

## Consensus

---

Volume 38

Issue 1 *Reformation: Then, Now, and Onward. Varied  
Voices, Insightful Interpretations*

Article 10

---

11-25-2017

# Women, Priests and the Anglican Church in Southern Africa: Reformation of Holy Hierarchies

Miranda N. Pillay

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

 Part of the [History of Christianity Commons](#), [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#), [Practical Theology Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Pillay, Miranda N. (2017) "Women, Priests and the Anglican Church in Southern Africa: Reformation of Holy Hierarchies," *Consensus*: Vol. 38 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.  
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol38/iss1/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact [scholarscommons@wlu.ca](mailto:scholarscommons@wlu.ca).

# Women, Priests and the Anglican Church in Southern Africa: Reformation of Holy Hierarchies

Miranda N. Pillay<sup>1</sup>

## Introductory Remarks

We trust it will give women new possibilities of leadership in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (Cape Times: 1992).

The Anglican Church in Southern Africa (ACSA)<sup>2</sup> is celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the ordination of women to the priesthood in 2017. The quotation above is a statement made by the South African Council of Churches following the announcement that the Anglican Church in Southern Africa voted in favour of the ordination of women at the church's September, 1992 Provincial Synod.<sup>3</sup> This was a newsworthy event given the currents of change and rhetoric of freedom in apartheid South Africa.<sup>4</sup> Under the heading "Women priests for SA" the *Cape Times* (August 15, 1992:2) reports that seventy-nine percent voted in favour of the ordination of women. This result complied with the two-thirds majority required on an issue declared "controversial."<sup>5</sup>

The controversial issue was (and remains?) undergirded by the gender of clergy justified (explicitly or implicitly) by the gender of God.<sup>6</sup> For example, in an article *Hear God calling women* by Revd Mike Mc Coy it is clear that those who are against women in the priesthood believe that "male character as distinct from female character is necessary" for priesthood.<sup>7</sup> This theology of exclusion appears to have been justified by the ways men in authority use the Christian Bible. Bishop Thomas is quoted to have said, "no part of the New Testament testifies that a woman could be, in a public and authorised

---

<sup>1</sup> Miranda N. Pillay is senior lecturer in New Testament Studies and Ethics at the University of the Western Cape.

<sup>2</sup> The organization itself dates back to the English Reformation and the estrangement of Henry VIII from the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. Following the missionary movements during the British occupation of the Cape (South Africa) the Anglican Church in South Africa was officially founded in 1847, with the arrival of Bishop Robert Gray. Later, with the inclusion of Mozambique, Namibia and St Helena it was named Church of the Province of Southern Africa – C.P.S.A (Archibald, 1996. "Inventory for AB2546" [www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventory/collections](http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventory/collections). The name was changed to *Anglican Church in Southern Africa* (ACSA) at the Southern African Provincial Synod held 8-9 September 2006. Today ACSA comprises six countries and two islands, viz. South Africa, Namibia, Swaziland, Lesotho, Angola, Mozambique and the islands of Tristan of Dagama and St Helena (Bompani 2017: 130-131).

<sup>3</sup> For a historical overview of the "movement for the ordination of women" in the Anglican Church, see Swart-Russell and Draper (1991).

<sup>4</sup> The decision to open the office of priesthood to women occurred during the four-year period between the release of Nelson Mandela (11 February, 1990) and South Africa's first democratic election on 27 April, 1994 – a time of transition and intense negotiation. See <http://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/nelson-mandela-freed>.

<sup>5</sup> By this time, this 'controversial issue' had been discussed by the church since 1970 after the appearance of a report on the 'Ministry of Women' presented by a commission appointed by the Archbishop (Swart-Russell and Draper (1991:222).

<sup>6</sup> Gender in its broader socially-constructed sense, but particularly the bodylines (and sexuality) of women as it relates to the maleness of Jesus.

