# Gender and Marriage: The Case of the Ordained Women in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana

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#### Abstract

The paper is concerned with the ordained women in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) and how gender prescribes roles in their marriages and in the PCG. Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with male and female and their relationships are socially constructed, context/time specific. Christianity prescribes to women the role they must play in their matrimonial homes. Women played major roles in the history o f the Basel Mission in the then Gold Coast. However, they are portraved as wives of missionaries. More precisely, they were seen as mission brides and wives, thus representing virtually the collective property of the Mission. In combining the traditional and contemporary roles, many women find themselves playing the roles as wives, mothers and reverend ministers. The PCG put strong emphasis on family life and the issue of relocation has greatly influenced some of the PCG's member's attitude to c ouple ministry. Thus another traditional practice where women do not take leadership positions when men are around. The study examines the theory of gender discourse as a theoretical frame using historical analysis method. The existing structures within both the church and society are patriarchal and the structures turn to focus more on men than on women in the various sectors of life. In the field work, the researcher came across an ordained couple where the wife was ordained first, went into the ministry first, in terms of educational gualification she is more gualified than the husband and they were put in the same district but the husband was rather appointed by the PCG as the district minister for the wife to be his subordinate. The African culture assigns women in the family to the domestic domain denying them from decision making positions in the church but women and men should act in partnership.

Key Words: Presbyterian, Ordained Women, Marriage, Gender Roles, Couple Ministry

# Introduction

Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with male and female and their relationships are socially constructed, context/time specific. *Marriage in the African context is a union between a man and a woman who have consented to live together as husband and wife.* Gender prescribes roles in the Ghanaian family and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) is no exception. The PCG operates on the grounds of the prevailing patriarchal, social, cultural and religious environment of the nation in which the church exists and it is under the grab of cultural practices and norms through

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misinterpretation of religious tenets. Among the many world religions, Christianity for example, incorporates some beliefs, practices as well as culture that prescribe to women the role they must play in their matrimonial homes. One of such passages in the New Testament (NKJV) is Ephesians 5:22-24. 'Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.' This passage has often been quoted to confirm the position of wives in Ghanaian marriages. It can be seen from the passage that wives are expected to submit to their husbands. These Scriptural and cultural sayings are controversial and these are some of the sayings the men hold on to in the Ghanaian societies (See Appendix A, Table 1a & 1b). During the debate for and against women's ordination in the mid-seventies in the PCG for example, debaters against women's ordination deduced their arguments from Biblical scriptures and cultural perceptions as mentioned above. Reflecting on 'the custom of all the churches; the creation of woman from and for man; her seduction by the serpent and her subjection to man by divine command' (Chapman, 1967, p. 33). Women were thought to lack logic and they were thought to be fragile and needed to be silent in public gatherings. After several debates on whether or not women should be ordained in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG), the church eventually ordained women into the clergy and assigned them roles. As ordained ministers some are married with children and they are performing their roles as chaplains, congregational leaders, administrators of lay centres and managers of schools. Their other roles are married women ministers as presbytery chairperson and clerks and finally as missionaries (Only one woman had been a Presbytery Chairperson since women entered the ordained ministry).

It is surprising that as the PCG ordains married women into the clergy ministry and assigns them some roles, some of the issues rose for and against the commissioning of women, continue to follow them in performing their roles and this has affected their family lives. In performing their ministerial roles, the ordained women ministers are faced with some challenges in their marriages which are based on socio-cultural, theological and psychological factors. This paper will fo cus on the gender prescriptions of married ordained women ministers of the PCG.

This study will be analyzed within the theoretical frame of gender equity against women theory which holds men accountable for not allowing women equal role performance. The main argument is that the existing structures within both the church and society are Patriarchal (matrilineal or patrilineal) in the sense that the structures turn to focus more on men while marginalizing women in the various sectors of life. Russell thinks women should be freed from male dominance stating that 'there should be a political theory and practice to free all women...' (Russell, 1993, p. 57). Women are performing their marital roles creditably and they are challenging the paradigm, calling for a change and equality. They are defining, establishing and asserting equal political, economic and social rights and equal opportunities for themselves in Ghana.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1986, p. 121) argues that women's experience should become an integral part of what goes into the definition of being human.' M. A. Oduyoye further explains that there should be a movement geared toward liberating the human community from entrenched attitudes and structures that can only operate if dichotomies and

hierarchies are maintained. By this she argues that both men and women should be given equal entrenched attitude structures (Oduyoye, p. 121).

