

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST PATRIARCHALISM IN KENYA
(1980-1992):
REVISITING THE HISTORY OF WOMEN MINISTRIES

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Abstract

The recommendation to ordain women as full priests in the Anglican Church was first made at the Lambeth Conference of 1978. Usually, Lambeth Conferences are held every ten years and all bishops of the Anglican Communion normally attend them. In the Kenyan context, the House of Bishops began to discuss the ordination of women as early as the 1980s. This was a follow-up to the deliberations of the abovementioned Lambeth Conference at which member churches were given the go-ahead to consider women ordination. Ultimately, the Kenyan Anglican Province agreed in principle that women could be ordained and that each diocese was to be autonomous in taking up the issue. In Kirinyaga Diocese of the Anglican Church of Kenya, the then Bishop, David Gitari, raised the issue of women ordination in four consecutive diocesan synods, i.e. 1979, 1981, 1983 and 1986. This article seeks to describe the history of women ordination in the Anglican Church of Kenya, with special reference to Kirinyaga Diocese. In so doing, it will first attempt to locate the Anglican Communion in general and then narrow it down to Kirinyaga Diocese. In its methodology, the article will start by attempting a survey of the history and traditions of the Anglican Church in Kenya. In turn, it will be able to point out the reasons why women ordination in the locality was problematic – as both history and the patriarchal nature of the society militated against its success. The article will attempt to demonstrate that as women ordination finally took root, it turned out to be very successful. The materials in this presentation have been gathered through oral interviews with relevant individuals whose identities have been kept confidential, as well as by participant observation by the researcher who was an eyewitness to the larger part of this debate. An extensive reading of some materials under discussion has also been done. The aim of the article is to laud the critical role of those who have gallantly participated in this “new struggle” to deconstruct patriarchy and clericalism; and in the African context, Mercy Amba Oduyoye is foremost in deserving this honour.

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1 INTRODUCTION

The article focuses on African women's ecclesiology, as can be traced historically in the Anglican Church of Kenya, Kirinyaga Diocese. The word 'ecclesiology' is derived from two Greek words, *ecclesia* and *logos*. *Ecclesia* means the Church while *logos* means word or reason. It literally means the study of the Church or reasoning about the Church. To this end, Rosemary Ruether (1983:213) defines the Church as the place

where the good news of liberation from sexism is preached, where the spirit is present to empower us to renounce patriarchy, where a community committed to the new life of mutuality is gathered together and nurtured, and where the community is spreading this vision and struggle to others.

African women's ecclesiology highlights the various concerns that revolve around the women ministry in the African Church. This includes their participation as the majority in the African Church, their activities, their under-representation in areas, such as denial of ordination, exclusion from decision making, clericalism,ⁱ social violence and domestic violence, leadership, meaningless Church symbols that promote patriarchy,ⁱⁱ among others. In particular, Mercy Oduyoye (2001:81) notes that the Church is divided against itself for as long as it "militates against and marginalises women" in crucial matters such as ordination. This denial of ordination is seen as a deliberate attempt at keeping women a step behind men in the service that both men and women are called to render in God's household. Since God is not sexist, both men and women are called to service.ⁱⁱⁱ

As Isabel Apawo Phiri (1998:199-200) says, external influences have negatively affected the African Church with regard to ordination of women. For example, in the Anglican Church of Malawi, Rev R S Hunter argued against the ordination of women on the basis of maintaining what was the tradition of the very first Anglican missions. His views were in total disregard of the context, which is the Chewa Anglican Christians of Malawi. The argument further failed to take into consideration the present needs of the contemporary situation, which amounts to a serious challenge to Christianity in Africa of the 21st century.

African women's ecclesiology, as seen in African women's theology, thus seeks to address the areas that need to be improved, as it focuses on the way forward. In this article, I intend to examine the ministry of women in the Anglican Church of Kenya, Kirinyaga Diocese.

2 DEFINING ANGLICANISM

Anglicanism has its origin in the 19th century in England (Hillerbread 1996:38). It began with the supposition that a national state is an independent political

entity, which rightfully was to take charge of its own affairs while maintaining continuity with the earliest Church, the scripture and the first four general councils, with the early Church fathers (Hillerbread 1996:39).

The word “Anglican” means English and, in combination with *ecclesia*, refers to the Church of England, a terminology dating from the 20th century (Hillerbread 1996:38). Wright, in Hillerbread, points out that Anglicanism referred to a geographical entity and did not, as it did later, involve doctrinal considerations (Hillerbread 1996:38). Hillerbread (1996:39) says:

The phenomenon of “Anglicanism” emerged historically with the development of the nineteenth century quest for the uniqueness of the doctrine and discipline of the English Church and with the spread of that beyond Britain to other parts of the world forming the Anglican Communion of autonomous Church voluntarily adhering to the doctrine and discipline of the English Church.

