WESTERN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

WOMEN'S ORDINATION IN THE REFORMED CHURCH OF EAST AFRICA

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OF

REFORMED CHURCH OF EAST AFRICA

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DEDICATION

To my dear Lord Jesus who the Blessings flow, I dedicate My Thesis. To

Dear wife Catherine Mabonga and my sons Davis Jimmy and Brian who encouraged me greatly on the phone while being here at the USA. To dear mother Esther Nafula for nurturing my early childhood. You taught me the fear of the lord. To Kaaboi RCEA parish especially Mzee Stephen Borno your encouragement and support enabled my coming for studies.
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ABSTRACT

The ordination ministry has been viewed as central in the body of Christ, in my context. The Gospel will be ineffective among my people without the office of ordination. Women have played major roles in many areas inside and outside the church. They are the majority and therefore I have suggested that they should be ordained.

Mission work was done consecutively by two missionary enterprises in Kenya and led to the establishment of Reformed Church of East Africa (RCEA). We are thankful for the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa (DRC) for their role in the phase of church planting and with their spontaneous congregational outreach towards the local people especially in the Rift Valley of Kenya and those of Western Province. Their relentless efforts in evangelization produced fruits that we stand on as a church. In my thesis, I have indicated how the Reformed Church of East Africa began, and how the early missionaries viewed women in ordained ministry. I have also reported the testimonies of three RCEA women who view ordination of women to be as important as ordination of men. The Kiplombe 2002 conference is where women gave tremendous testimonies in regard to equality and ordination of women in the church ministry. My thesis is also centered on a biblical ecclesiological basis for women's leadership with the biblical analysis of women's testimonies in my context. I have emphasized women's firm conviction about the appropriateness of their ordination, and how the ministry of ordination will benefit the entire church in many aspects.

The RCEA has many cultural and social settings, thus I have observed the two major tribes within the church (Luhya and Kalenjin) and how the cultural and social settings of these two tribes have been a hindrance in the ordination of women. And finally, my experience as a church minister for the last 12 years in the Reformed Church of East Africa, has been truly helpful in
writing my thesis, I have written my true reflection of how women should be given a chance in
the ministry of ordination in the RCEA. I have also given my own proposal of a way forward for
the RCEA in regard to women’s ordination. The proposal points, if taken positively, will create a
new face for the church setting. Women will be viewed positively, will participate in the pulpit
program, and will be ordained without patriarchal domination.

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WOMEN'S ORDINATION IN THE REFORMED CHURCH OF EAST AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Reformed Church of East Africa dates back to the 1960s. The Church came to East Africa when the first Afrikaner settlers came into Kenya and started their congregation in the Rift Valley Province of Kenya and parts of Western Province in the early years of the 1960s. The RCEA's original name was "Dutch Reformed Church." Initially, the church was predominately for the white people. The type of worship reflected their home country of the Netherlands and Afrikaner from South Africa. In 1963 the church changed its name from "Dutch Reformed," to "Reformed Church of East Africa."

The RCEA has its roots in the Netherlands Reformed Church. The church practiced patriarchal leadership and, in that respect, women were left out of any church leadership. In the RCEA constitution, it is stated that only men can be ordained in pastoral ministry. The government of the church consists of the synod, presbytery, parish and local church councils. The officers of the church include the moderator of the church, who is also the chairman of the synod, the deputy moderator, the general secretary and his deputy, the honorary treasurer, the secretary to the pastors and five elders who serve on the executive board of the church. No women are present on the entire executive board.

The RCEA is predominantly in the Rift Valley and Western Provinces of Kenya. However, for the last ten years the church has been rapidly spreading to other parts of the country. The church has been trying to mend her name in relation to racial segregation in Kenya and in South Africa. In the past wounds have occurred because of separation and
mistreatment by church leadership. We are happy that the face of the church has changed
tremendously in that respect. I am also grateful for the spirit of our denomination in
striving for unity among Christians, regardless of tribe or race. However, the issue of
women's ordination is still a concern, which needs be addressed in a more deep sense.
CHAPTER ONE

TESTIMONIES OF WOMEN
OF THE REFORMED CHURCH OF EAST AFRICA

For the last twelve years I have heard from women about how the church patriarchal structures have isolated them from ministerial positions in the Reformed Church of East Africa. Women have felt isolated and marginalized; yet their desire and commitment to serve the church of Christ can be noticed in Sunday service attendance where hundreds of women turn up for worship. I witness that the majority of women speak their claim silently. They have been sidelined in local, parish, presbytery, and synodical level church committees. Women are asking whether they truly belong in the body of Christ. When they read the Scripture they see a different picture of Christ.

The Christ in the Scripture was close to everyone; he was a person of compassion, love and care. He ate, talked and sat with men and women alike. He listened to Mary and taught her, he touched and healed a woman thought to be an outcast due to her twelve years of bleeding. Women followed Jesus throughout his ministry.

This is the Christ the Church has failed to recognize in regard to women’s church leadership and ordination. In serving as a pastor, I see women in large attendance in cell group meetings and women in visitation of the sick in their homes and hospitals. At one time while serving in the ten local congregations in the North Rift, Kenya, all I could see during our cell groups prayer gathering were women. During my pastoral visitation on my bike, I witnessed that women are close to the families. I see hearts of caring. These women reconcile families. They love to endure in hardships. And even when things are tough, they don’t miss church prayer gathering. As I gather around them, I hear them ask
questions about God’s plan for women in Church leadership. They are left with many questions in regard to how the church selects those who go for theological training in preparation for the church ministry. Men enjoy all the privileges of theological training, serving on the church committees, planning, organizing and decision-making. In contrast, women are left to acquiesce and support all the decisions made and endorsed by the patriarchal teams.

THE TESTIMONY OF EDITH CHEMORION

Edith Chemorion has been a member of the Reformed Church for over 20 years. As a child, she loved Jesus and the acts of redemption. She believed in the Bible and what God has done through Christ’s death and resurrection for the forgiveness of humankind. In her early life, she knew that the love of God had no boundaries, though the culture she was raised up in gave closer attention to boys than girls. She had good parents who encouraged her education in high school and college, where she trained as a teacher. She taught in the late years of the 1980s but felt called to serve the church in areas of education and be trained for ordained ministry so as to serve the church in a broader context.

Edith is married to Chemorion and blessed with three children. She remembers when she mentioned the training to her husband. Her husband was excited that she could train and serve the church. But the only concern was whether or not a woman could be recognized in the ordained ministry in the Reformed Church of East Africa.

The church did allow her to go for training and said that after her training she could come back and serve the church. So she went for her theological studies at St
Paul’s United Theological College and received a Bachelor in Divinity in 2002. She has been active in church work ever since, but has not been recognized for ordination because of the church tradition that does not allow women to be ordained. Edith Chemorion says she generally does not see anything that should hinder women from taking an active role in the ministry of the Word and sacrament. She does not see any theological reason for women not to welcome new converts into faith community, baptize, officiate weddings, officiate funeral ceremonies and preach the word. Edith feels frustrated about being excluded from church ordination just because of her gender. She claims to have all the training that qualifies her for ordination in the Church, but for her it has not happened. She sees the church structure, tradition and cultural settings within as oppressive and segregative and in need of change. In her view, Genesis 1:27 speaks of man and woman as created in the image of God. He created him male and female.

In an interview with Edith she insisted that there is no justification for discriminating against women and seeing them as unworthy in God’s service to his people. She narrates how Jesus viewed women in the New Testament. She says Jesus’ ministry transcended all cultures, traditions, and customs. In her view, Jesus uses all people, so long as they are available to be used by him. I was so impressed with the examples she gave of women who served the body of Christ. Priscilla, Phoebe, Mary and many others followed Jesus and learned from him as he preached and evangelized, Women, she notices, were used in the Old Testament just as in the New Testament. Edith feels discouraged because of the patriarchal domination that has oppressed the talents of women. She does not see the old church traditional practices, inherited from the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa over half a century ago, to be meaningful to the present
time. She longs for a day when the patriarchal system will recognize women and adopt a well-balanced approach in regard to women’s ordination.

Women have not been allowed to use their talents in church leadership. Edith is frustrated when she is invited to preach in our sister churches including the Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist. She is recognized and accorded all the privileges accorded to ordained male ministers. She is given the pulpit to preach, lead worship and the like. But back at her home church such things can never happen. There she is never given an audience. And in this regard, she feels belittled, marginalized and ostracized by the church structures because of her gender. She poses a question, “Who is Christ in the Reformed Church of East Africa and who is He in other churches?”

She remembers when she was young in the Sunday school. Boys were treated differently than girls. Boys were said to be superior to girls, while girls were said to be slow and shy. She recalls those memories. And being trained in theology, she now experiences the patriarchal structure that will not recognize her education. She understands God to be perfect. He never makes mistakes. He created male and female perfectly. And yet men have confused and misunderstood the ideal part of “created in the image of God, both male and female.”

Edith has been given the responsibility of coordinating women’s programs including educating women on stewardship in the church and homes. That has brought a bit of relief on her part. However, the RCEA patriarchal leadership still does not seem to believe a woman can deliver any good. At times she feels frustrated and embarrassed.

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1 Paraphrased from the Gen 1:26.
when her male counter parts view her as though she is inadequate. What goes on in patriarchal thinking is, “woman cannot do good alone”.\(^2\)

**THE TESTIMONY OF MARGARET KIMOSOP**

Margaret was born in a Christian family. Her father is a Reformed Church pastor who has served the church for over thirty years. Margaret’s early life was nurtured in a Christian atmosphere. Margaret had three brothers and one sister. They all accompanied their parents to worship every Sunday. She loved Sunday school and when she was in high school, she was assigned to teach Sunday school. She managed to go to the University in Kenya where she trained as a teacher, graduated, and taught in high school. Later the church recommended her for religious studies at Calvin Theological Seminary. Margaret graduated from Calvin Theological Seminary in \(2001\). She hoped that the church would recognize women’s ordination, but somehow the RCEA has been opposed to women’s ordination.