<sup>7</sup> The article appeared in the Church's official Report on Synod proceedings on 14 August 1992.

way, the representative of Christ.”<sup>8</sup> This understanding was echoed by Mr. David Mokobe, a lay representative from Bloemfontein who says that, “If God meant women to be priests he would have done so from the beginning. Men must be a symbol of Christ at the eucharist.” However, while these voices sounded warnings of the “impending doom which would befall the Church of God,”<sup>9</sup> other voices were also heard.

### Voices of inclusion.

A lay representative from Swaziland, Mrs Maureen Jonga said, “God did not discriminate between male and female” and that the Anglicans should put their house in order because the Anglican Church had always been respected for its stand against injustice and discrimination.<sup>10</sup> Bishop John Ruston from St Helena admitted that, even though he had theological reservations about the ordination of women he “could not ignore the claims of many women to have a calling to the priesthood. The Revd Roy Snyman from Port Elizabeth believed the ordination of women to be an issue of vocation and not and not an issue of liberation. I don’t agree with the view that these two issues are mutually exclusive. South Africans who experienced the draconian laws of apartheid should know this: The most effective form of discriminate and oppression is to deny particular groups access to resources and positions of authority. The positional power of whites over blacks in the country’s apartheid laws of segregation and separate development was based on discursive power articulated in apartheid theology. The same way specific places, spaces and positions were reserved for certain groups based on white superiority, the perceived superior nature of males served to keep women from pursuing their calling to the priesthood and other male-dominated professions.

It is my view that the exclusion of women from priesthood, as well as the theological shifts which persuaded otherwise, have not been dealt with on clerical or grassroots levels of the church. Considering all the above observations and concerns, it stands to reason that language about the gender of clergy and of God should frame my discussion because it remains an issue of concern for many Christian communities in general<sup>11</sup> and the Anglican Church in Southern Africa in particular.<sup>12</sup> This year (2017) marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the ordination of women priests. This presents a (new) context for the church – clergy and laity, male and female – to be intentional about seeking to reform perceived genderedness of God and transform gender stereotyping priests. I understand myself to be working from a feminist ‘theo-ethical’ perspective as I hold the view that the way we understand ourselves in relation to God informs our beliefs, attitudes and actions toward the ‘other’. In this paper I explore the need for the Anglican Church to be intentional about embodying a theology that transcends gender hierarchy in priesthood – and by extension, the laity. I then revisit the hierarchal theologies of the Trinity and propose how this essence of the Christian faith might lead to a boldness which calls for a shift in church praxis. But first, because this year also marks the 500<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Bishop Thomas Stange was the bishop of Bloemfontein 1982-1997.

<sup>9</sup> The words of Mr Michael Smale from Umzimvulu (*This is what they said*, 1992) posted on [www.facebook.com/ACSA-25th-Anniversary-of-Women-Ordination-to-the-Priesthood](http://www.facebook.com/ACSA-25th-Anniversary-of-Women-Ordination-to-the-Priesthood), 3 July 2017.

<sup>10</sup> See post *This is what they said* on [www.facebook.com/ACSA-25th-Anniversary-of-Women-Ordination-to-the-Priesthood](http://www.facebook.com/ACSA-25th-Anniversary-of-Women-Ordination-to-the-Priesthood), 3 July 2017.

<sup>11</sup> The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) were urged at its 2017 General Council meeting to make a call to accept the ordination of women (<http://wrcr.ch/news/the-wrcr-considers-a-call-for-its-members-to-accept-the-ordination-of-women>, accessed 4 July 2017).

<sup>12</sup> In September 2016 Provincial Synod of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa voted against a motion presented by one of its dioceses (Diocese of Saldanha Bay) to permit bishops (who so wished) to bless same-sex unions.

anniversary of the reformation I think it plausible to briefly foreground the Reformation as a movement calling for the transformation of ‘holy hierarchies’.

