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CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IN SELECTED NIGERIAN CHURCHES

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Abstract

For a long time in Africa, women were not accepted into full-time Christian ministry. Only recently have some denominations granted them structural recognition and ordination. However, this transition is not without significant friction. The Nigerian Baptist Convention and the Methodist Church Nigeria (MCN) are selected for this study as they represent mainline churches in Nigeria that have formally ordained women into full-time Christian ministry. This paper investigates the multi-layered challenges faced by ordained women in Christian ministry with the view of proffering strategic solutions. Adopting a historical and analytical methodology, the study reveals that these female ministers face deeply entrenched gender-based, socio-cultural, and institutional biases that severely limit their ministry opportunities. They are often confined to auxiliary roles, denied administrative leadership positions, and systematically relegated to low-paying or rural parishes. Furthermore, they face exclusion from key priestly functions, internal intra-gender conflicts, and direct insubordination by fellow male ministers. The research recommends that both the Baptist and Methodist denominations enhance theological training for women while aggressively emphasizing their ecclesiastical equality. The churches must also entrench the female pastorate practically, ensuring women are not restricted to traditional or secondary roles. Additionally, establishing robust support networks, eliminating biological and cultural prejudices, and intentionally appointing women to high-level leadership positions will help unlock their full potential for institutional growth and spiritual impact.

Keywords: Ordination, Patriarchy, Insubordination, Denominations, Misogyny, Methodist Church, Baptist Convention, Women Priesthood, Priestly Functions, Intra-gender Conflict.

INTRODUCTION

The marginalization of women in church ministries in Nigeria has become a topical issue among theologians, bible scholars and church members. The scholarly conversation has not brought satisfactory resolution to what is believed as the under-recognition and under-utilization of the gifts God has given Christian women. One wonders why and how the problem is so entrenched in both society and the Nigerian churches, which are intricately connected. Some scholars argue that social restrictions on women have religious undertones **(Odey and Onah, 2020: 78).** Hence the three major religions in Nigeria are not exempt from contributing to these restrictions. The seclusion of women (purdah) practiced by Muslims in the North and parts of Western Nigeria, and the prevalence of child marriage **(Adeboye, 2005: 2)** illustrate Islam's contribution to gender discrimination. Ndute **(1998: 98)** observes that

African Traditional Religion also imposes various restrictions on women through patriarchal culture which holds that men are superior, thereby legitimizing the subjugation of women. Aina **(2003: 56)** also notes that patriarchy "provides material advantages to males, which… places several constraints on the roles and activities of females." These practices limit women's opportunities for advancement and exclude them from active participation in the public and religious arena.

Because Christianity was initially established in a world of three cultures—Jewish, Greek and Roman, where women were often demeaned, the religion has largely inherited society's discriminatory stance toward women **(Adetunji, 2023: 12–14).** Jesus' choice of only male disciples and Paul's instructions that women remain silent and not assume leadership (1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:11-12), among other controversial biblical instructions on women affairs, have influenced the Nigeria church and societal practices for centuries. Olufunke Adeboye notes that European patriarchy crept in during the colonial period, resulting in a male-dominated religious and political space in Nigeria **(2005: 1)**. Consequently, religion controls decisions in society, shaping gender roles both negatively and positively.

Although some women have broken ranks in both the socio-political and ecclesiastical Spheres in Nigeria, this demonstrates that they are not second-class citizens that are confined to passivity. Christian denominations have opened ordained ministry to women within their traditions. Yet, despite these breakthroughs, a closer examination of women ministry especially in two mainline church traditions reveals a host of challenges. This paper seeks to uncover those struggles by investigating the experiences of women ministers in the Nigeria Baptist Convention and the Methodist Church of Nigeria.

BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF WOMEN MINISTRY

The Greek word most often translated "ministry" in the New Testament is "διακονία" (diakonia), from the verb διακονέω which means "to serve" or "to minister." **(Strong, 2001: G1248**). *Diakonia* can refer to any kind of service, whether charitable work, the proclamation of the gospel, or the specific duties of church leaders (Acts 6:1-4; 1 Tim. 1:12). Biblical understanding of Christian woman's identity is crucial to her place in Chrisian ministry.

The Old Testament opens with a creation narrative that presents men and women as equal partners created in God's image, sharing joint stewardship of the earth (Gen 1:27, 26, 28-29).