Gender, based segregation is largely evident in the socio-economic and religious activities, patterns and roles set for women and men in traditional African societies. Thus, women were not only prevented from occupying certain societal and ecclesiastical positions in the church because of their sex but also assign different roles that centre on the home. Thus M. A. Oduyoye argues that 'in Africa, women make pots which are sold cheaply; men make ritual objects and carvings that are highly regarded (Oduyoye, p. 123). In effect, the social differentiation between men and women was determined just as the wheels of culture were set in motion.

Russell is also of the view that the existing system does not encourage women to live their full potentials whether in the church or society in general. She, therefore, argues that women and men should act in partnership so that both men and women are given equal opportunity if they have the skills. However, scholars such as Gaba argues that in Africa, some women can be diviners and priestesses performing all the functions of priests (PCG, 1971, p. 59). Hence wives should be allowed to perform equal roles with their husbands. It is within this frame of thought that this discussion on gender and marriage in the PCG of ordained women ministers is based.

## Factors Influencing Gender Roles in the PCG

There are many factors that influence gender roles in the Ghanaian societies and the PCG. Ghananian women, for example, are prevented from occupying certain hierarchical positions because of their sex and also due to the socio-cultural situations in which they find themselves. In her book Beads and Strands, Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2002, p. 78) reflects on the position of the African woman and the roles they play in the society. According to her, "the position of women in Africa today within the wider society is normally prescribed by what is deemed to be beneficial to the welfare of the whole community of women and men." According to Mercy Amba Oduyoye, issues of equality cannot be adequately spoken of in terms of African culture. The culture, she said, is replete of gender equality and fairness. This is particularly so because, according to her, role differentiations in Africa are clear and are not meant to be valued hierarchically (Oduyoye, 79). According to Mercy Amba Oduyoye even though the African Culture from its very beginning, has allowed wome n to be in charge of shrines and cultic centres, it is also observable that there are more women in the secondary roles of mediums and cultic dancers, than there are women who serve as high priestesses of shrines or as healers. What is even more noisome, she observes, is that there are more women who serve as clients of the divinities of the cults (Oduyoye, 79). Such cultural or traditional notions of women's "religious responsibility" are canned into the institutions. Women, notwithstanding t heir equal or transcendent" potentials are made to play second to men. Women who rise up and challenge or take up the challenge are resisted not only by men but even by their own colleague women due to the dominant socio-cultural sexual differentiations.

Some scholars again, argue that within the African socio-cultural context patriarchal system is men centred thus, Labeodan argues that;

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The patriarchal system is held in high esteem in most African Societies. As a result of this, women... are to be seen and not heard... there is so much suppression and oppression of women by men who are supported by the cultures...... They used certain facts about the physiology of man and woman as the basis for constituting a set of identities that work to empower men and disempower women (2007, p. 113).

She explains that the roles assigned to women are very much related to the cultural and historical traditions that try to place women in the domestic domain that they are supposed to be home makers and nurturers of the family including husband and children. E. Martey (1998, p. 38) for example, interprets this, the fact that women's roles are basically restricted to the home as a type of injustice and restriction against women in society. This socio-cultural role assigned to women within the African traditional communities is reflected on how the PCG assigns roles to women. This reaffirms how the socio-cultural perceptions on women form part of the assignment of roles to PCG women in their marriages.

Grace Adeoti (1998, p. 107), like Labeodan, also holds a similar view that 'In many societies be it Africa or elsewhere, a woman is seen as the burden bearer with no rights whatsoever to equality with man. She is even seen as an irrational being not capable of reasoning; therefore, she is to be seen and not to be heard... The ancient world was predominantly a man's world.'

Again, E. Martey (1998, p. 38) continues that 'the history of African culture is patriarchal. Women in Africa have not been treated equal to men in opportunity, dignity and power.' He says the cultural restrictions and discrimination against African women is...... Most societies in Africa prefer having male children, especially, as the first born. A wife may be divorced for not having male children, or at best, the man may look elsewhere for male children (Martey, p. 41). The interesting aspect now is the at industrial revolution and scientific advancement have pushed women into new/ contemporary roles and they are contributing to a new view of the part that women could play at work and in the society. The new role that women play in the society affects the PCG particularly. Some women only need to acquire certain skills which will enable them to do their work effectively.

# P. C. G Ordained Women and Marriage

In the Ghanaian communities women turn to play multiple roles in whatever situations they find themselves. In combining the traditional and contemporary roles, many carrier women find themselves playing the roles as wives and mothers and their jobs inclusive. It is not uncommon to find a woman playing multiple roles, a woman being a mother, wife and an ordained minister, etc., at the same time. This implies that the ordained women ministers in the PCG like their counterparts in the other sectors of life find themselves as mothers, wives, single parents, etc.