He further states that the bishops of the Anglican Communion met at the Lambeth Conference in 1930, during which time they recognised that the “term Anglican at one time had purely local connotations” but now referred to the doctrine of the Catholic faith as contained in scripture, stated in the creeds, expressed in the sacraments of the gospel and rights of the primitive Church as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer (B.C.P.) by Thomas Cranmer in 1549 (Hillerbread 1996:39).

When we look at the theological understanding of the Anglican ecclesiology, firstly, the Church was viewed as essential in every detail of human life.^{iv} Secondly, to be in Christ was to be in the Church, his body, to be baptised in the sacrament of justification and to be participant in Holy Communion, the sacrament of sanctification (Hillerbread 1996:39). However, in terms of women ministry, the Anglican Communion has dragged its feet all the way to recent times when a ray of light has been detected. Thus the Anglican Church of Kenya is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion whose headquarters are in Canterbury (UK). It is therefore no wonder that some of her patriarchal structures that we find today in the Church date back to 1600 AD when King Henry the 8th differed with the papacy and led the Archbishop of England to break away from the Catholic Church. Some of her structures, like the liturgical Book of Common Prayer (B.C.P.), the place of women in ministry, the powers of a bishop, the language of worship, clericalism, liturgy in general, symbols and general “violence” to women need revision to make the Church, especially in Africa, compliant with the demands of the 21st century. For the sake of time and space, I shall restrict myself to the general life of women ministry of the Anglican Diocese of Kirinyaga in Kenya.

3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF KENYA (1844-)

The current Anglican Church of Kenya began in 1844 when the first missionary to bring the Christian gospel to Kenya, Johann Ludwig Krapf of the London-based Church Missionary Society, arrived in the Port of Mombasa, Kenya in 1844. Johann Rebman, another missionary from the CMS, followed him in 1846.^v In 1884, the first administrative diocese was formed with the

name of Eastern Equatorial Africa (combining Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika), with James Hannington as the first Diocesan Bishop. In 1898, the Diocese of Mombasa, covering all Kenya and Northern Tanganyika was formed. As the Church grew, Northern Tanganyika was removed from the Diocese of Mombasa, which now covered Kenya only. In 1955, Festo Olang and Obadiah Kariuki were consecrated in Uganda as the first African bishops of the Anglican Church in Kenya by the Archbishop of Canterbury.^{vi}

As time went by, the Anglican Church of Kenya, which was initially one diocese, grew from strength to strength. As a “Church of the colonizer” – the British – who were ruling Kenya by then, it became like the State Church. By 1964, Kenya had two Anglican dioceses – Mombasa and Nairobi. By the year 2008, the Anglican Church of Kenya had 29 dioceses. This rapid increase in the number of dioceses is partly because of the increase of population in the country. In addition, the Anglican Church is the largest Protestant group of churches in Kenya, in a country of over 35 million people, and where 84% profess to be Christians. Patriarchy is the other reason why the dioceses increased so tremendously within a relatively short time, that is, many people want to occupy the “executive” seat of a bishop. As a result, the “ambitious” ones incite the locals to demand their own diocese to be carved, maybe to get a diocese which will be dominated by their own tribesmen and women, hence the need to subdivide.^{vii}

4 THE STRUCTURE OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF KENYA (1844-)

The structure of the Anglican Church is hierarchical with an episcopal type of government. The head of the Anglican Church of Kenya is the archbishop, and under him/her there are the diocesan bishops who govern their respective dioceses with a lot of autonomy. In 2008, Kenya had one Anglican archbishop, who is the head, and 29 bishops who head the 29 dioceses that constitute the Anglican Church of Kenya. Under a bishop there is an archdeacon who heads an archdeaconry. Under an archdeacon there is a rural dean who heads a rural deanery. Under a rural dean there are vicars who head up parishes. Under a vicar are pastoral assistants, that is, clergy who are not given responsibilities to head a parish and therefore receive instructions directly from the vicar. Like lay ministers, the pastoral assistants assist the parish priest. A parish is made up of at least one congregation, although it can be composed of as many as ten congregations; a rural deanery is made up of at least two or more parishes. An archdeaconry is made up of two or more rural deaneries, while the diocese, which is headed by a bishop, is made up of one or more archdeaconries.

The Province of Kenya (the entire Anglican Church in Kenya) is made up of one or more dioceses. By 2008, the Anglican Province of Kenya, headed by the Most Rev Benjamin Nzimbi, was made up of 29 dioceses, as mentioned earlier. An interesting development in the Anglican Church worldwide is that each diocese is autonomous. In other words, a particular diocese can do as it wishes. For example, it may worship differently from other dioceses, pay higher (or lower) salaries to its clergy/workers, or ordain women. Decisions are made at Lambeth Conferences (UK), held every ten years and attended by all bishops. Individual dioceses can decide whether or not to implement the

decisions. Not even the archbishop can force bishops and their dioceses to implement a decision.