Margaret Kimosop’s testimony touches African women in general and their contribution to church expansion specifically. In this I witness the current wind of change in African mainline churches. There has been flexibility for women as far as diaconal and ministerial ministry is concerned. Women are being accommodated as ordained ministers in many denominations such as the Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches.

In Margaret view, women are the pillars of missions in Africa. Margaret points out the central role women played in the missionary movement on the continent of Africa and in the evangelization and growth of the early church. They gathered around the

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\(^2\) Edith Chemorion’s Testimony, 2004.
missionaries, together with their families, to listen to the preaching and teaching. Margaret claims that 75% of church membership in Africa is women. She sees the role women have in Africa as God’s gift. Many women in Kenya are actively involved as teachers, lay leaders and missionaries. Women, of course, continue in their noble task of nurturing and raising up strong families and communities.

Margaret says the Reformed Church of East Africa should not be exceptional in not adopting women into the core of church growth and development, especially at the local church level. Unfortunately, many women have not been recognized in the important roles they play in the life of the church. As more women gain education, they desire to play an even greater role in the further development of the church.

I asked Margaret what she thinks about women being given the responsibility of being a pastor in the midst of a male dominated system. In response she says many women in the Reformed Church desire to be accepted and given access to positions of greater responsibility, including being ordained as ministers of the Word. She emphasizes that there are a growing number of educated and theologically trained women in the Reformed Church whose gifts, if they can be utilized for the benefit of the church as a whole, will allow us to experience good changes. However, the policies and the church constitution bar them from assuming the ministerial office.

I had asked Margaret what she thinks about the church constitution and the policies in the church. She stated “more than ever the RCEA must carefully and diligently examine its stand on this crucial matter with the ultimate goal of enrolling women into the leadership structure of the church. RCEA women have wonderful gifts to offer including sensibility, patience and strong relational skills that are desperately needed by
the church today. They are keenly aware of the need to seek collaboration and consensus in decision-making. These skills, gifts, and leadership styles are acutely needed as the church seeks to redefine its essence, its nature, and its mission in today’s changing society.”

Margaret concludes her observation by referring to women of faith in the Bible, including Hannah, Mary, Ruth, Esther, Miriam, Deborah, and many others who provided a model of inspirational leadership and faith. RCEA women are asking for fair recognition. They are asking for their share of opportunity to play deeper roles in the extension of God’s kingdom in his world today.

There are reasons to believe that women’s ordination is required in order to enhance a better-balanced position in the church. Margaret lists only a few reasons, among many, for why women should be ordained into the ministry. Ordination of women in the church will set a better precedence within the church and stand as a good example to other sister churches, Margaret concludes.

THE TESTIMONY OF BEATRICE SIRARI

Last year, prior to my coming for studies here at the U. S. A., I talked to Beatrice Sirari who is a 2002 graduate of Reformed Institute of Theological Studies (RITT). She strongly feels the church has not been fair in dealing with the issue of women’s ordination. After her graduation from RITT she hopes that the church would recognize her by ordaining her in the ministry. Beatrice is married and has two children. She rejoices to have a family and she desires to serve God in the ordained ministry. She is convinced that is her calling. Beatrice says she has been in the Reformed Church all her
life. She was raised up in the Reformed Church of East Africa. The church customs and traditions she experienced as a child didn’t become meaningful to her until she grew up to realize how women were being marginalized in the RCEA.

In Beatrice’s early years, women were not allowed to stand before male elders, even in giving announcements. Women were treated like children. Unfortunately, women were treated as if they are brainless. Beatrice joined the college after consultation with her pastor and elders, who supported her move in theological education. After her completion, she was placed on internship with other male candidates for ordination. She did exceptionally well. She passed all the requirements. However, it has been two years since she graduated, and the RCEA has not recognized her in any way, despite the completion of her studies and her desire to serve God in ordained ministry. She sometimes becomes frustrated and disappointed because she feels male domination has no place in clear biblical interpretation. Beatrice says traditions and customs change with time. She feels it is time for the church to re-examine her stand on the issue of women’s ordination. She claims if there is any affirmation women in the RCEA can be given, it is ordaining them in the ministry.

TESTIMONIES FROM THE 2002 KIPLOMBE CONFERENCE

Every year the RCEA holds women’s conferences for the RCEA women in Kenya. In August 2002, the Eastern Presbytery extended the invitation to other presbyteries. Women’s coordinator Susan Kangogo and her assistants from eleven parishes organized the women’s conference. The conference was called for the following reasons:
1. To stir up women's talents
2. To revitalize women's gifts in the body of Christ.
3. To familiarize women with ministry in the church.
4. To allow women to share their burdens and look for a better way forward.
5. To educate women about their rights in church leadership since we're all equal, male and female, before God (Gal 3:28).
6. To bring new understanding and awareness between men and women as equal partners in the body of Christ.
7. To pray for the church policies and synod body for the recognition of women's ordination.

Seven hundred women attended the conference. I was invited to one of the speakers. The theme of the conference was, "Christ has broken the barrier. Rise women!" We also had other speakers who came from different denominations. The message of justice for women and recognition for leadership dominated the conference. All types of women, from teachers and theologians to the semi illiterate, attended the conference.

Susan Kangogo, in her opening massage, told women to rise up against the barriers erected by the patriarchal traditions that had hindered women from proclamation of the Gospel and leadership positions. She reflected on the course of justice for women in the church. She moved the conference when she reflected on the pain and intimidation women have gone through in homes and churches for so many years. She reminded the conference that women were the first people to witness Jesus resurrection and therefore they were the first evangelists.
All the speakers within the Kiplombe conference spoke against intimidation and marginalization of women in church leadership and in favor of ordination of women in the ministry. Many women who attended the conference gave touching and painful testimonies. I may not remember all the testimonies and even if I could, it would be unwise to mention their names in my thesis for fear of victimization from their spouses because of the patriarchal setting.

One particularly touching testimony was that of Mama Rose Koskei, who is semi illiterate. She broke down in tears in the conference as she narrated how her husband denied her permission to go to church for so many years. She loved God and she wished to attend women’s meetings and give tithe and offerings but her husband would not allow her to go to church. One morning, while listening to the radio, she heard the preacher talk about Acts 2:17-18. “In the last days God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days, and they will prophesy”(NIV). The passage was her break-through after many years of intimidation. She confronted her husband with the passage, seeking her freedom. Her husband was very surprised that his wife knew the truth in regard to the Scriptures. After that her husband did allow her to attend church every Sunday and women’s cell group meetings, but she still longs to see women pastors and evangelists within the body of Christ. Somehow her husband may have read the Scripture but could not understand it. Or perhaps he just never told his wife what was truly in the Scripture.

Another woman, Caro Cherono, testified about how her husband denied her permission to read the Bible. Her husband felt the Bible would incite his wife against the
cultural and traditional practices of circumcision. Caro testified that she desired to read the Bible at home with the children and pray as a family but her husband believed a woman could not pray or read a Bible before man. Caro believed that God meant women to be submissive to men whether in wrong or good. Caro Cherono lived with bitterness in church, seeing men as oppressive and unloving. She wondered why women were created to be “subordinate” to men. She had been taught by the culture, as she grew up, that women are meant to be silent when men are present, be it in the church or at home. But now that she can understand the Bible, she is set free. She can read and understand. She told the conference, “It is time to rise against falsehood and wrong interpretation in the Bible against women.”

**RESOLUTIONS OF THE 2002 KIPLOMBE CONFERENCE**

1. God desires that male and female will work together as co-partners, not as superiors and subordinates in the church.

2. In order for the RCEA to grow spiritually and numerically, women need to be accommodated and recognized by church ordination.

3. Christ gives us inspiration to be bold and firm, for through him women have been liberated from rigid church customs and traditions.

4. We must embark upon a new understanding of the Scripture and we must recognize the love of Christ, who loves women in their struggle for justice at home and in church leadership.

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THE TESTIMONY OF ANDREW WAFULA

The Reformed Church of East Africa, for the last ten years, has brought me to many encounters, especially in relation to women's diaconal ministries and women's ordination. I have witnessed many women in active roles in church growth. Women are the pillars of the RCEA in evangelism, prayer meetings, home cell prayer groups, and reconciliation among families. Women lead in tithes and offerings in my congregations. Similarly, Rev David Kiprono of Ainabkoi Parish (RCEA) told me early last year, 2003, which women seem to be doing very well in many aspects of his parish including tithing, even though their earnings are very minimal.

I remember when Kenya experienced tribal wars. Women became the victims of many atrocities and men ran away. During the tribal clashes, I witnessed hundreds of men running and leaving their families, in fear of being killed. But the women would never leave their children or other family members. I sensed a spirit of courage, strength and determination in these women. This same spirit, which I witnessed among women in my home county during times of war, is the spirit I sense in the women of the Reformed Church of East Africa.

I hear women asking for building the body of Christ without patriarchal oppression. They are asking not to be under-utilized. In my years of pastoral work, I have mainly seen women serving food while all the committees are congested with males. Now I hear the cries of women growing louder and are clamoring for attention. They want to share the pulpit with men because it is biblical; because we are all God’s children.

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4 Andrew Wafula. The information written was compiled during the 2002 women’s conference.
THE TESTIMONY OF HISTORY

The concerns of all these women are rooted in the church tradition we inherited from the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa. In worship, women were not given an opportunity to preach or lead. When the church was officially handed over to African people, nothing changed. The liturgy, the church constitution and the common practice were all adopted by the African synod. In other words, we inherited the South African customs and traditions, as far as worship is concerned. The church constitution we inherited favors the oppressive patriarchal system and marginalizes women. RCEA women are saying the customs and traditions have brought nothing but segregation and discriminations.