Paul Jewett (1975: 78) and Susan Foh (1974/1975: 380) both argue that this initial vision affirms sexual equality, with no inherent hierarchy. The emergence of sin (Gen 3) introduced power imbalances and male dominance that shape much of the biblical text. Consequently, the OT contains both affirmations of women's value. For example, Genesis 1:27 affirms human dignity, while passages like Deuteronomy 24:1–4 reflect a highly complex legal framework. However, some problematic passages also mirror a patriarchal culture: laws and narratives that deeply marginalize women (e.g., Gen 16:9, 34:1–2; 2 Sam 13). This tension leads Old Testament scholar Eric A. Seibert (2012: 131) to argue that feminist interpreters must distinguish between the descriptive aspects of a male-authored, androcentric canon and the prescriptive ideals of equality that underlie the creation account.

Despite the prevailing patriarchy, the Old Testament also records significant female leadership and agency: prophetesses like Miriam, Huldah, and Deborah held authoritative roles; Esther and other women exercised courageous influence; and the "woman of Proverbs 31" exemplifies economic and social empowerment. These examples demonstrate that, while the textual tradition often reflects a male-centered perspective, it simultaneously preserves counter-cultural testimonies of women who operated beyond prescribed roles **(Younger, 2002: 159**), challenging the notion of universal female subordination and highlighting the complex, often contradictory portrayal of women in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, the ministries of Jesus offer a paradigm shift for women's ministry. In a Greco-Roman-Jewish world that often-treated women as possessions, Jesus showed love and respect for women, refusing the rabbinic stance that "it is better to burn the Torah than to teach it to a woman" **(Awojobi 2021, 8).** He broke Jewish tradition by allowing women to travel with him and supported his ministry (Lk 8:1-3). Jesus entrusted the bold and loyal women who followed him to the cross with the pivotal responsibility of being the first witnesses of his resurrection (John 20:11-17). He affirmed women's intellectual and spiritual calling in his interaction with Mary and Martha (Lk 10:38-42), where Mary's posture at his feet was praised as a model of discipleship, a clear assertion that the spiritual life belongs to women as fully as to men **(Tucker and Liefeld 1987, 28)**. Jesus' action and teachings establish a biblical foundation that affirms women's dignity and active participation in ministry, challenging the cultural norms of the first century and shaping contemporary understandings of women's leadership in the church.

Hope Amolo (2003, 146) observes, Paul has often been called Anti-feminist because of passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–12, where he requires women to remain silent in the churches and prohibits them from exercising authority over men. However, these injunctions must be understood against the backdrop of the first-century Jewish, Greco-Roman, and early-Christian cultural milieu. As scholars of biblical gender history note, "To understand the position of women in Christianity, we must give attention to the Jewish milieu and Greco-Roman world when Christianity began and spread" **(Scanzoni and Hardesty, 1974: 112).**

In other words, Paul's directives were shaped by specific socio-cultural conditions and must be read in light of his broader affirmation of women's ministry elsewhere in the New Testament. When Paul's entire ministry is taken into account, a far more nuanced picture emerges. He not only welcomed women as vital partners in mission—such as Phoebe, Priscilla, and Junia—but also explicitly accommodated their leadership roles by outlining instructions for them to teach and prophesy (Rom 16:1–7; 1 Cor 11:5). These examples strongly suggest that Paul's restrictive statements were locally contextual, balancing against a career-long pattern of affirming women's active participation in the life and mission of the early church.

From a Christian perspective, women's involvement in ministry should be understood through the lens of "diakonia." Every believer, regardless of gender, is called to serve the body of Christ. Romans 16 and 1 Corinthians 11:5 reveal women actively exercising 'diakonia' in early Christian ministry, including worship, teaching and prophesying. Christian woman's identity transcends sexual categories; she is called by Christ and finds her role in Him. They

are participants in the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Great Commission. Therefore, the biblical picture presents "diakonia" as a universal call to service.

NIGERIAN CHRISTIANITY AND WOMEN IN MINISTRY

According to Olufunke Adeboye (2005: 145), Christianity functions as a global religion with distinct local variations. While the core theological fundamentals of Christianity remain largely consistent worldwide, the vast differences in how women are treated across various Nigerian denominations can be traced directly to the socio-cultural frameworks established by the founders of those specific movements. Christianity, with its strong inherited patriarchy from the Jewish tradition, reinforced the existing male-dominated African and Nigerian cultures. The Christian theology of women and their place in the church cannot be separated from the writings of the early Church Fathers. As Dorcas Olu Akintunde (2001: 24) argues, patristic theology from the third century through the Middle Ages profoundly shaped the institutional church's restrictive attitude toward women and formal ministry, heavily influencing the denominational models later imported into Nigeria.

