

Theologische Universiteit Kampen/ Utrecht

The doctrine of the Image of God in Reformed and African Women's Theology and its implication for female leadership in Nigerian Baptist Churches: An intercultural analysis of Herman Bavinck's Image of God and Mercy Oduyoye African Women's Theology

Master's thesis for the Master of Intercultural Reformed Theology (MIRT)

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Dedicated to God, the giver of life
and to my lovely family.
Parents: Femi & Folake
Lovely siblings:
Joy, Gift and Praise

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intersection of African Women's Theology, as presented by Mercy Amba Oduyoye, and Herman Bavinck's Reformed theology on the Imago Dei. It explores how these ideas can influence the issue of female pastoral leadership in Nigerian Baptist Churches. Oduyoye's emphasis on African women's experiences and spirituality, challenging patriarchal structures, especially from Yoruba Traditional Religion, will be considered. The study also examines Bavinck's theology regarding the Imago Dei's role in promoting equal human dignity and supporting female leadership. It critically analyzes historical patriarchal systems in the Church that have marginalized women, advocating for the use of both theological frameworks to enhance women's inclusion in leadership roles. Additionally, it delves into the concept of internalized oppression among women in the Church, a factor contributing to gender inequality according to Oduyoye. The research pays close attention to the official positions of the Nigerian Baptist Synod in light of Oduyoye and Bavinck's theological perspectives. By engaging in dialogue between these theological viewpoints, the study aims to develop a nuanced understanding of gender roles in Nigerian Baptist Churches and suggest avenues for theological and ecclesiastical reforms that affirm women's humanity and leadership potential.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background of the research

In theological research on women and the church ministry by Patrick Mwanja, an African scholar, he noted that if one were to inquire about the status of women in their respective Churches today, numerous Christians would likely assert that women play a pivotal role in service at African local churches.¹ Within the Church, women have been actively engaged in crucial services and have demonstrated exceptional leadership capabilities whenever afforded the opportunity. Nevertheless, issues about women, such as their equality with men, their inherent human dignity, and their potential for empowerment within the Church, have emerged as significant concerns in the African *Yoruba* context.²

In a research paper by a Baptist female theologian, Esther Falade on an evaluation of the impact of theologically trained women in the Nigerian Baptist Convention, she states that women in leadership roles within the Baptist church are often seen in areas such as the Diaconate, caregiver positions, and Sunday school teachers in Nigeria. Nevertheless, a contentious debate exists surrounding the idea of women assuming also other roles within the Church.³ Unlike their male counterparts, women are often confined to serving in these departments. Despite demonstrating unwavering dedication in their current capacities, these women encounter obstacles when they desire to fulfill the calling of a pastor within churches, such as becoming head pastors.

In this research, I want to pay specific attention to the position of women in the Nigerian Baptist Convention. This denomination is no exception, and women who attend theological school end up in one of these positions, caring for the teenagers or overseeing Sunday school classes.⁴

¹ Patrick Mwanja, "Women and Church Ministry in Africa: Removing the Impasse towards a Fruitful Theological Conversation.," *East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion* 4, no. 1 (November 9, 2021), <https://journals.eanso.org/index.php/eajtcr/article/view/465> (accessed June 20, 2024), 83-84.

² Patrick Mwanja, 84.

³ Esther Iyabode Falade, "A Critical Evaluation of the Impact of Theologically Trained Women on the Nigeria Baptist Convention," (June 2002) <https://nbts.edu.ng/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/esther-iyabode-adebate-falade> (accessed June, 2024), 6

⁴ Esther Falade, 6.

While reading literature about women's leadership within the Church in the context of African perspectives, the issue of women being unable to assume the same leadership positions in Churches as men was attributed to the patriarchal nature of African societies, which significantly influences the mindset of church members⁵, a perspective with which I also concur. The influence of a patriarchal society on the Church's leadership framework is plausible; however, it is essential to explore other impacts on or within the church aside from the patriarchal structures of the society.

This raises the theological question regarding the significance of man and woman being formed in the likeness of God. Does a connection exist between being created in the likeness of God and attaining equality in the church's leadership? Must one occupy a specific role to be recognized as equal? Is there truly a challenge for women in aspiring to leadership positions or in the perceptions surrounding their aspirations for leadership? Is the problem beyond leadership in the Church?

In this research the Ghanaian theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye is an important conversation partner. Oduyoye is described as an African Christian Feminist Theologian who is deeply entrenched within the cultural and religious fabric of Africa, deliberated on the status of women in the church within the African context.⁶ She explained that the way in which women in positions outside the African Churches which includes Nigeria, are treated (society) and inside the church are quite similar but often in the society women are more recognized of their presence than in the church. Oduyoye, described some Church attitude to this situation as a claim of 'not being of the world' even though they are 'in the world'⁷ In the sense that where the world would grant women access to, some mainline churches would refuse due to doctrine constrains. The question is then "Is the issue of women leadership a result of patriarchal system of the society or the church doctrine?"

Oduyoye expounded on the status of Christianity in Africa by elucidating the nexus between the Christian faith and African cosmology.⁸ This underscored the importance of the Godhead, spiritual

⁵ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 67-68.

⁶ Oluwatomisin Olayinka Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2023), 8.

⁷ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 82.

⁸ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 34.

essence, and reverence for elder culture, all of which struck a chord with African cosmology. Consequently, Africans embraced Christianity when it was perceived as an integral part of their culture, rather than an entity separate from or contrary to it. Oduyoye denoted African Christianity as being 'cultured in Africa'.⁹ Furthermore, Oduyoye discerned a similarity in the viewpoints of Europeans and Africans concerning gender. While Europeans emphasized the masculinity of God, African Christian men adopted this perspective and integrated it with the prevailing male-centric beliefs in their communities. She noted that the issue was not the attribution of gender to God per se, but rather the interpretation of the relationship between genders, which gave rise to widespread confusion.¹⁰ This prompts the question: What does be created in the image of God imply?

The other theological conversation partner is the Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Bavinck. Bavinck, while not explicitly addressing the issue of male and female leadership in the church, does emphasize that the entirety of the human race is created in the image of God.¹¹ Furthermore, he argues that the image of God is far too profound to be fully realized in a single individual, no matter how gifted they may be. Instead, it can only be partially unfolded in all its depth and richness within a humanity consisting of billions of members.¹² In order to effectively address the issue of leadership positions within the church, it is crucial to consider possible causes of the leadership structure, such as patriarchal influences or internal church issues, and explore how these can be addressed through the theological concept of the 'Image of God'.

⁹ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 34.

¹⁰ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 34.

¹¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics* : 2 (Baker Academic, 2011), 315.

¹² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 334.

1.2 Statement of Research Problem

The issue this research aims to address is the challenge of female pastoral roles in the Nigeria Baptist Convention. It is commonly observed that within the Nigerian Baptist Convention, women who have attended theological seminary and shown strong commitment to their leadership roles face difficulties when aspiring to serve as pastors in the local Churches. It is against this dilemma that this research will explore how female pastors are called to pastoral roles and the factors that limit their roles in leadership positions at the Nigerian Baptist Convention local Churches.

1.3 Research Question

Main question: What can we learn from a dialogue between African Christian Women's Theology of Mercy Oduyoye's and Herman Bavinck's Dutch Reformed perspective on being created in the image of God for female pastoral leadership roles in the Nigerian Baptist Churches in the African Traditional Religion context?

Sub-questions

- i) What is African Traditional Religion's (Yoruba tradition) understanding of leadership positions between males and females?
- ii) What is the knowledge on the position of theologically trained female pastors in the Nigeria Baptist Convention?
- iii) What is Mercy Oduyoye's understanding of women and Christianity in Africa and her theological response on the leadership position of women in the African Christian context?
- iv) What is Herman Bavinck's understanding of the image of God in relation to the position of male and female?

v) How can Oduyoye's African women's theology and Herman Bavinck's perspectives of being created in the image of God open new perspectives to the question of women's leadership position in the Nigeria Baptist Convention?

1.4 Significance of Study

This study holds significance for both male and female members of the Nigerian Churches, particularly the Nigeria Baptist Convention and the academic body for case study and further study. The primary goal of this study is to draw attention within the Nigeria Baptist Convention to both obvious and subtle tensions regarding leadership positions in the church. To achieve this, it is crucial to examine the socio-religious context in which the Nigerian Baptist Convention function.

Here, we will pay special attention to the possible influence of African Traditional Religion specifically in the Nigeria Yoruba community. The researcher would contend in this study that the concept of humans as the "image of God" can offer insights into female leadership roles in the Nigerian Baptist church. Consequently, the study will present Mercy Oduyoye's African Women's Theology and Herman Bavinck's Reformed interpretation of the 'image of God' about leadership roles. Furthermore, practical recommendations will be proposed for Nigeria Baptist Churches to address gender-related leadership issues sensitively within the Church. It is believed that the findings of this study will serve as a valuable tool in resolving questions about leadership eligibility, and fostering unity among individuals created in the image of God, regardless of their positions.

1.5 Positionality of the Researcher

As a Nigerian Baptist member and female theologian, I have always been open to exploring the topic of men and women leading the Church. In the patriarchal society I have lived in, women are rarely given opportunities to hold leadership positions equal to men. It is also noticeable that there are very few women serving as head pastors in Nigerian churches. I strongly believe that women who are called and ordained should have the opportunity to lead a church if they desire. However, these views have not yet undergone intercultural theological scrutiny. There may be underlying

reasons for this situation within the context that need further examination. Therefore, I am willing to consider other perspectives as well. I intend to present the issue clearly and offer a contextually sensitive analysis.

1.6 Limitations

The aim of this study is not to investigate the leadership roles of men and women in Nigerian Churches. Instead, it is specifically centered on the Nigerian Baptist Convention in the Yoruba community. The focus of this study is on the leadership position (clergy) within the Nigerian Baptist Convention and its surrounding circumstances. This research aims to comprehend the leadership framework of clergy within the Baptist faith and how Oduyoye African Women's Theology and Bavinck's doctrine of the Image of God can offer relevant responses to the situation.

1.7 Research Methodology

To respond to the main and sub-research questions, I plan to utilize the following methods. My research is primarily situated within the disciplines of practical theology. I aim to explore the status of women within the Yorùbá context in Nigeria and the NBC. This investigation of the context will involve reviewing works by scholars from these contexts such as John Mbiti and Olajubu Oyeronke for the Yorùbá context, and Akintola Babalola and Ogunlana Adekunle from the Nigeria Baptist Church and other authors. Questionnaires and interviews will not be utilized, as there is enough information available from academic sources.

Subsequently, I will explore Oduyoye's perspective within African Women's Theology, alongside interpretations of her works by other authors who share similar ideas, will provide valuable insights. Furthermore, the study will delve into the systematic theological perspectives on the "image of God" in Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics and within the context of African Women's Theology. It could be beneficial to supplement Herman Bavinck's insights by examining other Reformed theologians like G.C. Berkouwer and Anthony Hoekema to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of the "image of God" from a Reformed standpoint.

1.8 Structure of the Research

This study is divided into six chapters. The initial chapter presents the issue of female leadership in the Nigeria Baptist Convention. It discusses key elements of the research introduction such as research questions, sub-questions, significance, and methodology. The order of addressing the main question followed the sequence of the sub-questions. This same structure was maintained in chapters two through six of the theses.

Chapter two examines the first sub-question by reviewing scholarly literature. It poses the question: what is the African (Yorùbá) traditional religion's perspective on leadership roles between males and females? This section provides an overview of the Yorùbá people's history and their traditional religion. It delves into the concept of gender not only as a sexual identity but also as a societal responsibility in Yorùbá culture. Additionally, the chapter explores various scholarly arguments concerning gender in Yorùbá traditional religion, such as those of Oyewumi Oyeronke and Oyeronke Olajubu. These debates are further elaborated on in chapter 2. The chapter also delves into the examination of gender roles in leadership pre- and post-colonialism, drawing on works by African authors like Toyin Falola, Akintunde Akinyemi, and Atinuke Okunade. Moreover, it focuses on the impact of Christian missions on leadership roles in Yorùbá traditional religion. The empirical studies conducted by these scholars aimed to determine the presence of a gendered system among the Yorùbá people before and during the Colonialism/Christianity era.

The third chapter tackles the question: what is known about the status of female-trained pastors in the Nigeria Baptist Convention? This chapter explores the establishment of the Nigeria Baptist Convention by Christian missionaries in Nigeria. It specifically examines the role of female ministers who have received theological training in the Convention. The analysis reveals that the issue lies not necessarily with the Convention itself but with individual local churches due to their autonomous policies. Additionally, the chapter investigates the potential barriers preventing the acceptance of female pastors in these local churches.

Chapter four delves into Oduyoye's perspective on the issue of Christianity and women in Africa, as well as the theological response of African women. The assessment focuses on African Women's Theology by Oduyoye, exploring its foundation and origin within the circle of concerned African women theologies established by her. Additionally, the chapter examines Oduyoye's views on Christianity in Africa and its treatment of women, along with the African women's theology response to matters concerning women in the church, their ecclesiology, emphasis on ministry partnership, and African women anthropology.

Chapter five explores Bavinck's interpretation of the image of God in relation to the roles of male and female. It provides insights on the doctrine of man as the image of God, particularly from a Reformed theologian's standpoint. The discussion includes Bavinck's Organic perspective on the Image of God, the human origin, the concept of the whole person as God's image, and the unity of humankind. Furthermore, this chapter draws on the perspectives of other Reformed theologians to enhance the understanding of these concepts.

Finally, chapter six addresses how Oduyoye's African women's theology and Herman Bavinck's insights on being created in God's image can offer new perspectives on women's leadership within the Nigeria Baptist Convention. This exploration is conducted through a series of questions and suggestions aimed at addressing the issue of female leadership within the NBC by drawing from Oduyoye and Bavinck's theological frameworks.

1.9 Defining Keywords

1.9.1 Yorùbá Traditional Religion

Yorùbá traditional religion is one of the well-known religions in Nigeria. According to Toyin Falola and Ann Genova, who are Yorùbá historians, Yorùbá's historical roots are believed by certain individuals to trace back to an ancient Hausa term, *Yarriba*, denoting people from Òyó with whom they had economic and social interactions.¹³ Falola noted that the Yorùbá ethnic group, consisting of

¹³ Toyin Falola and Ann Genova, *Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 1

over 30 million people, has been extensively researched and documented. The Yorùbá people have historically lived in a region situated in present-day southwestern Nigeria commonly acknowledged as Yorùbá land. Presently, Yorùbá land encompasses regions within the Nigerian states of Lagos, Ògún, Òyó, Osun, Ondó, Ekiti, and Kwara, as well as parts of the Francophone Republics of Benin and Togo, where they are identified as *Nagot* or *Anago*.¹⁴ Their intellectual prowess in the arts, military strength, cultural adaptability, capacity to embrace modern changes, and the pivotal role played by their educated leaders contribute to their scholarly interest. Moreover, the strategic geographical location of Yorùbá land facilitates their interaction with neighboring African nations and enables trade with foreign merchants through established trade routes.¹⁵ The Yorùbá people hold significant importance and have garnered considerable attention. The emphasis on Yorùbá Studies in academic research is evident through the recognition of their art, music, religion, and oral traditions, among others.¹⁶

Yorùbá traditional religion is the fundamental belief system of the Yorùbá people in Nigeria, involving the worship of various deities like *Olodumare* (God) and divinities such as *Sango*, *Oya*, and *Orunmila*.¹⁷ The Yorùbá Traditional Religion is primarily based on the culture and worldview of the Yoruba ethnic group, creating a close connection between culture and religion. This traditional belief system encompasses the spiritual beliefs, practices, and customs of the Yorùbá people. It revolves around the concept that spirits, supernatural beings, and witchcraft are intricately linked to human life on earth, leading the people to be described as "cultured heathens" due to their awareness of a Supreme Being who is accessed through "various intermediary deities."¹⁸ According to John Mbiti, an African theologian, religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or always possible to isolate it and Africans are notoriously religious.¹⁹ In the same

¹⁴ Toyin Falola and Ann Genova, *Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics*, 1.

¹⁵ Toyin Falola and Ann Genova, *Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics*, 2.

¹⁶ Jacob Olupona, "The Study of Yorùbá Religion Tradition in Historical Perspective," *Numen* 40, no.3 (1993), 241

¹⁷ Ayodele Jegede, et al., eds. *Peoples and Cultures of Nigeria*, (Ibadan, Nigeria: Department of Sociology, 2012), 310.