Women are not the only ones who originally experienced discrimination. According to RCEA history, the church at one time belonged to one race, the white settlers. The church had no inclusive settings. Most of the writings and history were done in Dutch Afrikaner languages, isolating the local people in all aspects. “Quite often the personal gain and benefit were the motivation behind the settlement of expatriates who also came with their church, DRC, Dutch Reformed Church. The relationship between the farmers and their employees, the status of an African in the eyes of a white man in those days, and the role played by the concept of racial segregation influenced the early history of the Reformed Church of East Africa. Even up to almost a century after South Africans came to Kenya some of the pastors still recall how they and their families were not allowed to sit on the chairs in the house of the South African missionaries. They had
to sit on the floor."  

"We are told the stories of horror meted out to farm workers by their employers. At one time my grandfather was severely flogged by the Afrikaner settler just because he trespassed over his land while running to go to church. He recalls that incident with sadness.  

All this is part of the inheritance handed over to us from the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa, including the barring of women from leadership.

OTHER THEOLOGIANS AND OTHER AFRICAN TRADITIONS

The African and Mexican theologians see women to be important assets to the present and future developments of the Church. Elsa Tamez states. "It is regrettable that owing to the marginal position of women, the Church, the theology and seminars are loosing the valuable contributions of this sector of humanity. As a general rule, one overlooks the fact that women not only have required training but also new Cosmo-vision and creativity with regard to many subjects concerning the theological, biblical, liturgical and pedagogical recreation."  

The testimonies of the three women, Edith, Margaret and Beatrice, are supported by the African theologian. The Theologians would like to see women involved in different fields in the church including "full participation in theology, biblical hermeneutics, Church liturgy, theological education and other related fields. Women should be promoted in leadership and be equipped in full partnership in the life and mission of the family, Church and society. And also to involve women in theological

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6 Ibid.
7 Elsa Tamez. The Ordination of Women Reformed Perspective. Studies From The World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 52.
studies for deeper contextual understanding of the biblical message and its implications for growth of the Church.”

The claims of the three women in the RCEA are also supported by other African traditions. In Malawi, for example, we hear stories that explain people’s beliefs about the origin of life and the place of men and women in religion and society. “The Kaphirintiwa myth of Chewa of Malawi, among other themes, expresses that man and woman came down to earth together with God and animals as a result of heavy rain. They landed on Kaphirintiwa, a flat-topped hill in the mountains of Dzalayama, where one can still see, to this day, the footprints and traces of a man and a woman and animals. Thus from creation, there was equality between man and woman and harmony with animals and nature – a theological theme in African Theology.”

Oduyoye’s most recent book, (The Daughters of Anowa), claims that although traditional religions and cultures made more space for women’s contributions than the patriarchally driven patterns of Islam and Christianity, “by the time a woman has spent her energies struggling to be heard, she has barely the energy to say what she wanted to say. Oduyoye launches into an extensive perambulation around the myth and folk–tales of powerful women leaders within Asante and Yoruba culture. Political women leaders such as the queen mothers of Asante, the Ohemaa (Queen Mother), who instruct political protocol was senior to the Oheme (king). The Yoruba Iyalode (variously translated as mother of the town, mother of all women), whose business is women’s affairs, Mama Urhobo Iyaloja of Dugbe market, who controlled the Olulu Masquerade and the syndicate of Ibadan’s thieves, and the Aba women of eastern Nigeria who resisted the British

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8 Musimbi Kanyoro, *In Search of a Round Table: Gender, Theology and Church leadership* (Geneva,
government in 1929 are evoked to assert African women’s secular and cultic leadership before the advent of Christianity and colonialization. Many freeborn women had freedom of movement, a measure of economic independence and avenues of representation within the domestic and public spheres long before European intrusion. “10

“Women’s power, a power able to transform nothing less than a continent, is Oduyoye’s religious quest. Re-appropriation of mothers stories and histories is one method of strengthening women’s loosened wrists, in the face of multiple challenges of violence, corruption, poverty and indebtedness and increasing patriarchalisation of marital and ecclesial practice across Africa.”11

Speaking to Pan African women in her Assembly in Nairobi, Judy Mbugua, the chairperson, in her opening speech said, “the time has come for Christians to lessen chains that have bound women in the area of ministry and simply recognize their potential. Working together in harmony will bring glory to God. But it is also time for men to realize that we are God’s latest models of creation—the model with least problems. So we are asking men to give us a chance, an opportunity to use our God given abilities.”12

SUMMARY

9 Ibid Isabel Apawo Phiri 29
11 Ibid, 77.
12 Judy Mbugua. Our Time Has Come: African Christian Women Address (Grand Rapids, Michigan: The
I have shared the RCEA women’s testimonies and their request for ordination in the church. From women’s testimonies, we learn the feelings of women and the experiences they have gone through for so many years in the RCEA. We have also seen that the church frustrates the efforts of women who want to be ordained into church leadership despite their theological training and their recommendations. The women have cited many Scriptures in their testimonies. I will expand upon these texts and others in chapter two. The denial of women’s ordination tends to be approached in a cultural and social manner. I will address the issues of cultural and social hindrances towards women’s ordination in chapter three.
CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND ECCLESIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN’S ROLES

The testimonies given by the women in chapter one include many biblical facts that support their view. The most compelling of these, Acts 2:17-18, was brought forward by Rose Koskei. “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams; yea and on my menservants and my maidservants in those days I will pour out my spirit; and they shall prophesy.”

What we learn from the testimonies of the women is that they are open to the reality of this Scripture and want the Church to practice what is in the Scripture and be fair to women in relation to ordination. The Holy Spirit is the guiding person. The Holy Spirit has no partiality in the distribution of the gifts. As a Church, we are called upon to witness the power of the Holy Spirit who uses both men and women in the ministry. The message “your sons and daughters” is clear manifestation that ordination for women is part of building the body of Christ regardless of whether male or female. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation.

What RCEA women are asking is for the church to have genuineness and fairness in regard to the interpretation of the Scripture in regard women in the ministry of the
church. When approaching the Bible with new openness, women and men alike find significant biblical support for women in the ordained ministry of the church. In this chapter I will connect women's clamor for ordination to Biblical support for the engagement of women in ministry. I will review important texts from both the Old and New Testaments. In the process I will be comparing two views. One view is given by Grenz, and is labeled "egalitarian" (those who support women's ordination). The other view is termed "complementarian" (those who oppose the ordination of women).

THE COMPLEMENTARIAN VIEW

Complementarians argue that, "the principle of male headship and female submission is rooted in creation, and was not abolished in redemption and is never indicated in the Bible."\(^{14}\) "The early fathers were asked, what is woman? They answered that she is the devil's gateway."\(^{15}\) In other words, complementarians would describe a woman as weak. Rev Herbert Carson, an English Baptist minister, deplores a false delicacy in discussing the matter of women ministering to men; a delicacy, which he feels, is contrary to biblical realism. "If a man stands in the a pulpit, the average woman is not unduly affected by appearance: but if a woman stands there, men, being men, will often find that their thoughts are less on the word spoken than on the speaker. Someone will reply indignantly that "to the pure all things are pure, and in fact, for the gateway."\(^{16}\)

The complementarians argue that only men may lead. "They argue that God intends women always to serve as subordinates to men. For their position these scholars appeal to

\(^{13}\) Acts 2:17-18 RSV.
the subordinate relationship for the "intimacy of patriarchy in the domains of both created and uncreated being."\textsuperscript{17} Complementarians also base their opposition of women's ordination upon the fact that man was created first and woman came second.

Some complementarians also believe that the "fall" in Eden resulted in women's Subordination and submission to men. They base their argument on Gen. 3:16, concluding that male domination has been a result of the fall. Paul Jewett claims, "the church is the bearer of revelation and, according to this revelation, sex is intended to illumine the hidden things of God. What the husband is to the wife, Christ is to the church. Hence the one who is invested with the ministerial office, which gives authority to minister in Christ's name, must be the one whom God has appointed to function at the natural level as husband and "head" of the family. Male and female, are the live and awful shadows of realities utterly beyond our control and largely beyond our direct knowledge. Hence when we tamper with the basic functions God has assigned to each, we do so at our peril."\textsuperscript{18} "It was unthinkable that a female should be a minister in the church, in as much as Christians are spiritual Levites and the church, the New Israel of God because God created man and woman to have different functions and the function of the male, which includes protection and guardianship of the family and home, is symbolized in the office of the priest who guards the temple and offers sacrifice."\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16} Paul Jewett, 15.
\textsuperscript{17} Grenz and Kjesbo, 151.
\textsuperscript{18} Paul Jewett, 15.
THE EGALITARIAN VIEW

The Egalitarians also base their argument in the Scripture since Scripture is the Word of God. Grenz Stanley has given very attractive and tremendous insights on this subject. I will use most of his points in support of women’s ordination.

The Patriarchal system seems to ground the opposition to women’s ordination. Somehow the message of subordination sounds real and true to many. Women are left to lean on male direction and leadership in the congregation and in church committees. The phrase “new creation” refers to the goal of God’s action in the world as described in the Bible. Although inaugurated in a final sense in the ministry of Christ, God’s purpose for creation reaches its culmination only at our Lord’s return. Because God’s telos determines the mandate we are called to fulfill, this vision forms the ultimate foundation for an ecclesiological explanation. We reach to one another as one community as it is reflected in Genesis 2:18 “It not good for man to be alone.” Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is new creation the old has passed away behold the new has come” (11Cor 5:17).\textsuperscript{20} Redeemed people are different when viewing the issue of women in the ministry. “Biblical feminists often equate subordination with inferiority. They claim that subordination of women implies that women are inferior to men, which contradicts clear biblical evidence to the equality of all persons.”\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{19} Grenz and Kjesbo, 178.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 174.
\textsuperscript{21} Grenz, 151.
“According to egalitarians, the complementarian argument takes too narrow a view of the scriptural teaching on gender. Gender-based discrimination runs counter to the entire thrust of the biblical vision of God’s intention for creation. In the old order, people readily discriminate on the basis of sex. Christ’s redemptive work, however, frees us from the role of hierarchy as the fundamental principle for male–female relationships....The radically egalitarian situation of the new era can clearly be seen in Peter’s declaration that women and men are coheirs of the gracious gift of salvation (1Peter 3:7).” 22 The egalitarians argue that “There is not longer Jew or Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Relationship, therefore, should not be based on gender, race, tribe and nationality. God enters in this new relationship and radicalizes our inner being; such that our beliefs, customs, traditions, and our cultural setting are then viewed in relation to the new redemption order. “God intends to bring glory to himself by establishing a reconciled people who reflect to all creation the character of their creator and redeemer.”23

**WOMEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

There are those who have based their arguments against women’s ordination on Old Testament Scriptures and those who have spoken for it. In addition to the Genesis story, I want to show how women were viewed in the Old Testament time, and how women’s leadership is evident through prominent women.