For example, Tertullian called women "the devil's gateway" whose sin caused the Son of God to die **(Gnanadason, 1988: 69–76)**. Even the Reformation did not substantially alter these stereotypes. Martin Luther, the founder of Protestantism, wrote that the whole of the female body was created for nurturing children and that, in all other respects, women are inferior and incompetent, incapable of teaching or ruling **(quoted in Tavard 1973, 173)**. The Church Fathers interpreted the narrative of Jesus—a male Savior with only male disciples—prescriptively. Consequently, when Christianity began to thrive in Nigeria in the nineteenth-century wave of British and other European missionaries that spread the faith inland, their evangelistic efforts were largely male-dominated **(Ojo and Ajani, 2021: 4)**, a situation that resonated with Nigerian society.

It is therefore important to outline the socio-cultural context of women's roles and status in Nigeria. Historically, women in many Nigerian societies were regarded as inferior to men in ability, character, and strength. **Olabisi I. Aina (1998: 7)** notes that women traditionally occupied two key statuses: wife and mother. As a wife, a woman's primary duty was procreation; as a mother, she transmitted culture, norms, and values to her children. Akintunde (2003: 172) emphasizes the significance of this motherly teaching role, noting that women as carers, mothers, and teachers play indispensable roles in the acculturation and spiritual awareness of children.

Nevertheless, the view of women as second-class citizens confined strictly to marriage and family has historically fostered an inferiority complex, leaving only a few women with the structural freedom to rise above these limitations. However, the notion of universal female inferiority has gradually become unpopular. Emmanuel Adetunji (2023: 11–12) records that, throughout Nigerian history, prominent women such as Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Idia of Benin, Moremi of Ile-Ife, Madam Tinubu of Egba land, and Efunsetan Aniwura, the Iyalode of Ibadan, commanded immense respect from both men and women alike. In contemporary times, increased access to education and greater structural freedom for women to compete alongside men in politics and commerce have produced many more examples of women excelling in leadership careers and across the wider political arena.

As demonstrated in this study, because members of diverse Christian denominations share a common socio-cultural matrix, the lived experiences of Christian women remain deeply intertwined with the broader history of female subordination and subjugation in Nigerian society. Nevertheless, as this analysis has shown, the era characterized by the total exclusion of women from formal ministry is steadily receding as robust movements for women's liberation and gender equity continue to emerge. Consequently, an increasing number of contemporary theologians now frame women's ordination not merely as an ecclesiastical concession, but as a fundamental matter of justice. Today, mainline Protestant bodies such as the Methodist Church Nigeria and the Nigerian Baptist Convention have increasingly carved out institutional spaces for women to exercise their spiritual gifts—albeit bounded by the theological constraints permitted by their respective corporate constitutions.

AN OVERVIEW OF WOMEN MINISTRY IN NIGERIAN CHURCHES

The First out of three main classifications of the Nigerian churches are the mainline, called 'orthodox/mission' churches. The historic Roman Catholic and other Protestant Missions such as the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist belong to this group. They are churches established by the British, European, and American missionaries who spread the Christian faith and shaped the country's religious landscape. The mission churches adhere to the brand of Christianity introduced by the Western missionaries who prescribed a strong hierarchical and male-dominated clergy, Western culture, and rejection of African worldview (Olademo, 2009: 15).

Second are the African Independent Churches. Most of them broke away from the mainline denominations. They include the Native Baptist Church, the United Native African Church, and the United African Methodist Church. Another arm of this denomination is the Aladura such as the Cherubim and Seraphim (C&S) Church, The Church of the Lord, and the Celestial Church of Christ. Unlike the mission churches, these denominations recognize women's spiritual gifts as prophetesses and spiritual leaders. Their doctrines and practices are heavily influenced by African cultural conceptions in the propagation of the Christian message **(Omotoye, 1979: 96)**. It was in this denomination that women's spiritual gifts were first recognized in Christianity in Nigeria **(Olademo, 2009: 151)**.