One of the problems facing the ordained women ministers in their marital lives is cultural and societal demand that every wife, irrespective of who they are, are to relocate to wherever their husbands are transferred to. I think this issue of relocation has greatly influenced some of the PCG men's attitude to married ordained women ministers.

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Another problem facing the PCG ordained women ministers who are wives is the ability to efficiently perform their roles of being wives which demand cooking, washing, nurturing, making sure food is ready and cleaning the house. With the role of a woman minister which includes preparing sermons, preaching, visiting congregations, counseling, literally being on duty for 24 hours as a commissioned and an ordained minister.

In the Ghanaian society, it is a challenge when women still combine old tr aditional roles with contemporary roles. This affects married ordained women in the PCG because elsewhere in Europe, roles are differential and most women would not agree that men are the heads in their homes. In response to the question whether respondents think the Ghanaian expectations of women affect ordained married women ministers? Some claim it is difficult for ordained married women ministers to balance their lives carefully to be able to perform their roles as wives, mothers and minist ers. A female minister in an interview remarked 'her husband is very supportive and he does not leave her alone to go about the house chores and he eats whatever is available' (Interview 18/ June/ 2008). Dolphyne (1991, p. 5) writes on 'who does what in the home,' and to Dolphyne;

Every African woman grows up knowing that it is the woman who cooks the meals and generally sees to it that the house is clean and well kept, and that everything is in its proper place. Whatever her level of education or professional status she does not normally expect her husband to share the household chores (p. 5).

Dolphyne is of the view that when a husband enjoys cooking and chooses to cook breakfast or dinner one day, she appreciates the fact that he is being helpful, but she does not expect him to do so as a matter of compulsion. She continues further that husbands who have lived in Europe before used to help their wives in the house chores but when they are in Ghana they do not help their wives. Prof essional women in Ghana like the ordained female ministers claim they employ house helps and pay their salary, thinking the house helps do their jobs for them. Peter K. Sarpong (1974, p.69) also affirms Dolphyne's point that 'a good wife is obedient to her husband, faithful, hardworking, and helpful and she sees to it that all that he wants is forthcoming without him having to ask first as, for example, clean clothes, hot water for baths and food.' Motherliness requires a woman to provide by wa y of preparation of adequate food and shelter for her own children, others and strangers.

Generally speaking, in Ghana and, in most African societies, a lot is expected of married women. Dolphyne says women are supposed to be solely in charge of the kitchen, the children, marketing and the general running of the home. Hired helps, in most homes, however, ease the amount of actual work they would have to do. However, some men insist that their wives personally do certain chores, for instance, pre paring their food. According to Dolphyne, some aspects of African culture have a particular bearing on issues of women's emancipation (Dolphyne, p. 1). She thinks, like E. Martey, M. A. Oduyoye and B. Sackey, that these customs, traditions and beliefs have, over the years, helped to keep women under subjugation and make them feel generally inferior to men and incapable of operating at the same level as men in society. Marriage is one of such institutions (2006, p. 49). B. Sackey has also refuted a review of the theory of inequality that revealed that 'evolutionary anthropologists used the concept of adaptation and division of labour to propose that the size

and strength of men made them adapted for different jobs while the biological make up of women kept them at home as only careers of husbands and children' (2006, p. 49).

This research examined the perceptions of clergy womens' views on how being a minister have influenced their marriages, specifically the negotiation and distribution of marital authority since their ordination. For instance, wives are often at a disadvantage in marriage simply because of the 'implicit hierarchy in worth' which assigns a greater value to men and masculinity's 'invisible power'. Socially, the issue of women's rights has been affirmed by secular society and women's ability to perform well in a number of traditionally male occupations stands as a visible affirmation of these rights. At the same time, theological interpretations within the Christian tradition are often actively mobilized to support resistance to female roles. In addition to this, historical patterns within Christianity have been dominated by male imagery, which makes it difficult, on a cultural and cognitive level, for some laity to accept female leadership roles (Sintim-Adasi, 2013, pp. 115-117). As the local church sorts through these issues, the female minister is often left in a vulnerable position and even in her marriage. Another category had the subjection of married women to their husbands in mind. 'A woman cannot be a church leader because if she is married she is under the responsibility of her husband'. The Bible says she belongs to him and, therefore, cannot make an independent decision (Rydzewski [Accessed 24/09/2011]).

Some respondents accept the bible as authority behind women's subjugation. Thus every injunction against women is taken in its totality. In addition, the question of who is going to look after the home and the children?' is the frequently asked question.