There are many examples: Sydney Diocese has categorically refused to ordain women, despite the Anglican Communion in Lambeth Conferences having endorsed the ordination of women.^{viii} Mombasa Anglican Diocese of Kenya only agreed to ordain its first three women on 17 October 1999, after most of the other 29 dioceses had already done so.^{ix} Another example that shows the autonomy of each Anglican diocese is seen in the fact that most of the African dioceses have refused to acknowledge the ministry of homosexuals, unlike their counterparts in Europe and North America.^x

5 THE POWERS OF A DIOCESAN BISHOP

When the Anglican Church was introduced in Africa, it brought with it the patriarchal structure that was part of the old Catholic Church, where the Pope would wield a lot of political and religious power. This is what Rosemary Ruether calls “patriarchal anthropology”. Unfortunately, attempts to contextualise the Anglican Church and make it an African Church have not succeeded wholly in regard to moderating the powers of a bishop. Bishops still tend to block any constitutional change which might disempower them to any extent. In brief, after a clergyman or -woman has been elected as a bishop, he/she becomes an employer of everybody working in that particular diocese. He/she can sack, promote or demote without much ado; there are no clear mechanisms to regulate or check the excessive powers of bishops, which can encourage their misuse. An example is the Mount Kenya South Bishop who was allegedly engaging in illicit conduct. Any clergy who tried to object were allegedly demoted, sent to remote areas, sacked, suspended or received “disciplinary measures”. The Bishop finally lost his position in 1996, when politicians, civic groups and a few daring members of the clergy organised huge demonstrations against him, forcing the then Dean of the Province, who also happened to be the Acting Archbishop (David Gitari), to advise him to step down so as to avoid causing further embarrassment to the Church. Interestingly, this Bishop at first refused to listen to the Dean of the Province, and even went on to dismiss him as “one who has no moral and canonical authority to try me”. After further pressure from various quarters, however, he ultimately stepped down and died six years later.

A bishop is in office from the day of consecration (even at 30 years of age) to the age of 65. He/she is the only one who can release clergy/Christians to go and study; and he/she is the only one who cannot be transferred. In Kenya and the rest of the world, cases of bishops practising episcopal autocracy have been reported, including harassing juniors or those who vied for their position in elections. It reminds us of Lord Acton’s words that “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely”.^{xi} To an extent, one can rightly say that the Anglican constitution corrupts any good clergyman or -woman who is made a bishop. Yes, there are bodies like the diocesan synod and the standing committee of the synod, which claim to be above the bishop, but this is merely theoretical in that the bishop can overrule them.

In a letter that was written by a desperate lay reader from ACK Njoro Parish, Nakuru Diocese, that appeared on the Internet, Mr Samuel Kamau Njogu explains that the Anglican Church is in dire need of change. He says, in part:

The Constitution drafted by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) more than 100 years ago is still in force. Why should the ACK sit ... demanding that the national constitution, which is only 40 years old, be reviewed? Why should it see the speck in its brother's [read sister's also] eye, but not the beam in its own?^{xii}

He goes on to say that "regulations VI of the Authority of the Bishop of the ACK Diocese of Nakuru Constitution is a good example. Our Bishops have too much power. It is sad that some have used these powers to instil fear in pastors and other members of the ACK".^{xiii} Wondering how it would be if bishops stop hearing the voice of God, he further says:

Why should a Bishop have the power to veto a decision passed by a synod? This right should be removed forthwith. It is a draconian way to silence those who may have good ideas but which are contrary to the Bishops' selfish interests.^{xiv}

Speaking for the silent pastors, Njogu stresses that love is what is needed in the Church rather than a situation where "many pastors have suffered under some Bishops but are afraid to speak up for fear of losing their jobs". Surely, he says, fear should not rule the Church, for as Paul tells Timothy (in 2 Timothy 1:7) "God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

Njogu's suggestion that Anglican bishops serve for a maximum of 10 years, in two five-year terms, and not until the retirement age of 65 years might turn out to be the lonely voice shouting in the wilderness. Further, his suggestion that bishops be transferred regularly to other dioceses to prevent intimidation, corruption, manipulation and oppression of those under them is not a new idea to the Anglican Church of Kenya, for the (Bishop Henry) Okullu Commission of the late 1980s had made a similar suggestion, but the bishops did not endorse it.

With such powers being vested in one person, gender equality will remain a pipe dream in many dioceses. For example, with a total of 29 dioceses in Kenya, there is not one woman bishop (by 2008); furthermore, only two bishops had appointed two women as archdeacons in their respective jurisdictions by 2004, namely the Diocese of Embu and the Diocese of Nairobi.^{xv} If each diocese has at least an average of five archdeacons, one wonders why they cannot reserve at least two of those positions for women in each diocese, making a total of 58 women archdeacons. By 2008 the Diocese of Kirinyaga had six archdeaconries, but no women had been appointed as an archdeacon! And with over 20 rural deaneries, by 2008 there are still only four women appointed as rural deans. If the powers of the bishop were used in regard to women, a kind of affirmative action could be undertaken to ensure that women and men enjoy equal representation in the ministry.