Then, the third are the Pentecostal denominations. M.A. Ojo divided this into the classical and the neo-Pentecostal. The former are the Christ Apostolic Church, Assemblies of God, Foursquare Gospel Church, Apostolic Faith, The Apostolic Church, The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Deeper Life Bible Church. The neo-Pentecostals include Church of God Missions, Christ Embassy and the Winners Chapel **(Ojo, 1996: 92–110)**. The Pentecostals emphasize the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, spontaneous worship, eloquent leaders, women ministry, and the 'prosperity gospel.' **(Olademo, 2009: 152)**.

Each of the three denominations of the Christian church posits different beliefs and practices regarding gender, but since the mission churches, which are most conservative, had prescribed a male-dominated church system before the African Independent and the Pentecostal church took shape, the general perception in the Nigerian churches is the restrictive mood of women in church ministry. The present author however believes God's interest in women's participation in the great commission through the use of their spiritual

gifts, is a manifestation of how God is using women in various capacities today in Christian ministries in Nigeria.

In Nigerian churches, we have contemporary women who are founders of churches like Mother in Israel V. John (Ona Iwa Mimo Cherubim and Seraphim Church, Ilorin) and Prophetess F. E. Alaba (Grace Church Tanke, Ilorin). We also have popular preachers who are co-founders with their husbands. Few examples are Pastor Funke Adejumo (Agape Christian Ministries), Pastor Faith Oyedepo (Living Faith Church) and Pastor Nike Adeyemi (Daystar Christian Centre). Some like Bishop (Mrs) Margaret Idahosa (Church of God Missions) and Evelyn Joshua (The Synagogue, Church of All Nations) took over church leadership successfully from their late husbands since 1998 and 2021 respectively. This testifies to the fact that a woman could also do well in ministry if called, trained and allows the leadership of the Holy Spirit. With ladies undergoing training in Bible institutions like ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja; UMCA Theological Seminary Ilorin; Ogbomosho Baptist Theological Seminary; and ECWA Jos Theological Seminary, the future Nigeria churches shall witness more exploits from women as theologians and in church ministries.

This breakthrough and promising future of women in Nigerian Christianity did not just happen. It resulted from the influences of African Independent and Pentecostal churches on orthodox/mission churches and Nigerian society. African Independent churches recognized women's spiritual gifts, which is biblical and foundational in Nigerian churches. Pentecostals built on this and made it a paradigm for women ministry in Nigeria **(Odey and Onah, 2026: 81)**. They offer ministry opportunities, self-expression, and actualization to women—with wives of pastors ("Mummy G.O.s") often leading alongside their husbands. One of Pentecostalism's emphases is women ministry, challenging Bible students, theologians, and the mainline church to rethink their stance on women in ministry. The Pentecostal focus on "the Spirit rather than tradition" **(Ojo, 2006: 80)** undermined patriarchy, enhancing women's roles and inspiring women in other denominations who see their exploits.

The NBC and MCN are two examples of the mainline churches that have found the rationale for women ministry, overcoming the strict barriers of the early days of their establishments. Now that women relatively thrive in these churches, it is important to examine how they got there and their challenges.

CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN CHRISTIAN MINISTRY IN SELECTED NIGERIAN CHURCHES

Women Ministry in The Nigerian Baptist Convention: The Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC) has a rich history, dating back to August 1850 when Thomas Jefferson Bowen, a Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) missionary, arrived in Badagry in South -West, Nigeria. The NBC was formally established in 1914, uniting Baptist churches across Nigeria. As a conservative evangelical denomination, NBC's theology and ecclesiology are modeled after the SBC, USA. However, NBC has diverged from its parent denomination in some ways, notably in its decision to ordain women into the Gospel ministry in the late 1990s **(Ojo and Ajani, 2021: 2–4)**.

Traditionally, until the early 1990s, women in the NBC played notable roles as children's workers, ushers, leaders in the welfare department, and providing diaconate support to the

substantive church pastor, largely based on assigned roles by the Pastor **(Lateju, 2023: 7–10)**. The shift of Baptist women's roles from just supportive ministries to higher positions within the denomination raises questions about the factors driving these changes. The NBC now ordains women as Pastors, appoints women as directors in various organs, and as heads of Theological institutions **(Lateju, 2023: 7–10)**.