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22 Grenz and Kjesbo, 177.
THE GENESIS STORY

Genesis 1:26,27 has been greatly debated in regard to the relationships of men and women. The debate centers on who should have authority over whom. The Jewish Patriarchal society believed that men have authority over women in line with what we read in Genesis one. In the Jewish view little is built on Genesis 2 and 3.

“Genesis 1:26,27 tells us that we (male and female) are: (1) Created to have dominion over the earth; (2) made to live in the relation of man and woman; (3) images and likeness of the divine being.”24 In Genesis 1, we have a picture of man and woman created for cooperative work in loving response to the will of the Creator, in whose image they were made. “There is no implication of the inferiority of woman either ontologically (i.e., in her nature or being), or functionally. A study of the word “man” is used in the generic sense. That is “man” means mankind or humanity in general.”25

There has been misunderstanding over the word ‘helper.’ It is pointed out that the word helper in Hebrew is used in the Old Testament in speaking of God as humanity’s helper. Moses used this same word in reference to God as he gave the reason for naming one of his sons Eliezer. “Strong’s exhaustively Concordance of the Bible indicates that the word translated as “help” or “helper” in these passages comes from the same Hebrew word meaning, “to surround, i.e. to protect or aid. It describes a relationship of mutual interdependence, rather than the woman existing for the male’s convenience, or

23 Ibid., 175.
25 Ibid., 17.
as his underling." This misunderstanding has created confusion and prejudice towards women. Patriarchal status has so dominated the minds of most men in the church that issues of women leadership are never given any attention.

“In Genesis 1:26-28, when God said “let us make man in our image, after our likeness,” there followed an assignment of dominion to them. Then comes the declaration that male and female created he them” (KJV) with a repetition of the assignment of dominion to them. In the order established at creation, the equality of male and female is quite clear.”

We read in Genesis, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Gen 2:18). The grand fulfillment of God’s program, however, does not lie in the past, but in the future “The Bible climaxes with the marvelous hope of the new creation, the vision of white robed multitudes inhabiting the new earth; encompassing this biblical vision of the community is God’s desire to dwell among redeemed people. This was Yahweh’s intention when he entered into covenant with Israel.” God’s desire is to bring people to reconciliation, understanding, and a community that awaits eschatological fellowship.

GENERAL VIEW OF WOMEN IN OLD TESTAMENT TIMES

Women were subject to child-like existence in ancient Israel. “An adult women was a minor in the eyes of the law and lived under the authority of her nearest male relative. Even her vows to God could be canceled by her father or husband (Num. 30:3-16). Her husband could divorce her (Deut. 24:1-4) or take another wife (Ex. 21:10; Deut.

26 Ibid.
27 Ella Pearson Mitchell, Women to Preach or Not to Preach (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1991), 5.
28 Grenz and Kjesbo, 175.
21:15-17), but she could not divorce him. She was subject to a terrible ordeal if her husband even suspected her of unfaithfulness (Num. 5:11-31). She could inherit the family lands only if there were no male heirs, but she could only marry within her own clan because the land would pass to her husband Num. (27:1-11; 36:1-13)." 29

We notice male domination in all of Israel’s life. Women had no right to address men in any given forum and if she had an issue to report, she was to go through her husband for approval. In many cases she was turned down, as it was always the thought that women had nothing to offer. The duties of women were to bear and care for the children and care for the household affairs in general. Men could be seen in the market places talking with other men as to the affairs of the land. All the religious matters in the ancient society were in the hands of men.

The Israelite family was, in all periods, a male-headed household, (called ‘bet ab’; ‘house of the father’) in which descent and transmission of property in particular, the patrimonial land, “nalala” inheritance, was reckoned through the master. Matrilineal organization means women are, to some extent, either aliens or transients within their family residence. Married women are considered outsiders in the household of their husband and sons, while daughters are prepared from birth to leave their father’s household and transfer loyalty to a husband’s house and lineage. “Ancient society did not consider women fully human. And as incredible as this may seem, there are manifest today residual evidence of the view of womanhood as less than fully human” 30 One assumption in the Israelites life was that women were evil and tempters. They claimed

29 Ibid., 65.
30 Ella Pearson Mitchell, 2.
that women brought suffering in the entire world. In the prayers of the Jewish men they could pray, 'blessed are thou Lord that you never made me woman.'

In religious matters, women were barred from taking any role or even getting near the pulpit. “Some scholars have suggested that on practical grounds, women would have found it difficult to serve as priests while also fulfilling their primary social role of bearing children and managing the household.”31 There was an assumption that there is no difference between status and role in a society. “That is to say equality before God is utterly without meaning, if it is not expressed in the equality of role, to the extent that one has the gifts to perform the role. Thus, it is no less nonsensical to say that God made men and women equal and put only men in the seats of authority, than it was to say that God was the author of the power arrangement of the slave system.”32

JOEL’S PROPHECY

“It is Joel’s vision of the pouring out of God’s Spirit that has made verses 28-29 the most well known passage in the book of Joel. The section is framed by God’s statement that at a future time “I will pour out my Spirit” with the opening statement adding the words “on all flesh.” The Hebrew word for Spirit could also mean “wind” and “the Spirit of God associated with the gift of power.” Sometimes this power enabled mighty deeds. Many of the early judges and kings of Israel were said to receive God’s Spirit and to be enabled thereby to perform deeds of deliverance and leadership in times

31 Grenz and Kjesbo, 66.
32 Grenz and Kjesbo, 67
of crisis."\textsuperscript{33} The power in the Spirit enabled prophets to proclaim God’s massage to all mankind irrespective of their backgrounds.

“What is remarkable about Joel’s vision is not his mention of God’s Spirit but that this gift should be poured “on all flesh.” Verses 28b-29a testify to the inclusivity of this gift in Joel’s vision. Six categories of people are included as recipients: sons and daughters, old and young, male and female slaves. God’s gift of the Spirit in this time of salvation is without regard to gender or age or social status. It is for all. And it enables all to prophesy; to dream dreams; to see visions. This has to be known, that the direct communication and revelation are all modes of God’s dealing. What was true in the past for the remarkable leaders and prophets of the biblical story will now be true to all. Direct relationship to God will become the norm not the exceptional experience. All will know the empowerment of God’s Spirit.”\textsuperscript{34}

We also read in Acts 2:14-21 that Peter preaches at Pentecost, that what people were witnessing had been prophesied by the prophet Joel many years ago. It was amazing that God’s promise never failed in spite of the many years that had passed. The pouring out of God’s Spirit signaled the start of new age from Peter and the early Church, and the gift of the Spirit broke down many of the barriers that separated and divided people from one another. “The inclusive vision of God’s gift of the spirit in Joel 2:28-29 inevitably reminds us of the inclusive community envisioned by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:28. “There is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”.\textsuperscript{35} What we

\textsuperscript{33} Bruce C. Birch, \textit{Hosea, Joel and Amos} (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press, 1997), 154.  
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. 154  
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 155.
learn is that the Spirit of God constantly unites us in spite of our divisions. God breaks the barriers we erect.

According to Joel’s prophecy, everyone in Israel has direct access to inspiration. “For Joel, the gift of YHWH’S Spirit has nothing to do with obedience to legal statutes or with moral transformation, nor even with a new creation as in Isaiah 32:15. The expression “all of you” *al-kol-basar* (“upon all flesh”) can also mean ‘everyone,’ without ethnic or gender restrictions.”\(^{36}\) We also observe in Joel’s prophecy that “the outpouring of YHWH’S vitality will lead to widespread prophecy by the young generation ( *benekem ubenotekem*, ‘your boys and girls’). In other words your sons and daughters. A comprehensive promise to all people including the old.”\(^{37}\)

In verse 29 we read, “on your slaves, too, both male and female”. My understanding is that equality between the male and female shall prevail not only in a specific generation but also to all generations, now and in the future. The social status of women has to be respected just like that of men.

**WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP**

We read of great and tremendous women who were servants of God and humanity in the Old Testament. We notice excellent performance of women in spite of the harsh tradition that oppressed them. Old Testament law was prone to place women in a very inferior position, perhaps the most telling evidence of Old Testament cultural bias against

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37 James L. Cransham, 167.
women. However, in spite of the treatment of women in such a manner, we notice several women with great impact as far as the Old Testament is concerned.

**DEBORAH**

Deborah’s role in Israel’s history is that of prophet and judge. “Deborah rose from the lowly estate of lamb keeper in the tabernacle. Her performance as counselor, judge and seer was so impressive that the populace forgot her gender. The esteem in which she was held is demonstrated by the fact that Barak, General of the Army, would not dare to face battle against the superior Sisera without her at his side.”

The fact that Deborah was a woman seems to be a major exception to the rules, and may, thus, have been less far important than is often assumed. “Deborah served as the highest leader of her people. Although she was married, her leadership role included the exercise of authority over men. She was a prophet as well as a judge (Judges 4:4). As a member of the prophet community, she acted as the mouthpiece of God’s word (4:6-7). Deborah announced God’s commands to his people.” Significantly, “the prophet was a person who was called by God to speak the word. The person, man or woman, was called on the basis of God’s choice, not on the basis of personal status or ancestry. The prophet was called and gifted to proclaim God’s word of covenant and promise, of judgment and redemption.” Deborah demonstrated all these characteristics. She was a judge and as a judge she led God’s people in settling disputes among God’s people. We note that judges

38 Ella Pearson Mitchell, 8.
39 Grenz, 68.

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in Israel were regarded with great honor because they functioned as Israel’s highest legal tribunal (Deut. 17:8-13). She also assumed the role of national judge in much the same way Moses had done earlier (Ex. 18:13). Deborah also performed politically in the same capacity as Moses. In fact, it should be known that judges were raised so that they could deliver God’s people from the hands of the foreign oppressors. “God intended that judges foster true worship and morality in Israel (Judge 2:19).”