## Reformation Theology: A Call to Shift Authority

Christian theology has not been the same since the Protestant Reformation and its herald calls to **shift church authority**, the understanding of grace in salvation, and theological engagement that included more and more Christians (Streufert 2010:3).

It is not my intention to bring any new insights to Reformation Studies which, I understand, is a well-established field of research.<sup>13</sup> Neither do I want to investigate the general historic significance of the Reformation<sup>14</sup> though I am mindful that theo-historic understandings of the Reformation are very necessary for understanding contemporary Christianity and ecclesial practices.<sup>15</sup> My enquiry here is based on the observation that the Reformation was a call to “shift church authority” as Luther called for more and more Christians to have access to scripture (Streufert 2010:3). Luther’s theological shift – from church tradition to scripture and from works to grace – also resulted in transforming practice. Two examples are noted, namely, a move from priests reading scripture in Latin to the general public reading scripture in German and, a move from Latin liturgy to hymns in German set to popular tunes (Streufert 2010:3). This may be regarded as a *kairos* moment in the history of the Christian church. While the Reformation has been blamed, among other things, for church division and individualism, it has also been lauded for invoking tolerance and democracy (Howard and Noll 2016:3). As Ozment notes, the first Protestants have left a heritage of spiritual freedom and equality to people of all nationalities, the “consequences of which are still working themselves out in the world today” (Lindberg 2010: xiv).

A particular consequence of the Reformation is that Christian theology continues to be transformed as it seeks to express God’s grace in new contexts. When and where Christian theology seeks to address the lived realities of individuals and groups that suffer injustices through exclusion, exploitation and violence, it is a manifestation of God’s love and mercy and grace in a “this-world experience of salvation.”

On 29 May 2017 South African Anglican Archbishop, Thabo Makgoba, blogged about his experience on “breaking bread together in Luther’s Wittenberg”<sup>16</sup> and says that it was an honour to be the preacher at the Festive Service celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation at the 36th German Kirchentag held at Elbe Meadows, Wittenberg. He describes the setting at the event:

---

<sup>13</sup> It not being my field of research, I found *The European Reformations* by Carter Lindberg (2010) and the Sourcebook with the same title and edited by Lindberg (2014) very informative. Also see volumes edited by Howard and Noll (2016), *Protestantism after 500 Years* and Whitford (2008), *Reformation and early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research*. Kirksville: Truman State University Press. The volume *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives* (2010) edited by Mary J. Streufert is essential for any discussion on gender and the Reformation.

<sup>14</sup> Lindberg argues for its plural form, *Reformations* because there has never been only one Reformation movement – neither historically nor theologically (2010:xii).

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 1 in Lindberg (2010), “History, Historiography, and Interpretations of the Reformations” and Howard and Noll (2016) *Protestantism after 500 Years*.

<sup>16</sup> <http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/2017/05/breaking-bread-together-in-luthers.html>. See also [https://www.kirchentag.de/aktuell\\_2017/sonntag/festgottesdienst.html](https://www.kirchentag.de/aktuell_2017/sonntag/festgottesdienst.html)

There were altars pitched throughout the stadium, each with a tree branch and a group of clergy and laity celebrating [the Eucharist]. Could this be the real meaning of breaking bread together, little altars where the people are?

In his sermon “The Reformation – Our inspirational GPS for the next 500 years” Makgoba says that Gen 16:1-13 reflects the predicament of Hagar’s context – that of “slavery, poverty, sexual and economic exploitation, surrogacy, rape, domestic violence and homelessness.”<sup>17</sup> This ancient context has also been the site of struggle for black South Africans in general, and continues to be a struggle, especially for black women in South Africa many of whom can identify with the oppressive realities of Hagar’s context, says Makgoba:

When Hagar finds herself vulnerable, on the periphery, God gives her [Hagar] the resources to survive. Just like the Syrian you have welcomed into Germany, Hagar stands as a beacon of hope to all who suffer, to the oppressed around the world.<sup>18</sup>