Ojo and Ajani's empirical research highlights key factors that transformed women's roles in the NBC: access to formal education, establishment of the Women's Missionary Union (WMU), employment of women theologians as educators, and appointment of women to key convention positions **(Ojo and Ajani, 2021: 1)**. The WMU of the Baptist church empowered women through Christian education, leadership training, and skill acquisition programs. These activities stimulated women into higher callings, transforming their roles. Aduke Akinola, the WMU Executive Director in 1992, championed women's ordination in the NBC. She urged NBC women to follow Scripture over culture and pushed for women's theological training and appointments **(Akinola, 1992, vol. 1)**. After the NBC approved women's ordination in 1994 **(Nigerian Baptist Convention 1994)**, Bosun Adegboyega and Olusola Ayo-Obiremi were ordained in 1997 **(Moronfoye and Adeleke, 1997: 14–22)**. The ordination set them apart for ministerial tasks even though challenges lay ahead.

Challenges of Ordained Women Pastors the Nigeria Baptist Convention

1. Disparity in treatment and preference compared to male pastors: Despite the approval of women's ordination to pastoral ministry by the NBC, it is reported that there is disparity and preferential treatment in favor of male pastors over female ministers **(Miller, 2024:1)**. The ordained male ministers are saddled with more ministerial responsibilities and enjoy more privileges than their female counterparts, as if the latter are not equally called, educated, and gifted. Thus, female pastors and sympathizers would accuse the Baptist of preaching gender equality in principle but promoting inequality in practice. The disparity between male and female ministers and the preference for male ministers reflect in the church pastorate, theological education, and remuneration **(Miller, 2024: 1-3)**. Many female pastors face restrictions on becoming senior pastors. Those appointed often find their roles limited to specific traditional areas such as children, youth, and education ministries, with their authority largely confined to the women's union. Typically, female pastors are assigned to low-paying churches or places male pastors are rejected or unwilling to serve.

2. Limited leadership opportunity: A natural consequence of the disparity and preferential treatment is the ordained women's limited leadership opportunities. Women are given recognition in church, primarily as ordained deaconesses, ministers, and pastors, yet they are still not permitted to occupy certain positions **(Miller, 2025: 7)**. This experience at the local church level appears to be replicated at the Association, Conference, and Convention of the Baptist church Nigeria. Ordained women ministers in the NBC are noticeably absent from top power structures as they are often marginalized even at the local church level. Their calling, gifts, and sacrifices are not adequately recognized, and it is concerning that there are hardly any Associations or Conferences where a female pastor serves as Moderator or Conference President. Notably, no woman has ever held the position of NBC President since its inception **(Miller, 2025: 7)**. Patricia T. M. laments that female pastors' participation in church leadership in the NBC is poor **(Miller, 2025: 7)**. Typically, their leadership roles are restricted to traditional responsibilities of the children, youth, and the women's union of the church.

3. Negative impact on women ordained ministers: The unimpressive work environment leads to feelings of inferiority and regret among women pastors. This ministerial situation of limited opportunities among the female pastors leaves many feeling restricted, unable to exercise their gifts fully, and often considering male pastors more favored. Many prospective female pastors reject the call out of frustration, while trained women pastors leave ministry or fail to fulfill their calling due to anticipated improper treatment **(Miller, 2025:7).** Thus, there are murmuring and background complaints where there supposed to be motivation. Thus, the continued gender-based tension of the ordained NBC pastorate weakens the enthusiasm of the ordained female pastors and discourage others from answering the call or pursuing theological training that will enhance their ministry.

4. Family and home challenges: The factors driving change in women's roles in the NBC have implications for women in ministry, particularly in relation to their families **(Ojo and Ajani, 2021: 215–230)**. The cost of a successful female pastoral ministry is high, impacting families significantly. This particular challenge of ordained female pastors is not limited to the NBC alone; it cuts across all Christian denominations. Early marriage stages are challenging, with balancing childcare, home management, and ministry demands. Pregnant or nursing mothers may struggle with church responsibilities **(Onwunyi, 2018: 50)**. Female ministers often grapple with apportioning time between home and ministry, risking their homes if they focus too much on church ministry. Balancing both requires intention. Olufunke Adeboye notes that success in ministry should not come at the expense of the home **(Miller, 2025: 8–9)**. Juggling family and ministry remains a recurring stress point, with some imperiling their families due to ministerial responsibilities.