God used Deborah in serving his people and the entire nation of Israel. In the African context, a prophet was of great value to the people. S/he was a guide and a foreteller of what was to befall a community. This reminds me of my Luhya tribe and many other tribes in Kenya. Prophets were people whom everyone in the society respected. Their words were never questioned. Likewise, the Old Testament judges were people to whom everyone went for council and to settle moral, social, and political disputes. In spite of the patriarchal domination Deborah rose up to be a great leader. The example of Deborah confirms that neither God nor the ancient Hebrews found female leadership intrinsically abhorrent. On the contrary, judges, and prophets carried out their responsibilities in public view.

**MIRIAM**

As a prophetess, Miriam had a quite a significant role. “God reminded the Israelites that they were given Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, to lead them out of the land of

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41 Ibid.
Egypt. She was indeed recognized as a major leader, one on the team of three. 

I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron and Miriam’ (Micah 6:4). Miriam’s leadership in Israel is unquestionable. She gained positive note in Israel’s history because she was a prominent leader, as well as a prophet.

HULDAH

Another significant female, for our purposes here, is Hulda, the woman whose advice was seriously sought by King Josiah. “The temple worship had ceased and the place was in ruins. Hilkiah and the high priest found scrolls suspected of containing the law, in the temple debris. When they were presented to young Josiah, he wanted to be sure the scrolls were authentic, and not the work of an impostor. He sent a delegation of five of the highest court officials to consult with Huldah, who alone could be trusted to know the real from the fictitious in such matters. The record (II Chron. 34:22 II Kings 22:14) is typical of shalom, since women had no importance in their own right.”

There might have been many other women in the history of the Old Testament, but somehow with the nature and the tradition that prevailed at that time, it was not possible to write their stories. As we read the stories we do have of great women, we are compelled to remind ourselves that women in the OT were recognized for their excellent work in serving God. Women represented God’s message to the people and therefore,

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43 Ella Pearson Mitchell, 8.
stood in the gap between God and people. We therefore learn the OT prophets commissioned by God were both men and women. We cannot afford to ignore the unique and truthful stories of women who served the Lord in leadership positions in the Old Testament.

WOMEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament stands to support strongly the issue of women leadership. I want to reflect on a few passages and female individuals who stood to serve the church, and worked hand in hand with the apostles for the Gospel proclamation. I want to show that women worked as partners with men without being sidelined as they built the body of Christ. "When Jesus died the curtain barring entrance into the Holy of Holies was torn into two, from top to bottom (Matt 27: 51). That torn curtain signifies that now God’s Spirit no longer dwells in a place, but in the people of God who have become a moveable tent, the sanctuary of God. The barrier between the Holy of Holies and the holy place is swung back" Redemption has destroyed all the barriers that previously victimized people because of their gender, tribe, race or social status.

WOMEN AND JESUS

Jesus transcended all the culture, tradition, and customs of the people and reached to women to heal them. "Jesus accepting contact with the woman with the flow of blood showed how caring Jesus is to women. In light with social taboo, that had grown up
around the law, concerning female uncleanness. (Lev 15: 19-30) this problem placed a
great hardship on the women.\(^{45}\)

Jesus is portrayed as accepting and affirming women’s ministry of service.
“In the synoptic gospels women are shown primarily serving Jesus. “The gospel of Christ
is the gospel of good news, good tidings for women. Their new status of dignity and
importance is one of the conspicuous features of the early Christian movement. When
Jesus came into the world born of the Virgin Mary new sanctity was at once imparted to
motherhood, and with it came a new and higher conception of women’s character and
person (Luke 1: 48). From the first, women were numbered among the followers of Jesus
(Matt: 9: 22; 15:28; 26:7).”\(^{46}\)

“The disciples of Jesus, according to the Gospels, were those persons who heard
and responded to his call to follow him. The earliest evangelist, Mark, portrayed Jesus
teaching about the nature of discipleship: “If anyone would come after me, let that person
deny self, take up the cross and follow me’. The word “follow” is a technical expression
denoting discipleship. All four Gospels portrayed women as well as men following Jesus
during his historical lifetime.”\(^{47}\)

We understand that the majority named as disciples of Jesus were men, given the
fact of the cultural and religious situations that prevailed during that time. But that does
not mean that Jesus never allowed women in his ministry. There are many areas in which
women served the Lord during the time of Jesus. Those who were writing the Gospels


\(^{45}\) Dennis R. Kuhns,


\(^{47}\) Tetlow, 93.

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were all men who were products of a culture that strongly emphasized the superior importance of men and the subordinate role of women. During the early period of itinerant Galilean ministry there may also have been a problem with contemporary social convention. In the first century it was not socially acceptable for women to wander about the country following a male teacher and camping in the open, in proximity to a group of men. Yet it was precisely this practice of Jesus of teaching in the open and not just in the synagogue that enabled women to be his disciples.

Women came close to Jesus for prayer, council and for healing when men and in their tradition had rejected them. It is the same Jesus who calls women who cry silently in our congregations who have none to listen that he can truly use them (women). In the New Testament time everything has become new. If anyone was close to women, in relation to service to God, it was Jesus. He knew that women, like men, had potentials in leading and serving the body of Christ even though the tradition regarded women as weak and not able to deliver.

We notice these women remained faithful to their service at the crucifixion and burial of Jesus. Then it was these same ministering women who were chosen to be the witnesses of Jesus’ first resurrection appearance and who were commissioned to continue their ministry by bearing witness of the resurrection to other disciples. I view that zeal and commitment among women at the crucifixion they were not only willing to be with Jesus at crucifixion; but they were far ahead at the tomb of Jesus and were the first people to witness the resurrection of Jesus. The scene reminds me of the phenomenon I witnessed during the Kenyan wars, which I referred to earlier. What strikes me most is how men were quick to withdraw and run away. Peter and the sons of Zebedee had gone
to fish and others were contemplating how to escape because of the fear of being alone and attacked by the Pharisees. It is in this line of story that we are surely assured of the fact that women are not weak, they are not cowards but they are courageous people who can preach, celebrate holy communion, baptize, and perform many other church activities.

WOMEN AND PENTECOST

Apostle Peter declared the startling message of the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Three thousand people, men and women, were converted and filled by the Spirit. The Joel prophecy, explained by Peter in Acts as now coming to fruition, instructed the church, which was being born that day, that God has no partiality in his working. Therefore God can use women as well as men. In my experience, the Kiplombe conference was a powerful reminder of the day of Pentecost, for I witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit among the women. You could see women burning with Holy Ghost fire testimonies. Just like at Pentecost, they had come from different tribes with varieties of cultural beliefs. Some had no education at all. Others were college graduates. Yet they were one in the Spirit. The yearning and deep sense of spiritual inspiration came down as they sang and gave their testimonies about how our Lord Jesus Christ can use them regardless of their gender.

When the Holy Spirit came during Pentecost day, it was a manifestation that the Lord has come, through his Holy Spirit, to all people. The 120 people who had gathered in the upper room were all filled with the Holy Spirit. It showed that Christ distributes his gifts to all people without favor. "Acts records that women were present in the room and
that the Holy Spirit came upon the whole group. Women shared equally in the experience."\textsuperscript{48}

The Pentecost experience sets firm the reality that God visited all flesh through the Holy Spirit. We read in Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit come upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the end of the Earth" (RSV). Women were included in this great fulfillment. Peter, along with the early church, recognized this to be true, that the Holy Spirit would triumph over all Jewish laws and traditions. Gentiles and slaves and women alike were all to be welcomed as new creations serving the body of Christ.

**WOMEN AND THE EARLY CHURCH**

Following Pentecost, we learn of a great number of women who were prominent in the early church. I may not be able to include here all that they performed alongside male apostles; but we read of their tremendous contribution to church expansion in the early church. We know of Lydia who converted her house at Philippi to be a Church. She had a good number of followers who formed the Philippian church.

"In Acts we discover Christian women were perfectly apostles (Acts 18:26). Unusual for that time is the way Paul mentions Priscilla’s name before her husband’s in some of his letters. Some scholars of early church history suggest that perhaps she edited Paul’s letters before they were sent out to the churches. It is established that she was with Paul when his letters of Philippians, Philemon, and Colossians is believed to have been

\textsuperscript{48} Dennis R. Kuhns, 34.
sent out from Rome in revised form. “Therefore Priscilla is considered as a probable editor of these letters.”

We notice also Phoebe being among prominent women. She played a big role in the church. She is called diakonos, translated “deaconess” in the RSV and “servant”. Phoebe served the church alongside men. She is said to have been in the team of Apostles as they accompanied Paul in his itinerant ministry as missionary apostle. Rom 16:1 states that Phoebe was a deacon of the church of Cenchraeae. Paul commended Phoebe to the Church of Rome, to which she was being sent as an official messenger. “We also had women missionary apostles and women prophets. There were most likely also women teachers. It is quite possible that women were among the first Christian ministers of the Eucharist.”

Paul is mentioned to have called ministers of the gospel as his “fellow workers.” Paul called such persons both “my fellow workers” and “our fellow workers” and also “God’s fellow workers.” We read of women who were among those Paul addressed as his own fellow workers: “Prisca, Euodia and Syntyche. There were also men: Aquila, Timothy, Mark, Artarchus, Degas, Luke, Epaphroditus and Justus.”