For Makgoba this ‘hope’ is to be found in God’s unconditional love and not, I think (and hope) in Hagar’s submission to Sarah or Abram according of her inherited or ascribed ‘station in life’. It does not matter who we are or where we are, it is the unconditional love God that “reassures us that God indeed does see us,” says Makgoba. But Christian hope is also goes beyond wishful thinking to inspire action in “this-world experiences.” To this end, Makgoba concluded his sermon with a challenge:

As you live the Kirchentag, I charge you to hear the cries of others and of our planet as God would. My prayer is that you will be radical; that you will give love away – even as you recognise your frailties and limitations, even if you are daunted by the enormity of the task of transforming the world. Even if you feel that you are seeing the challenges only dimly, please do something, at least one thing, for love's sake, for dignity's sake, for freedom's sake, for Christ's sake.

This call is the heart of Luther’s theology. Marit Trelstad identifies three ways in which Lutheran theology and heritage show that love and grace encourage “this-world experiences of salvation” viz. “eliciting *metanoia* within the very identity of humanity; bringing accountability and judgement; and emboldening defiant actions towards justice” (2010:109). In essence Luther’s reformation theology might provide a turning point when different forms of oppression which exclude, exploit and violate the dignity of others are challenged and, when the vision of inclusion is embodied through intentional transformative practices.

As I think back on when I first heard the word *Reformation*, it was in the context of a history lesson in high school in the early 1970’s: Martin Luther nails his Ninety-five Theses on a church door in Wittenberg, Germany on October 1517. When today I read this ‘nailing’ to be an act of defiance against what I now understand to be the ‘holy hierarchy’ of clerics who hold authority in the church, I cannot help but think that even though I learnt the ‘facts’ by rote to pass my high school history examination, it must have influenced my thinking about the need to challenge oppressive hierarchies of power – initially white supremacy in apartheid South Africa and later skewed gender power relations in the family, church and society.

---

<sup>17</sup> <http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/2017/05/the-reformation-our-inspirational-gps.html>

<sup>18</sup> <http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/2017/05/the-reformation-our-inspirational-gps.html>

Contributors to the volume *Transformative Lutheran Theologies* (2010) acknowledge (some explicitly, others implicitly) that ‘Luther was not a feminist’ and, while he advocated for the “priesthood of all believers” there is not a hint that he or reformers after him advocated for the priesthood of women. Yet, the fact that Luther stood boldly against the holy hierarchy of clericalism by offering an alternative theology opened up the possibility for addressing other oppressive hierarchies, based on a particular understanding of God and scripture. For example, in South Africa church leaders stood up against racial hierarchy in South Africa and challenged injustices inherent in apartheid theology by offering an alternative theology – a theology of liberation. Despite, the Anglican Church being at the forefront of challenging apartheid theology, many men and women (clergy and laity) are rather reluctant to challenge systemic sexism<sup>19</sup> inherent in patriarchal theology with the same boldness, dedication and rigour.<sup>20</sup>

## A Feminist Call: Solidarity is what is asked for

Bishops opposed to the ordination of women could not be compelled to ordain them (Desmond Tutu).<sup>21</sup>

While this statement may be reflective of the spirit of Anglicanism,<sup>22</sup> it may also be a sign of condoning clericalism and sexism in the church. At worst – with not much stretch of the imagination – the Arch (as Desmond Tutu is fondly referred to in South Africa) is oblivious to class and racism embedded in his words. In 1992 South Africa stood at the brink of ‘freedom’ which was at the heart of the Arch’s theology in the struggle against apartheid – a system which privileged white South African men and women. It goes without saying that a white woman who felt called to the priesthood most probably had the privilege and ‘freedom’ (economic freedom, if nothing else) to move to a diocese where the ordination of women was accepted and implemented. I remember Tutu’s words, “Free at last! Free at last!” as he cast his vote in the country’s first democratic election where he, as a black man well into his years, voted for the first time. As a ‘coloured’ South African woman, it was also a ‘first’ for me. I remember Tutu saying that this ‘freedom’ from the shackles of apartheid was also a freedom for white South Africans – as they could now live into the fullness of their humanity. In the same vein, feminist