Women Ministry in The Methodist Church of Nigeria: John Wesley and his brothers founded the Methodist movement in 1738, emphasizing brotherhood, worship, and "**holiness of heart and life**" (Wesley, as cited in Theilen, 2003: 20). The Wesley brothers were Anglican priests who sought to reform the Church of England from within, but their evangelism approaches and emphasis on personal holiness led to the formation of the Methodists. Initially, the movement's hierarchy was dominated by men, with women playing seemingly minor roles. However, historian **Paul W. Chilcote** reveals that women significantly contributed to Methodism's early success (as cited in Theilen: 2003: 20).

Initially, the Methodist Society sought to adhere to the Church of England's laws and regulations regarding women's roles. However, as the movement progressed, women found opportunities to contribute meaningfully. Women's involvement in Methodism evolved over time, with growing opportunities in leadership. Through their dedication, women gained recognition within Methodism, playing a vital role in shaping the movement's inclusivity and vitality. Chilcote's work sheds light on the essential contributions women made to Methodism's growth and development (Chilcote, 199:45).

The MCN originated in 1842 with the arrival of Wesleyan Church missionaries. While it is a traditional mainline church, it has made significant strides in including women in ministry roles. According to **Akintunde (2005:11)**, women's roles in the Methodist Church mirror those of deaconesses in the NT (1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3-6). Examples include assisting with water baptism, burial of women, Catechising women, and caring for sick women at home **(Akintunde, 2005)**. These roles are auxiliary rather than leadership positions. Over time, the church has

progressed, approving women as presbyters, deacons and even ordaining them as priests. This progress stems from fresh scriptural insights and historical reflection, turning new perspectives into humble realities **(Adetunji, 2023, 21)**.

Now that the MCN women can hold the same priestly office as men, preaching, leading services and overseeing churches, they must pass through the procedures which include having a genuine call, accreditation as a lay preacher, scrutiny before the council leaders of the congregation, the quarterly meeting of the circuit, the Synod of the Diocese and acceptance by the Conference, followed by a three-year training in a Methodist theological college with an annual examination after which the candidate will be ordained into the priesthood order. According to the **Methodist Church Nigeria Constitution (2021)**, the candidate will be watched in all ramifications of life to know whether she is fit enough to be ordained or not. Beyond the possibility of having women as full-fledged clergy, the MCN has proven to have a progressive stance on women in leadership, underscored by the landmark ordination and 2023 enthronement of **Rt. Rev. Dr. Nkechi Nwosu** as the first female Bishop of the MCN, Jos Diocese **(Channels Television, 2023)**. One is left to wonder how these ordained women priests fare in their MCN ministry.

The Challenges of the Ordained Priests in MCN

1. Restrictions on priestly functions: Restrictions on priestly functions deeply impact the ministry of women in the Methodist Church Nigeria (MCN). Many female ministers in the MCN have been limited in their priestly capabilities as co-workers in God's service, facing barriers when trying to conduct the Eucharist, perform baptisms, or solemnize marriages **(Adeboye, 2005: 160)**. Similarly, Indigenous African Churches like the Cherubim and Seraphim, Church of the Lord (Aladura), and Celestial Church of Christ—despite showcasing a greater superficial inclusion of ordained women—restrict menstruating women from worship or leading in "holy spaces". Specifically, the Church of the Lord ordains women but bars them from performing communion, weddings, baptisms, or burials until they reach menopause **(Adeboye, 2005: 160)**. This taboo of a biological obstacle, rooted in an assumed female impurity, echoes Old Testament Levitical observances (Leviticus 15:19-24) as well as traditional African customs. Transitioning to broader institutional trends within the MCN, empirical research by **Olatunji (2018)** analyzed data from 960 respondents out of 1,200 administered questionnaires. His findings revealed that while the MCN has successfully ordained more than 50 full-time female ministers who have progressed to the rank of Presbyters, a sharp numerical disparity persists between male and female priests, manifesting heavily as a gendered difference in the actual functions female priests are permitted to perform **(Olatunji, 2018: 45)**. This continuing restriction of priestly functions suggests that while churches may formally ordain women, they often grapple with fully embracing their practical ministry and ecclesial leadership.