As we conclude this sub-topic, which has prepared us to examine the women ministries, we cannot ignore Njogu's words that: "The time to exit ecclesiastic tyranny is now, and not tomorrow ..."^{xvi} These powers, as above discussed, are comparable to what Rosemary Ruether (1983:206-207) and Potgieter (1996:18) call "clericalism", which disempowers and turns people into "laity" – meaning people who do not know what goes on in the Church or people who should just be led.

6 HISTORY OF WOMEN ORDINATION DEBATE (1980-1992)

As early as 1980, the House of Bishops in Kenya had begun to discuss the ordination of women. This was a follow-up to the recommendation of the Lambeth Conference of 1978 that the member Churches could consider ordaining them.^{xvii} Although in 1980, the Kenyan Anglican Province^{xviii} agreed in principle that women could be ordained, each diocese was to be autonomous in taking up the issue.

In Kirinyaga Diocese, the then Bishop, David Gitari, raised the issue of women ordination in four consecutive diocesan synods, i.e. 1979, 1981, 1983 and 1986. The motion was turned down on the first three occasions because most of the male clergy opposed it.^{xix} The motion was finally passed in 1986.^{xx} However, women were not ordained immediately following this resolution. The reason? The Bishop probably feared the general outcry from both laypersons and clergy, accusing him of bulldozing the voting "though people did not subscribe to the idea wholly". This is reminiscent of a case in Mombasa Diocese, where, in discussing the need to ordain women in 1999, a bitter exchange ensued during which Mr Nelson Ziro of Gede Parish said that the Church should not accept women as priests because the Bible was against it.^{xxi} He quoted several scriptures, which indicated that women should keep quiet in the Church and discuss matters concerning the Church with their husbands at home. He was overruled and accused of undermining progress in the Church, since a commission had already conducted a survey among the relevant dioceses.

In Kirinyaga Diocese, the debate was also received with much anger, bordering on physical fights, as each group asserted its respective position. It is no wonder that after a resolution was "passed" to ordain women, the opponents of the motion went underground to "poison" people, especially the laity who had limited knowledge of the Bible. In 1992, six years after the ordination was passed, the Bishop called the diocesan synod and expressed the need to ordain three women. To his surprise, some members reacted as if they had not participated in the previous synod that had endorsed the ordination six years ago. Some argued for the postponement of the ordination, others vowed that it would only happen over their dead bodies. In short, there were mixed reactions. But the Bishop, who refused to be influenced by patriarchal anthropology, stood his ground and acted as if he was only informing them of the date of ordination, not seeking their views, as this was a decided case.

To the utter surprise of everyone, two of his senior clergymen (archdeacons), vowing never to allow it [women ordination] to happen, called an "illegal"

meeting of the clergy, which was attended by a good number of clergymen.^{xxii} At this meeting, the two senior clergymen reportedly explained the problem and the danger that the Bishop was leading the Church into, and dismissed the characters that were going to be ordained as unworthy to be invited to the sacred ministry. They vowed to get a court injunction. But before doing so, they called a press conference and “externalised” the Bishop for his “high-handedness”, dictatorship and for pushing the issue of women ordination down the throats of the people/Christians. They accused him of reducing the delegates of the synod to mere rubber stamps that only endorsed what he had already decided. This was given a wide coverage by the Kenyan daily press. However, three women were ordained before the opposers were able to file a court injunction. In addition, the Bishop demoted the dissenting clergymen forthwith to stop their growing influence. One wonders why the very people who accused the Bishop of dictatorship and rubber-stamping issues were so strongly in favour of everything else he did? Why was women ordination such a thorny issue?

Even more surprising was that some senior female laywomen were also opposed to women ordination! They argued that it is against the natural law and harmony in society to elevate women to positions of power and influence, especially to the holy ministry of the Church. They alleged that it is against the Bible and culture. This raises the following question: What is the difference between an Anglican woman lay reader (who robs like clergy) and an Anglican clergywoman? Anglican women lay readers had been serving in the Church for years, so why was women ordination such an issue? (An Anglican woman or man lay reader serves the Church like a priest in the absence of the priest; the only difference is that he/she cannot baptise or administer the Holy Eucharist.)