¹⁸ Ayodele Jegede, et al., eds. *Peoples and Cultures of Nigeria*, 312.

¹⁹ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1985), 1.

way, Yorùbá traditional religion is an integral part of the Yorùbá culture, worldview, and demeanor. It is essential to consider the culture, theology, and gender dynamics of the Yorùbá Traditional Religion within the Nigerian Baptist Convention context. This examination raises inquiries such as: does the African traditional religion gender roles have an impact on women in leadership roles within NBC this setting? How is the patriarchal system interpreted in the traditional religion of the Yorùbá people? To what extent is the NBC influenced by the traditional religion's patriarchal system?

1.9.2 African Women's Theology

In the work of Oredein, an African scholar who contributed to the study of African women's theology, she writes that, African women's theology is sometimes referred to as African feminist theology, it serves as a counterbalance to African (men's) theology by advocating a more comprehensive approach in African theological studies.²⁰ The theology covers the writings of women who do not accept that African men's theology should suffice for the entire faith community.²¹ These female theologians who contribute to the study of women's theology in Africa argue for this vision of "doing" theology with women in the community. Doing theology which implies "participation and exploration, emphasizing the activity that produces theology". African women theologians seek "to be at the heart of where theology is being created, in the womb of the community of faith, and to academically articulate what is being produced".

These theologians employ a perspective methodology rather than conducting an analysis and critique of preexisting literature. By acknowledging the unique perspectives that emerge from specific contexts of each woman in Africa, they frequently opt to narrate a tale and subsequently provide a theological reflection of it. This particular approach can be categorized as a dialogical one, as women who not only strive to both confirm certain beliefs and traditions while also scrutinizing them in light of contemporary societal challenges, but also struggle with making their

²⁰ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 4.

²¹ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 10.

own contribution to the creation of theologies that respond to demands of spirituality. African women's theology tends to focus less on refutation and defense, instead emphasizing declarations of faith and the rationale behind such affirmations.²² African Feminist Theology asserts that African women's voices are worth hearing and that the owners of those voices should be welcomed to pull up a chair at the table of theological exploration and join as equal contributors to the discussion. African women's theology reminds theologians of all stripes that Christian theology is broader than initially imagined and getting broader still.²³

1.9.3 Nigerian Baptist Convention

According to Babatunde Ogunlana, a Nigerian Baptist scholar, Nigeria Baptist Convention, commonly known as such, is a prominent denomination within Nigeria, with its members identified as Baptists.²⁴ The inception of Baptist activities in Nigeria dates back to the year 1849 when the Southern Baptist Convention of America assigned the first missionary, Rev. Thomas Jefferson Bowen, to the country. Subsequently, Baptist presence and influence have thrived in Nigeria.²⁵

Within the NBC's theological framework, the belief is upheld in a singular God who manifests as the eternal Son, conceived through the Holy Spirit within the Virgin Mary. Furthermore, the NBC acknowledges the Bible as the ultimate source of guidance for matters of faith and conduct.²⁶ Central to its doctrinal stance is the affirmation of Jesus Christ's divinity and sovereignty, emphasizing salvation exclusively through grace and faith. Additionally, the NBC adheres to the practice of believers' baptism, the principle of church membership for believers, and the concept of the priesthood shared among all believers.²⁷ The organization advocates for the autonomy of local

²² Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 11.

²³ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 4.

²⁴ Babatunde Ogunlana, "The Nigerian Baptist Yesterday Today and Tomorrow: A Critical Reflection," *Www.academia.edu*, November 2018, https://www.academia.edu/37744587/The_Nigerian_Baptist_Yesterday_Today_and_Tomorrow_A_Critical_Reflection. (accessed June 23, 2024), 1.

²⁵ Babatunde Ogunlana, "The Nigerian Baptist Yesterday Today and Tomorrow: A Critical Reflection," 3.

²⁶ Babatunde Ogunlana, "The Nigerian Baptist Yesterday Today and Tomorrow: A Critical Reflection," 3.

²⁷ Babatunde Ogunlana, "The Nigerian Baptist Yesterday Today and Tomorrow: A Critical Reflection," 3.

congregations, supports religious freedom, advocates for the separation of Church and State, and endorses voluntary collaboration among churches.²⁸

1.9.4 Reformed Theology

Reformed theology refers to a specific branch of Christian theology that has a rich tradition. A Reformed theologian, Roelf Velde, writes that this tradition primarily originated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but can be traced back to the scholastic theology of the Middle Ages and the writings of the early church fathers.²⁹ An influential scholar in Reformed theology, Albert Wolters noted that the Reformed theology can also be described as a reformed worldview. The Reformed worldview is distinguished by its focus on adhering to the authority of the Scripture exclusively and engaging in continual reform prompted by the doctrines of Church Fathers, Reformers, and the Protestant Reformation. Wolters elucidated that our worldview should be molded and verified by the Scripture. It is able to authentically direct our lives solely when it aligns with scriptural principles.³⁰

The Reformed worldview, as discussed by Wolters, presents an interpretation of the fundamental terms in Bavinck's definition in a comprehensive and all-encompassing manner. According to Bavinck, the Christian faith is centered on the notion that God the Father reconciled the fallen world through the sacrificial death of His Son and is actively engaged in the continuous renewal of it towards the realization of the Kingdom of God with the aid of His Spirit. This delineation emphasizes the core principles of Christianity, with a specific focus on the themes of reconciliation, creation, redemption, and the establishment of God's Kingdom. The Reformed worldview posits that the aforementioned terms such as "reconciled," "created," "fallen," "world," "renews," and "Kingdom of God," possess implications that transcend individual human experiences.³¹It is

²⁸ Babatunde Ogunlana, 8.

²⁹ Roelf T. te Velde, *The Doctrine of God in Reformed Orthodoxy, Karl Barth, and the Utrecht School : A Study in Method and Content* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 6

³⁰ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 1

³¹ Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 20.

believed that these terms carry cosmic ramifications, impacting the entirety of creation and existence.³² The Reformed worldview advocates for societal reformation and highlights the importance of continuous renewal across different facets of life. Reformed theology holds significant importance within my study due to its deep historical origins among the pioneers of Christianity in Nigeria, which can be traced back to the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. This theological framework has had a profound impact on doctrinal beliefs and practical applications across various regions, including Nigeria. By examining Reformed theology, one can gain valuable insights and understanding regarding the discourse on leadership positions within Nigeria. It serves as a bridge linking the historical context to contemporary realities, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the role of theology in shaping present-day conversations and perspectives.

1.9.5 Image of God

“So God created mankind in his image, in the Image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27). The phrase ‘created in the image of God’ has been defined in different ways by many Theologians over the years. In this section, I will present definitions given by theologians on the Image of God.

Defining the image of God from the Dutch Reformed perspective

In this research, I will explore the concept of being created in the likeness of God as analyzed by Herman Bavinck and other Dutch Reformed theologians, G.C. Berkouwer and Anthony Hoekema. Reformed theology has emphasized that the image of God in its narrower sense is closely intertwined with the broader sense, and that together these two aspects form the complete image of God. Therefore, the entirety of one's being, rather than a specific element within a person, represents the image of God.³³ The concept of the image of God is described as having both Christological and anthropological significance. The Christological aspect suggests that Jesus Christ

³² Albert Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 20.

³³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 554.

embodies the true representation of God, who is without sin, and perfectly mirrors God. On the other hand, the anthropological aspect conveys that humans, as bearers of the divine image, share some resemblance to God and reflect His essence. It is acknowledged that every individual, regardless of gender, carries this divine image.³⁴ The issue that now arises with this doctrine lies in the major differences between the structural, functional and relational approaches to what exactly the image is.³⁵

Berkouwer addresses the question of whether we can accurately describe the image of God in both a broader and narrow sense.³⁶ which is also referred to as includes both a structural and a functional aspect.³⁷ Berkouwer suggests that Reformed theologians made the distinction for two reasons: they recognized that man, though fallen, remains man; and man, through his fall into sin, has lost that conformity to God's will which marked his life before the Fall.³⁸ These theologians made this distinction between the narrow and broader image because they believed that even after the fall, humans still retain some aspects of the image of God. The theologians also noted that humans lost their original alignment with God's will due to sin. The narrower image is believed to have been completely lost due to sin and the broader image, although corrupted by sin, is thought to still exist in some form.³⁹ In other words, Reformed theology has most vividly emphasized that the image of God in the narrower sense is closely connected to the image in the broader sense, forming the

³⁴ Van der Kooi and Van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics : An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 282

³⁵ The structural approach to the image of God (which views the image of God as a particular structural layer in the human mind) implies a very individualistic concept; each human being is, as an individual, an image of God. This approach stands in tension with the emphasis of Gen. 1 on humankind as a whole. Finally, on this approach the non-bodily aspects of our humanness are often put above bodily aspects, which is a priority that does not appear in Gen.1. There the entire human being is an image of God (see also Gen 5:1–3), not just our spirit, soul, or mind. Old Testament scholars point out that the functional concept of the image of God was well known in Israel's cultural environment, although there it tended to be specifically tied to the king. In this approach the *imago Dei* does not primarily refer to what we are but rather to what we do, or should do: care for the earth. The core of the relational view is the relationship that is initiated by God; God addresses us and expects to receive a response. We are the image of God in the sense that, being addressed by God, we will reflect this relationality and give it form in genuine interaction with our world. (Van der Kooi and Van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics : An Introduction*, 284-289).

³⁶ Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 81.

³⁷ Bruce Ware, "Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God" in *Biblical Foundation for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002), 77.

³⁸ Bruce Ware, "Male and Female Complementarity and the Image of God", 77.

³⁹ Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 81-82.

complete image of God. Therefore, the image of God resides within the whole being of man, not just a part of him. Sin, which led to the loss of the image of God in the narrower sense and damaged the image in the broader sense, has deeply impacted the entire individual. As a result, the grace of God in Christ restores the whole person, holding immense significance for their entire life and work, including family, society, government, art, science, and more.⁴⁰

According to *Calvin*, the image of God is found primarily in man's soul, including mind, will, and emotions.⁴¹ He emphasized that the image was marred but not entirely lost which implies restoration of this image as a central aspect of salvation and sanctification through Christ. He also saw the process of sanctification as gradually restoring believers to their original righteousness and holiness.⁴²

G.C. Berkouwer contends that mankind possesses an inescapable relation with God. He elucidated that the authentic essence of humanity, the core of human existence, is intricately linked with human's bond with God. He argued that the image of God concerns the whole man, his place in this world and the future, his likeness in his being a child of a father, of this father in heaven.⁴³

Anthony Hoekema emphasizes that the image of God in man involves the entire person, not just a part like the soul or spirit, and encompasses man's threefold relationship with God, others, and nature.⁴⁴ He highlights that in the life to come, the image of God in man will be perfected, maintaining the relationships for which man was created, deepened, and enriched, leading to a God-glorifying rule over creation. Hoekema stresses the importance of loving God, loving neighbors, and ruling over creation in a way that reflects God's image, ultimately aiming for the perfection of the image of God in man. He points out that previous theologians often overlooked the biblical text

⁴⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 554.

⁴¹ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 61-63.

⁴² Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 61-63.

⁴³ G. C Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984), 118.

⁴⁴ Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 101.

describing man's creation in God's image, which underscores the significance of reflecting God's likeness in all aspects of human life.⁴⁵

In my working definition for the image of God I follow Herman Bavinck's line. For Bavinck, humankind was originally created in God's image. After sin and fall, the image of God still remains intact. For Bavinck the image of God does not refer to just the human soul, faculties, attributes, and human body but all of it images of God. Essentially, the whole person mirrors the whole God, who is triune. Therefore, humans do not possess or carry God's image but rather embody it. He stressed that every aspect of humanity reflects God's image, extending to the furthest reaches of our humanity, defining our essence. Humans are not divine but represent a limited, creaturely reflection of the divine. Every aspect of God—His spiritual nature, virtues, perfections, self-differentiation, and self-revelation in creation—has a finite resemblance in humanity. He argues that God permitted His creations to face temptation, viewing the fall as an unfortunate event rather than a deliberate act. The separation caused by sin only disrupts the distinction between integrity and corruption, yet the fundamental image of God remains unchanged.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 101-103.

⁴⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 556-562.

Chapter Two

Male and Female Leadership Position in the African Yorùbá Traditional Religion

2.0 Introduction

This chapter will assess five main areas to examine the roles of female and male leadership in African traditional religion, specifically in the Yorùbá tradition. The first part will provide an overview of the history of the Yorùbá people, while the following part will explore the historical background of the Yorùbá religion, its beliefs, and rituals. Subsequently, the third section will address the complexities of defining gender in the Yorùbá traditional religion, followed by an analysis of the leadership responsibilities of men and women in the fourth segment. Lastly, the fifth section will discuss the influence of Christian missionaries on leadership roles in Yorùbá traditional religion. It is crucial to analyse this study to gain a deeper understanding of the leadership structure in Yorùbá religion, the potential impact of this structure, and how it has influenced African Christianity in their leadership system, which will be discussed in Chapter 3 and 4 of this thesis.

2.1 An overview of history of the Yorùbá people

The origin of the *Yorùbá* people remains somewhat unclear due to the fact that their culture initially relied on oral tradition.⁴⁷ Stories detailing the early history of the Yorùbá are primarily rooted in legends and myths rather than concrete historical records.⁴⁸

The earliest documented historical source of the *Yorùbá*'s origins can be attributed to Reverend Samuel Johnson, one of the earliest native ministers. Following Johnson's passing, the responsibility of reconstructing the manuscript of "*History of the Yorùbás*" fell to his younger brother, Obadiah Johnson. Samuel played a crucial role in collecting the material and making judgments, which

⁴⁷ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbá from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, (C.M.S books:Nigeria, 1921), 3.

⁴⁸ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbá from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, 3.

shaped the History in its known form, while Obadiah, having assisted his brother in completing the initial version, was uniquely positioned to compile it once more.⁴⁹

Samuel Johnson argues that the Yorùbá people originated from Egypt. According to him, *Oduduwa* was the original ancestor of the Yorùbá race because Yorùbá oral traditions teaches that. Whilst the *Oduduwa* oral tradition proposes a view according to which *Oduduwa* originated from ‘East’ or ‘Mecca’, Johnson disputed this view and associated *Oduduwa* with the Coptic Christians. He seemed to point out that the Yorùbá ancestors were actually of Christian lineage and not Islamic lineage.⁵⁰ Johnson contended that the Yorùbá people could not have originated from the Arabian family or have migrated from Mecca. He highlighted that according to oral traditions and mythology, the Yorùbás’ potential roots suggest they possibly came from upper Egypt or Nubia. Under the leadership of the Egyptian conqueror Nimrod, who had Phoenician roots, the Yorùbá were believed to have originated. Subsequently, the Yorùbá accompanied Nimrod to Arabia for conquest before being expelled from the region due to their distinct religious practices, which may have been a blend of paganism or a distorted form of Eastern Christianity.⁵¹

2.2 History background of the Yorùbá traditional religion, beliefs and practices

In Yorùbá society, religion and culture, just like in many other African societies, are so closely connected that it is impossible to have a complete history of religions without considering related disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. The Yorùbá religion has greatly influenced the history of the Yorùbá people, playing a key role in molding their cultural identity, social structure, and political systems.⁵² A prominent Yorùbá scholar, Jacob Olupona noted that, the Yorùbá religion's belief system, which includes a variety of supreme being, deities, rituals, and ceremonies, has impacted different aspects of Yorùbá life such as governance, art, music, and community relationships. The historical development of the Yorùbá people has been deeply intertwined with

⁴⁹ J.D.Y Peel, *Religious Encounter and the making of the Yorùbá*, (Bloomington:Indiana University Press,2000), 308-309.

⁵⁰ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbá from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, 2.

⁵¹ Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbá from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate*, 2.