2. Intra-gender conflict: Intra-gender conflict presents another layer of friction within the ecclesiastical space. In addition to structural patriarchy, there is also documented intra-gender conflict and gender discrimination within the MCN, with some local churches outrightly refusing to accept women priests as their pastors **(Adetunji, 2023: 12)**. This localized resistance poses a significant setback to the practical realization of the ordination of women to the priesthood in the MCN. Sadly, women can sometimes become their own worst enemies in this arena; empirical observation reveals that envy, gossip, and systemic competition often pit

female congregants and ministers against one another. Certain groups of women actively undermine fellow women's ministerial achievements or employ dismissive language, which severely hinders both spiritual growth and total ministry progress **(Eyoh & Ikot, 2024: 29)**. A stark historical example of this dynamic manifested globally at the 1988 Lambeth Conference, where the activist group Women Against the Ordination of Women (WAOW) organized to formally oppose the introduction of female ordination by distributing packets of resistant material to participants **(Adetunji, 2023: 16)**. Such resistant attitudes, both historically and in contemporary settings, directly lead to women being continuously pigeonholed into limited auxiliary roles and routinely dismissed in their broader leadership aspirations **(Adetunji, 2023: 16)**

3. Rejection by fellow priests and insubordination: Dr. Nkechi Nwosu, the MCN's first female Bishop, historically faced structural resistance from ministers who felt threatened by her leadership. Reflecting on her ecclesiastical journey, she recalled navigating distinct "persecutions and silent oppositions" from peers who struggled to accept her authority **(Sokoya, 2022)**. Despite the MCN's official constitutional recognition of women's ordination, individual members and localized regional churches vary sharply in their acceptance. This hesitation highlights a deep-seated structural patriarchy often justified by restrictive biblical passages like 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Ironically, these isolated textual boundaries frequently overshadow the profoundly inclusive themes found across the wider New Testament canon, such as Jesus' treatment and formal commissioning of women as the premier witnesses to his resurrection (Matthew 28:9-10; John 20:17-18). Furthermore, this resistance ignores the model in Romans 16:1-7, where the Apostle Paul explicitly commends prominent women like Phoebe and Junia as vital, authoritative co-workers in early Christian ministry.

4. Challenge of public perception, safety, and dignity issues: Societal perception regarding female pastors remains a highly contested challenge across contemporary Nigerian Christian denominations. Initially, women in these roles are routinely viewed with public suspicion, and it is primarily those who achieve exceptional ministerial success who eventually earn institutional respect and congregational admiration. Research indicates that male peers frequently exhibit caution around female clergy, subtly implying that women operate on an "unusual spiritual and ministerial terrain" **(Eyoh & Ikot, 2024: 31)**. Consequently, carrying oneself "above reproach" becomes an exhausting structural requirement for female leaders, as they must continuously perform perfection while managing basic human vulnerabilities. Nevertheless, female ministers who successfully maintain absolute personal and systemic integrity steadily earn immense goodwill from the broader Christian community. This relentless focus on maintaining an inner theological calling over external social expectations is best encapsulated by Bishop Nwosu, who famously observed: *"I did not see myself as a woman when I came into the ministry. From the beginning, I saw myself as an individual called to fulfill a purpose"* **(as cited in Sokoya, 2022: para. 1)**.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that women in ministry in the NBC and MCN face similar yet distinct challenges, rooted in gender-based, sociocultural, and institutional biases. In the NBC, limited leadership opportunities and disparity in treatment perpetuate gender disparity, with women often confined to children, youth, and women's ministry. They are often paraded to low-paying churches or places men reject, exacerbating their challenges. Ordained female

ministers struggle to reconcile family responsibilities with ministry, facing public perception, safety, and dignity issues. Methodist women face similar obstacles, plus resistance from male colleagues and limited roles. They are often denied priestly functions like conducting Eucharist or baptism, highlighting persistent patriarchal structures. Dr. Nkechi Nwosu's experience as MCN's first female Bishop underscores these challenges, showing official recognition does not guarantee local acceptance.

To address these challenges, it is essential that the NBC and MCN should do more to enhance adequate theological training for women called by God, emphasizing their acceptance, gifting and potential to members. Fellow ministers should support, not intimidate, female ministers. The Baptist church should entrench women pastorate practically, ensuring they are not limited to low-paying churches or restricted to youth, children, and women ministry. The leadership should appoint female scholars and pastors to occupy positions where they can exercise spiritual and intellectual capacity. MCN leadership may need to review denying women priestly functions. If gender sensitivity is encouraged by establishing support networks and eliminating prejudices, it will help women balance responsibilities and overcome challenges. By working together, the church can unlock women's potential for growth and impact.

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