Another lesson learnt from women opposing the ordination of fellow women is that the society is in dire need of de-patriarchalisation. It will require deep and intensive cleansing to rid itself of this monster, since it is so ingrained in us from childhood. We also need to appreciate that, as a result of this social conditioning, some women have developed low self-esteem. This harmonises with Ogundipe-Leslie’s “six mountains on the women’s back in Africa”, where she identifies the fifth mountain as the woman herself. She rightly argues that women are “shackled by their own negative self-image, by centuries of the interiorisation of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy”. She goes on to say that “their own reactions to objective problems, therefore, are often self-defeating and self-crippling”;^{xxiii} some react with fear, whereas more self-assertive action is needed.

Thus, since 1992, Kirinyaga Diocese has been ordaining women and the numbers have increased significantly: by 2007, from a total of about 120 clergy, around 40 were clergywomen. This is an admirable figure considering that women ordination is barely 10 years old. In fact, contrary to sceptics, the women ministry has been admired greatly in the Diocese of Kirinyaga. They have even revived some parishes that had shrunk due to the clericalism of the male clergy.

7 TRAINING OF WOMEN IN KIRINYAGA DIOCESE

Since 1979, on the initiative of the then Bishop, David Gitari, women have been trained in theological colleges alongside men and have been performing well.^{xxiv} After three years of theological training at certificate level at the local college, St Andrews' College of Theology and Development, Kabare, women were licensed as lay readers, since there was no female ordination, while their male colleagues entered the holy order by being made Anglican deacons. After one year of probation, women were commissioned as deaconesses, while men were ordained to priesthood. This meant that women remained lay people, not because of under-training, but because they were female. They were thus posted in parishes to serve under their male colleagues as pastoral assistants. Sometimes they even had to serve under their male juniors, which caused a great deal of discontent. Some well-trained women were posted at the diocesan bookshop, selling books and stationery, just like any person who had never received any theological training. But after 1992, women were able to respond to the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and the great commandment of love (Mark 12:28-31), just like their male counterparts.

Despite the clergymen and the deaconesses having received equal training, some clergymen did not treat the deaconesses as colleagues and co-workers, but saw them as subordinates. It was not unusual, for instance, for a deaconess to be asked by the male clergy to prepare tea or lunch during Church council meetings, just like any other worker in the parish. This was blatant exploitation, denying the women their right to participate in the meetings and relegating them to the domestic domain.

8 ARGUMENTS AGAINST WOMEN ORDINATION

These arguments (as read in the synod books – the author having been a rural dean in the said diocese) were characteristically heated debates, as observed earlier. They were based on historical, biblical, cultural and generic factors, and they were raised by both men and women.

Some people contended that since the trend among missionaries, specifically the Church Missionary Society (CMS), was to train and ordain only men, not women, “why should we now ordain women? Are we better than the missionaries and are we preaching a different Christianity from the one of the missionaries?” Such patriarchal arguments were based on ignorance of the fact that the Church in Africa inherited an already gender-biased tradition. The argument fails to recognise that two wrongs do not make a right.

Theological and biblical arguments were that women were not part of the Levitical priesthood in the Old Testament. Further, in the New Testament, Jesus only chose male disciples and that Pauline theology does not allow women to speak in the Church. Such arguments failed to recognise that the Bible should always be interpreted in terms of social-cultural hermeneutics.

Cultural arguments that were advanced held that women were never leaders in the traditional societies, and even those who were involved in the religious affairs were always beyond menopause. It is for that reason that some members of the synod held that deaconesses should be ordained to diaconite

ten years after completing their ordination training; others recommended that only married women be ordained; still others held that ordained women should remain single like the Roman Catholic nuns.^{xxv} In a later synod, some members openly admitted their fear that ordaining women would empower them to lead even men, which is against the Kikuyu traditional culture. This fear of women ruling men was reinforced by the story of the legendary Wangu Wa Makeri, the first woman Kikuyu chief who is reportedly said to have ruled with a lot of brutality, especially towards men. Her story was included in the Kenyan government school curriculum in the 1960s and 70s. Scholars were taught lies, namely that Wangu Wa Makeri never sat on a chair but sat on men's backs in her meetings. This story was used to socialise school-going children and warn them of the danger of giving leadership to women, implying that they are prone to abusing it.^{xxvi} In any case, the prehistoric Kikuyu have a story that Kikuyu were at one stage matriarchal but shifted to patriarchy after women turned ruthless in their leadership prowess (Kenyatta 1938:2). As a result, men met secretly to craft a coup that brought women down. And in this meeting, they conspired to impregnate all their wives; this was to ensure that they were physically weakened as men staged a coup d'état, both at family and governance level. According to the story, as men celebrated their victory, they vowed that they would never allow a woman to lead the Kikuyu community.^{xxvii}

While the story was taught to standard three children in the Kenyan schools, it did not indicate the period that Wangu Wa Makeri lived. Yet it created an impression that Wangu lived before Christ, or during medieval times. For that reason, it influenced many school children and socialised both girls and boys to hate women leadership. Many questions must have clouded the minds of pupils as their teachers exaggerated the story of Wangu sitting on the backs of men. This clearly poisoned them against women leadership once and for all. What's more, if this story were combined with the story of the fall of humanity recorded in Genesis 3, where another woman – Eve – allegedly played a big role, a school-going child would obviously come to the conclusion that women leadership was bad.

