Women's Priestly Ordination in the Nigerian Baptist Convention: A Critical Discourse

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Abstract

Though the Nigerian Baptist Convention in 1993 adopted the inclusion/ordination of women into the priesthood. Yet only a few of them are serving in church leadership in the capacity as Priest in charge in spite of their training in theological studies. In addition, there is silent gender stereotype against women in priesthood in the performance of clerical roles. A number of Churches have not come to terms with this reality that women priesthood have come to stay. There are still Churches that will not nominate a female minister to be their Pastor during the Pastoral call process (employment of a Pastor) and as such there are shortage of female ministers serving as leading church pastors in the local Baptist Church. This article critically examines the arguments on women Priestly ordination and Church leadership in the Nigerian Baptist Convention. It also examines stereotype and discrimination against women priest in the Nigerian Baptist Convention. Descriptive and hermeneutical analytical methodologies are used in this study to critically explore the arguments for and against women Priesthood in the Nigerian Baptist Convention. The study reveals that women congregants prefers women priest in the Baptist church, while the male folks seldom support women priest as leaders of Church, and just a few congregants prefers any gender.

Keywords: Women, Priesthood, Ordination, Pastoral Roles.

Introduction

The concept of Priesthood is represented in the scripture with the word "shepherd" it is a popular concept in Scripture that presents rich and diverse pastoral leadership forms. A review of the Old and New Testaments' presents shepherding as a metaphor that is both sufficiently broad to communicate the all-inclusive scope of leadership functions and narrowly directed toward the identity and responsibilities of those entrusted with the sacred roles of pastoral ministry. The shepherding ministry portrays the nature, role, and proper functions of faithful church leadership among God's people. The Church according to Berkhof, (2009) consists of a called-out body of disciples devoted to fulfilling the ministry of the word in the world. The church is a corporate unit responsible for the mission and ministry of the body of Christ. A Shepherd plays a crucial role in nurturing the church spiritually as it supplies the leadership direction necessary to achieve its primary mission and mandate.

Indeed, the shepherd's job description includes clerical oversight, congregational leadership, and flock nurturing. Hayes, (2001) asserts that what the Church of Jesus Christ is, decides what it does. Beyond nurturing and instructing, the church is a ministry body of men and women God calls to guide the faith community towards truth, understanding, love, and discipline. The call of God extends to all human beings, male and female alike, who are willing. Thus, as some people propose, God does not restrict the call to shepherding His flock to only men, but He also uses the womenfolk in biblical history and in this contemporary times (Hayes, 2001).

Female Religious Leaders in the Bible

In the Old Testament era, Israel reflected a thoroughly patriarchal culture where male domination in marriage, religion, and legal responsibility were prevalent, and the men relegated women to secondary positions in society. Nicole (2007), defines patriarchy as a social organization where fathers are the supreme authorities in their families, clans, or tribes. She further observes that in a patriarchy, men possess cultural dominance and use their power to exclude women from sharing in aspects of communal life. Ruether, cited by Kwok Pui-Lan (2005), adds that the priestly story in the first chapter of Genesis speaks of human

beings as charged to have dominion over the earth and the Hebrew Bible assumes men exercise dominance over women, children, and enslaved people in patriarchal families. However, few women who served in leadership positions challenged the patriarchal culture.

Miriam, the elder sister of Moses and Aaron and Amram and Jochebed's daughter, was the first woman in the Bible to be given the appellation prophetess. The title appears first in Exodus when Miriam leads the Israelites' women in a victory song after God destroyed Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea ((Exodus 15:20-21, N.I.V.). Miriam referred to herself as a prophetess (Num12:2). Heward-Mills asserts that prophetess in the Hebrew language means a woman inspired and directed to teach the will of God. Prophets are men and women who speak on God's behalf concerning the present or those who foretell the future. In its origin solely in the Spirit's prompting, the believers can distinguish a prophecy from teaching and preaching and in its content, prophecy also served the purpose of edification. Rev. 19:10 says: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Miriam had gifts of singing and leadership and those spiritual gifts are divine endowments bestowed upon a member of Christ's body for service. After God parted the Red Sea, the women under Miriam's leadership sang and danced with timbrels. In addition to being a prophet and leader, Miriam was a worship leader using music and dance. Another pointer made to Miriam's leadership position was when prophet Micah named her as part of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam's leadership triumvirate: “I took you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of bondage. I brought Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam” (Micah 6:4, NIV). A sign that God set apart Miriam to be one of His earliest leaders. Belleville (2005) makes high claims for Mariam's leadership role in Israel, affirming that “Miriam was sent by God (along with her two brothers) to lead the people of Israel during the wilderness years (Mic. 6:4). The Israelites held her in such high regard as a leader that they refused to travel until she took the lead (Num. 12: 1-16).