⁵² Jacob Olupona, “The Study of Yorùbá Religion Tradition in Historical Perspective”, 241.

their religious practices and spiritual beliefs, which have contributed to their sense of unity, values, and traditions throughout the years.⁵³

According to Olupona, the earliest reports on Yorùbá religious beliefs and rituals were documented by missionaries, travelers, and explorers. He described them as some individuals who journeyed to the Yorùbá region to validate their preconceived notions about "pagan" worship and spiritual practices among the African populace. Regardless of their intentions, they visited, observed, and recorded their experiences, highlighting the splendor of the ancient Yorùbá realm.⁵⁴ Among them was W.H. Clarke, who noted that the Yorùbá people were a unique group of pagans. Clarke also portrayed the Yorùbá as refined pagans due to their acknowledgment of a supreme deity accessed through various lesser gods (deities) who act as intermediaries between humans and God. In a reference to Bolaji Idowu by Olupona, he noted that Idowu depicted Yorùbá Traditional religion as a form of widespread monotheism, presenting a deeply theological analysis that often parallels Yorùbá beliefs with Christian concepts.⁵⁵ Similar to the Christian concept of God, the Yorùbá believe in the existence of a supreme being, whom they call *Olorun*, signifying the Lord of the heaven. But they recognize him as the creator of the heavens and the earth, yet too majestic to engage directly in human matters, leading them to accept the presence of various gods as intermediaries, known as *Orisas* (deities).⁵⁶

2.3 Understanding the concept of gender in Yorùbá traditional religion

The discussion on gender in Africa has proven to be a contested topic among scholars. According to Luqman Muraina an African sociology scholar and Abdulkareem Ajimatanraeje a Yorùbá scholar, in defining gender identity of a human body, both posited that, two categories are popular: the sexual and gender explanation. The former interprets the biological facts of being a male or female, and gender refers to the social or religious consequences of being either of the two sexes.⁵⁷

⁵³ Jacob Olupona, "The Study of Yorùbá Religion Tradition in Historical Perspective", 241.

⁵⁴ Jacob Olupona, "The Study of Yorùbá Religion Tradition in Historical Perspective", 243.

⁵⁵ Jacob Olupona, "The Study of Yorùbá Religion Tradition in Historical Perspective", 247.

⁵⁶ Jacob Olupona, "The Study of Yorùbá Religion Tradition in Historical Perspective", 247.

⁵⁷ Luqman Oṣéyemí Muraina and Abdulkareem J. Ajímátanraeje, "Gender Relations in Indigenous Yorùbá Culture: Questioning Current Feminist Actions and Advocacies," *Third World Quarterly Vol.44*, no. No.9 (June 5, 2023), 1-

Oyewumi Oyeronke who is a Nigerian gender scholar, argues that gender is commonly viewed as a dichotomous conversation revolving around two socially ranked and contrasting categories: men and women which she claims should not be a right starting point to describe gender in Yorùbá land. She highlights that the conventional interpretation of the Yorùbá terms 'obinrin' and 'okunrin' as female/woman and male/men is a misinterpretation stemming from the failure of many Western and Western-influenced Yorùbá intellectuals to acknowledge that in Yorùbá customs and beliefs, these classifications are neither in binary opposition nor hierarchical.⁵⁸ She affirms that in the Yorùbá language, there are no specific words for masculine and feminine to describe positions or characteristics. Instead, there are only terms for the relational roles of wife and husband (*oko* and *iyawo*). She contended that the concept of 'gender' was non-existent in Yorùbá society or religion before colonization,⁵⁹ which claims that the Yorùbá were non-gendered in the aspect of describing positions or characteristics.

Oyewumi strongly argued that an upshot of the Christianization of Yorùbá society was the introduction of notions of gender into the religious sphere, including into the indigenous religious system. She explained that, in traditional Yoruba religion, gender distinctions did not play any part, whether in the world of humans or in that of the gods.⁶⁰ Just like Yorùbá civic life, did not articulate gender as a category, therefore, the roles of the *Orisas*, priests, and ancestors were not gender-dependent either. She explained that just like other African traditional religion, in the Yorùbá religion there was *Olodumare* (God - the Supreme Being). *Olodumare* did not have a gender identity, and it is doubtful that s/he was perceived as a human being before the advent of

2.

⁵⁸ The word *obirin* does not derive etymologically from *okunrin*, as "wo-man" does from "man." 'Rin', the common suffix of 'okunrin' and 'obirin', suggests a common humanity; the prefixes *obin* and *okun* specify which variety of anatomy. There is no conception here of an original human type against which the other variety had to be measured. 'Eniyan' is the non-gender-specific word for humans. In contrast, "man," the word labeling humans in general in English that supposedly encompasses both males and females, actually privileges males. It has been well documented that in the West, women/females are the Other, being defined in antithesis to men/males, who represent the norm. (Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourse*, (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 34.

⁵⁹ Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, 34.

⁶⁰ Oyèrónkẹ Oyèwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, 140.

Christianity and Islam in Yorùbá land.⁶¹Second, the *orisa* (gods) were the manifestations of the attributes of the supreme being and were regarded as his/her messengers to humans. They were the most obvious focus of Yorùbá worship. Though there were anamale and anafemale *orisa*,⁶² as in other institutions this distinction was inconsequential; therefore, it is best described as a distinction without difference. For example, both *Sango* (the god of thunder) and *Oya* (the female river god) were known for their wrath.⁶³

This claim of Oyewumi then questions the work of other Yorùbá scholars like Bolaji Idowu who have referred to the '*Olodumare*' as 'he'. She replied to this question as 'masculinization of Yorùbá religion'. She sees Idowu who is a scholar and church man using a gender bias inherent in the use of the English third-person masculine singular pronouns and the picture of the Yorùbá supreme being that emerges is decidedly male and quite biblical.⁶⁴ In discussing on examples of masculinization of Yorùbá religion, she gave another example noting that, there is replacing of female symbols with male ones and transforming gender-neutral gods into male gods in African religions.⁶⁵ While some points mentioned by Oyewumi are accurate, it is important to question whether gender truly did not exist in African religion before these influences.

In response to my question and in contrast to Oyewumi's assertion of African genderlessness, Oyeronke Olajubu, a respected Nigerian scholar in gender studies, argues that gender did play a significant role in Yorùbá religious tradition, albeit in a manner distinct from Western perspectives.⁶⁶ Olajubu highlights that gender classifications have always been present among the Yoruba, although they can be flexibly manipulated across social structures and religious practices. However, this gender framework does not lead to the subjugation of women by men, as Yorùbá philosophy emphasizes complementary gender relations deeply rooted in cosmic experiences.⁶⁷ This

⁶¹ Oyèrónkẹ̀ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, 140.

⁶² Oyèrónkẹ̀ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, 140.

⁶³ Oyèrónkẹ̀ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, 141.

⁶⁴ Oyèrónkẹ̀ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, 141.

⁶⁵ Oyèrónkẹ̀ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, 141.

⁶⁶ Oyeronke Olajubu. "Seeing Through a Woman's Eye: Yorùbá Religious Tradition and Gender Relations," *Journal of feminist studies in religion*, 20 (2004), 42.

⁶⁷ Oyeronke Olajubu, "Seeing Through a Woman's Eye", 43.

complementary approach is integrated into various aspects of Yorùbá societal and religious consciousness, recognizing the importance of both male and female principles in ensuring harmonious living. Social, political, and religious frameworks within Yorùbá culture reflect this balanced perception, with neither gender claiming exclusive control over private or public domains, unlike in some other cultures.⁶⁸

Supporting Olajubu's perspective is John David Peels, an anthropologist and historian specializing in Nigerian culture and religion, who challenges Oyewumi's notion of pre-colonial genderlessness.⁶⁹ Peel contends that gender distinctions were indeed significant in traditional Yorùbá religious practices and that the adoption of Christianity in the nineteenth century did not lead to substantial changes in Yorùbá society. He asserts that traditional Yorùbá gender norms greatly influenced the development of Yorùbá Christian beliefs and rituals, suggesting that gender constructions were deeply embedded in Yorùbá traditions.⁷⁰

The exploration of gender in African Yorùbá traditional religion is crucial for comprehending the distribution of leadership roles within this belief system. Till now we have seen that, instead of analyzing gender roles independently by sex, we can effectively examine them from two perspectives to enhance our comprehension, we shall investigate the religious leadership gender roles before and during colonial times.

2.4. Gender Leadership roles before Colonialism: Complementary roles and patriarchal system

In Yorùbá cosmology, Toyin Falola and Akintunde Akinyemi who are both prominent African Yorùbá scholars explained that, the *Yorùbás* has definite roles for men and women in society. Women play key roles in religious ceremonies as priestesses and prophetesses. Some important deities are female. For instance, several cults, including *Òṣun*, *Ògún*, and *Ṣàngó*, have women priestesses who are known as *Ìyá Òṣun*, *Ìyá Ògún*, and *Ìyá Ṣàngó*, respectively. They went further to

⁶⁸ Oyeronke Olajubu, "Seeing Through a Woman's Eye", 43.

⁶⁹ J. D. Y. Peel, "Gender in Yorùbá Religious Change", *Journal of Religion in Africa* vol.32 (2002), 138.

⁷⁰ J. D. Y. Peel, "Gender in Yorùbá Religious Change", 147-148.

explain that Yorùbá women in precolonial period were admitted into sacred knowledge⁷¹ and as initiates, such women could participate as leaders in high religious ritual practices from which uninitiated men and women were excluded.⁷² Falola expounded that Yorùbá religion is anchored in the belief that symbols of calm and peace (*èrò*) represent female principles, whereas toughness represents male principles. Hence, the prayer *k'òdún ó y'abo fún wa o* (may this year bring us all that the female principle stands for). This prayer is a metaphor for the people's conception of female (*abo*) and male (*ako*). A "female year" in this context is blissful; a "male year" is very unpleasant. Maleness or femaleness were prescribed by nature and, as such, were seen not as dialectically opposed attributes but rather as complementary ones. They are also indispensable. The prominence of female deities in the *Yorùbá* pantheon is a reflection of the fact that maleness or femaleness does not automatically imply exclusion from certain social or religious statuses.⁷³

Ikechukwu Kanu, Olu Omojola, and Mike Bazza conducted research on women in Yorùbá religion and highlighted that Yorùbá women possess mystical powers despite their seemingly frail physical appearance; some even carry more power within than they exhibit externally.⁷⁴ According to Yorùbá beliefs, certain women wield extrasensory, divine abilities, some of which are geared towards causing destruction, earning them the title of "*iyá ayé*" (women of the world). These women were traditionally seen as *atúnnidá*, individuals capable of influencing one's fate and potentially altering it.⁷⁵ Similar to the assertions made by Falola and Kanu, Adepeju Johnson-Bashua concurred that women often hold positions as priestesses, spirit mediums, and prophetesses in traditional African religious practices. The religious framework in Africa stands as one of the oldest institutions where

⁷¹ Toyin Falola and Akíntúndé Akínyemí, *Encyclopedia of the Yorùbá* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 349.

⁷² Ikechukwu Kanu, Olu Omojola and Mike Bazza, "Women in Yorùbá Religion and Culture", *Tolle lege: An Augustinian Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, vol.2 (2020), 124.

⁷³ Toyin Falola and Akíntúndé Akínyemí, *Encyclopedia of the Yorùbá*, 349.

⁷⁴ Ikechukwu Kanu, Olu Omojola and Mike Bazza, "Women in Yorùbá Religion and Culture", *Tolle lege: An Augustinian Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, vol.2 (2020), 124.

⁷⁵ Ikechukwu Kanu, Olu Omojola and Mike Bazza, "Women in Yorùbá Religion and Culture", 124.

women have significant authority, owing to their active involvement in leadership roles and the cultivation, validation, and transmission of women's knowledge and skills.⁷⁶

Furthermore, according to Yorùbá scholar Atinuke Okunade, there existed a belief that women's roles were closely linked to those of men, thereby reducing the push for gender equality. Every task, irrespective of the doer, was viewed as equally significant as it contributed to the fundamental objective of ensuring the community's survival. Likewise, the roles undertaken by women in venerating and serving the gods, divinities, and deities of the region were deemed crucial.⁷⁷

Essentially, these traditional beliefs suggested that, in the era before colonialism, Africans in traditional native societies fulfilled specific duties to uphold their communities and religious practices.⁷⁸ Okunade elaborated that women played predominant roles in ancient Africa.

Specifically chosen women oversaw the spiritual frameworks and frequently held positions of authority in African Traditional Religion. These positions necessitated unique religious duties and might not have been apparent to or acknowledged by all members of society except for the initiates and committed individuals or families whose inherited responsibilities included participating in the ceremonies and rituals.⁷⁹ Frequently, men were observed engaging in visible religious activities during festivals, while behind the scenes, women of spiritual significance performed foundational duties prior to the public displays witnessed by the community. Their spiritual responsibilities encompassed acting as oracles, mediums, seers, and counselors; they managed the religious events' schedule and possessed adequate authority to remove curses from those afflicted.⁸⁰

However, Mary Nyanqweso Wangila, contends that while it is indeed true that women in traditional religion were more secure based on gender complementarities in the past than they are in present times,⁸¹ it would be inaccurate to claim that traditional societies were not patriarchal. Even though

⁷⁶ Adepeju Johnson-Bashua, "African Traditional Religion, Gender Equality, and Feminism," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Traditional Religion*, ed. Aderibigbe, I., Falola, T. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 312-313.

⁷⁷ Atinuke Okunade, "The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Traditional Religion*, ed. Aderibigbe, I., Falola, T. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 222.

⁷⁸ Atinuke Okunade, "The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion", 222.

⁷⁹ Atinuke Okunade, "The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion", 222.

⁸⁰ Atinuke Okunade, "The Role of Women in African Traditional Religion", 222.

⁸¹ Mary Nyangweso, *Women and African Religions*, (Santa Babara : California, 2021), 310.

women might have been acknowledged as active participants in daily life, including rituals and various leadership roles in Yorùbá traditional religion.⁸² She explained that patriarchy is justified by religion through religious beliefs and practices. For example, certain teachings may uphold male dominance. Additionally, religious ceremonies and customs may assign specific gender roles and responsibilities with men.⁸³ For instance, Maria Rojas points out that women were linked to witchcraft, representing the perceived threat of women wielding unchecked power. Religion, on the other hand, served as a tool to regulate women by suggesting that women straying from their designated social roles, without the control of men, could yield hazardous outcomes.⁸⁴ In contrast to Rojas illustration, Bashua sees the gender in the African traditional religion not as portraying women as subordinate, passive, and defenseless. Rather, one which is left with the image of strong, courageous, independent, and hard-working members of society whose roles are complementary to men.⁸⁵

2.4.1 Gender Leadership roles at and after colonialism: Patriarchal system

The study of Kanu, Falola, Okunade, and Bashua reflects the significance and high regard given to female leadership role in African traditional religion. However, they do not fail to note that, these recognized roles of the religion may have now been compromised. Kanu noted that, the participation of women in Yoruba culture and religion are not prominent today like in the traditional culture.⁸⁶ Colonization and civilization have really influenced these practices. He explained that western civilization might have brought its positive parts but may have also destroyed Yorùbá values and women participation in their culture and Religion.⁸⁷ Bashua similarly also noted that colonization might have had also a negative effects on African culture and religion has it introduced

⁸² Mary Nyangweso, *Women and African Religions*, 310.

⁸³ Mary Nyangweso, *Women and African Religions*, 310.

⁸⁴ Maria Rojas, "Women in Pre-Colonial Nigeria," www.postcolonialweb.org. (1990) <https://www.postcolonialweb.org/nigeria/precolwon.html>. (accessed July 10, 2024).

⁸⁵ Adepeju Johnson-Bashua, "African Traditional Religion, Gender Equality, and Feminism", 314.

⁸⁶ Ikechukwu Kanu, "Women in Yorùbá Religion and Culture", 125.

⁸⁷ Ikechukwu Kanu, "Women in Yorùbá Religion and Culture", 125.

western culture which in return introduced the separation between the secular and religions, while in African society, all institutions derive their validity from religion.⁸⁸

Bashua, acknowledges that in pre-colonial Africa, women held a revered status bestowed upon them by the supreme being, actively participating in cultural and religious spheres without facing gender-based discrimination.⁸⁹ For instance, the practices of performing ritual has proven to be quite adaptable in showcasing a positive feminine gender portrayal.⁹⁰ Bashua concluded that the status of women today in African is a product of foreign culture and mentality which in turn is influenced by western culture because gender roles in African traditional religion are not fixed on gender boundaries; instead, the focus is on personal inspiration guided by divine selection as the ultimate source of power and authority, rather than institutional hierarchies.⁹¹ He described traditional religious stance on gender today as diffused liberalism, which exalts women, on the one hand, presenting them on equal status to men while, on the other hand, requires them to be submissive to their leadership roles.⁹²

2.5 Christian missionaries' influence on leadership roles in Yorùbá traditional religion

According to Falola, the arrival of British colonialism in Yorùbá land led to a profound transformation of the original culture of the Yorùbá people in southwestern Nigeria, impacting gender relations. The colonial era marked a crucial period for women's involvement in the socio-political, religious, and economic spheres of Yorùbá land.⁹³ The influence of colonialism was substantial, as it introduced external elements and altered existing traditions. It promoted the supremacy of male power structures and institutions, marginalizing female leadership while emphasizing male dominance in governance, administration, and religion.⁹⁴ Oyewumi noted that, the introduction of Christianity, which was male-dominant fashion, was another factor in the

⁸⁸ Adepeju Johnson-Bashua, "African Traditional Religion, Gender Equality, and Feminism", 312.