Researchers in more recent times have been surprised to discover that Wangu Wa Makeri was just a colonial assistant chief who served under a man, Chief Karuri of Weithaga Location, Murang'a District, Kenya. In fact, she is reputed to be the first woman chief in Kenya. She was portrayed as being strict, but not to the extent of literally sitting on men, as a whole generation had been taught in school. She 'sat on' the evildoers in the society by administering justice to everyone on behalf of the appointing authority, without favour. In any case, it has been established that she lived between 1865 and 1936.

Chief Wangu Wa Makeri should have been upheld as a fine example to support women ordination, not suppress it, because she demonstrated that women are not as weak as they are typically portrayed. It appears that she was a very successful judge in settling domestic problems such as marriages. She was a military warrior and a leader. It is therefore unfortunate that the controversy over women ordination in Kirinyaga Diocese was wrongly informed by the story of Wangu.

Another argument that was used against women ordination in Kirinyaga Diocese is that women would cease to be traditional wives and mothers, which to some, was against the role of nature. The proponents of women ordination, including the then Bishop, David Gitari, claimed that such arguments were mere prejudice and stereotype, born of patriarchy.

Concerning the issue of uncleanliness during menstruation and after childbirth, Bishop Gitari argued that women should not be stigmatised because of their biological make-up, which was something beyond human control; and, after all, both men and women have the same blood.

In the diocesan synod where the motion was finally passed in 1986 with a majority of 131 votes against 78 opposing votes, it was noted that the objections to women ordination were more cultural than theological. The need was also expressed to stop preserving some of the discriminative aspects of our culture in our Churches and society in general.

9 STATUS OF ORDAINED WOMEN IN KIRINYAGA DIOCESE

The women ministry in Kirinyaga Diocese is a success. In fact, women clergy are often preferred to men clergy. Some who were previously opposed to women ordination have recanted; some even went so far as to say that they had been misquoted previously, even though their words are recorded in synod books.^{xxviii}

By 1999, Kirinyaga Diocese was leading the other Kenyan dioceses in terms of ordaining women. Back then it had 29 ordained women clergy and by 2008 the number had risen to about 40, most of whom got married to their male counterparts, hence strengthening their ministry even further. In 1999 Embu Diocese had ten ordained women clergy, whereas others, such as Mombasa, had none. Even by 2008, Mombasa had less than ten ordained women.

Concerning women and theological education, by 2008 many had received graduate studies, postgraduate studies, some had gone abroad and others had moved to different dioceses, like “expatriates”, showing that women ordination is a success and that they have been assigned admirable and respectable duties. Following the election of the Diocesan Bishop, David Gitari, as the Archbishop of Kenya in 1997, Rev Canon Daniel Munene, who took over as Bishop, elevated Rev Joyce Karuri Kirigia to the Administrative Secretary of the Diocese. This is the second-most senior seat from that of the Bishop because an administrative secretary is in charge of the general administration of the diocese, from subordinate level right up to that of the bishop. Joyce Karuri performed her duties with extraordinary energy, competence and dedication: she reorganised the structure of the diocesan office, almost giving it an entirely new shape – a better one. But, following a disagreement with the Bishop, she was removed after serving for only one year. Even if her period in office was short-lived, she demonstrated clearly to Kenyans in particular – and Africans in general – that a woman in Africa can do the job just as well.

When the first three women were ordained deacons in 1992, Bishop David Gitari reminded them that they were “women priests” not “men priests”. In other words, they had to bring their extraordinary God-given qualities as Kikuyu women - including gentleness, politeness, chastity, motherliness, authority, orderliness, sympathy and many others - in order to promote the work of God. In so doing, it was as if the Bishop was telling them to accept their womanhood and not be ashamed of it or feel second-rate because of it. He was encouraging them to go out and serve without feeling inferior in any way; on the contrary, their womanhood should be viewed as an asset, not a liability. The Bishop’s advice has indeed borne fruit, for the women ministry in Kirinyaga Diocese is a huge success.

So far there has been only one setback, in 2000, when a clergywoman fell pregnant out of wedlock and the new Bishop, Daniel Ngoru, suspended her from the Church ministry and the parish which she had headed as a vicar. Attempts by some sympathisers to reverse her suspension on the grounds that there have been cases of male clergy impregnating women members of their congregation without their [the male clergy] being suspended, fell on the deaf ears of the Bishop and his committee.