Deborah is the most powerful woman depicted in the Old Testament and as the fifth judge of Israel, Deborah served as the leader of Israel, a prophetess, a military leader, and a mother in Israel. After Moses, only Samuel and Deborah combined all these qualities. Judges 4:4 - 5 reads: “Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of

Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. The Israelites came to her under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in Ephraim's hill country to settle their disputes." Deborah showed ultimate authority as the supreme political leader in a time of war by adopting a plan, organizing troops, destroying the enemy, and leading her army to victory. She was the ruling head of state, just as Samuel and other prophets were in the days before Israel had a king and one of the people moved by the Holy Spirit to speak God's Word with much wisdom from God.

The egalitarians claim that Deborah's leadership in Israel shows that God can call women to leadership positions. Bilezikian, cited by Grudem (2004), writes:

> *As Prophet [Deborah] assumed spiritual leadership, she exercised judicial and political power as a judge. Eventually, she directed the strategy for a decisive battle on the field. Because, as a prophet, she was a spokesperson for God, Deborah also served as a political guide and one-person Supreme Court.*

Huldah (c. 7th century B.C.), the prophetess who verified that the scroll of the Law (probably the Book of Deuteronomy) found in the temple (c. 621 B.C.) was God's Word and helped to spark the significant religious reform in the days of Josiah. As described in 2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34, workers repairing the Temple of Solomon discover an old scroll during King Josiah's reign. The High Priest Hilkiah knows they have made a significant finding and chose Huldah as the authority to divine confirmation. The High Priest selecting Huldah as the authority the chief priest goes to, is exciting because the prophets Jeremiah, Nahum, and Zephaniah, lived in the same area. However, the High Priest chooses Huldah to interpret the Word of God at a point of crisis in Judah's history and proves her role as a woman leader.At once, after the king's entourage arrived at Huldah's house, she began to prophesize:

> *"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Tell the king who sent you to me,' the LORD says: 'I (God) am going to bring calamity on this place and its people, as written in the found book that the king of Judah read. Because they have left me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all your handmade idols, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.' Tell the king*

> *of Judah, who asked you to inquire of the LORD,' This is the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, regarding the words you heard: Because your heart was open to receive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you listened to the negative things spoken against this place and its people, that they become doomed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes (repented) and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. Therefore, I (God) will gather you to your fathers and be buried in peace. You will escape all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.'" (2 Kings 22:15-20, N.I.V.)*

Jewish tradition records show that Huldah was the head of an academy in Jerusalem and the great Reformer. John Calvin (somewhat grudgingly) referred to Huldah and Deborah as examples of why female leaders might, at times, be legitimate. According to John Calvin,

> *Two years ago, John Knox, in an isolated dialogue, asked my opinion respecting the female government. I frankly responded that because it was a deviance from the primitive and established order of nature, it ought to be held as a judgment on man for his dereliction of his rights, just like slavery — that, nevertheless, certain women had sometimes been so exceptional that the singular blessing of God was noticeable in them, and made it manifest that the providence of God had raised them, either because he willed by such examples to condemn the spineless of men, or thus show more distinctly his glory. I here instanced Huldah and Deborah. (Letter to William Cecil, John Calvin, 1559, Translated by David Constable).*

Female leaders with requisite qualifications and passion for God's work will excel in ministry just as the male leaders would do if they are focused.

The New Testament does not refer directly to women as presbyters or bishops, but it shows that women occupied influential leadership positions. There are several exciting descriptions of women as leaders in the New Testament, including several prophets (Elizabeth, Anna, Mary Magdalene, four daughters of Philip), patronesses, and an apostle (Junias).