The point is that culture decides what women's work is and what men's work is. As girls grow up they are taught at home what women's work is. Cultural demands are interpreted as God's will for women. The place of a woman is in the home and her major roles are child-bearing and child-rearing. Patriarchal culture which is concerned with preserving ruling power in the hands of men at all cost is called upon here against women sharing leadership roles in the church. There are also the assumptions that in culture, under no circumstance do women have power over men (Rydzewski [Accessed 24/09/2011]).

## Ordained Married Couples in the PCG: Women as second Choice Leaders

In the PCG there are couples who a re ordained ministers doing God's work together. There are about six couples in the PCG and the PCG put strong emphasis on family life. The PCG may at times face the issue of transferring one couple to a different town. I think this issue of relocation has greatly influenced some of the PCG's member's attitude to ordained couples in the ministry. That if, for example, Reverend Mrs Mensah and Rev. Mr. Mensah are pasturing different churches in the same town, and thus Reverend Mrs. Mensah leaves her congregation and relocates with Reverend Mr. Mensah if he is transferred to another town. Since the PCG put strong emphasis on family life separating couples to minister in different towns can be contrary to their teachings on family life. Separating couples to different towns when the need arises can be problematic. Perhaps this is one of the several reasons that the PCG has put on hold the practice where couples are ordained into the ministry.

There is a traditional practice where women do not take leadership positions when men are around and this has affected some ordained women ministers whose husbands are also ordained. In the field work, the researcher came across an ordained couple where the

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wife was ordained first, went into the ministry first, in terms of educational qualification she is more qualified than the husband and they were put in the same district but the husband was rather appointed by the PCG as the district minister for the wife to be his subordinate.

One would have thought that since the ordained wife is more qualified than the ordained husband in terms of education and experience, the church would make the wife a district minister instead of the husband when the opportunity arose. That was not the case in this situation, the husband who is junior in the ministry and from a lower educational background was rather made a district minister and the wife had to work under him. Anyone in the woman's position would not be happy about such a situation and would complain when one gets the opportunity to do so. It is possible at times that if the couples in such situations are not mature enough such decisions by the PCG can bring conflict in their marriage. So far, no plausible explanations have been given to such decisions. This gives room for people to deduce their own views or conclusions to such an act which can be seen as unjust from the woman's perspective. It can also give room for one to conclude that the traditional patriarchal system is still dominant in the PCG marriages.

Even though, in the research the researcher found six couples in the PCG and though this number may not be significant, some of the issues raised may affect the PCG's stance on couples doing God's work. In fact, since 1994 these and others such as financial issues have affected the PCG's stance and on the commissioning of ministers' wives.

Some respondents think ordained couples as co-workers in the PCG are not effective. According to a male couple minister, there is a problem with ordained couples in the PCG and it started when women were not ordained. He claims deacons, deaconesses and evangelists were married among themselves doing God's work, (Ampadu, Interview,10/08/2010) and he remarked that when the deaconess and evangelist programmes were fading out they were sent to Ramsayer Training Centre at Abetifi to be commissioned as ministers. A woman was not nominated and this created tension. The issue of couples doing God's work together in the PCG erupted and information from the Head Office was sent to the Training Centre for all married women whose husbands were to be ordained or were ministers to be withdrawn (Prempeh, Interview, 18/11/2010).

To the question on how respondents assess couple ministers as co-workers, majority of the male ministers think it may have inherent problems while majority of the church leaders and church members think home keeping, parenting and marital relationship are critical issues facing the couple ministry? All working mothers face cultural prejudice concerning women's position in the home. Some claim the management of the home is always not in 'good' shape' or have broken down'. Others think it creates pro blems in the home as to who should take up the house chores. As to whether their husbands assist them with the house chores some of the female Clergy complain their husbands do not help them with the house chores. Such individual differences occur in other career couple homes. Some are of the view that the conflict of who should be the head of the home creates tension. Some think when they are posted to one station some of the stations cannot accommodate them while they also get worried about the welfare and schooling of their children. Some think that the woman's role is to serve the home and not be a minister.

To the question why the PCG is disallowing spousal commissioning the Clerk of the General Assembly recalled that the regulation of couple marriage is based on postings. He

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remarked that ministers' spouses are not allowed for joint ministry with the reason being that posting becomes a problem because the couple will have to minister one congregation (Oppong, interview, 10/12/2011).

Presbytery Chairpersons and district ministers are forced to make husbands of couple ministers senior ministers and the females second ministers, for fear their marital issues may interfere with the ministry, many of couple ministers enter into many challenges due to lack of co-operation on the part of their husbands.