At this stage, it is important to appreciate that unlike in some other dioceses in Kenya, women clergy have been readily accepted by Christians in the Diocese of Kirinyaga. In fact, Bishop Daniel Ngoru admitted, in 1999, that he was constantly requested by Christians from various parishes to post women clergy to serve them. Besides the high status accorded to women priests in Kirinyaga Diocese within the Church, their positions also give them status in the wider community. For example, when there are secular meetings by the provincial (government) administration, women priests, like men priests, are called to open the meetings, sometimes with a word of prayer, or even to deliver a speech. A local chief cannot start his or her meeting without inviting the local Anglican priest.

In my observation, women priests are not accorded this respect just because they are women, but because of their performance so far - something which has been noted even by non-Anglicans. A case in point is Kibirigwi Parish. This parish was collapsing and its elders were divided. They had been unable to pay their previous pastors for almost five years, owing to the enormous debts they had incurred. Nevertheless, a clergywoman was posted there in 1994 and she helped to reconcile the elders and to clear their financial debts within a short time.^{xxix} Further, the population of the Church grew to such an extent that they had to purchase a public address system (PAS) so as to be able to communicate to all those unable to find a place to sit inside the Church during the Sunday services. The great success of the women ministry was totally unexpected before women ordination began. It was not easy to imagine how they would perform, given that the society is still recovering from years of institutionalised patriarchy.

We can attribute the general success of the women ministries to the fact that, unlike men - most of whom are “drunk” with clericalism - most women do not seek to dominate parish or Church council meetings, despite 80% of them being well educated. Instead, they give participants an opportunity to express

their views. As a senior clergyman in the Diocese (by virtue of my being made a Rural Dean in 1999), I must confirm that women clergy, more than male clergy, tend to delegate duties without feeling threatened or diminished in any way. As a result, the laity feels empowered by their clergy and recognised as important. This is the ministry that Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, advised him to practise: ministry of servanthood and sharing. It is also the ministry that Jesus taught his disciples to practice, in Mark 10:44.

There have been isolated reports of women clergy being afraid to chair parish council meetings and, instead, appointing a man from the parish council to do so. Such action is unfortunate and affects not only the woman's own identity as a leader, but also the identity of women priests in general, giving the impression that women are incapable as Church leaders, which just confirms the traditional stereotypes. In Mary Daly's words, this self-depreciation of a woman is a false humility that "is rooted in guilt feelings over being a rival to males or threatening the male ego ..." (Daly 1973).

There are some women who interpret their priestly status as a privilege which makes them equal to men, hence they despise certain categories of Christians, especially the underprivileged. This view of the priesthood gives credence to Oduyoye's (1995:177) remark that "for some women, seeking ordination to Priesthood is asking to be co-opted into the ranks of the oppressor". This misconception has a negative implication in that it reinforces the Kikuyu stereotype that once women are in power, they are not able to cope with their juniors, which may spell doom for the women ministry in the Diocese. Personally, I am aware of only one example in this regard, which means that it is not a serious problem in the Kirinyaga Diocese.

10 CONCLUSION

In concluding this article, it is critical to appreciate that, as the English saying goes, "Rome was not built in a day." In other words, patriarchy, which has influenced the modern African Church, will need to be dismantled bit by bit, as the society becomes more conscientised on gender disparities in our African societies. This means that postcolonial Africa must swing into action to overcome these gender imbalances as a way of healing the society. To this end, we must also share Nyambura Njoroge's understanding of struggle when she says that the road to Golgotha is not without stumbling blocks;^{xxx} for there are moments when our dreams turn to a nightmare; there are moments when the buoyancy of hope turns to a fatigue of despair. Nevertheless, we should never lose hope concerning these gender disparities, since truth will prevail, as Jesus' resurrection demonstrated so clearly. We must therefore continue to dream of a better tomorrow for every man, woman and child. We must dream of a day when human beings will be judged by their characters and not by their gender or background or skin colour; for before God, such petty things do not matter. In any case, as the German evangelist Dietrich Bonhoeffer – who was killed for opposing Adolf Hitler's policies in the 1930s – discovered, true calling must be based on the costly grace and not on the cheap grace. It is costly grace because the Redeemer was crucified for the sake of humanity. It is costly because Christ said that if a person intends to follow him, he or she must be prepared to carry the cross. Women ministers in Kirinyaga and the

rest of Africa must be encouraged to choose the costly grace as the way of Christ and thus be bold enough to be co-workers with Christ in God's vineyard.