Mary Magdalene was one of the prominent figures in Jesus' ministry and she was a follower of Jesus, and a supporter of his ministry, as in Luke 8:1-4:

> *After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom. The Twelve disciples were with him and some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene), who was delivered of seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Cuza, who is also the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were assisting in supporting them out of their means. (Luke 8:1-4, NIV).*

As an essential part of the New Testament Passion story, Mary was present at the cross with Jesus when the other disciples have fled (John 19:25). She was among the first to see the empty tomb (Luke 24:10) of Jesus and she was the first to speak about the resurrected Christ (John 20:10/18). More importantly, she was the first to be given the commission to spread the risen Christ's message and the Risen Lord commissioned Mary as an evangelist. Jesus charged her to tell the disciples, "Go instead to tell my brothers, 'I am going back to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' Mary Magdalene first brought the news of Jesus' resurrection to the disciples: "I have seen the Lord!" Moreover, she moved swiftly in obedience to her Master and Lord to deliver the message (John 20:17-18, N.I.V.).

Some non-canonical sources describe Mary as having an even more prominent role in the ministry of Jesus. John's Gospel presents her as a model of discipleship. Similarly, the Gospel of Peter clearly describes Mary as a disciple:

> *"And at dawn upon the Lord's Day, Mary Magdalene, a disciple of the Lord, took her friends with her and came to the grave where the people laid him" (Peter 1:12).*

A disciple literary means a "learner," that is, one who follows another person's teaching. The disciples of Jesus were His followers whom he trained in the Word and Mary Magdalene was always with Jesus, learning from Him. Jesus taught that the proof of true discipleship is continuing and abiding in His Word. So, Jesus said to those Jews who had believed in Him," if you abide in my Word (hold fast to my teaching and live by them), you are indeed my disciples" (John 8:31AMP Bible).

Some Gnostic gospels describe Mary as equal to the Apostles. Long into the Middle Age, Mary Magdalene was revered as "apostolorum apostle," apostle to the apostles. As a disciple and an apostle, Mary Magdalene's position of spiritual authority leads to the assumption that she was a leader among many Christians.

A Historical Overview of Women's Ordination into the Priestly Ministry

During the early centuries of Christianity, Priestly ordination was the process and the ceremony by which one moves to any new ministry in the community. By this definition, the first twelve hundred years of Christianity saw the ordination of women into various ministries in the church, not as leaders. Women performed liturgical roles in episcopal (women bishop), presbytera (women priest), deaconess, and abbess in the early Middle Ages. Nkomo, and Hellicy (2009), note that in early era, Hilda of Whitby (614-680) was an abbess (the female head of a religious community). A radical alteration in the definition of ordination during the 11th and 12th centuries removed women from ordained ministry and tried to eliminate any memory of women's ordination in the past. “The discussion that went with this adjustment has made some meaningful difference in the writing of the time.

Calls for women's Priestly ordination were almost non-existent until the latter half of the twentieth century, when feminism arose. Feminists view society as male domination based on patriarchy and many feminists consider religion a patriarchal institution that shows and perpetuates the inequality between men and women. The three prominent positions towards Scripture and women are the critical feminist, the evangelical feminist, and the evangelical traditionalist. The critical feminist holds the position that the Bible is a traditionalist, and its patriarchal disposition oppresses women. The evangelical feminists believe that the Bible is feminist. According to Groothuis, cited by Nicole (2007), evangelical feminists believe in the “equality of opportunity for women to use their gifts and abilities fully in the church, home, and society, even if that entails sharing authority with or exercising authority; over men”. Its egalitarianism liberates women, and the third position is the evangelical traditionalist position that the Bible is a traditionalist. Its advocacy of loving leadership lets women thrive.

Buttressing the above point, the Baptist emphasis on congregational autonomy places them in an exciting position. Theologically, Priestly ordination is a concern of the local church, and each congregation ordains its leaders only with the blessing of regional and national bodies. In the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the priestly ordination of women became the flashpoint during the conservative/moderate controversy, which brought division in Churches over whether the church should ordain women or not. The common contentions that have opposed the ordination of women have included women must be silent, scripture prohibits women from headship, and women must remain subjected to men. Thus, the SBC runs a closed-door policy to give women more opportunities for service in the church. The North American Baptist Conference (NABC) and her counterpart, the Conservative Baptist Association (CBA), are still on the verge of resolving women's ordination after a series of task force and committee reports. However, the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) originating from the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) keeps an open-door policy for women's ordination and gives ministry opportunities (Adeleke, 2002).