⁸⁹ Adepeju Johnson-Bashua, "African Traditional Religion, Gender Equality, and Feminism", 312.

⁹⁰ Adepeju Johnson-Bashua, "African Traditional Religion, Gender Equality, and Feminism", 312.

⁹¹ Adepeju Johnson-Bashua, "African Traditional Religion, Gender Equality, and Feminism", 312.

⁹² Adepeju Johnson-Bashua, "African Traditional Religion, Gender Equality, and Feminism", 312.

⁹³ Toyin Falola, *Encyclopedia of the Yorùbá*, 347.

⁹⁴ Toyin Falola, *Encyclopedia of the Yorùbá*, 347.

process of establishing male dominance in Yorùbá society.⁹⁵ Christian missions in Africa have been rightly described as the handmaidens of colonization as it is one of the tools used to further the colonial agenda.⁹⁶ Christian missionaries were well received by the various Yorùbá states, which was not necessary because they wanted the religion, although Yorùbá religion always had room for the adoption of new gods. The reason Yorùbá rulers sought European missionaries was political, not religious. Yorùbá rulers needed the presence and skills of missionaries in order to secure access to trade with the Europeans on the coast and to enhance their position in the power struggle among Yorùbá states during this time period.⁹⁷

According to Peel, the Christian missions functioning as extensions of colonial governance, played a pivotal role in reshaping gender norms in African communities, including those in Yorùbá traditional religion.⁹⁸ Peel did not fail to recognize the existing patriarchal structures in the Yorùbá society, while he recognized this, he expounded that these structures were reinforced by the missions' influence during the colonial period, as they served as conduits for colonial policies, which he characterized as the amalgamation of two hierarchical systems - one based on traditional beliefs and the other on Christian ideals, resulting in a multifaceted interaction of gender dynamics and power dynamics.⁹⁹

Similarly, Oyewumi emphasized that colonizers used tools such as education, land ownership, Christianity, and leadership roles to exert control over women. She highlighted the strong link between Western education and missionary efforts, which aimed to establish a distinct gender divide.¹⁰⁰ Missionaries specifically targeted men for training to spread the gospel and civilize other communities independently. Men were considered competent and suitable for roles like evangelists, pastors, clerks, interpreters, assistant engineers, and more. Conversely, the education provided to

⁹⁵ Oyèrónkẹ̀ Oyě̀wùńí, *The Invention of Women*, 136.

⁹⁶ Oyèrónkẹ̀ Oyě̀wùńí, *The Invention of Women*, 136.

⁹⁷ Oyèrónkẹ̀ Oyě̀wùńí, *The Invention of Women*, 136.

⁹⁸ J.D.Y. Peel, "Gender in Yorùbá Religious Change", 162.

⁹⁹ J.D.Y. Peel, "Gender in Yorùbá Religious Change", 162.

¹⁰⁰ Oyèrónkẹ̀ Oyě̀wùńí, *The Invention of Women*, 134.

women was tailored to prepare them to be dutiful wives to pastors and teachers.¹⁰¹ Referring to J. S. Oḍéyemí, Falola states that missionaries collaborating with colonial administrators further perpetuated gender inequality in religious settings by segregating men to one side and women and children to the other in churches. Unlike the precolonial era when women served as priestesses and some deities were female, women were not allowed to join the clergy in Christian Churches due to a theological stance considering the ministerial priesthood as exclusively for men.¹⁰²

2.6 Conclusion

Through examining gender leadership roles, patriarchy, and Christian missionary influence in Yorùbá traditional religion, it can be observed that there is an intricate interplay of influences from both the existing patriarchal system of the *Yorùbás* and the patriarchal system brought in by colonialism. In the precolonial Yorùbá religion, there existed a more harmonious perspective on gender roles, but this was disrupted and restructured by colonialism through the use of Christian mission. As a result, the reinforcement of patriarchal frameworks resulted in a more inflexible and exclusive system, changing the traditional dynamics and roles of women in the society and its religious customs.

¹⁰¹ Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women*, 134.

¹⁰² Toyin Falola, *Encyclopedia of the Yorùbá*, 347.

Chapter Three

The Position of Female-Trained Pastors in the Nigerian Baptist Convention.

3.0. Introduction

In chapter two, I discussed male and female leadership positions in the African Yorùbá Traditional Religion. I enumerated the history of the Yorùbá people and their traditional religion, beliefs, and practices. I mentioned the gender roles in the Yorùbá traditional religion in the pre-colonial era and post-colonial times. Chapter three will start with an overview of the Nigerian Baptist Convention (NBC). It has seven sections. It discusses a brief of the Nigerian Theological Seminaries and Colleges of Theology. Moreover, the call system for the pastoral service of the Nigerian Baptist Convention local churches was looked into. This section will lead us to look into what roles are given to female pastors in the local NBC churches. This chapter will look into some factors that are preventing the call of female pastors into the role of lead pastor.

3.1. An Overview of the Nigerian Baptist Convention

The emergence of the Nigerian Baptist Convention in Nigeria and its development can be traced back to the pioneering work of Thomas Jefferson Bowen in 1850, through the mission work of the American Southern Baptist Convention.¹⁰³ The Nigerian Baptist Convention officially started as the Yorùbá Baptist Association in 1914, this later changed to become the Nigerian Baptist Convention.¹⁰⁴ Bowen worked among the natives in Nigeria and learned their language to aid the mission work. As the work continues, the arrival of Mr. & Mrs. Philip of Georgia, and Mr. Beaumont of Alabama strengthens the mission work in Ogbomoso, Oyo State, Nigeria.¹⁰⁵ The Baptist works continued with the planting of churches, the establishment of medical centers and the Theological Training school which served as a training school for the native workers, mainly

¹⁰³ Allen Olatunde, "Nigerian Baptist Missions: From Inception to Udoh," in *African Theology: Theology papers in African ways*. (February 14, 2016), https://africantheology.wordpress.com/2016/02/14/nigerian-baptist-missions-from-inception-to-udoh_ (accessed on July 20, 2024), 1.

¹⁰⁴ Allen Olatunde, "Nigerian Baptist Missions: From Inception to Udoh," 1.

¹⁰⁵ Allen Olatunde, "Nigerian Baptist Missions: From Inception to Udoh," 1.

teachers and preachers.¹⁰⁶ The establishment of the Theological training school continues as the NBC today has ten theological seminaries (others are referred to as Baptist College of Theology) in Nigeria.

3.2 Female Clergy in Nigeria Baptist Convention

Olufunke Adeboye discussed the role of women in leadership positions within the Nigerian Church. She categorized leadership in mainline churches, such as the Baptist, into three levels. The first level involves leading church activities like Sunday school, prayer groups, and ushering auxiliaries, without requiring ordination but possibly needing informal training. Mainline churches distinguish between lay leadership and clerical responsibilities. The second level consists of ordained clergy, requiring seminary training in mainline denominations. The third and highest level pertains to the policy-making body of the denomination, comprising senior clergy members. Many churches readily appoint women to the first level, emphasizing their ability to care for women and children in the Church, a task believed to suit women better than men.¹⁰⁷ In the case of Nigerian Baptist Convention, females are allowed to attend theological seminaries and also be ordained. The problem now lies at after the ordination. What opportunities exist for female graduates to lead and to be involved in ministerial leadership?

To begin with the appraisal of the NBC on women's ordination in the denomination. Funmilayo Talabi-Adeniran, who teaches at the Baptist College of Theology in Agbowo Lagos, Nigeria, notes the significant role of religion in marginalizing women from leadership positions. Historically, women's leadership in ministry and churches faced rejection until recent years when women began advocating against female subordination. Prior to the 21st century, religious leadership, particularly pastoral ministry, was predominantly male-dominated, except in certain African indigenous churches that allowed limited female leadership without full authority. However, there has been a

¹⁰⁶ Allen Olatunde, "Nigerian Baptist Missions: From Inception to Udoh," 1.

¹⁰⁷ Olufunke Adeboye, "Breaking through barriers: Religion and female leadership in Nigeria," *Journal of history and diplomatic studies*, vol.2 (2005), 150-151.

notable progress.¹⁰⁸ According to Adeboye, the Baptist Mission began allowing female clergy in 1997¹⁰⁹ and currently includes three women out of thirteen in the Executive Committee, the top decision-making body of the Nigerian Baptist Convention¹¹⁰ Adeboye highlights that this progress does not signify the complete elimination of gender barriers in religion; rather, it establishes precedents for future generations to follow and draw inspiration from.

This breakthrough in the religious domain has far-reaching implications extending beyond religious realms.¹¹¹ For example, according to Adeniran, apart from women lack of opportunity to be the head pastor, Ayandokun Esther, became the first female professor in Nigerian Baptist Convention Theological institutions, a remarkable accomplishment. Additionally, some orthodox churches, previously resistant to women in leadership roles, are now ordaining women as pastors and appointing them to key positions within ministries in the 21st century. Women have also formed missionary societies in churches, actively contributing to evangelism efforts.¹¹² However, it is only accurate to mention that while female leadership role is taking a dynamic process, there are still some issues. In my positionality as a Nigerian, I have personally noticed that in many Baptist associations,¹¹³ while there are some female pastors who serve with children education in Church or are supporting the ministry of their husbands who happens to be the head pastor of the Church, there is no female head pastor of a Church. This situation has most times made me question the reason for lack of female head pastors in the Nigeria Baptist.

According to Baptist beliefs and practices, there is no explicit prohibition against calling female pastors to lead a Church, but the use of pronouns in describing a 'full-time pastor' may raise questions:

¹⁰⁸ Funmilayo Talabi-Adeniran, "Women Leadership and Integrity in the 21st Century Nigeria," *Journal of history and diplomatic studies*, vol.4 (2021), 257.

¹⁰⁹ Olufunke Adeboye, "Breaking through barriers: Religion and female leadership in Nigeria," 152.

¹¹⁰ "Our Executives – Nigerian Baptist Convention," *Nigerianbaptist.org*, 2024, <https://www.nigerianbaptist.org/our-executives/>. (accessed June 25, 2024)

¹¹¹ Olufunke Adeboye, "Breaking through barriers: Religion and female leadership in Nigeria," 152.

¹¹² Funmilayo Talabi-Adeniran, "Women Leadership and Integrity in the 21st Century Nigeria," 259.

¹¹³ A Baptist association is a group of about 10 or more Baptist Churches in a geographical area that meets quarterly for meetings.

“ The full-time pastor is the one called by his Church to serve on full-time basis by leading the Church to determine, and carry out its vision and mission. He serves as an enabler to involve Church members in the work of the Church so that its divine mission can be achieved... “¹¹⁴

The use of pronouns 'his' and 'he' raises questions about the positioning of women who aspire to become the head or full-time minister of a Church. Nonetheless, it is important to mention that, as per the NBC policy, Churches have the autonomy to choose their pastors. As outlined in the policy, in a democratic setting, the leader should reflect the choice of the majority of the congregation. In a congregational Church, this decision should be based on factors beyond just human considerations. The Church is encouraged to discern the will of God, which is revealed through circumstances and recognizable means.¹¹⁵

Falade stated that the matter of female leadership roles in the Nigeria Baptist Convention Churches has been neglected. A large number of female pastors with a calling to ministry remain unnoticed or unemployed. She contended that despite being theologically trained, many NBC female pastors are not appointed as paid pastors and are not acknowledged, instead serving in lower-ranking roles. Nevertheless, she highlighted that these women in NBC are diligently committed to missions, stewardship, and other aspects of the Church's overall life.¹¹⁶

Akinyemi Alawode, for example, writes from the perspective of female mission pastors who have theological training. He observes that the presence of female clergy is a prevalent issue within the Baptist religious community and among Baptist missionaries.¹¹⁷ For several years now, both male and female missionaries have been involved in various missionary activities to expand the Church,

¹¹⁴ “Beliefs, Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention” (2015), <https://www.nigerianbaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/NBC-Policies-and-Practices>. (accessed June 19, 2024) 15.

¹¹⁵ This will be further discussed in § 3.4 of this chapter. (Beliefs, Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention), 14.

¹¹⁶ Esther Falade, “A Critical Evaluation of the Impact of Theologically Trained Women on the Nigeria Baptist Convention,” 6.

¹¹⁷ Esther Falade, “A Critical Evaluation of the Impact of Theologically Trained Women on the Nigeria Baptist Convention,” 6.

although female missionaries have had limited participation.¹¹⁸ This challenge of Baptist females in missions is seen as an internal denominational issue. Within the Baptist denomination, missionaries clarify that the stance on female involvement is not based on a belief in female inferiority. Rather, it is a policy set by the Global Missions Board, the Mission Agency of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, which does not deploy single or married women without their husbands, except in cases where the spouse has passed away during active service. This policy has been upheld within the denomination for an extended period. Therefore, the reluctance to involve female missionaries could be due to maintaining order rather than viewing females as inferior, aligning more with the broader issue of gender inequality in cross-cultural missions¹¹⁹ As reported by Alawode, some male missionaries interpret the Bible as supporting women in supportive roles rather than taking on leading roles in the field. They suggest that women can serve alongside their husbands or male counterparts.¹²⁰

In the following section, we will delve into the Church's process of calling to service and the potential obstacles faced by female clergy ministry.

3.3 The Nigerian Baptist Convention Call System to Service in the Local Baptist Church.

As mentioned earlier, the local Baptist Churches are allowed to select their Church pastor. The Nigerian Baptist Convention is known for the congregational method of church polity. What this means is that the congregation determines the way of running the affairs of the Church and the selection of its leaders. Moreover, the Church practices the autonomy of the local Church and calls its pastors to lead them without any external influence of the Baptist denomination.¹²¹ The Church will pray and select a committee of a few members to be addressed as a pastor search committee that will meet and take steps to search for a pastor that meets certain requirements as drafted by the Church. The requirement is not a written policy of the NBC but could be drafted with requirements

¹¹⁸ Akinyemi Alawode, "Prospects of addressing the challenges of gender inequalities in Christian missions," *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 80 No. 1 (April, 2024), 1.

¹¹⁹ Akinyemi Alawode, "Prospects of addressing the challenges of gender inequalities in Christian missions," 1.

¹²⁰ Akinyemi Alawode, "Prospects of addressing the challenges of gender inequalities in Christian missions," 1.

¹²¹ Gold O. Anie, *Beliefs, Policies and Practices of the Nigerian Baptist Convention*. Ibadan: Baptist Press, 2015, 14.

such as the level of education of the prospective, years of experience, and marital condition of the prospective pastor to call. Due to the limited time and the empirical work of the thesis, I would not be able to analysis different written policies of each Baptist Churches on the calling system of the pastors. However, according to Falade and Alawode, there are some factors associated with the call system of NBC which are preventing the female pastors to be the lead pastors in the local Baptist churches. These factors shall be discussed in the next section.

3.4 Factors Preventing Call of the Female Pastors to the Local Baptist Church.

There are lots of factors determining the involvement of female gender in the leadership position in Nigeria and these factors also resonate in the Christian organization, in particular, the Baptist church. As I earlier discussed in chapter two on the leadership positions and roles that are given to women in the Yoruba community during pre-coloniality and post-coloniality. Women were given some roles that are prominent in society, such as *Iya Osun*, and *Iya Sango* among others. With the passing of time and the emergence of Christianity, these special roles of women could not hold in Christianity as the missionaries promoted more the supremacy of male power structures and institutions as I earlier expressed in chapter two. Toyin Falola argues that more leadership opportunities in governance and religious activities were given to men with little consideration for women.¹²² Adeboye, along with Falade's agreement, points out that there are cultural obstacles to female leadership in Nigeria. Adeboye classifies these barriers into two categories: traditional values and beliefs that hinder women's progress and a modern political culture that discourages female leadership. In traditional Nigerian culture, women are mainly seen as wives and mothers, which results in unequal distribution of domestic duties, restricting women's time for other pursuits and subjecting them to emotional and psychological consequences for non-compliance.¹²³

Alawode suggests another reason for the reluctance to call female pastors, which is complementary theology deeply rooted in biblical interpretation. Alawode's observations from the Baptist mission

¹²² Esther Falola, "A Critical Evaluation of the Impact of Theologically Trained Women on the Nigeria Baptist Convention," 347.