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ENDNOTES

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- 1 Clericalism assumes that people have no direct access to God; only the clergy can mediate or intercede for others. It is for the clergy to authorise theological training, to preach, to teach and to administer the sacraments.
- 2 Women are, however, allowed, in a small way, to integrate themselves into this male-defined and dominated role and they adopt the same titles such as Reverend, Bishop, Moderator, Archbishop, Very Reverend, Rt Rev Canon, etc. without questioning the suitability of these titles. They, too, stand in the pulpit when given a chance, without sometimes questioning the symbolism of the pulpit in an African setting. In areas where some are ordained – they, too, wear the clerical collar and the clerical gowns - without questioning their symbolism.
- 3 See Thoko Mpumwana, “My perspective on women and their role in Church and society” in Ackerman, D Draper J A et al, *Women hold up half the sky: women in the church in Southern Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1991), 374.
- 4 For more information on Anglicanism and its doctrines, see Hillerbread, 1996.
- 5 See W B Anderson, *The church in East Africa 1840-1974* (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1988), 5.
- 6 See Church (Anglican) pocketbook and diary 2003.
- 7 As Ibra Asuman Bisiika says, in reference to Uganda, the root of the problem in the Anglican Communion lies in the mystery in which the office of the bishop is shrouded. “As late as the 18th century, Bishops still exercised a lot of political authority, in part because of the teaching that the Church was above state.” He goes on to say that the moral high ground that the Church still enjoys over the state today is “actually a residual carry-over from the old times”. It is unfortunate that even with the increased biblical literacy and the democratic trends that characterised the 19th and 20th centuries, the office of the bishop in the Anglican Communion is still associated with awe, luxury, pomp, power and unquestionable decrees (see <http://allafrica.com/stories/200302120244.html>). This makes being a bishop so attractive that some members of the clergy would do anything in order to be elected bishops. In Western Kenya, in the late 1990s, there were reports of the supporters of different bishopric candidates fighting with dangerous weapons! Stories have been heard of clergy consulting African traditional practitioners rather than the God of Christendom so as to become bishops in the Anglican Church.
- 8 See <http://www.anglicancommnuion.org/acns/acnsarchive/acns1000/acns1051.html>
- 9 See <http://www.nationaudio.com/news/DailyNation/171099/News/News24.html>
- 10 See <http://www.religioustolerance.org/femclrg3.htm>
- 11 This is a common quotation.
- 12 See Samuel Kamau Njogu. <http://www.nationaudio.com/News/Dailynation/Today/Comment/Comments> 30042003.... 2003/04/29
- 13 See Samuel Kamau Njogu, <http://www.nationaudio.com/News/Dailynation/Today/comment/comments30042003....> 2003/04/29
- 14 See Samuel Kamau Njogu, <http://www.nationaudio.com/News/Dailynation/Today/comment/comments30042003....> 2003/04/29
- 15 See Claire Barasa. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200301060667.html>
- 16 Samuel Kamau Njogu. <http://www.nationaudio.com/News/Dailynation/Today/Comment/Comments> 30042003.... 2003/04/29
- 17 See Lambeth Conference 1978: 44-45 Resolution No. 20
- 18 Meeting of the representatives of all dioceses that make up the Anglican Church of Kenya
- 19 Resolution 51/83
- 20 Resolution 56/86
- 21 Ngumbao Kithi, “Anglicans vote to ordain women”. <http://www.nationaudio.com?News/Dailynation/171799/News/News24.html>

- 22 It should be noted that such a meeting to discuss the unprocedural working of the bishop by clergy is not legal in the Anglican Church, for a bishop wields a lot of power.
- 23 Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, *Recreating ourselves: African women and critical transformations*. (Trenton, African World Press, 1994), 36; Oduyoye 2001: 81, Njoroge 1996: 7 & 11, implies this view. It is incumbent upon us to pay urgent and special attention to arrest this negative self-image, especially among the rural women in the villages.
- 24 See the diocesan synod minute book, 1983:17, min. 32:4
- 25 Most of these arguments are contained in the CPK Diocese of Mt. Kenya East, fifth ordinary session of the synod of 1983.
- 26 See Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (London: Heinemann, 1938), 4-8. Here Kenyatta explains how the Kikuyu society changed from the matriarchal to patriarchal. Despite this patriarchal-anthropological socialisation, members of the Kikuyu community refer to one another as *andũ a nyũmba ya mũmbi* – meaning – ‘people of the house of Mũmbi. Mumbi, the name of the “first” Kikuyu woman, literally means “the creator” or “the moulder”. This implies that there is a “quiet” admiration of women participation in the society that is not well harnessed so far!
- 27 Kabira and Mutahi (1988: 7) rightly point out that this story about Wangu Wa Makeri is told in order to perpetuate male domination. And as the story goes, Wangu, who was a chief, was “lured into dancing naked in a public place - something that women were never supposed to do”. And “as time goes by, the story becomes even more mythical and the truth or untruth of what historically happened becomes irrelevant”. Its function, which is to block women’s ascendance to power, becomes primary.
- 28 See synod minute books, 1980-3.
- 29 Money paid to the diocesan office by the parishes on a monthly basis – to run the office – is called a quota. Each parish is allocated an amount according to its ability.
- 30 See Nyambura Njoroge 1996. Rosemary Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, (Boston: Beacon; London: SCM, 1983), 213.