The function of the fellow workers in Paul’s ministry was to evangelize and proclaim the gospel. Paul mentions four women, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis, all of whom he called “hard workers” in the Lord.” What we notice is the recognition of women in the ministry during Paul’s time in the body of Christ. “These women stood in the strong contrast to the depreciatory attitude of the Jewish and Gentile cultures and

49 Dennis R. Kuhns, 36.
50 Elizabeth Meier Tetlow, 26.
51 Dennis R. Kuhns, 127.
52 Ibid, 126.
53 Ibid, 199.
54 Acts 21:9 KJV.

53 The book of Acts also makes mention of Sapphira, the wife of Ananias Tabitha; Mary, the mother of John Mark; the maid Rhoda; the slave girl whom Paul freed from a spirit of divination; Damaris of Athens. Of significant interest a comment about Philip who “had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.”54 Clearly, the New Testament shows that the early church utilized women in the proclamation of the gospel.

**GALATIANS 3:28**

Galatians 3:28 is a striking text, which the women in the Kiplombe conference dwelt upon. This text shows us that spiritual equality in Christ suggests that a person’s value, role, or function is not defined by gender any more than it is by socioeconomic status or race. “Paul advocates two basic concepts. They are equality of men and women “in Christ” and bestowal of charismata on all members of the community. For Paul, Galatians 3:28 is the basic text. Once a person is in Christ, all man-made distinctions become peripheral. As a result, all members of the community will have equal rights. As against the practice prevalent in the synagogues, Paul advocates equal partnership of men and women in ministry.”55

We read of the distinctions in the church of Galatians. It was not promoting the unity of the body of Christ, other people were being sidelined and marginalized within the church. We notice how strongly Paul speaks about the church ‘being one in Christ’ regardless of where one comes from. “It’s our natural inclination to feel uncomfortable around people who are different from us and to gravitate toward those who are similar to

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52 Ibid, 126.
53 Ibid, 199.
54 Acts 21:9 KJV.
us. But when we allow our differences to separate us from our fellow believers, we are disregarding clear biblical teaching.\textsuperscript{56} At the Kiplombe conference, the RCEA women noticed that the message of Paul is very relevant to their demand for ordination in the body of Christ.

“It should be pointed out that Paul advocates such a positive role for women against the background of Judaism, where women’s role was passive. So, for Paul, all normal categories like Jews and gentiles, male and female, slave and master, are broken down in Christ. And therefore Paul goes further to advocate the collective leadership in his community.\textsuperscript{57} In this passage we notice how the authority of the Bible and its interpretation has to go hand in hand. Paul points out clearly that women have a role in the church, just like men.

One time while preaching in my home Parish, Kaaboi parish Eldoret, I preached on this text Gal 3:28. I talked about God’s favor for each human being, small or big, black or brown, white or dark. The Lord receives people and uses them the way they are. Over one thousand were gathered and I asked them one question. Who are more important to God among those seated here? We had all types of people but the answer was, “those who have washed their spiritual garments, repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of their lives.” Nobody said men are more important than women. Thus is Paul’s message to the Galatian Church. “The Spirit of God works through women and men. According to the New Testament, women and men in the early

\textsuperscript{55} Musimbi Kinyoro, 46.
\textsuperscript{56} Gal. 3: 28 NIV Study Bible.
\textsuperscript{57} Musimbi Kinyoro, 46.
church fully participated in the ministry, which included practical service, prayer, and prophecy."\(^{58}\)

**BIBLICAL VISION OF COMMUNITY AND THE CHURCH**

“The vision of God’s plan, as inaugurated in Christ, forms the heart of the New Testament conception of human relationships. With the coming of the Savior, a new era has dawned, one in which the effects of the fall no longer need to dominate human living. The Biblical writers declare that in Christ the old ways of structuring interpersonal relationships have been superseded. The New Testament declares that our Lord has relativized the old distinctions between humans, which people tend to find so important. The church is to be the community in which such differences do not exist.”\(^{59}\)

The differences of sex, race, tribe, nationality, rich and poor, and the like, do not predominate Christ’s church. The Holy Spirit has to take the central role of the church. The Holy Spirit breaks all the barriers, all traditions and customs that hinder women from preaching.

The church is the body of Christ, which is supposed to embrace each and every individual. The church is said to be the new Israel, chosen people, royal family and holy nation. The church goes far to include women, children and all races of the world. The church has lots of varieties and diversities. These include tribes, colors, languages, arts, dialects, nationalities and the like. All these should strengthen the church’s growth, both spiritual and numerical.


\(^{59}\) Grenz, 176.
The Holy Spirit must play a major role in the church. The Holy Spirit can take the full initiative to make the church more attractive and welcoming. Unfortunately, in the minds of many Christians, the Holy Spirit has been diminished to a mere tool. Therefore, it seems the church no longer recognizes the Spirit’s power and authority and seems to have forgotten that the body of Christ is based upon the spirit of love and inclusion.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND TRADITIONAL SETTING WITHIN THE RCEA

The concept of cultural, social and traditional setting within the RCEA is the initial focus of my discussion in this chapter. I will relate how these three aspects have been a hindrance to women’s ordination into the ministry. It is important to note that most of the African cultures have not been empowering women, not only in ministerial ordination, but also in many other aspects, including social and political leadership.

The Reformed Church of East Africa had its roots in the Rift Valley Kenya and the Western Province of Kenya when it started. As I mentioned early on, the major tribes within the RCEA are the Luhya and the Kalenjin. The two tribes have much in common in how they viewed women, especially before Christianity came to Africa.
THE LUHYA TRIBE

The Luhya people, and in particular the Bukusu sub-tribe, have a belief that at one time God created man alone (male). It is believed that man could go look after animals like cows, goats and sheep alone. Man (Omuseja) had a lot of responsibility and was all the time tired and sometime he could not eat after the heavy responsibilities. He had to look after the farm, he had to look after the chickens and other animals and therefore the responsibility was just enormous. While the man was busy, there was also loneliness in his life. He could not talk to any of the animals because they never understood his language. Man was very quiet and isolated from his inner being. And so "Wele" God sympathized with him and one day when he had just arrived from the field, he met a woman in the hut who had prepared food, bed, and everything for him. The man was joyful. He thanked God (Wele) for the miraculous provision of someone to stay with. The man welcomed the woman in his estate and told her that from that day, she would be his assistant in keeping the home and managing domestic work. Within a short time there was such a powerful force between them that they become husband and wife.

The Luhya believe that the woman is to take care of household items and young animals at home. She is also to be bear children, mostly males, who can fight any danger. This belief is shared among many elderly males. The belief is that a woman was given to be at home, cook for the husband and care for the kids. It is believed that a woman cannot address men in any forum apart from asking for assistance. Similarly, our neighbor people, Baganda, from Uganda, believe a woman, in some places, should greet men while
kneeling on the ground. Man is seen as the master and lord of the home and state and head of every affair.

When the Dutch Reformed Church brought Reformed faith to Kenya, the two major tribes, Luhya and Kalenjin, were the only ones that joined the Reformed congregations. As they joined the church, they came with their own customs and traditional beliefs and therefore exercised those beliefs in the congregation. The first African moderator was from the Luhya tribe and originally came from a place of typical cultural practices. Many times culture prevailed over the biblical patterns. One unfortunate thing is that, even if one is a church leader, it is believed that he has to conform to the demands and beliefs of the tribe he comes from. The cultural patterns among the Kalenjin tribe and the Luhya influenced the church setting.

The Luhya tribe practiced male circumcision, the practice that was done as an initiation of young boys being welcomed into adulthood. It was the most dehumanizing and painful practice that young boys would go through. The practice is also done among the Kalenjin tribe. This kind of practice is seen as joining manhood and adulthood. Women were looked upon as children because they did not go through any initiation. Instead, girls and women are taught to be submissive to their husbands, in obedience.

The Luhya culture treated women as servants who had no choice but to get orders and direction from their husbands or another male for leadership. On the other hand, boys were taught how to be the head and warrior and give leadership in the family or community. Boys are taught to lead and women are taught to follow. All are taught that women are weak and hence cannot deliver any good, and can only be dependent. These
concepts and notions continue to grow among young people, even into their adulthood, as they join the church. They grow up accepting the belittling and marginalizing of women in places of work and in the church.

I have seen women in the Luhya community going from five to ten miles to the river to fetch water for domestic use and for the animals. Meanwhile the men sit in comfort waiting to be served by the women. Such treatment of women is evident everywhere within the society, including in our congregations. Women also trek long distance to look for firewood for cooking. They carry logs on their heads while at the same time carrying children on their backs or shoulders. They must cook breakfast, lunch and dinner and do laundry for the family as well. The women bear all these and many other burdens as well. The question is asked, “where are the husbands”? The answer is simple. Culture and customs have taught men that they are superior, and that “women are servants and they never get tied.” These types of notions and practices are carried into the church. As a result, women are given low profile in matters of leadership. Because of the cultural and traditional practices, women have seen the Gospel as partisan. Women feel isolated and see themselves as being treated quite unfairly in the ministerial ordination and any other church related work.

THE KALENJIN TRIBE

I worked in the Kalenjin tribe for seven years as a pastor and was able to witness how women are treated in that community. The Kalenjin tribe forms 60% of the Reformed Church in Kenya, including more congregations than any other tribe within the
RCEA in Kenya. Their roots in the Reformed Church date back to the early 1960s. The first Afrikaner missionaries settled in the Rift Valley Kenya where this tribe lived. The tribe believes that women are like children and that women’s responsibility is to take care of the home and give birth to children, mostly male children, who are known as “Weri” meaning warrior. In this tribe, women cannot share the same table with men since they are considered as children and children are not allowed to eat with men. Women in this community can only consult their husbands at home if there is an issue that requires public attention. These types of treatment to women have not only affected the social status of women but have also been adapted in the congregations, where women are silenced and cannot be given leadership by the church patriarch system.