---

<sup>19</sup> Sexism, according to South African feminist theologian Denise Ackerman (1988:22), is the exclusive ordering of life through gender power-relations. North American feminist theologian, Rosemary Ruether (1993:178) explains that sexism, understood to be both violence and violation to women’s bodily integrity, humanity, and capacity for full selfhood and as such, also is the distortion of male humanity. Traditional gender roles and power relations in churches have contributed to sexist social constructs

<sup>20</sup> According to Maluleka (2009:31) African male theologians who have been dealing with issues of oppression and exclusion in apartheid South Africa, are slow in recognizing issues of dehumanizing, oppression and exclusion operative in patriarchy (2009:31). “African theology,” says Maluleke “has remained largely beholden to the supremacist ideas when it comes to gender relations” and “patriarchy speaks to the supremacy of the male” (2009:33; cf. Pillay 2012).

<sup>21</sup> Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s words following the Synod 1992 resolution on the ordination of women (*Cape Times* 15 August, 1992:2).

<sup>22</sup> As South African theologian, Denise Ackermann explains that her experience at the 1998 Lambeth Conference confirmed for her the fact “...that being and Anglican can mean almost anything: you can be conservative or liberal in your approach to scripture, you can subscribe to church authority and promote or to simple egalitarianism, you can read the Bible to condemn homosexual practice and women’s ordination (yes, even today) or affirm both” (2003:142).

theologians have argued that sexism diminishes the selfhood and humanity of women and that sexism is also a distortion of the humanity of men.

As indicated in the *Introduction* of this paper, the beliefs of clergy and laity who were (and are) against the priesthood of women, confirm the fact that there is a link between the gender of God and gender of priests. Moreover, sexism in the church and gender stereotyping of priests do not simply disappear because of the presence of women priests in the church. Rather, it's business as usual and no changes are made to accommodate their presence in the 'old boys club' as there appears to be 'closing of ranks.'<sup>23</sup>

By accepting her calling to the priesthood, the woman priest questions (knowingly or unknowingly) the received tradition found in established, patriarchal notions about the nature of God and of humankind. While many women priests within the Anglican Church might not consider themselves feminists, many have come to realize that they have entered a field which can still be considered a bastion of men. For example, despite the presence of women priests, many male priests insist on addressing one another by the title "Father"<sup>24</sup> while their female colleagues are called by their first names. This and the fact that some women priests also address their male colleagues as "Father" result in parishioners being unsure of how to address women priests.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, because there is not gender neutral title for priests in ACSA, may make women priests 'invisible'. Besides, calling only women priests by their first name strips them of their profession. Worse, still, is addressing women priests as 'Reverend' while males remain 'Father.'

The male stereotyping of priesthood may then be considered a reason why, twenty-five since the ordination of women to the priesthood, some parishioners refuse to take communion from the hands of a women priest.<sup>26</sup> However, not all women priests experience such hostility. For example, in describing the research process of her doctoral thesis, Revd Beverley Haddad says that being a priest gave her access to spaces and places which otherwise might have been closed to her as a researcher from outside that particular community. Aware of the authoritative and hierarchical role a priest plays in communities such as the one she was engaging with, Haddad explains that while the functional status that came with her being a priest enabled her to "be present as an 'insider' at certain gatherings" of women, being a 'woman priest' also meant that the stereotypical notions of 'priest' were deconstructed in the process of her research (2000:8). However, she also mentions the importance of her having to win "the trust of the male leadership" in that particular setting (2000:9).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Moreover, as Katie Cannon (1994) argues, "when strong, positive, God-centred women confront their male counterparts, they are usually afforded a subtle, institutionalised option to conform to whatever those in power have defined as normative" (cf. Pillay 2003:152).

