both the conservative in the face of the changes that are being made.

To this end, majority of the Anglican churches has made measures to give pastoral care and nurturing for those who have felt offended towards the ongoing incorporation of women into the clergy. For this, the Church of England has come up with a methodology known as the “flying bishops.” This is a body of bishops that has been set up to take care of the parishes that do not wish to be under the tutelage of the bishops who have participated in the lobbying for the ordination of the women to be part of the clergies (Joan 1999, 188). Breakaway groups have also emerged, following their disapproval of female ordinations.

An example of this is the 1977 Continuing Anglican Movement, which was formed immediately the Church of England started ordaining women in the US. The Protestant Churches. The Protestant churches pose less problems and negative stances towards the ordination of women due to the fact that they view the Bible as the main authoritative source of reference for guidance. For instance, the Protestant churches believe in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers which says that all men and women, following the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ have access to God in prayer.

The dominant theme among the Protestants is the task of equipping all men and women to be effective servants of Christ as Lord (Toon 1990, 99).

Protestant bodies cite the involvement of women in the early church (especially in the New Testament) to disapprove the thought that God never intended the existence of women ministers. Conclusion. Most believers feel

that there is no solid ground for the dismissal of the ordination of women into the clerical positions. The New Testament scriptures are full of accounts of women who served the Lord as church leaders.

An example of this group include Priscilla, Mary Magdalene, Junias (who was an apostle), among others. Because of the changes that have been embraced in this issue, a lot of ministries have emerged, being championed by women. Some of these ministries include the Joyce Meyer, Juanita Bynum, and Paula White ministries, among a whole lot more. These branches of Protestant movements have been known to change lives for the better. This is a testimony to the mainstream churches of what they could be forfeiting due to their hard line stance.