¹²³ Olufunke Adeboye, "Breaking through barriers: Religion and female leadership in Nigeria," 152.

field show varying opinions concerning women. Some male missionaries believe that the Bible advocates for women to play supportive roles rather than taking on leading roles in missions. They suggest that women can assist their husbands or male counterparts. For instance, citing Paul's directive in 1 Corinthians 14: 34-35 which states that women should be silent in churches and seek knowledge from their husbands at home. On the contrary, other male missionaries argue that women should be encouraged to serve in missions as God can use any gender for His work, emphasizing that women have unique opportunities to minister due to their ability to connect and adapt easily.¹²⁴ Falade also proposes that the perception of female pastors might be influenced by doctrinal teachings in churches. She notes that while female pastors are often undervalued by males, women themselves need to improve their self-image and mutual respect. Falade highlights the challenge of women facing acceptance issues from other women in the Church due to early indoctrination. She stresses the importance of women recognizing and embracing their God-given dignity.¹²⁵ Moreover, Church policies and the selection process could be another hindrance. In the Baptist Convention, there is an autonomous system allowing members to choose their leaders. However, Falade mentions that women are often denied this opportunity due to gender biases within the congregation.¹²⁶

The analysis of factors impeding the appointment of female pastors in Nigerian Baptist congregations reveals that leadership decisions are frequently influenced by gender, theological interpretations, doctrinal matters, cultural norms, and congregational attitudes. Therefore, addressing these issues requires a context-sensitive approach, suggesting the incorporation of the theological perspectives of Mercy Oduyoye and Herman Bavinck.

¹²⁴ Akinyemi Alawode, "Prospects of addressing the challenges of gender inequalities in Christian missions," 1.

¹²⁵ Esther Falade, "A Critical Evaluation of the Impact of Theologically Trained Women on the Nigeria Baptist Convention," 62.

¹²⁶ Esther Falade, "A Critical Evaluation of the Impact of Theologically Trained Women on the Nigeria Baptist Convention," 61

3.5 Conclusion

The research into the role of female trained pastors within the Nigerian Baptist Convention has revealed that although the Convention might be open to ordaining female clergy, the Baptist local churches allow their members to select their church leaders. Often, the congregation tends to favour male pastors, posing challenges for female pastors in securing positions. The following chapter will then explore Oduyoye's perspective on the issue of Christianity and women in Africa, as well as the theological response of African women theology.

Chapter Four

Mercy Amba Oduyoye on African Women's Theology

4.0 Introduction

Chapter three briefly touched on the role of female clergy in the Nigeria Baptist Convention. The discussion also delved into the call system for pastoral service in local Churches of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, exploring the roles assigned to female pastors in these Churches, and identifying factors hindering the appointment of female pastors as lead pastors.

This chapter will explore African Women's Theology, commencing with an overview of Mercy Oduyoye, the author and co-founder of the African Women's Theology alongside other African female theologians. This section is divided into six parts, covering Mercy Amba Oduyoye's life, the establishment of African Women's Theologies, Oduyoye's perspective on the challenges faced by Christianity in Africa and its impact on Christian women. The chapter further examines African women's perspectives on ecclesiology, anthropology, and partnership in church ministry, concluding with an appraisal and critique of African women's theology.

4.1 The life of Mercy Amba Oduyoye

Family Background

Mercy Amba Oduyoye a renowned theologian, educator, writer, mentor, poet and often referred to as mother of African women's theologies¹²⁷, was born on October 21, 1933, in rural south Ghana, to the family of Reverend Charles Kwaw Yamoah and Mercy Yaa Dakwaa Yamoah.¹²⁸

Oduyoye was born into a Christian household, Oduyoye's father was a Methodist minister who began as a teacher and later became an ordained minister. Following his family's tradition of active and prominent Church leadership, her father ultimately served as president of the Methodist Church of Ghana. Her mother, while a faithful supporter of her husband's ministry and devoted mother, graduated from the prestigious Wesley Girls High School, an opportunity seldom afforded to

¹²⁷ Yolanda Smith, "Mercy Amba Oduyoye," *Biola University*, n.d., <https://www.biola.edu/talbot/ce20/database/mercy-amba-oduyoye>. (accessed July, 10th 2024).

¹²⁸ Yolanda Smith, "Mercy Amba Oduyoye,".

African girls. Oduyoye's mother became a leader and activist in her own right working for the liberation of women (and youth) in the church and wider society.¹²⁹

According to Oluwatomisin Oredein, a notable African religion and gender scholar noted that, Mercy Yaa, while supporting her husband, did not receive due recognition in the Churches where she served; she consistently received less acknowledgment compared to the men, whether European or African. Yaa believed that embracing Westernization would bring freedom to her and other Akan women, yet this hope was shattered by the deep-seated sexism within the Church.¹³⁰ This raises the question, if the issue of women leadership in the Church is caused by Westernization or if it had always existed before Westernization? The chapter will later show Oduyoye's perspective on this. Mercy Yaa and other women in ministerial roles feared the impact of colonialism on their Akan culture, as Christianity brought a sense of invisibility and disregard for women's core cultural principles. They learned early on that Christianity was not a solution for many African women, but a foe to be wary of.¹³¹ Mercy Amba watched this and learned early on that Christianity was not a salve for many of the African women of her mother's generation; it was a foe to be wary of and yet to be kept close.¹³²

For Oduyoye, the purported values of the Christian Church, combined with Akan culture, not only failed to uplift Akan women but further oppressed women.¹³³ There shows to be a clash between a matrilineal, mother-centered Akan culture that did not always adhere to its claims and a European-patriarchal Christianity that wandered from its message of love for all, taught Mercy Amba a harsh lesson in African women's (in)visibility in the Christian Church and in African culture due to the lack of recognition attributed to females.¹³⁴

Aware of women's marginalization in their society and church, both Charles and Mercy Yaa passed on to her daughter an informal education on gender within the African Church context. While

¹²⁹ Yolanda Smith, "Mercy Amba Oduyoye,".

¹³⁰ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 8.

¹³¹ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 8.

¹³² Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 8.

¹³³ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 8.

¹³⁴ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 8.

Mercy Amba internalized her mother's strength and experiences, her father's dedication to the faith fascinated her. A multilayered identity, attentive to gender and faith, helped the girl develop a firmer understanding of what it meant not only to be an Akan woman who was Christian but also an Akan woman privy to the benefits of certain systems, like education.¹³⁵

Educational Background

According to Oredein, school for Mercy Amba was a door her parents had opened for her, but the specifics concerning access to education were the most revealing. While she would engage fully in the educational opportunities available to her, Mercy quickly discovered that the social aspects surrounding the realm of education interested her the most. Queries about access to education and finances, the rich cultural tapestry of Akan society, and the decisions women could make in a postcolonial Ghana all played a part in shaping her academic journey.¹³⁶

Motivated by her interest in Christian theology, Mercy Amba pursued the Tripos Part III (a one-year master's-level program in the Cambridge educational system) in dogmatics at the University of Cambridge, graduating in 1964. After her time at Cambridge, she continued teaching, gaining valuable experience. In 1965, she taught religious studies at Wesley Girls' High School in Cape Coast, Ghana. This teaching role presented challenges and rewarding experiences, motivating her to address issues such as girls' education, teenage pregnancy, early marriages, rumors of abortions, and unexplained dropouts. She emphasized the education of girls and women, reflecting on the purpose and impact of education and the church's role in providing education to marginalized individuals. Oduyoye's quest for answers led her on an exceptional yet non-traditional intellectual and academic journey. Despite not formally attaining a doctorate, she produced theological content for local African and international audiences for many years. Oduyoye, with a practical approach, does not view her work as merely an intellectual exercise but as a tangible, practical response to crises faced by real individuals and communities, particularly those experienced by African women.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 8.

¹³⁶ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 9.

¹³⁷ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 9.

Oduyoye, a prominent figure in the ecumenical movement, has been involved with the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) since 1976.¹³⁸ Her contributions, particularly in feminist theology and African theology, emphasize inclusivity and gender equality, drawing from her cultural context and experiences.

4.2 Foundation of the African women's theology

The advent of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter the Circle) is well documented as a response to the lack of voice and presence of African women in the theological enterprise.¹³⁹

4.2.1 Origin and Structure: The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians

Rachel Nyagondwe Fielder described the circle of concerned African Women Theologians as an African baby, which was born in an ecumenical surrounding.¹⁴⁰ The movement was born in 1989, the network internationally known as the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, or the Circle, was co-founded by Oduyoye with the help of the first of several international planning committees.¹⁴¹ According to Fielder, Oduyoye's vision to begin the Circle was only realized in the 1980s, after a long and independent effort of making friendships with other African women, some of whom were not theologians, as seen in the group of founding members of the Circle.

Furthermore, Oduyoye was convinced that she needed others to achieve this goal, and this inspiration was typically Akan, the ethnic group she comes from, but also African in general.¹⁴²

Fielder writes that while there are already an existing movement addressing the issue of gender inequalities in the African society and church before the creation of the circle, what makes it distinct from these movements was that the theologies were formed in African cultures and religions.¹⁴³

Similar to Fielder's claim, Oredein notes that, African women academics already surmised that

¹³⁸ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 9

¹³⁹ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 21

¹⁴⁰ Rachel Nyagondwe Fiedler, *A History of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, 1989-2007* (Malawi: Mzuni Press, 2017), 10.

¹⁴¹ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 26.

¹⁴² Rachel Fielder, *A History of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*, 26.

¹⁴³ Rachel Fielder, *A History of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*, 10.

cultural and religious emphases in their communities could be used for good, that they simply had to be mined for their constructive features. But these women lacked a formal setting for tackling these questions and having these conversations together. Oduyoye saw how they needed a place where African women could communally interrogate what culture and religion do in women's lives. She desired a place, a gathering, where women with similar experiences could learn from one another, build each other up, and create new conditions for African women's wellness.¹⁴⁴

The circle is recognized as African because firstly, it is widely accepted that the circle is a movement that was founded by Oduyoye. Secondly, the birth attendants who became the first organizing team of the circle were Africans. Since the circle was birthed in Africa and for African women, circle theologies are also called African feminist theologies or African women's theologies.¹⁴⁵

In describing the structure of the circle, Carrie Pemberton describes it as comprising active teachers, academics, businesswomen, and pastors, making it a representative forum by its very nature. The circle also serves as a theological forum centered around a certain level of advocacy.¹⁴⁶

Despite this, it is important to note that the Circle is not a widespread movement but rather a gathering of educated and dedicated individuals who willingly engage in studying, collaborating, and publishing. The works produced by the Circle reflect a courageous determination to write.¹⁴⁷

Oredein expounded that, at the start of the circle, if a task or writing needed to be done it is attended to by rotating leadership on a case-by-case basis as the women are moved to see an idea to completion, refusing a hierarchical structure.¹⁴⁸ The Circle was created to sustain itself through shared ideas and responsibility.

Oredein notes that, the Circle's flexible structure was the brainchild of Oduyoye, whose behind-the-scenes work helped the group to grow in number each year. Membership was also not pressure

¹⁴⁴ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 26.

¹⁴⁵ Rachel Fielder, *A History of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*, 10.

¹⁴⁶ Carrie Pemberton, *Circle Thinking: African Women Theologians in Dialogue With the West*, (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2003), 159.

¹⁴⁷ Carrie Pemberton, *Circle Thinking*, 160.

¹⁴⁸ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 26.

filled. To be a member of the Circle, all one needed to do was produce some writing. More valuable than any membership fee, writing ensured an increasing exposure of African women's theology.¹⁴⁹

4.2.2 Doing African Women's Theology: Cultural Hermeneutics

The Circle 'does theology' in the mode of resistance, in a 'wake up call' for women to arise out of lethargy and describe their space in post-independence Africa.¹⁵⁰ According to Oduyoye, African women often live so that they may be present in this life to struggle to disclose God's presence in their lives and in the realities of Africa culture (the place of the bible and emphasis on context). A major problem for female theologians over time became the skill for the interpretation of the Bible and culture from their own location especially as the Bible became part of the African culture. This problem turned their attention to biblical and cultural hermeneutics.¹⁵¹

Oduyoye explained that the central premise of cultural hermeneutics is that it allows women to look at the Bible from an African perspective and to differentiate and extract from it that which is beneficial, while other interpretation of the bible if it does harm to women, the vulnerable and the voiceless is unacceptable.¹⁵² She argues that within the African culture, everything is not liberating, and therefore African women's approach to interpreting the Bible is crucial and done with the same cautious approach to African culture, since the bible also depicts other people culture.¹⁵³ Cultural hermeneutics enables women to view the Bible through African eyes and to distinguish and extract from it what is liberating and not.

Oduyoye suggests that there are two ways to treating culture as a principle for hermeneutics.¹⁵⁴ Firstly, taking culture as a tool which to understand and interpret one's reality, and specifically the Bible, allows one to take one's experience seriously and to connect it with other realities.¹⁵⁵ The second way in which culture can be used in cultural hermeneutics is by creating "a hermeneutics of

¹⁴⁹ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 26.

¹⁵⁰ Rachel Fielder, *A History of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*, 10.

¹⁵¹ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 11.

¹⁵² Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 11.

¹⁵³ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 11.

¹⁵⁴ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 12.

¹⁵⁵ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 12.

liberation” in order to identify positive aspects of culture and to promote them. According to Oduyoye, it is the responsibility of everybody in and outside the community to contribute towards this development of a hermeneutics of liberation.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, Oduyoye states that cultural hermeneutics directs that we take nothing for granted, that we do not follow tradition and ritual and norms as unchangeable given, and that cultural relativism does not become covert racism and ethnocentrism. Life is to be lived deliberately, intentionally and consciously, and where this practice has been lost, we have to create awareness of life experiences and their implications. Experiences are to be analysed, not only for their historical, social and ethical implications, but also for their capacity to create what grows to become cultural norms.¹⁵⁷

In theological reflection, women of the circle, according to Oduyoye, proceed from storytelling to analysing the story. They examine how the characters perceive themselves, interact with others, and understand their own agency in life. They inquire about the overall meaning of the narrative. Subsequently, they ponder on their encounters through the lens of Christian faith, incorporating biblical and cultural interpretations consciously. Through this lens, they pinpoint elements that foster community, transformation, and empowerment, nurturing life-affirming relationships. Their focus extends beyond stating beliefs; women engage in theology to support and sustain a spiritual life. Consequently, their faith affirmation leads to commitments, initiating practices that generate liberating visions and actions. This approach has shaped African women's theology as a theology of relations, emphasizing mutuality over hierarchies.¹⁵⁸

In summary, cultural hermeneutics is employed by Oduyoye to investigate how and why African women theologians find it essential that African culture should form the basis of their particular theology. Through critical questioning and analysis, African women make use of this kind of cultural hermeneutics to search for elements that contribute to the liberation of women in and outside the church. To sum up Oduyoye’s argument, it is the life-giving values that need to be

¹⁵⁶ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 12.

¹⁵⁷ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 12.

¹⁵⁸ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women’s Theology*, 12.

extracted from both the Bible and African culture. These life-giving values should be enhanced in all spheres of society and the Church.

4.3 Oduyoye's main theological insights

This section explores Oduyoye's description of the issue of Christianity in Africa and women's participation in Christianity, focusing on his theological insights.

4.3.1 Oduyoye on the Problem of Christianity in Africa

Oduyoye's inaugural work was "Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa," which was published in 1986. Within the pages of this book, she examines church history and colonial history through the theological lens of African women. Recognizing her specific context in crafting this book, Oduyoye acknowledges that it might be deemed "unsystematic" by conventional authorities, yet she asserts that it "offers insight into the theological dilemmas encountered in Africa and encourages further exploration of the faith."¹⁵⁹ Oduyoye elaborates in her book that the Christian missionary endeavor's lack of theological profundity appears to stem from the reluctance to address Africans' reservations about Christianity.¹⁶⁰ Africa harbors a benevolent tolerance towards the religious beliefs of others, ingrained in its culture of hospitality. Nonetheless, outsiders seeking acceptance and trust are expected to familiarize themselves with native customs. Western missionaries were slow to grasp that they did not possess as deep an understanding and appreciation for the African psyche and way of life as they presumed. The African identity was not easily deciphered.¹⁶¹ Despite some Africans embracing the European culture that came with Christianity, the overall missionary approach was met with resistance. The missionary approach struck a chord in the African consciousness. While European Christianity attempted to displace their traditional beliefs, many Africans remained steadfast in their heritage. What they practiced held inherent significance, depth, and sufficiency to satisfy their spiritual yearning. For numerous

¹⁵⁹ Oluwatomisin Oredein, "Mercy Amba Oduyoye Centers African Women within Christian Theology," *Sojourners*, (October 23, 2020) <https://sojo.net/magazine/december-2020/mercy-amba-oduyoye-centers-african-women-within-christian-theology>. (Accessed June 25, 2024).