Women are not allowed to attend certain cultural practices. For example the “Laiboni” (community elders), mostly called prophets, meet when decisions of the clan or tribe have to be discussed. In such meetings, matters discussed are social life, spiritual life, moral life, and economic life. The chief “Laiboni” foretells the future of the people at these meetings as well. When elders meet to discuss such matters, women are closed out. They are only allowed to cook food and never allowed to discuss anything before the elders. Even at home, husbands cannot share with their wives whatever was discussed in elders meeting. In this community, and in many African communities, men have a belief that women cannot keep a secret, women talk it over with other people either at the market places, or at the riverside while fetching water. For these reasons, men have little confidence in women’s leadership anywhere, including the church.

60 Luhya and Kalenjin sayings.
THE DUTCH REFORMED CHURCH

In the RCEA constitution, it is clearly stated that only a biological male with one wife, trained in RCEA theology will be ordained. In order for the male to be ordained, academic training in theology and practical training is needed. Before my ordination, I served as an evangelist for several years. I had to go for theological training for four years and later went for another training period of three years. After all the training, I had to participate in an internship program for one year. Then was required to preach to the synod, which then approved me for ordination.

We have little information about why the Dutch church never ordained women. In fact, we received the constitution in Dutch and the Dutch missionaries shared little in regard to the ordination of women. The perception the missionaries had, in regard to women, reflected that women cannot preach as long as men are there. The Dutch constitution was translated into English only a few years ago. Until then the, constitution was written in Dutch language. Little information is given towards our church constitution on women ordination. In other words, the church claims to have received this doctrine from the Netherlands and have held on to it since 1963.

The RCEA synod has not effectively debated over the article of the constitution that curtails women from being ordained. The church has started advocating for women’s theological training and yet the ordination issue has not been discussed and ratified. The training of women will create more effective evangelization and greater spiritual and numerical growth. Since women are closer to the family than males, I feel ordaining women will result in more stable families. Women tend to have lots of patience, perseverance, love and many other virtues.
Our Church has its foundation in Calvinist tradition. We have adopted the teaching of Calvin in our congregations since the church began in Kenya. It is surprising that the teaching of Calvin has gone so much in our church elders, ministers and evangelists and entire congregation. Sometimes ministers talk more in the pulpit about Calvin than the Gospel. In our local parish presbytery and synod, members quote Calvin more in their presentations than the Bible. We forget that the Bible has to prevail in guidance and instruction. Church traditions and cultures sometimes hinder the Gospel proclamation. We must avoid the temptation of twisting the Bible for our own traditional and cultural expediencies. No one could have made clearer than Calvin that the Protestant reemphasis on the ministry of Word, prayer and sacraments was in no way a rejection of the traditional teaching on the unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity of the church. Calvin was in agreement with the Augsburg Confession in affirming that the true church is where the Word is truly preached and the sacraments rightly administered.61

Calvin believed the church has authority; it has power to forgive and responsibility to maintain discipline. The power is exercised in public preaching, and in private pastoral admonitions. The RCEA bases their belief in Calvin, arguing that men have authority over women just as Christ has authority over his church. I view such an argument to be of no value. We should be reminded that the three women I interviewed believe that Galatians 3:28 sets women free from intimidation and marginalization from the patriarchal setting. The Calvinistic tradition has taken center stage in the church rather

than the Bible. We have allowed tradition to have a bigger say in the church than the Holy Spirit, in relation to our church function.

The courts and councils are where the RCEA has frustrated women’s efforts. While I do appreciate the work of Calvin as far as the church is concerned, one way or the other, the Calvin doctrine has been misinterpreted to mean that our culture can dominate over the biblical teaching. Although we have to uphold church tradition, there is danger of the tradition dominating authority over God’s people. We must question some of the tradition that is not in line with the biblical teaching. When the Reformed Church began in Kenya, the Gospel did not change many of the traditions. People still practiced polygamy and alcoholism and no one corrected them. Such tradition has been harmful to the body of Christ.

ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS

As much as culture is important and part of people’s social development, I feel the Luhya and Kalenjin need to re-examine their beliefs and social settings in regard to women. Sadly, the traditions we have inherited from these tribes continue to affect women inside the church building as well. I see conflicting viewpoints among Christians within this context in regard to church leadership. Some of this is due to faulty interpretation and application of the Scripture, but also to inaccurate knowledge of the text and lack of acquaintance with cultural issues. Culture should be contextualized, but should not take the place of the authority of the Scripture.

In addition to the tribal biases against women, the Reformed Church in the Netherlands brought its traditions that excluded women from church leadership. The patriarchal indigenous people were pleased to know that even the Bible believing
missionaries excluded women from church leadership. In this way, the early missionaries with the Reformed culture and tradition contributed towards marginalization of women in the church.

In the church women sit on one side of the church while men sit on other. I am told that the early missionaries introduced the seating patterns of the church, separating women from men. This type of mindset goes against what Paul writes to the Galatians.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

As one would expect, things have greatly changed in the 21st century, within the Kenyan churches and globally. Some of the oppressive cultural roots are being broken in many churches. The Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists and others have broken the cultural and traditional chains that were put on women. They ordain women just like any of their male counterparts. Not surprisingly, a passage that has shed much light for these denominations, towards women in ministry is Joel 2:28, “I will pour out my Spirit on the whole flesh, sons and daughters.”

Although our sister Churches now ordain women, in the beginning they said a resounding “no” to women’s ordination. Then women organized seminars and conferences to help examine the Scriptures from a new perspective. Many men have also changed their minds about women’s ordination. In October of 2000, during my graduation from St Paul’s United Bible College, the Anglican Archbishop, who was our chief guest, spoke. He said, “All men and women alike are one in Christ. All can serve
the body of Christ without being discriminated in the Church ministry.”62 The Anglicans, the Presbyterians and the Methodists overcame the cultural and social beliefs that marginalized women. They have allowed the Holy Spirit to manifest himself in the Church.

In the RCEA, the tradition inherited from the Netherlands has been one major barrier towards women’s ordination. In other words, the church has not been able to accept the Spirit of change in her constitution, which was inherited from the Dutch missionaries. Secondly, the cultural and social setting within the church has contributed towards denial of women’s ordination. As I mentioned earlier, the Luhya and Kalenjin tribe make up 80% of the Church. And the two tribes have strong beliefs that women should never preach. Rather, they assume women are our assistants in our domestic working. They assume that it is unbiblical for a woman to preach before men. They base their on Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (5:21-24), along with other passages from the Old and New Testament. These texts, however, need to be examined within the context of the whole biblical witness, including Pentecost.

VISION FOR THE CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured on all people regardless of gender or nationality. People from all over the world were present including, Egypt, Persia, Rome, Arabia, Asia Minor, and Libya, as well as Judeans and Galileans (Acts 2:7-11). On that day, the church saw no distinctions among her members’ witness. It was a

62 October graduation 2000
new cultural setting; a culture of one people with a new image of oneness in sharing the power and the authority of our Lord Jesus in serving the body of Christ. “Just as God had called Abraham out of Ur Chaldees, he and his descendants might be God’s chosen people, and just as God had called Moses and the children of Israel to leave Egypt and its slavery behind and enter a new and promised land to serve God in righteousness and justice, so now God sent his own son to gather the whole people of God from every land and every people.”\(^{63}\) We learn from God’s people that God intends no boundaries in relation to nationality and no cultural hindrances toward the Gospel. The Holy Spirit should be the guiding person in our cultural beliefs and approaches in leadership in the church, including ordination.

The Christian culture should witness the power of the resurrected Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The church has been spoken of as “A spiritual temple, a Holy nation, chosen people, royal priesthood, chosen race, God’s own people.”\(^{64}\) As I have served the church as Pastor, I am encouraged by the efforts of women as they relate in the church making spiritual and social contributions in spite of their marginalization by the male leadership. They see their male counterpart as people of God, created in his image and likeness.

Men can change their attitudes towards women’s leadership in the church. But, at this point, women feel that the cultural inheritance men have acquired has made them imprisoned by cultural domination instead of biblical culture. Men fear that if women are given leadership in the church, they will look down on them. Others fear it is not wise to have women stand at the pulpit because men will be belittled in the face of children and

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women a like. Still others believe that women do not have enough knowledge to preach the Gospel. In many instances, traditional men, who dominate the society, will laugh at their fellow men in market places, villages and social gatherings if they allow women to speak in any special gatherings, including the church. In some places, however, women have been given freedom to lead and preach and have no struggle with men.

"Women’s ordination is recognition of the rightful status of women. Its inherent meaning lies in the concepts of partnership and stewardship, because recognition and acceptance"\textsuperscript{65} result in motivation, encouragement and hence full participation. It is unfortunate that men who have given women leadership, are undermined and looked upon with suspicion by their fellow men. Men who associate closely or eat with women are ostracized by their fellow men. They are given bad names and many times are regarded as unfortunate people. This happens in the villages, in the large communities and, sadly, in the churches.

I believe the Church should be a spiritual culture where people hope in one Lord, one faith, and one Spirit; one God and, therefore, father of all. God seems to cherish diversity. The culture in the NT is different from our own church cultural and social setting in women’s ordination. One of the first attempts of the church to understand its ministry is expressed in the Apostles Creed. The core of this text comes to us from about the year 200. The creed confesses, "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins. The first thing we notice about this is that the belief in the church and its ministry is developed out of belief in the Holy Spirit. "A Trinitarian understanding of God makes clear that the unity of God is not

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid page 231.
some dead, monolithic uniformity, but that in the unity of God there is communion.\textsuperscript{66} I view this to be the most important aspect in Christian family. It is a communion of both men and women. Some of our cultural beliefs affect the growth of spiritual maturity and commitment.

The communion table that our Lord gave as an example is often misunderstood. Some males tend to believe it is only meant for males. This is a wrong assumption. In some communities in my context, it is a taboo, for a woman to give Holy Communion to a man and, therefore, a taboo to have women in the ministry of ordination. Still others feel man was created first and, therefore, should be at the front line in everything. These types of beliefs contradict the biblical teaching and practice of the early church. All people who are called by Christ’s name should share the communion table because we are one in Him, children born of the Spirit.