Consequently, women can participate fully in church roles except for priestly functions in the Catholic Church, for God has not called them to the priesthood. The Declaration on Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood (1976) ruled out the ordination of women. According to the Vatican, "Jesus had not named any women disciples, and females do not possess a 'natural resemblance' to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist (in other words, females are not male)." In Catholicism, women have battled to become recognized as clergy and one of the thorny debates in the evangelical circle in contemporary times is the nature and scope of leadership opened to the females in the Church. The myriad of questions include: can a woman preach God's word? Can she serve Lord's Supper, baptize, or lead in worship? Can she conduct marriage and burial ceremonies? Can she serve as bishop, elder, or deacon? Can she put Reverend or Doctor before her name? For these and many others of which, some churches have not reached a middle ground, some evangelicals have come to recognize that God has given his gifts to both men and women in the body of Christ, and the church should encourage them to receive the training they need to prepare for future ministry fully. Grenz and Kiesbo (1995) submit that the debate for ministry headship coalesces around two broad positions; Christians supporting the Council

on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood believe that the Bible restricts the public ministry of women.

In contrast, the group for Biblical equality is convinced that God calls gifted persons into all aspects of public ministry regardless of gender. The centre of the argument is the question of male leadership versus shared leadership. Regrettably, some Christians believe that the Holy Spirit calls only men, not women, into leadership roles and endows them with the required gifts for such a call. Some others, by contrast, believe that the Holy Spirit calls men and women to any responsibility in the church and bestows on them the necessary gifts to fulfil such a role. Heward-Mills (2016) therefore, observes that some oppose the full participation of women in church leadership because God calls men to provide leadership or headship in the church, and women are to help them, particularly in areas of worship and shepherding.

It must be affirmed here that gender is not an issue in God's plan for church leadership and does not condition his gracious calling to it. Gender–inclusion should be the practice in church leadership, as against gender–exclusion where men discriminate against women. Ray Anderson, cited by Franklin (2008), asks, "Can anyone forbid Priestly ordination for those women who give evidence of being called forth and gifted for pastoral ministry in the church?" Similarly, can anyone forbid leadership positions for any woman who shows evidence of being called and gifted for leadership in the church?

The two sides to the debate on women in ministry leadership are complementarians and egalitarians. Both complementarians and egalitarians believe that God created men and women in His image but differ on the concept of authority, yet both claim the Bible as their final authority on matters of faith but have markedly different approaches to biblical hermeneutics and how to apply the various strands of biblical teaching. Thus, some think that a "blended approach" will be possible.

Egalitarian View

As a movement within Christianity, egalitarianism traces its roots to the first wave of Liberal Feminism that surfaced during the 19th century. Luis Dizon, Hansie

Fernandes (2013), and Robert Groves observed that "their impact on mainstream Protestant denominations was not sensed until the mid-twentieth century, with the growth of second-wave Feminism. "Egalitarianism takes a more Constructivist view of gender roles, arguing that the redemptive work of Christ is to eliminate from the Christian Church, the "hierarchical" gender roles formed after the fall. Therefore, Egalitarians' conviction is that when taken as a whole and correctly interpreted, the Bible teaches the sameness of male and female in the world, Church, and home.

Therefore, the egalitarians understand women and men as equally made in God's image. There are no role differences with gender to authority or teaching in the church biblically. Women and men should have the same level of power in ministry; this means that women can serve any role and function in any capacity that men can; therefore, all church ministries are open to women as well as men. In a review of the book, Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry written by Stanley J. Grenz with Denise Muir Kjesbo (Grenz, 1995). Thomas R. Schreiner (1995) asserts the authority of Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah in the Old Testament show clearly "the seeds of an egalitarian strand unparalleled among surrounding nations." These women in a patriarchal culture occupied leadership positions.

Egalitarians seek to replace the hierarchical ordering of males over females, focusing on reciprocal relationships (Grenz, 1995). They argue that God intends men and women to mutually support each other in all dimensions of life, including the church and church ministry. All sides of ministry, to the egalitarian, ought to be opened to women and the woman within the rank of the clergy, like the men, is a potential catalyst for positive change. Thus, they allow for a greater variety of roles to be taken by women, such as being members of the clergy and being more flexible regarding the roles of men and women in family life.