¹⁶⁰ Mercy Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing : Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Eugene.: Stock Publishers, 2009)., 21.

¹⁶¹ Mercy Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 21.

individuals, their culture continued to influence their acceptance of the Christian faith.¹⁶² Similar to Oduyoye, Oredein argues that Africans found it logical to blend elements of their religious practices with Western Christianity due to living in a hybrid religious identity.¹⁶³ The values of Christianity appeared to align well with African lifestyles, but eventually, many Africans discovered that this fusion had mixed outcomes, especially for the Europeans.¹⁶⁴ Unfamiliar with external influence on their Christian expression, Europeans sought to denigrate African Christian culture and identity. Whereas, Africans were simply trying to personalize Christianity—to find their own reflection in it. Africans did not discard their existing faith traditions and cosmological beliefs but instead integrated Christianity into them.¹⁶⁵ Oduyoye categorized this by explaining that some things in Western Christianity appealed to Africans, Christianity attracted Africans for material advantages and religious diversity. Some accepted it for its benefits, such as access to resources like hospitals and schools. Africans' understanding of redemption and salvation was tied to physical and material wellness, making this logic logical.¹⁶⁶ Africans, intrigued and impressed, embraced these standards. African Christianity's inception, as Oduyoye clarifies, stemmed from contextual interpretations. Many Africans were able to incorporate Christianity into their religious frameworks. For Africans, receiving the gospel-cultural message from Europeans did not equate to automatically embracing it as intended by Europeans. Africans were unafraid to adapt Christianity to fit their traditional spiritual beliefs, thus making it uniquely African.¹⁶⁷

In summary Oduyoye's argument is not that Christianity poses a threat to African traditional religion, but rather that it invalidates everything that existed before the Christian faith became established in Africa.¹⁶⁸ Oduyoye argues for a Christianity that is deeply rooted in the lived experiences of African people.

¹⁶² Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 34.

¹⁶³ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 35.

¹⁶⁴ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 35

¹⁶⁵ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 35

¹⁶⁶ Mercy Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 23

¹⁶⁷ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 35

¹⁶⁸ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 35

4.3.2 Oduyoye on African Christianity and Women

In 1995, Oduyoye wrote *Daughters of Anowa*. She wrote from an African Christian perspective on the involvement of the Church in the Africa women liberation. Focusing on liberation for African women and their relationship with the church, as well as examining the church's view on women growing into Christ-like individuals.¹⁶⁹ Oduyoye stressed that the church must also be a place of liberation for women, recalling how a Church father, Augustine of Hippo, once stated that a woman alone is not created in God's image, unlike a man alone. Additionally, Martin Luther expressed that women were suited only for church attendance, kitchen work, and childbearing. Oduyoye posed important questions on who defines a woman's humanity, whether it be men or God, and if family life is a vocation, a biological imperative, or a practical framework for society.¹⁷⁰ Regrettably, one common ground between European and African cultures was the perception of gender roles, where Oduyoye observed that Europeans associated God with maleness, influencing African Christian men to adopt this view alongside existing male-centric cultural norms, leading to confusion on gender interpretations.¹⁷¹

Oduyoye stresses that for many individuals, perceiving God as male and viewing leadership as a male privilege has prevented the church from acknowledging the presence or absence of women.¹⁷² The justification of Christian sexism has led to the erasure of African women within both European and African Christian communities. Christianity's bias against women is bluntly stated by Oduyoye, who highlights the prevalence of male-centeredness and misogyny across all forms of Christianity in Africa. The intersection of misogyny between the colonizer and the colonized should be seen as shameful rather than a basis for solidarity; regrettably, this is not the perspective held by many Africans.¹⁷³ She illustrates how the treatment of women in African churches contradicts Christianity's professed promotion of the equal value of all individuals. Instead, it exposes how

¹⁶⁹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchal*, (Orbis Books, 1995), 5.

¹⁷⁰ Mercy Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, 5.

¹⁷¹ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 46.

¹⁷² Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 82.

¹⁷³ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 82.

Christianity reinforces societal norms of obedience and subservience, leading to the dehumanization of women.¹⁷⁴

Furthermore, Oduyoye observes that African women's presence in the Church is remarkable, as they discover hope in Christianity's message as well. She credits their dedication to Christianity to its ability to empower individuals.¹⁷⁵ African women, following their cultural tradition, embrace what brings vitality and enlightenment to their lives while also resisting its negative aspects.

Oduyoye explains that for women to feel accepted in Christianity, they must overlook the idea that they are controlled by a male-dominated system instead of God's will or inherent sinfulness linked to their gender. Despite African women's admirable resistance, the existence of a misogynistic gospel remains a significant challenge to the church's integrity in Africa.¹⁷⁶ This issue stems from harmful gender biases within discussions about the Christian God. Oduyoye suggests that the church sometimes appears to support ideologies that question the full humanity of marginalized individuals, potentially justifying their mistreatment or exclusion. Given the existing scrutiny African women face globally, their faith should not be a source of further oppression.¹⁷⁷

In her analysis of African women's relationship with Christianity, Oduyoye frequently uses the term "Church" broadly to refer to the organized Christian presence in Africa. She interprets the Church through the experiences of African women.¹⁷⁸ Oduyoye highlights that the way women recount their interactions with the Church reflects their understanding of its nature. The focus often lies on how Churches view and teach about women, revealing the true nature of the Church as opposed to its professed identity. This perspective of the Church does not concentrate on its catholicity or universality beyond recognizing that concerning women's experiences, the Church is genuinely universal. She observes a lack of Church that earnestly pursue the unity of the Church when it

¹⁷⁴ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 82.

¹⁷⁵ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 82.

¹⁷⁶ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 82.

¹⁷⁷ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 82.

¹⁷⁸ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 82.

comes to human unity, especially in terms of gender equality, as women and men are not treated equally within the Church.¹⁷⁹

While the subject of men subjugating women receives more attention, Oduyoye pointed out that such behavior can also be observed among women. Oduyoye notes that numerous African women have assimilated the beliefs and customs that contribute to their marginalization. This assimilation represents a type of psychological conditioning in which women, after being consistently devalued, start to embrace these standards as their reality.¹⁸⁰ Consequently, women may find themselves supporting systems and behaviors that oppress them, either unconsciously or consciously. In the realm of the Church, Oduyoye highlights that this internalized oppression emerges in discussions regarding topics like the ordination of women. Despite the Church ideally being a realm of equality and fairness, it frequently reflects the patriarchal frameworks of society. In these discussions, women may be divided—some advocating for their complete inclusion in leadership positions, while others, influenced by internalized patriarchal norms, oppose such advancements. This split within the Church is viewed by women as a profound conflict, where the Church's bias and marginalization of women are perceived as a betrayal of its core principles.¹⁸¹

4.3.3 Mercy Oduyoye on Ecclesiology

African women's ecclesiology, akin to their overall theological stance, embodies liberationist ideals. African women view the Christian church as a communal sanctuary promoting inclusivity and collective liberation, as stated by Oredein. Regrettably, many African women must first advocate for their own inclusion within the African and universal Christian Church to experience this liberation. African women argue that for the Christian Church to truly embody its identity, women must actively participate in its activities, affairs, and decision-making processes.¹⁸²

Oduyoye highlights that numerous women perceive the Scriptures as a "patriarchal and ethnocentric" instrument. However, she argues that rather than scripture itself, the biblical

¹⁷⁹ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 82.

¹⁸⁰ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 81.

¹⁸¹ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 81.

¹⁸² Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 61.

interpretation and Christian theology in Africa have had the effect of sacralising the marginalization of women's experience.¹⁸³ Oduyoye stresses the importance of women feeling at home in the Church, envisioning it as a place where everyone is valued.¹⁸⁴ The ecclesiology of African women sheds light on the Church's connection with God, the interactions among Church members, and the church's relationship with the world. This perspective is characterized by a profound awareness, radical inclusivity, and expansive imagination, reinterpreting conventional hermeneutical concepts in a way that honours the profound bond between humanity and divinity. Through both local and global ecumenical initiatives, African women have deliberately crafted their ecclesiology as a transformative space—one that occupies, enters, and redefines the Church's potential. They have always seen themselves as integral members of the Christian Church, suggesting that the remainder of the church must acknowledge this reality.¹⁸⁵

In her writings on African women's studies in Ecclesiology, Oduyoye portrays the Church as God's household, where all individuals are considered God's people. She asserts that human beings are part of God's earthly household, as well as beings around God in unseen realms. Oduyoye further articulates that God, the origin of humanity, nurtures all creation, with the entire cosmos reflecting the divine economy. She emphasizes that the church symbolizes the hearth with God as a mother figure, portraying the entire earth as the hearth and all individuals as God's children.¹⁸⁶

Oredein elaborates on how the hearth-hold imagery in African women's theology serves as a means to establish their ecclesiology, emphasizing the importance of treating women as foundational within the Church. The way in which people perceive God is intertwined with how the community views and respects its women, prompting a reevaluation of the treatment of women within the church as a reflection of its theological beliefs. African women's ecclesiology encourages a reconsideration of the church's approach towards women.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Mercy Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 76.

¹⁸⁴ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 78.

¹⁸⁵ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye* 62.

¹⁸⁶ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 79.

¹⁸⁷ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 62.

Oredein notes that, despite the initial optimism surrounding the hearth-hold ecclesial imagery, symbolizing unity in God's love through diverse individuals coming together, there exists a dilemma rooted in African women's encounters with interpretations of racial and gender differences in Christianity's history in Africa.¹⁸⁸ The legacy of European colonialism has significantly influenced African Christian perspectives of God, leading to fractured relationships within humanity due to gender stereotypes, ultimately impacting the understanding of God. These doctrinal challenges stem from the notion of difference, often weaponized as a tool of authority to exclude others from full participation, perpetuating inequality within the church.¹⁸⁹ The question arises regarding the place of African women in the Christian ecclesiological discourse, considering their dual marginalized identity as both African and female.

Nevertheless, Oduyoye presents a straightforward solution to address the issue of African women's doctrinal neglect: acknowledging African women as essential members of the Christian community. By embracing this perspective, the Church opens itself to innovative approaches in exploring the Christian faith.¹⁹⁰

4.3.4 Mercy Oduyoye on Partnership in Church Ministry

Oduyoye opines that “partnership of women and men, ordained or not, is the true image of the Church of Christ”.¹⁹¹ Oduyoye makes this statement from the vantage point of seeing the Church divided against itself in terms of the unity of the genders, that is, male and female. Her motive for such a notion of Christian ministry as a “partnership between both men and women” stems from her reflection on the oppression and marginalization of women within and outside the Church and within their respective cultures. Gift Baloyi explains Oduyoye theology of partnership in Church ministry as a reflection of the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ on Earth, which was inclusive

¹⁸⁸ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 62.

¹⁸⁹ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 62.

¹⁹⁰ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 62.

¹⁹¹ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 86.

and redemptive – inclusive in a sense of creating space for women to participate freely as capable disciples of Christ, without necessarily looking at their biological makeup.¹⁹²

Oduyoye places emphasis on the need for African women to be liberated from any form of male patriarchy and dominance. She believes that women have a vital role to play in ensuring that their rights, dignity and liberation are visible in the church and society. Her point of departure is strongly placed on the fact that all those who have been baptized are duly called into the Christian ministry as partners in the service of Christ. But in the process, these hermeneutics must take into account the fact that those male patriarchs need education in order for partnership to take place. Oduyoye tries to show the male patriarchs that women are not a threat to their maleness but partners in pursuit of the true gospel of Christ.¹⁹³ As a result of gender inequalities in Christian ministry in a church, Oduyoye suggests that a new vision is desperately needed so that the Church can recognize the ministries of men and women. This requires local churches to acknowledge women's experience as members of the church. All people must share in the life of the Church, its mission and ministry.¹⁹⁴

Oduyoye opines that if *koinonia* is a community of sharing and participation, then, in its operations, women too should find power to exercise their charisms for the general health of the community and especially for the Church. Oduyoye calls the church to be a model of a community in which all have the possibility to participate. The community, according to Oduyoye, has to live out its proclaimed reason for being based on the life of the Christ who came that all may have abundant life. Abundant life, it is argued, is that which nurtured in a communion where there is participation. It is Oduyoye's argument that all people have been created in the image of God and are called to be Christ-like.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Gift Baloyi, "Mercy Oduyoye's model of 'Partnership between Women and Men' in African Christian ministry," *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 78(2), (2022), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i2.7598>, 4.

¹⁹³ Gift Baloyi, "Mercy Oduyoye's model of Partnership," 4.

¹⁹⁴ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 85.

¹⁹⁵ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 85.

In summary, according to Oduyoye, if humans are the Church together, then together they must fulfil the reason of the church as *koinonia*. Together here means together as women and men. The Church must become a household in which all count, and in which the full range of ministries become the joint responsibility of all in the Church and are undertaken according to charisms. She states that women have been called together with men to actualize the servant-hood role of the Church in the world.¹⁹⁶

4.3.5 Oduyoye on African Women Anthropology: Our body - our difference

According to Oduyoye, the whole human community and each of its component parts—family, industry, Church—are affected by the culture-bound view of humanity that puts limits on leadership duties. One of the themes that has come in for re-examination is the *Imago Dei*.¹⁹⁷ Oduyoye suggests that the bodies of African women are more than just biological beings; they are closely connected to their identities, cultures, and spiritual beliefs. She illustrated this concept through the lens of African Women's anthropology, highlighting the importance of recognizing women for their capabilities beyond gender and sexuality.

Oduyoye suggests that feminism is a precondition for a Christian anthropology that does justice to the humanity of women. In this context she describes feminism as part of the whole movement geared to liberating the human community from entrenched attitudes and structures that can only operate if dichotomies and hierarchies are maintained. African women theologians advocate the full participation of women in all spheres of life on terms of ability and inclination, criteria that Christian anthropology undermines.¹⁹⁸ According to Oredein, African women's theological anthropology seeks to wrestle the storytelling power out of the hands of a few and return it to the entire community.¹⁹⁹

According to African women theologians, an element that is missing from traditional Christian anthropology is a positive appropriation of the women's embodiment. They emphasized a necessity

¹⁹⁶ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 85.

¹⁹⁷ Mercy Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 67.

¹⁹⁸ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 67.

¹⁹⁹ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 52.

of facing the issue of human sexuality as an integral part of women humanness and a gift from God in religious anthropology.²⁰⁰ Oduyoye notes that the fear of women bodies²⁰¹ has made it difficult to accept the integrity of woman being and led to the separation of women make up into material and spiritual, body and soul, spirit and mind. On the other hand, being in the body has allowed traditional Christian anthropology to make the female body an obstacle to the fullness of the woman's humanness.²⁰² African women theology stance is that woman bodies are the medium through which they express humanness, as such there can be no separation of the body from the rest of our being, in consequence, women posit that the female and male bodies are not complementary, as each is capable of expressing the fullness of humanness.²⁰³

Women's anthropology points out that what is described as feminine and masculine are cultural coded and should not be allowed to circumscribe women humanness. It is, therefore, unacceptable that women's humanness should be limited to their biology and the cultures that make women into beings whose only reason for existence is to assure the continuity of human race need to be transformed. Women humanness is also expressed in our being spiritual, having consciousness of who they are, where they come from and notions of beginnings and endings, a self-consciousness that makes women think of the meaning of life.²⁰⁴ Oduyoye notes that, in the Christian creation narrative, the female's creation is only slightly different to the male's, for to be female means to be created by God in a unique moment similar to the male—from pre-existing material (dust). This woman is “the express will of God”.²⁰⁵

According to Oredein, the bias against bodies taints how the world, but especially how those in the church, understands the other essence and soul. How someone perceives another's body should not

²⁰⁰ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 69.

²⁰¹ Oduyoye refers to the "fear of women's bodies," addressing the complex and often negative perceptions that society and religious institutions have historically held regarding women's physicality, sexuality, and bodily presence. (Mercy Oduyoye, *African Women's Theology*, 69)

²⁰² Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 69.