<sup>24</sup> Consider this Facebook Post of Revd Leon van Rheede, "Something I must relay to you...so funny and beautiful...someone came to my church office just now to make an appointment and with the person is a child not more than 4 years old...after greeting them both and blessing the child they left and immediately returned... the adult looking with amazement said that the child asked her outside if I am the Father in heaven..." <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=leon%20van%20rheede>, posted on 3 July 2017.

<sup>25</sup> See for example, <https://umcyoungpeople.org/the-latest/what-do-you-call-a-female-preacher-a-young-adult-devotion>, accessed 15 July 2017.

<sup>26</sup> While colleagues in academia may dismiss this observation as 'anecdotal', it has been the reality for one (too many) woman who was the priest-in-charge of a parish where I worship. Perhaps the blame for such exclusion (and self-exclusion from community at communion) rests with the church who has not dealt with the male head-ship theology that has been used to exclude women from the priesthood in the first place.

<sup>27</sup> [http://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10413/4766/Haddad\\_Beverley\\_Gail\\_2000](http://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10413/4766/Haddad_Beverley_Gail_2000), accessed 21 July 2017.

I am not a priest, but have held (and continue to hold) leadership positions in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. Like many women leaders my experience in the church has been one of both, hope and frustration. I remain hopeful because the ethos of the Anglican Church is such that there is a space for diverse views. My frustration remains as I sometimes wonder what is worse: not being permitted to voice one's views or to have one's views on issues trivialized, particularized, spiritualized, or universalized.<sup>28</sup> I'm also mindful of the possibility that the presence of my diverse voice (which includes being a feminist theologian/academic and a 'coloured' woman representing laity) may be co-opted to serve and legitimize the status quo. For example, as the only woman representing laity on Diocesan Chapter (the Bishop's Advisory Form), I expressed my concerns that parishioners do not know how to address women priests and that the church ought to suggest an inclusive title to be used for both male- and women priests – lest male priests continue to be 'the father'. The male priests present did not offer any comment but the Bishop offered an explanation that: 'Reverend' is not a grammatically correct form of address. To date, official correspondence from the diocese continues to address male priests as 'Father' and women priests as 'Revd'. Frustration mounted and I had to decide between representing previously marginalised voices and withdrawing/rescuing my voice from being co-opted. I resigned as lay-canon. As a woman of faith, I believe (and hopefully work towards) the church's potential to be a sanctuary of hope and healing and whole-making.

As pointed elsewhere<sup>29</sup> all three archbishops of ACSA have since, and including, Archbishop Tutu acknowledged the value of feminist insights: "Feminists have forced us to confront the patriarchal orientation of much of the biblical texts" says Desmond Tutu (2002:7); Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane, in his 2005 *charge* to Synod says, "We must repent of the historic patriarchy of our faith which so often colludes with discriminatory attitudes in our cultures" and Archbishop Thabo Makgoba urges that,

We still need to move further away from past tendencies to privilege the cognitive over the affective side of faith, to privilege men over women ... We are, I believe, heading in the right direction, though we must go further, both in overcoming old habits of partiality, and in looking with fresh eyes at the new realities of the twenty-first century, to see who are now being marginalised, excluded, diminished or rendered voiceless (2009:3).

Considering these statements by those who have been leading the Anglican Church of Southern Africa since 1986 when Desmond Tutu became the first black person to be elected Archbishop of Cape Town, not all African male theologians are slow in recognizing issues of dehumanizing, oppression and exclusion operative in patriarchy (see footnote 18). Shifts have been made. The question is how to implement these theological shifts in praxis – lest they remain statements made at the right time at the right places by the right people?