The ordained female clergy in the couple ministry are facing cultural prejudice concerning women's position in the home. The challenges they face in marriage, home care, and parenting are not different from what other working mothers face. When the male ministers were asked whether they will work with couple ministers if they were Presbytery Chairpersons/District ministers that had a congregation that was capable of maintaining the two ministers, majority of t he respondents about 60 percent said 'No' and the rest 40 percent said 'Yes'. The reasons adduced include:

- divided attention on the part of the couple between the home and the ministry;
- the female spouse's services may be interrupted in case of emergency;
- the two might not attend meetings together;
- in matters affecting the couple, the church will suffer;
- Marriage between couples are not worthy of emulation nowadays.

### Cultural prejudice concerning women's position in the home

The reasons outlined for the ineffectiveness of couple ministry in the PCG includ ed issues about home management, child upbringing and the problem of posting them to separate stations. Respondents are very much concerned about home management and child upbringing which is very critical for a Christian home/family. Most of the reasons given could, however apply to any couple who have careers to pursue. For example home keeping is a shared responsibility. Findings show that while the couple ministers did not find any problem with their joint ministry, marriage or family upk eep, majority of the male ministers, church leaders and members found couple ministry to be largely ineffective. Interestingly, when women had not entered the ministry, people did not think about the responsibilities of the minister father in the home. Respondents' answers to the question on how they assess their ministries as co-workers were varied between effective and ineffective. The majority for reasons that centre on family keeping and marital relations. In essence, the challenges that couple ministers are facing are only part of the cultural prejudice concerning women's position in the home.

#### Conclusion

The experiences of PCG ordained women in their marriages are underrepresented and it seems evident that the strong wave of transformation that has evolved in the church will continue till things are normalized. In the aspiration for innovation or modernization recourse to the converse seems to have taken place and aspects of tradition have been retained through their very rejection.

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Findings indicate that the challenges of the ordained women in their marriages and in the PCG are closely linked with some of the various issues that were raised during the debate on women's ordination. Some of the negative issues used against the women have become challenges in their marriages and ministry affecting, to some extent, the roles assigned to them. At the 47th synod held in Sunyani in 1976, the delegates agreed on women's ordination but they insisted that initially the ordained wome n should be restricted to the roles of chaplains in institutions such as Hospitals and Schools and they were not allowed to be in charge of congregations like their male counterparts. The research clearly demonstrate that even when ordained women have been assigned similar roles of men, influence of the sociocultural, theological and psychological issues, for example, made them second to men. Similarly, the culturally assigned roles of being wives and mothers for example continue to hunt the ordained women in whatever positions they found themselves. These and other related theological, socio-cultural, and psychological peceptions continue to follow the ordained women in the PCG. These centred on marriage, couple ministry and the combination of traditional and new roles. Industrial revolution and scientific advancement have, however, pushed women into new roles and they contribute to a new view of the part that women could play in the work of the church and society. The PCG is not o nly to proclaim the gospel but it is to help people to interpret the gospel in the context of their life situations. The new roles that women play in their marriages and in the society affect church work particularly among women.

PCG report of ad hoc committee to research into marriage of couples who are Presbyterians ministers/ordination of spouses of ministers.

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#### Interview

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# APPENDICES

# **Appendix A.** Ordination in 1979 with Male Colleagues



The woman minister not in a gown among male ordained ministers. The attire is Kaba and Sleet. On this occasion, she preached the sermon on behalf of those ordained. Her exhortation was based on 'who is on the Lord's side?' At the end of it, she raised both arms high up and affirmed, 'we are on the Lord's side.' This was a historic event. Source: Programme of Burial and Thanksging Service for the Late Rev. Gladys Emelia Maku Nyako, May 2008.

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Nature of Argument Marital child-bearing and home -keeping responsibilities will affect performance	Frequency 36	Percent 23.1
Paul's injunction that women should remain silent(quiet) in public (Biblical argument)	36	23.1
Socio-cultural argument regarding menstruation of women	32	20.5
Women are feeble	10	6.4
Women are to assist their husbands in the Ministry	12	7.7
Men supposed to be heads (not worren)	8	5.1
Women cannot leave husbands when transferred	4	2.6
Women not as industrious as male counterparts	18	11.5
Total	156	100.5

Source: Field Data: 2011.

# Table 1b. Arguments against women's ordination (female ministers' views)

Arguments	Frequency	Percent
Theological argument based on Paul's injunction (women should not speak in public)	18	42.9
A woman's place is the home (marital and domestic roles)	17	40.5
Women are spiritually unclear. (traditional and Pauline theology)	5	11.9
Women are inferior to men and should not lord over men )	2	4.8
Total	42	100.1

Source: Field Data 2011.