²⁰³ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 70.

²⁰⁴ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 69.

²⁰⁵ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 69.

comprise the story told about that person. Those in power conflate how they receive a woman's body with that of her essence, with her soul.²⁰⁶

Oduyoye suggests the need to revisit the interpretation of Genesis 1.²⁰⁷ It raises the question: Does it suggest that the woman is not made in the image of God in the same way that the man is? Can we continue affirming Genesis 1:26 without considering the rationality of conscious beings? Oduyoye suggests that while few illustrations from the early Church Fathers may be apposite here, only an intensive study of their writings will be of real value in this search for the meaning of being human as there is no doubt that the image we have of ourselves as African Christian women and men and of community and the language we use in speaking of ourselves have been shaped by these thinkers.²⁰⁸

4.4 Appraisal and Criticism of African Women's Theology

The exploration of African women's theology has been quite intriguing thus far. It is interesting that while Oduyoye was describing the issue of Christian Westernization in Africa she did not fail to mention that there already existed a patriarchal culture in Africa. Also, Oduyoye separating the place of the problem as caused by humans rather than by Scripture is to be noted. The theological perspective underscores the importance of the Church embracing women and promoting collaborative work between men and women in leadership roles to achieve equality. Additionally, it emphasizes the interconnectedness among all individuals.

Nevertheless, certain aspects of African women's theology remain unexpressed or not fully articulated. According to Baloyi, citing Isabel Phiri, argues that traditional African cultures typically do not allow women to lead men, attributing this to societal norms influencing the Church.²⁰⁹ This shifts the focus from a theological debate to a cultural one, raising doubts about the practical application of this theology within the Church.

²⁰⁶ Oluwatomisin Oredein, *The Theology of Mercy Amba Oduyoye*, 59

²⁰⁷ Mercy Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 67

²⁰⁸ Mercy Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 67-68

²⁰⁹ Gift Baloyi, "Mercy Oduyoye's model of Partnership," 4

Oduyoye's idea of the "partnership of women and men" serves as a foundational framework for her liberation hermeneutics. However, the term "partnership" lacks a comprehensive explanation, leading to questions about the nature of equality within this partnership and its sustainability over time.

Chapter Five

Herman Bavinck and some other Reformed Theologians on the Image of God

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, we examined African feminist theology by Oduyoye, focusing on African Christianity and gender and the theology of African women to the issue of leadership. The aim was to understand the responses of Oduyoye and African feminist theologians to the question of African Christianity and women. It is interesting to note that in this chapter, Oduyoye pointed out a similarity between European and African perspectives on gender. While Europeans highlighted God's masculinity, African Christian men embraced this concept and blended it with existing male-centric beliefs in their communities. Oduyoye highlighted that the main issue was not assigning gender to God, but rather the interpretation of gender relationships, which led to widespread confusion on gender roles in the Church.

Chapter 4 raises questions such as whether Genesis 1 implies that women are not created in God's image in the same manner as men. It also prompts us to consider the rationality of conscious beings when affirming Genesis 1:26. Moving forward to Chapter 5, we will delve into the concept of humans as the image of God from the viewpoints of Herman Bavinck and other Reformed theologians. The focus will be on exploring Bavinck's background and theology to grasp his work better and draw insights from his theology.

5.2 Historical background of Herman Bavinck (1854 – 1921)

Herman Bavinck was born on December 13th, 1854 in *Hoogeveen*, a small town in the Dutch province of Drenthe. By virtue of *Hoogeveen's* status as a frontier town, Bavinck grew up as a native speaker of Dutch and German. His father, Jan Bavinck, was a pastor and theology professor in the highly conservative *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* (the Dutch Christian Reformed Church, also known as the *Afgescheidenen - Secessionists*).²¹⁰

²¹⁰ James Eglinton, "Some Benefits Of Going Organic: Herrman Bavinck's Theology Of The Visible Church," *Theology In Scotland*, 17 No.1, (2010), 23-24.

Herman Bavinck's father, Jan Bavinck (1826–1909) came from the little German village of *Bentheim*, near the Dutch border, and was a member of the German *Alt-Reformierten Kirche* (Old Reformed Church), a group known for its piety and strong adherence to the traditions of the Reformed faith as set forth at the Synod of *Dort*. Bavinck sr. played a significant role in the Christian Reformed Church, reflecting a pious and open attitude towards culture and learning. Bavinck sr.'s position influenced Herman's religious background. Furthermore, John Bolt expounded that, Herman Bavinck's historical background was shaped by the Secession movement, his father's influence, the Reformed traditions, and the academic challenges he encountered at Leiden University.²¹¹

According to James Eglinton, Bavinck's life took a surprising theological twist in 1874 when he transferred to Leiden University, the flagship seminary of the established *Hervormde Kerk*. He completed his candidate study in 1877 and commenced doctoral work, earning a Doctor of Theology *cum laude* in 1880. Bavinck applied for ordination within his own denomination but was received and ordained by the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk*. He served as a professor at the Theology School in *Kampen* and was a leading churchman during the coming together of his denomination and Kuyper's *Doleantie* group. Bavinck married Johanna Adriana Schippers in 1888 and published his magnum opus, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Reformed Dogmatics), between 1895 and 1901. He accepted a position at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1902 and made significant contributions to philosophy, applied ethics, psychology, and educational theory. Herman Bavinck died in Amsterdam at the age of 66.²¹²

5.3 Discussing Herman Bavinck “Image of God”

In chapter four, I have concluded that Mercy Oduyoye suggested studying the early Christian Church fathers regarding humans as the image of God to explore the roles of female and male leadership in the African Church. However, this paper will not focus on the perspective of the

²¹¹ John Bolt, *Bavinck on the Christian Life: Following Jesus in Faithful Service* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 26-27.

²¹² James Eglinton, “Some Benefits Of Going Organic,” 24.

Church fathers on the image of God, as they may not provide suitable responses. Instead, I will examine how the Dutch Reformed theologian Bavinck presents the concept of the image of God in man differently from other early Christian theologians and philosophers. Bavinck presents a different approach to the doctrine. According to Bavinck, there is no distinction between image and likeness; instead, they are used interchangeably.²¹³ Bavinck also argues that the image of God in man is too profound to be limited to an individual.²¹⁴

Gray Sutanto, a Reformed theologian, expounds on Bavinck's theological doctrine of the Image of God as a comprehensive theological anthropology that transcends common dualities. Specifically, it demonstrates how Bavinck's perspective navigates the debates between affective and cognitive views of the self, the relationship between the self and God in creation, federalism versus realism, and structuralist versus relational interpretations of human existence. Moreover, it provides innovative insights on inquiries regarding the body-soul connection, federalism and original sin, the unity and diversity of humanity, consummation, and the beatific vision.²¹⁵ The concept of the image of God in Bavinck's theology not only serves as a presentation of his theological anthropology but also as an application of his ideas to contemporary dialogues. This results in a depiction of humanity that is inherently religious, shaping Bavinck's perception of the self, interpersonal relationships, and the ultimate purpose of the self in communion with God.²¹⁶

Bavinck's elucidation of humans as the image of God is notably characterized by its rejection of dualism, its holistic approach, and its emphasis on embodiment. Rooted in the belief that humans do not merely possess or bear the image of God but actually are the image of God, Bavinck's perspective resists partitioning specific human capacities or aspects as the exclusive locus of the image. Instead, he highlights humanity as a whole as bearers of the divine image.²¹⁷ Similar to Sutanto, also Eglinton asserts that Bavinck's doctrine of human creation in the image of God

²¹³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 532.

²¹⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 577.

²¹⁵ Gray Sutanto, *God and Humanity: Herman Bavinck and Theological Anthropology* (Blooming Publishing, 2024), 2.

²¹⁶ Gray Sutanto, *God and Humanity*, 2.

²¹⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 554

underscores the extension of this image to every facet of the individual.²¹⁸ While all created beings exhibit traces of God (*vestigia Dei*), only humans are the direct image of God. Human beings reflect the image of God because they are authentically human, and their essence is intrinsically tied to being the image of God. Just as the cosmos functions as an organism revealing God's attributes to varying degrees in different creatures, the image of God is most prominently displayed in humanity. This manifestation may be more pronounced in certain aspects, such as the soul over the body or ethical virtues over physical abilities.²¹⁹

Defining the image

According to Bavinck, on the topic of the image of God, there was initially a wide range of opinions in the Christian Church. The image of God was described to be in the human body, in rationality, or in the freedom of the will, then again in dominion over the created world, or also in other moral qualities such as love and justice. But gradually two views came to the fore side by side or as opposites, both of them appealing to the distinction between image (*selem*) and likeness (*démut*). He opines that, Some, like Clement of Alexandria and Origen, believed that God created man in his image as a rational being to acquire likeness with God through obedience-naturalistic view. Others believed that man received likeness as a gift and could regain it through Christ. The naturalistic view, supported by the doctrine of the freedom of the will, viewed holiness as a good that humans could achieve through moral efforts.²²⁰

When discussing various perspectives on the image of God in man, Bavinck notes that Lutheran dogmaticians referred to the image of God in human as natural, as human nature would not be pure without it. They did not, however, believe that this image automatically derived from human nature, making it an indispensable and essential part of it.²²¹ The Lutherans acknowledged that the essence of man also reflects something divine, but they asserted that the true image of God only consists of

²¹⁸ James Eglinton, *Trinity, and Organism Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif*, (T&T Clark International: New York, 2012), 83.

²¹⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 555.

²²⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 533-534.

²²¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 548.

"original righteousness" along with qualities like "immortality, impassibility, dominion," and a "most blissful condition." While the Son (Christ) is inherently and fundamentally the image of God, in man, this image is considered an "accidental perfection" that can be lost, as it was in fact lost and only renewed and restored in believers.²²²

According to the Reformed theologians, they argued that although supernatural qualities were lost, the natural ones remained intact, including righteousness as an inherent part of man's nature. They utilized terms such as "substance," "essence," "attributes," "gifts," and "supernatural gifts" to distinguish between what remained and what was lost of the image of God.²²³ Some Reformed theologians also highlighted the supernatural favour of God, the gracious presence of the holy Trinity, and the resulting joy and delight as supernatural gifts.²²⁴ Additionally, Reformed theologians included the essence of man in the image of God. For example, Calvin made a clear distinction between the substance of the soul and its gifts, asserting that the image of God comprised "those marks of excellence with which God had distinguished Adam over all other living creatures," and thus included integrity, a view shared by all Reformed theologians.²²⁵

However, the Reformed church has gained a clearer understanding of the image of God. Reformed theology, as characterized in § 1.8.5, has effectively emphasized the link between substance and quality, nature and grace, creation and re-creation by distinguishing between the image of God in a broader and a narrower sense. According to Bavinck, the distinction is sometimes seen as too mechanical and requires further organic development.²²⁶ Nonetheless, Reformed theology has highlighted that the full image of God is made up of both the narrower and broader sense of the image, closely interconnected. The image of God is not just a part of man but man himself. Sin has led to the loss of the image of God in the narrower sense and damaged the image of God in the broader sense, impacting the whole person. Therefore, the grace of God in Christ restores the entire

²²² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 549.

²²³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 548.

²²⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 548.

²²⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 550.

²²⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 554.

person, holding great significance for every aspect of life, including family, society, the state, art, science, and more.²²⁷

5.4 Discussing Bavinck's Organic view of the Image of God

Sutanto in describing Bavinck's organic view of the image of God states that the organic motif is Bavinck's way of describing the way in which creation is shaped by its triune Creator.²²⁸ Bavinck argues that, in God, there is an absolute unity in diversity, as this simple God exists in three persons. If God is the archetype, and creation the ectype, then creation, too, will be shaped by patterns of unities in diversities. Human beings, made in God's image, are those creatures who mirror God's being most: God is the supposition, the archetype, the example, the original from which humanity [stems], and humanity is his likeness, his correlating image, though to a small degree. It follows that if image-bearers of God are the pinnacles of creation, then we shall see this pattern of unity in diversity most clearly in human beings, though in an analogical fashion.²²⁹ According to Sutanto, this organicism means that human individuals are intrinsically made in God's image – and that the image is non-partitive and not limited to one aspect of the human being. Bavinck's definition is ostensive, pointing to the humans as image bearers.²³⁰

5.4.1 Bavinck on Human Origin

When Bavinck discussed on the human origin, he speaks about the divine origin of humanity. According Bavinck, the divine origin of humankind has never been questioned in the Christian church and in Christian theology. Many pagan sagas attribute human creation to the gods or the demigods.²³¹ However, Bavinck also notes that, in both religion and philosophy, very different ideas about human origins have frequently been entertained as well, Sometimes man is viewed as having emerged autochthonously from the earth; then again as having evolved from some other animal, or as the fruit of some tree, and so forth.²³² Bavinck criticizes Pantheism, Materialism and Darwinism

²²⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 554.

²²⁸ Gray Sutanto, *God and Humanity*, 10.

²²⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 532.

²³⁰ Gray Sutanto, *God and Humanity*, 10.

²³¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 511.

²³² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 512.

views of human origins as fundamentally unbiblical. In Pantheism, God's essence is identical to that of creatures. Creation is replaced by the notions of emanation or evolution. Materialism claims that all creation and phenomena of the world must be regarded as mechanical combination or separation of atoms. Darwinism insists that humanity is nothing more than evolved animals, employing the notions of survival for existence by natural selection and heredity.²³³ He refers to Materialism and Darwinism are both historically and logically the result of philosophy, and without of experimental science.²³⁴ For Bavinck, only Scripture, however, sheds a full and true light on the origin of humanity which is described as the image of God doctrine of man's divine likeness.²³⁵

For Bavinck, there is no essential material distinction between the words 'image' and 'likeness,' noting that Scripture used those words interchangeably. The image of God is integral to the very being of humanity, and thus he does not state that human beings bear or have the image of God but are the image of God. It means that every human being has one and the same origin in God. Every human being also has a divine origin in the whole Deity, not only in some divine attributes. Every human being was created after the image of God in terms of the whole person, as it were, that nothing in human beings is excluded from God's image. In this regard, when the image of God is considered in humanity as a whole, its meaning can be fully unfolded. For Bavinck, as will be seen, the origin of humanity as the image of God is essential to the understanding of the human essence and human destiny.²³⁶

Bavinck argues that the scripture's words "image" and "likeness" refer to humankind, not God, and not to the uncreated archetype. He argues that man was created after God in such a way that humankind is his image and likeness. This creation is not restricted to certain attributes or parts of the divine being, but rather the whole human person is the image of the whole Deity.²³⁷ Bavinck further explains that the meaning of the image of God is explicated to us in the uncreated archetype

²³³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 512.

²³⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 513.

²³⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 531

²³⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 532.

²³⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 532.

(the Son).²³⁸ He notes that the image of God is explained by the Son, who is called the Word, Son, or imprint of God. He is called "God of God" and "Light of Light" because his nature conforms to that of God. This applies to man, who is also the image of God. The Son is the eternal only begotten Son, while man is the created son of God. The image of God manifests itself in man's dominion over the created world, including conformity to God's will. Re-creation in conformity to the image of God or Christ primarily involves putting on the new man, which includes righteousness and truth.²³⁹

Similar to Bavinck, the Dutch theologian Hoekema explained that, the creation account does not explicitly state how man is like God, but certain resemblances are implied. For instance, dominion over animals and the earth is one aspect of God's image. Man's creation of male and female is another aspect of God's image. The resemblance to God is not found in physical differences but in the need for companionship, social beings, and the complementing nature of humans. Humans also resemble God as responsible beings, capable of making decisions and ruling.²⁴⁰ However, Hoekema stated that, while it is not in Scripture, some theologians claim that at the time of man's fall into sin he lost the image of God, and can therefore no longer be called God's image-bearer.²⁴¹ In opposition to this claim, Hoekema argues that, though man fallen into sin risked losing the image of God, in the work of redemption God graciously constrained the effects of human's fall and restored his image in man, making him once again like God in his love, faithfulness, and willingness to serve others. Because human beings are creatures, God restore them to his image—this is a work of sovereign grace. But because they are also persons, they have a responsibility in this restoration.²⁴² Human carries guilt and shame, but his createdness in the image of God is spoiled, but not destroyed. Human's essence remains an object of God's common grace, even though it is tainted by sin.

²³⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 533.

²³⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 533.

²⁴⁰ Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 24-25.

²⁴¹ Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 26.

²⁴² Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 19-20.