“The Gospel calls upon the culture that is not in line with biblical patterns to change. The Gospel has to be placed above our beliefs, customs and practices and therefore needs contextualization. “Contextualization is the placing of the Gospel in the total context of a culture at a particular moment, a moment that is shaped by the past and looks to the future.”\textsuperscript{67}

Sometime I imagine that my people will see the Scripture afresh in relation to women in ministry. The point I am making is that we cherish our cultural values and beliefs, we love our homes and languages, but our social, cultural and traditional values should be evaluated in line with the Gospel message. “The Gospel which is from the beginning to

\textsuperscript{65} Musimbi Kinyoro, 140.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 233.
\textsuperscript{67} Lesslie Newbigin \textit{Foolishness to The Greeks}. (Grand Rapids: Michigan. William B. Eerdmans
the end embodied in culturally conditioned forms, calls into question all cultures, including the one in which it was originally embodied."

**MY PROPOSAL TO RCEA**

What I have stated in the three chapters has been the feelings and pleas of women within the Reformed Church of East Africa for ministerial ordination. My service within the Church has made my true contribution in my thesis. I have stated how their male counterparts look at women in the church and outside the church. Women have expressed their testimonies and concerns and are asking for fairness and recognition of women's ministry in the Church. They want to serve in the body of Christ in ministerial positions. They have been left out of the ministry of ordination for so long and feel it is time for them to be ordained.

From the time the RCEA began in East Africa, women have been silent and obedient towards the patriarchal church system. But their patience and submission towards men is almost gone. They feel it is time to act and not wait. It has not been a sign of defeat and weakness, but it has been a sign of waiting for God's direction, and now is the time for them to be heard by the patriarchal system.

The body of Christ is supposed to be a community where everyone is welcomed. It is a community of love and equality. Regardless of the person's gender, color, tribe, nationality or education, we are all one in Christ. Christ's community is people who dwell together with regulations as well as inspiration as they relate. It is a group of people, which Christ, through the Holy Spirit, constitutes into a community gathered in Christ's name. "The church is seen as story rooted in action and also a history of Jesus of

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Publishing. 1986), 21
Nazareth, it is the presence of the resurrected Lord. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God continues to inspire us with Christ’s presence by which the Christian community is constituted as it responds through proclamation, liturgy and service.\textsuperscript{69}

I wish to suggest some of the ways that can help the RCEA overcome denial of women’s ordination.

1. The church should revisit our constitution with the aim of amending the article that bars women from ordination.

2. For a long time the RCEA has depended upon the Netherlands for support, especially for finance and training. It is time for the church to adopt a self-sustaining, self-proclaiming and self-propagating motto. This type of spirit will cut a tie from outside that has imposed retrogressive and oppressive practices towards women who have a desire to serve the body of Christ.

3. The Church should be flexible to change and be sensitive to the moving of the Holy Spirit in line with what the three women and Kiplombe conference communicated in chapter one. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3: 28). I want to propose that we hold frequent elder’s, youth, women’s and pastor’s seminars with the theme, “Male nor female, all one in Christ Jesus.” Such seminars will create biblical awareness among the patriarchal setting towards women’s ordination.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid, 4.
4. The cultural and social lives of tribes represented within the RCEA need to change. This is to say, the culture and social lives of people is not static, it is subject to change and must allow the Gospel to prevail. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (II Cor 5:17 RSV). While our cultures seem attractive and desirable, we need to break some of the customs and practices that hinder women’s ministry and Gospel proclamation in the church. We also need to educate ourselves about the effects of rigid culture, in regard to Gospel proclamation. We must increase Bible study sessions in our congregations to talk about issues that affect the Gospel message allowing women to participate in the leading. We must read the Bible more, with a deep sense of the importance of interpreting with extreme fairness to everyone. I recommend, further, that conversion and the infilling of the Holy Spirit be realized among the pastors, evangelists, elders and entire congregations. The Holy Spirit will show good direction in matters of women’s ministry.

5. “For the old has passed away behold all is new” (II Cor. 5:17). I recommend that the subject of women’s ordination be addressed in our synod and Biblical principles be seriously looked up to. I further recommend spiritual implications of cultural practices be dealt with in a Christ like manner.

6. I recommend that the church take a serious look at the treatment traditionally meted out to women with a view to legislating against some of the practices that dehumanize and undermine the Christian view of women’s dignity.

7. I further recommend that women be given opportunities in leading the church. This includes liturgy, preaching and evangelistic work in different places. Giving
women the opportunity to serve in the church increases confidence and assurance from the entire congregation, that no one part is left out in serving the body of Christ.

8. Finally and not least, I recommend that we listen and seek audience with our sister churches, the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Anglicans as to how they have dealt with the issue of women’s ordination.

CONCLUSION

Apostle Peter declares that women and men are coheirs of God’s grace. In the Old Testament era, circumcision served the purpose of signifying this inheritance. Now the older rite has been replaced by baptism, in which all believers, male or female, can participate. Paul indicates that the transition from circumcision to baptism has destroyed the significance of the distinctions formerly were used to establish social hierarchies. Therefore, the hierarchies resulting from effects of sin, which are part of living in a fallen world, may remain.

The ministry of Jesus was that of servant hood and humility. He exercised love for all; equality for all. He talked with the poor and the needy, he emptied himself with obedience and self sacrifice. The model of Jesus’ servant hood shows that the purpose of ordained ministry is to serve the poor and needy and not to seek reward. He invited the strangers in his message; he fed the hungry and called upon the thirsty, naked and the sick. In his kingdom this is the true manifestation of how the church should view other people. The Church is called upon to be a living example to the world. The power of the Holy Spirit must be demonstrated in church members, pastors, elders, deacons and young
people. "We do not experience the church as a pyramid of authority; but we experience it as a community of prayer and love. What is needed is an imaginative new style of relationships and new structures in which liberated men and women can join together --- respecting one another’s dignity and distinctiveness." 70

Although I stated the New Testament view of women in my second chapter, I wish to conclude with that reminder. The New Testament gives new perspective as we seek the best way of understanding the Scriptures. The New Testament frees women who are intimidated and oppressed and gives them a clear way for their freedom, so that they too can serve the church of Christ. Those who oppose women’s leadership and ordination will argue, "If Jesus intended his church to have women ministers he would have included them among the twelve." 71 But how remarkably free he was in his dealings with women. Think of how he accepted the devotion of the woman who was a sinner; how he accepted the ministrations of women, including Mary Magdalene, on his journey to Jerusalem; his encounter with the Samaritan woman and the woman taken into adultery. To have treated women fully and without reservation as persons was a remarkable thing in the ancient world and particularly in Palestinian Judaism.

The New Testament records women who were both called to and described as holding each of these three top positions; apostle, prophet, and teacher. These are the positions considered authoritative and crucial by the New Testament church. We read about women in the New Testament who were held and affirmed in the church. We cannot isolate women and expect stable church growth. The Reformed Church can accomplish the great commission more effectively with the help of women.

70 E. Margaret Howe, 131.
The testimony we read in chapter one from Margaret, seems to focus on the contribution of women in the church and society. The RCEA has an obligation to examine how best women could be utilized in building up the body of Christ. It makes no sense to train women in the same theological college and then later abandon them just because of their gender. Ordination for women will open the doors for more women to play a greater role as mentors and role models for other young women and men who are growing up in today’s tough society. Edith’s New Testament observation in chapter one, states how Jesus’s dealing with women sends a strong affirmation of the women who were so actively involved in serving the church as leaders.

Edith’s testimony sends a strong signal that; cultural and traditions systems that are not in line with Biblical patterns, need to be broken. Why should women be ordained in the ministry? One reason is that the Bible makes it clear that those who would want to be ministers of the Word should possess as part of the attribute in service. We read of servant hood, humility, patience, and faithfulness. I feel, among other reasons, that these attributes affirm the claim for women’s ordination. These tributes are lacking among men, as we notice daily, be it in secular or work in the church ministry.

Women share the same burden for the ministry as men. Rom 16: 7 states “Greet Andronicus and Junia my relatives who were in prison with me. They are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.” What I notice is Paul’s appreciation of Junia who was active in the same ministry with Paul, as a co-worker. Even though she was female she was distinguished person and therefore able leader. In this regard, Edith gave a clear message that women in the New Testament were

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71 Andrew Wafula. My personal question.
recognized just like men. We also notice the RCEA engagement in women’s programs like education for HIV awareness, family education programs and others. I feel women if ordained they stand a better chance in doing well in the ministry with openness and free

The issues that were raised by women in Kiplombe 2002 conference touched on real issues that face the RCEA. It calls for the church to address the issue of women’s ordination with fairness and love as we serve the body of Christ. The testimonies of the women go hand in hand with their commitment and dedication in their love for Christ. The Kiplombe 2002 conference held in August calls for RCEA structures to change their stiffness and accommodate women in the ministerial ministry. Women are potential people; they are reliable and committed, not only to family values, but also in the church. Women are not asking for favor or rewards. They are basically asking the church to recognize the Biblical teaching in regard to service to God and who is to carry out the proclamation. We cannot run away from the reality that God is just. God loves all mankind and wants to use everyone that is available. Women noted Galatians 3:28 to be their strength in this conference.

Those who oppose allowing women to hold positions of spiritual leadership must place contextual limitations on Galatians as indicated above. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: you are all one in Christ”. Some interpreters in my context restrict the meaning of this triad to salvation by faith or oneness in Christ. Yet the verse carries a ring of universal application for all our relationships, rather to just an assurance that anyone can come to Christ. “Neither Jew nor Greek… neither bond nor free… neither male nor female.”--- I believe these are
basic relationship principles to which faithful followers of Christ must give highest priority and this was the main core at Kiplombe conference.

I am left with no doubt that we need to listen to women and come to their defense and liberate them from the culture and traditions that we inherited from time immemorial, which are oppressive and segregate the body of Christ. We need to ordain women in the RCEA.
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