I say 'right people' because feminists in general and African women theologians in particular have for decades been concerned about the dehumanizing effects of patriarchy on women as well as men. Throughout the historical shifts recorded in first- second and third-wave feminism one core belief of feminism has been the idea of human equality. Based on the multi-dimensional nature of women's experiences regarding race, class, age, ability, sexuality, etc. as raised within third-wave feminism, the Circle of Concerned

<sup>28</sup> See Riswold (2009); cf. Pillay (2013) for a discussion on these ways of dismissing feminist insights.

<sup>29</sup> In *The Anglican Church and Feminism: Challenging the 'Patriarchy of our Faith'* (Pillay 2013).



African Women Theologians calls for recognition of the full humanity of women and men. This also echoes the statement by Alice Walker (1983:xi), that a “womanist is one who is committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female (cf. Pillay 2012:100; Pillay 2013:8). Thus, a central feature of Christian feminism is that it is committed “not just to the liberation of women, but to the liberation of men also” says Elaine Storkey who explains:

What is more, this liberation is not only from class oppression, from work alienation, but from the very slavery that sin-ridden, male dominated culture has produced. For, cultural stereotypes have prevented men too from knowing real freedom (1985:163).

For this reason, “African women’s theologies include men in the vision and struggle for African liberation from all forms of oppression,” says Isabel Phiri (2004:16-24). The approach of African women theologians have the distinctive characteristic of inclusiveness, calling for the recognition of the full humanity of both women and men. As Denise Ackermann explains in an interview with Bastienne Klein:

No man can be liberated as long as women are not. Just as some whites joined the struggle for liberation from racist oppression, men must join women in the struggle against discrimination, abuse and violation. It is about their humanity as much as it is about ours. Solidarity is what we ask for (2004:42).

But instead of being in solidarity with women, men are closing ranks. There is resurgence of fundamentalist religious movements, often associated with conservative nationalism.<sup>30</sup> Thus, challenging patriarchy is often seen not as an injustice, but as an attempt to undermine Christian or African values and traditions. For this reason Ezra calls for a ‘refining’ of the African concept *ubuntu* and argues that if this concept is “divested of its patriarchal packaging” it could serve as a resource for the struggle against patriarchal violence. Defined in a diversity of ways, *ubuntu* is commonly understood through the isiXhosa proverb, “Ubuntu ungamuntu ngabanye abantu” which basically means that ‘a person is a person through other people’. Desmond Tutu is the main modern proponent of *ubuntu* philosophy.<sup>31</sup>

While Chitando does not suggest any strategies for ‘stripping’ *ubuntu* of its culturally inherent patriarchy, he argues that, because men are projected as defenders of African culture they “are more likely to embrace the quest for gender justice when it has been demonstrated that their own value system leads to gender justice.” Chitando’s argument is based on the observation that African nationalists have resisted the call for gender transformation because “it is a Western imposition.” It is my view that such an argument smacks of androcentrism which drowns the ‘voice’ of women and also justifies the position of men as the gatekeepers of patriarchy.<sup>32</sup> The idea of reviewing the inter-relatedness of *ubuntu* in an effort to transform contemporary gender relationship might seem plausible, especially if it will move those who ‘have voice’ to overcome old habits. But such a strategy serves to maintain the status quo – leaving covert power as the only option for women. At the end of a protest march organised by the Anglican Church’s

---

<sup>30</sup> See Pillay (2015), *Mighty men, Mighty families: A Pro Christian Movement to (re)enforce Patriarchal Control?*

<sup>31</sup> See Tutu’s *No Future without Forgiveness* (2000).

<sup>32</sup> As the cornerstone of patriarchy, androcentrism means a male-centred perspective on relationships. In essence it means ‘seeing the world through the eyes of men’.

Mothers' Union on 4 June 2017, Archbishop Thabo Makgoba questioned whether women should not consider depriving men of sex in order to persuade their men to join them in getting the government to appoint a judicial commission of inquiry into gender-based violence.<sup>33</sup> Do men need a dangling carrot to draw them into solidarity with women who are protesting against violence perpetrated by men? Is it the responsibility of women to mobilise men to action against macho masculinities which disgrace men. How do we “look with fresh eyes” at old realities?