Complementarianism View

Complementarians see God's image as more fully represented in males. Dizon, Fernandes, and Groves (2013) asserts that the complementarians' view holds that men have authority before God in church teaching and power in the church and home governing. It takes a strongly Essentialist's view of gender roles, states that

God set up "hierarchical" gender roles at Creation. This institution disallows female members in the clergy or family structures that do not place the man as the head of the household (Dizon, Fernandes, and Groves, 2013) . There are two different positions; the Two-Point Complementarian and the One-Point Complementarian. The first holds that men and women are equal in value but have different roles in the home and the church, and the other view holds that men and women are equal in value but when it comes to the home, the woman is subject to the man. They believe that God explicitly creates women to complement the men and serve only in supportive roles at home and in the church.

Blended Approach

Blended Approach believes in an "equal power differential in the home and church (i.e., not restricting women in the decision-making process both in the home and, in the offices based solely upon gender), while granting men a certain level of symbolic honour for their firstborn status within the human family (William J. Webb, 2001). Though this approach has created room beyond the traditional patriarchy position of the African Church. Though the Church advocates biblical equality at home and in the church. The symbolic honour advocated by this group is a way of placing the women in a subservient position.

A Historical Overview of Women's Ministry in the Nigerian Baptist Convention

The involvement of women in the Baptist ministry in the Nigerian Baptist Convention started with the coming of the pioneer Baptist missionary, Reverend Thomas Jefferson and his wife, Laurenna, to Badagry, Nigeria, on August 5, 1850. Laurenna Bowen established a Sabbath school at Abeokuta on January 22, 1854, and a Day school on October 1, 1855, starting the era of Western education among the Baptists in Nigeria. The wives of other missionaries who came to Nigeria were also involved in the mission work. Mrs. Harden was a Baptist leader in Lagos who involved in the care of refugees. Also, female missionaries from the United States; Clare Ketin (1916), Ruth Kersey (1920), N. B. Robertson (1929) and Sanders (1931) arrived in Nigeria as missionary nurses. Others are N.C. Young for evangelism, who played a significant role in the WMU work and Ethel Harmon (1938), who was instrumental in the formal organization of the Sunday School Department of the Convention.

Women's activities in the NBC continued with the formation of the Women Missionary Union (WMU) in 1919 as Baptist Women's League, which started as female church societies with centres in Lagos, Ogbomoso, Owo, Abeokuta, Shaki, Ibadan and Sapele. The WMU, under the leadership of N. C. Young started training young women with pastors' wives, established WMU schools for training, enlightened and ministered to them to arise to the needs of new converts and the unreached people. N. C. Young recruited natives as interpreters and field workers who assisted in setting up local groups for the Sunbeam Band, Girls' Auxiliary, Lydia, Women Missionary Societies, and Adult Literacy Education classes.

Iyabode Esther Falade, cited by Adeleke, noted that despite the invaluable contributions of women to the NBC ministry, the majority, if not all women, lacked theological education. The local culture denied them western education, which was responsible for their lack of access to theological education. The closest to theological training women had, was the training provided for pastors' wives which aimed at equipping them with the needed training to assist their husbands in ministry and work effectively with the WMU of the local church. The missionaries never thought of admitting women for theological education until the 1960s when the names of two women, S. A. Babaola and L. C. Ugunkah, appeared in the graduation programme of the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary (NBTS) with a certificate in Religious Education in 1965. Since then, there has been a gradual increase in women enrolling for theological education (Adeleke, 2002).

In the 1980s, the Nigerian Baptists joined in the debate on women's ordination since other Christian bodies were engrossed in discussing women in ministry. After due consideration of the arguments for and against women's ordination, the Ministerial Board in 1993 recommended that the Convention should go ahead to ordain women. The resolution to ordain women by the NBC is against the SBC's position on the ordination of women pastors. The NBC, by the decision, exercised her autonomy as a distinct Baptist body, her right to read and interpret the Scriptures, casting aside every cultural and patriarchal prejudice against the ordination of female pastors (Adeleke).