According to the research by Bavinck and Hoekema and their interpretation of Scripture, I am convinced that all individuals equally bear the image of God. Furthermore, Genesis 1:28 indicates that humanity shares this image by demonstrating that humans were granted a distinctive role by God's command, bestowing upon them the responsibility to rule over the earth and all its inhabitants.

5.4.2 The Whole Person as the Image of God

According to Bavinck, the doctrine of human creation in the image of God is extended to the whole person. He explained that, nothing in a human being is excluded from the image of God. This image includes the soul and body, faculties and powers, conditions and relations of man. Man is the image of God because and insofar as he is truly human, and he is truly and essentially human because, and to the extent that, he is the image of God.²⁴³ According to Bavinck, the human body and soul were not created separately and one of these cannot be said to not bear the image of God, rather, God formed body and soul together and as such the human individual 'forms an organic unity' [*Als zoodanig vormt de mensche eene organische eenheid*]. This organic unity between body and soul means that neither is reducible to the other – the distinction between the body and soul is fixed as the human self has an external and internal side.²⁴⁴ This organic unity maintains unity-in-diversity, and a holism where body and soul reciprocally influence one another and act together intimately: 'the spiritual component in [humanity] is adapted to and organized for a body and is bound, also for his intellectual and spiritual life, to the sensory and external faculties.'²⁴⁵

Naturally, just as the world is an organism and reveals God's attributes more clearly in some creatures than in others, also in the human being as an organism the image of God comes out more clearly in one part than another, more in the soul than in the body, more in the ethical virtues than in the physical powers. None of this, however, detracts in the least from the truth that the whole person

²⁴³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 533.

²⁴⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 556.

²⁴⁵ Gray Sutanto, *God and Humanity*, 12.

is the image of God.²⁴⁶ While Bavinck admits that the image of God comes out more clearly in one part than another, more in the soul than in the body, he argues that the soul and body are integral to a person's essence, reflecting the unique sensory-spiritual essence of a human being. The soul's intellectual functions are dependent on the brain, while the body is just as constitutive for humanity as the soul. The body's unity and disclosure of personality image God, and its limits and physicality show itself to be an image dependent on God.²⁴⁷ The human personality's actions with the body impact its environment, and the world that humanity inhabits conditions the body and thus impacts personality. The soul may reflect God's image more clearly than the body, but the body remains metaphysically constitutive for that image.²⁴⁸

While Bavinck acknowledges the individual as image of God, he also explained that, due to the infinite perfections of the triune God, only human beings taken as a corporate whole, together, can image God fully, leading to an eschatological understanding of the image that envisions corporate humanity obeying God in all its diverse parts. No single individual can display the fullness of the glory of God analogically, and each image-bearer has a role to play in reflecting that image. The corporation of the whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts. This presupposes a fundamentally singular human nature that is shared by all human beings together.²⁴⁹ According to Sutanto, ontologically, all human beings are made in God's image, and share the same structure of body and soul and the same capacities for desiring and thinking.²⁵⁰

Bavinck notes firstly, that the soul belongs to the image of God. Secondly, also other human faculties, which include the heart and mind, belong to the image. The heart, according to Scripture, is the organ of man's life, the center of physical life and the seat of his entire psychic life, emotions, passions, desire, will, and even thinking and knowing. This life splits into two streams: the life that embraces impressions, perceptions, thoughts, knowledge, and wisdom, and the heart, which is the

²⁴⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 555.

²⁴⁷ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 555.

²⁴⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 555.

²⁴⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 555.

²⁵⁰ Gray Sutanto, *God and Humanity*, 12.

seat of emotions, passions, urges, attachments, desires, and decisions of the will. The diversity and abundance of these forces reflect God, and humans are richly endowed and organized, allowing them to fully enjoy God's virtues and perfections.²⁵¹

Thirdly, Bavinck explains that the image of God manifests itself in the virtues of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness with which humanity was created from the start. Man was not created as a neutral being with morally indifferent powers and potentialities, but immediately made physically and ethically mature, with knowledge in the mind, righteousness in the will, and holiness in the heart. Goodness for a human being consists in moral perfection, in harmony with the law of God, and in a holy and perfect being like God himself. Scripture knows of no two sorts of human beings, no double moral law, and no two kinds of moral perfection and destiny.²⁵²

Fourthly, Bavinck argues that also the human body belongs integrally to the image of God. Bavinck argues that, the human body is integrally connected to the image of God. Scripture reconciles the two (spirit and body), stating that man has a "spirit" (*pneuma*) that is psychically organized and must inhabit a body. The body is not a prison but a marvellous piece of art from God Almighty, constituting the essence of humanity as the soul. It is our earthly dwelling, organ, instrument of service, and apparatus, and will be reunited with it in the resurrection of the dead. The union of the soul with the body is physical, intimate, and present in all parts of the body.²⁵³

In summary, Bavinck's notion of the whole person as the image of God emphasizes that, the whole human being is image and likeness of God, in soul and body, in all human faculties, powers, and gifts. Nothing in humanity is excluded from God's image; it stretches as far as our humanity does and constitutes our humanness. The human is not the divine self but is nevertheless a finite creature impression of the divine. All that is in God—his spiritual essence, his virtues and perfections, his immanent self-distinctions, his self-communication and self-revelation in creation—finds its

²⁵¹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 557.

²⁵² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 558.

²⁵³ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 558.

admittedly finite and limited analogy and likeness in humanity.²⁵⁴ Bavinck further discussed the unity of humankind, emphasizing the interconnection and common humanity among all people, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, or background, although we are unable to delve into this within the scope of this thesis.²⁵⁵

5.5 Appraisal and criticism of Bavinck on the Image of God

The exploration of the image of God from Bavinck's and other Reformed theologians' perspectives has proven to be fruitful. While we can clearly observe some insights, there are also aspects that remain unclear. It is evident that Bavinck believes that humans are made in the image of God.²⁵⁶ He recognizes that each person reflects God's attributes through bearing His image. While Bavinck makes this assertion, it may be readily embraced by African feminist theologians due to its emphasis on the completeness of an individual, but it could also be not suitable African society. Africans value communal life.²⁵⁷ It is worth noting that Bavinck also highlights this communal aspect. He acknowledges that collectively, human beings mirror God's relational nature, with the image of God being evident in the unity and diversity of the human community.²⁵⁸

Furthermore, although Bavinck does not explicitly address female and male leadership roles in his statement, "... she represents that nature and image in accordance with her own nature and in a manner uniquely her own; but she is a partaker of both human nature and the image, not over against others, but alongside them, and in solidarity with the man. She is 'from man,' 'for the man,' and 'the glory of man,' and not independent of man; but also the man, though head of his wife and 'the image and glory of God' because he in the first place is the bearer of dominion, is nevertheless incomplete without the woman..."²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 561.

²⁵⁵ See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 576-578.

²⁵⁶ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 554.

²⁵⁷ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 26.

²⁵⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 577.

²⁵⁹ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 578.

Bavinck argues that woman (Eve) is distinct yet shares in God's image, while also being described as originating from, for, and as the glory of man, rather than independent of him.²⁶⁰ The precise meaning of Bavinck's statement here appears somewhat unclear; what does it signify for a woman to be 'for the man'? What is the significance of the woman being the glory of man and man being the glory of God? How does the concept of a woman created in God's image as an individual but dependent on man fit into this? Is the illustration solely about marital union? If so, what are the implications? It is also important to recognize that Bavinck's work was not written in this present era. To achieve a better grasp of Bavinck's writings, it is essential to delve deeper into the context in which he wrote. Finally, an examination of Bavinck's perspectives on the covenant of works would be important. However, to answer all these questions exceeds the limits of this thesis.

²⁶⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 578.

Chapter 6

Theological conversation with Oduyoye's African Women Theology, Bavinck's Theology of the Image of God and its implications for Nigeria Baptist Churches' leadership position

The aim of this chapter is to offer insights by utilizing Oduyoye's African women's theology and Bavinck's doctrine of the image of God, in addressing concerns relevant to the Nigeria Baptist Convention. These include the effects of the patriarchal system on roles within Christian leadership, the concept of complementary, and the official positions held by the Baptist Church.

6.1 Oduyoye's and Bavinck's theological responses to the patriarchal systems in Nigerian Baptist Churches

Chapter 2 of this thesis has uncovered the existence of a patriarchal system in the Yoruba traditional system before and after the arrival of Christian missionaries in Nigeria, which was utilized to further Colonialism. Although it can be contended that the actions of Christian missionaries increased the patriarchal structure of the Yoruba traditional religion, it would be unfair to ignore the pre-Christian presence of patriarchal and complementary systems in the traditional religious framework.²⁶¹ In this chapter the patriarchal systems in Nigerian Baptist Churches, greatly influenced by both Yoruba Traditional Religion and Christian missionary efforts, will be analyzed using Oduyoye's African Women Theology and Bavinck's theological perspective on the Image of God.

Oduyoye emphasizes in African women's theology the importance of liberating women in the Church through equality.²⁶² She points out that concepts like equity, equality, and equal rights are often debated by Church members, but feminist theologians are raising them as crucial issues to be reconsidered by the Church.²⁶³ Instead of accepting the patriarchal constraints linked to one's gender by tradition, religion and culture, she advocates for collaboration and utilizing one's full potential. Oduyoye argues that without significant changes in the Church structures to allow women to access

²⁶¹ See Chapter 2 of this thesis.

²⁶² Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 85.

²⁶³ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 85.

the freedom that the Son of God sacrificed his life for, there can be no real transformation in people's lives. The invitation for everyone in the Church is to actively participate in its life, mission, and ministry, irrespective of gender.²⁶⁴ Furthermore, Oduyoye underlines the liberation of African women through Jesus Christ. She merges salvation and liberation in her African women's Christology, asserting that African women possess freedom in Jesus. The undeniable truth, as per Oduyoye, is that women's full humanity is fully realized in Jesus.²⁶⁵ Oduyoye also emphasizes the need to re-visit the interpretation of the scripture.

While not explicitly addressing the patriarchal influence within the Church, Bavinck's theological viewpoint on the *Imago Dei* highlights that each individual is created in the likeness of God, bestowing equal worth and respect upon both men and women.²⁶⁶ This theological stance raises doubts about the existing patriarchal structure. Herman Bavinck also suggests that no aspect of a person is devoid of God's image, encompassing the soul, body, abilities, attributes, circumstances, and connections.²⁶⁷ The significance of Bavinck's theology for NBC is that despite the differences in gender identities (sexuality) between males and females, they still share the same honor, value, capabilities, and authority. This urges individuals to view each other not only as equals in leadership roles but also as equals in aptitude.

Both Oduyoye and Bavinck establish theological foundations that challenge the traditional gender norms present in Nigerian Baptist Churches. Oduyoye advocates for gender equality, while Bavinck's recognition of the *Imago Dei* encourages a re-evaluation of roles that now restrict women from taking part in leadership roles and decision-making.

6.2 Oduyoye's and Bavinck's on the Image of God as theological response to the Official stances of Nigeria Baptist Churches Synod on leadership.

²⁶⁴ Mercy Oduyoye, 85.

²⁶⁵ Mercy Oduyoye, 64-65.

²⁶⁶ Herman Bavinck, 2. 561.

²⁶⁷ Herman Bavinck, 2. 526.

As described in chapter 3, one of the factors preventing the leadership role of females in the Nigerian Baptist Church is the internal denominational doctrine as mentioned by Alawode.²⁶⁸

Oduyoye's theology on African women asserts that within the Church community, women should play a role in shaping and nurturing the environment where all individuals can flourish according to God's plan. Consequently, the Church must not overlook its responsibility to engage with and involve women in its mission as guided by God. Oduyoye characterizes this mission as a means of facilitating salvation, often through liberation, humanization, and the pursuit of justice for all, with a special focus on those most marginalized, particularly women. Oduyoye believes that women, alongside men, are summoned to embody the servant leadership of the Church globally. The presence of a predominantly male-led hierarchy within the Church obscures this servant leadership, as the male-centric ministry tends to seek to be served rather than to serve.²⁶⁹ Oduyoye's theological perspective advocates for a revision of the Church's doctrines and policies that marginalize women.

According to Bavinck, humanity cannot be seen as a fully developed organism unless it is unified and represented by one leader. In the covenant of grace, Christ holds that role as the head of the church.²⁷⁰ For NBC, this emphasizes the importance of recognizing the importance of unity of the Church in Christ and promoting a leadership framework that embraces the involvement of both men and women.

6.3 Oduyoye's and Bavinck's theological responses to the Nigerian Baptist Theological concepts on Complementary and Headship.

Oduyoye promotes a model of mutual respect and collaboration within the Church, advocating for equal sharing of responsibilities and leadership between men and women. She stresses that rather than imposing rigid gender roles, complementarity should focus on appreciating and honoring the diverse talents and callings of all individuals. Oduyoye challenges the conventional notion of male

²⁶⁸ See Chapter 3 of this thesis.

²⁶⁹ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 65.

²⁷⁰ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 578.

dominance in leadership positions and instead proposes a redefined concept of leadership centered on service and reciprocal submission.²⁷¹

A fascinating element of Bavinck's writing is his emphasis on humans embodying the image of God both as individuals and as part of the broader human community. This perspective underscores the value of each person as well as the collective importance of humanity as a whole. Bavinck highlights that every individual is an integral part of the human race while also maintaining a distinct and significant role within that collective entity. His viewpoint upholds the unity of humanity while recognizing the unique significance of each person.²⁷²

The importance of both Oduyoye and Bavinck's theology lies in highlighting the significance of humanity and humans as the representation of God, both as individuals and collectively.

6.4 Conclusion

In this work, I have tried to answer the main question of the thesis: What can we learn from a dialogue between African Christian Women's Theology of Mercy Oduyoye's and Herman Bavinck's Dutch Reformed perspective on being created in the image of God for female pastoral leadership roles in the Nigerian Baptist churches in the African Traditional Religion context?

The impact of Yoruba Traditional Religion and the historical influence of Christian missionary teachings has influenced patriarchal norms in Nigerian Baptist Churches. Nevertheless, the theological perspectives of Oduyoye and Bavinck present opportunities for positive change. Through active participation in this discourse, Nigerian Baptist Churches can critically evaluate and reinterpret their theological positions on complementary and leadership. This reassessment has the potential to bring about significant reforms in church policies and doctrines for the growth and empowerment of female pastoral leaders.

²⁷¹ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 85-86.

²⁷² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 577.

Oduyoye's African Women's Theology advocates for theology, liberation, and the restructuring of oppressive systems for women within African society and religion. When engaging in theological discourse, Oduyoye employs a dual hermeneutical approach: biblical interpretation interacts with cultural interpretation.²⁷³ Oduyoye's emphasis on equality calls for the re-evaluation of traditional gender roles and the promotion of mutuality and partnership in church leadership. Her perspective underscores the necessity of recognizing and valuing the contributions of women, advocating for women full participation and leadership within the church.

Bavinck's theology of *Imago Dei* provides valuable insights into the crucial necessity of upholding the fundamental unity of the human race, which is deeply rooted in religion and morality. This includes considerations such as the solidarity of humanity, original sin, atonement in Christ, and the catholicity of the church.²⁷⁴ Bavinck underscores that while humans are not divine beings, they are nonetheless finite creatures bearing an impression of the divine. Everything that exists in God—his spiritual essence, virtues, perfections, self-distinctions, self-communication, and self-revelation in creation—can be found in a finite and limited manner in humanity.²⁷⁵ This applies to the topic of women in leadership by highlighting that all individuals are equally made in God's image and possess inherent dignity, value, and potential.

Moreover, the viewpoints of Oduyoye and Bavinck could inspire Nigerian Baptist Churches to adopt a church model that upholds the equal value and dignity of all believers. Embracing these theological insights can help breaking down patriarchal obstacles and foster an atmosphere of inclusivity and mutual respect, enabling both men and women to engage fully in the life and leadership of the Church.

In summary, Oduyoye's African Women Theology and Bavinck's theology on the Image of God imparts valuable teachings to Nigerian Baptist Churches. It presents a compelling vision for gender

²⁷³ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 8.

²⁷⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 511.

²⁷⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2. 511.

equality and the advancement of women in pastoral leadership positions. By incorporating these theological perspectives, Nigerian Baptist Churches can progress towards a more fair and just community, recognizing and honoring the varied talents and callings of all members within the African community.

6.5 Additional Research

Finally, an important area that needs further research is to find out the African Christianity contextual interpretation of man as the image of God and Herman Bavinck's view of the image of God as an alternative to human's relation to each other and oneself. This is, however, a future research topic.

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