The first qualifications for the ordination of female pastors are theological training, engagement by a church as a pastor or education or music minister, and recommendation by their church (Adeleke). In 1999, the Board included those working in theological institutions, denominational offices, and missionaries to the list of female pastors to be ordained, provided their local churches recommended them. Two female pastors Bosun Adegboyega and Olusola Ayo-Obiremi, who had their theological training at NBTS, Ogbomoso, were recommended by their local churches from Lagos Baptist Conference and were ordained with their husbands in 1997. The Convention had since continued to ordain women into the full gospel ministry.

Some of the ordained female pastors are engaged in church pastorate, theological institutions, Convention offices, and missionaries. Among the ordained ministers are Directors in the Convention offices, President of one of our theological institutions, Rector of the College of Theology, lecturers in theological institutions, and full-time pastors of local churches.

The Argument

Various arguments exist in different Church traditions on women's involvement in priesthood. Worthy to note, some churches ordain women into priesthood to serve at all church leadership levels while some other Churches ordain women for priesthood but deny them leadership roles. Simultaneously, some others do not allow female ordination but only serve as lay leaders, teachers, and other women's coordinators. The Southern Baptist Convention in the United States, the umbrella body of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in 1998 and 2000, adopted the Family Amendment to the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message calling wives to "submit graciously to the servant leadership of their husbands" and declaring, among other things, that "the office of the pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture." (Adeleke, 2002).

The argument on whether it is "biblical" for women to serve in church leadership even within denominations that have officially settled the question about women's Priestly ordination remains a puzzle. However, Barbara Brown Zikmund et al. (1998) note that ordained female ministers' serve as pastors and clergy leaders in Protestant denominations and Pentecostal settings who believe in the leading of

the Spirit to call anyone, male or female, to leadership in the Church. They believe in gender equality in God's original plan. While some mainline denominations have embraced gender equality in function with headship in the church, some evangelical churches have not. The rare evangelical church has a woman in its pulpit on Sunday morning, a lead pastor, a female chairperson, or the chief elder of its council. Though the Nigeria Baptist Convention (NBC) ordains and allows female pastors to serve in a church leadership capability when called, there are still some restrictions on how the female pastors carry out the ministerial work. Female Baptist pastors' calls to her Church leadership position may be by circumstantial or default because the preference for a call by most local Baptist congregations is male pastors. Also, it takes female pastors a longer time to receive a call to shepherd a church than male pastors (Okunlola, 2014).

Additionally, Hamman, cited by Durham (1991), asserts that religious and secular scholars from various disciplines, including economics, political science, psychology, theology, and sociology, have recognized bias from the hermeneutic, patriarchy, and power relations against women in ministry that keep them from acceptance in the church. In addition to the theological challenges, female leaders face common cultural stereotypes, and church subculture, affecting ministerial effectiveness. In the same vein, Nkomo and Ngambi (2009), in reconceptualizing Africans' Study in Leadership and Management, note that African women leaders and managers face significant gender-related interpersonal and structural organizational barriers to their advancement. However, culture significantly influences gender stereotyping, socialization, family and work relationships, and women's status in different countries. Hence, in some societies, men traditionally occupy positions of power and influence, while women have historically held lower-status positions.

The pastoral ministry, is a male-dominated profession, female pastors experience discrimination from men and sometimes women who, out of jealousy, may want to hinder the opportunities for other women to grow in ministry. Thus, Newkirk and Cooper, cited by Burnett (2017), note that insecurity, role perceptions, and personality flaws also contribute to the stigma women pastors experience in ministry. The implication of the above submission is that there is an accord between gender roles and leadership roles. Ritter and Yoder, cited by Danberry

(2021) in cognitive role theory, are of the view that "men will be more likely than women to emerge as leaders when expectations for the leadership roles are incongruent with gender stereotypes." Thus, few female pastors are in leadership positions, especially in the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

Conclusion

Conclusively, that there is no justifiable biblical and theological rationale to sustain the argument that women should not occupy leading Priestly roles in the church. In women's role as leading Priest, the Nigerian Baptist Convention has made a milestone compared to other older denominations. The denomination has recognized the validity of women's call to institutional ministry, offers theological education and ordination to ministry roles. Some other Mission founded denominations still struggle with the biblical authenticity of women's leadership.

However, the reality in the Convention is that woman in leading pastoral ministry is still taken clearly with some reservations. Presently, women's ministry remains under the oversight of male pastors, except in specialized areas of Music and education. Women rarely become substantive and senior pastors regardless of their training, ministry experience and even biological age.

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