Similarly, the predominantly white male movement in South Africa, *Mighty Men Conference* (MMC), teaches that gender equality is a secular, more precisely a non-Christian imposition by a non-Christian government. Its proponent, Angus Bucan, uses the Christian bible to justify male-headship as a God-ordained precept and benevolence to women (Pillay 2015:30).<sup>34</sup> As argued elsewhere, many men from the Anglican Church join the MMC “*saamtrek*” (in solidarity) to learn how to be “godly” men – as God is working through MMC to “re-instate them as the head” (Pillay 2015:45). As I’ve argued there, the Anglican Church cannot prevent its members from buying into the theology that this movement propagates but it has a responsibility to discern its own culpability in the MMC’s quest for male-headship as a scriptural injunction. This is important if the church is serious about women’s calling to the priesthood. Secondly, I have suggested that the church should offer its members an alternative theology to male headship.<sup>35</sup> What follows is my attempt to offer a theology of the Trinity that goes contrary to male-headship of God – and by extension, to human relationships.

### Trinity: A Theology of inter-connectedness?

The perceivers and definers of reality are usually from the dominant group – those who are on top in terms of cultural hegemony and ruling-class males (Ackermann 1991:97).

Like many feminist theologians, I too have learnt to approach discourses on ‘relationality’, mutuality ‘reciprocity’ with a hermeneutic of suspicion. Many (but not all) women know about sacrificing ‘self’ for the sake of community/relationships. Also, some eco-feminists have pointed to the fact that ‘relationality’ refers to human and exclude the rest of creation. Besides, how does one qualify ‘mutuality’ and reciprocity’ when in skewed power relationships some people do not have access to social and economic goods to be on mutual ground? Aware that one might exchange one concept for another with the similar (or other) limitations, I think the term “interconnectedness” as used by Catherine Keller (1986) might have the potential for greater inclusivity. Keller (1986) sees God as the source of connection. It is my contention that the “patriarchy of our faith which colludes with culture” has contributed to gender stereotypes of clergy (and other leadership roles) which is sanctified by perceived male gender of God.

<sup>33</sup> See Makgoba’s speech, <http://archbishop.anglicanchurchsa.org/2017/06/mothers-union-march-against-violence-on.html>, accessed 4 July 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Owino (2012:81-82) argues that MMC could prove to be an “unsafe space” for Christian men who seek “transformative forms of masculinity.” Du Pisani (2013:686) describes the founder and leader of MMC as a charismatic revival evangelist who “preaches” that male headship in households is what is needed to solve societal problems. Pillay (2015) has, after observing Anglican support for ‘Mighty Men Conference’ suggested the Anglican Church.

<sup>35</sup> Pillay (2015:45). But consider that, in a blog while in Wittenberg, Germany, Anglican Archbishop Thabo Makgoba makes mention of founder of the Mighty Men Conference, Angus Bucan, to explain the extent of the gathering at the 36TH German Kirchentag.

According to patriarchal hierarchy knowledge of God “trickles down from God at the top,” says Gail Ramshaw (1998:54). She explains:

In a patriarchal world, it's easy to describe God. God is the peak of the triangle, the king ruling from the summit of the mountain. All things are assigned their spot in the pyramid: at the base are the stones then the trees then animals then women then slave men (Ramshaw1998:54).

This is why the gender of God language has been problematic as the frequently quoted dictum of Mary Daly indicates: “If God is male, then male is God” (Daly 1973:19).<sup>36</sup> The “culprit” of patriarchal hierarchy in the Trinity is the title ‘Father’, says Ramshaw (1998:51). She notes that, while the Christian God was primarily referred to as king and judge in the Middle Ages, it was only after the Reformation that the title ‘father’ grew in popularity. She explains that when Christians dominated Western civilization, God was the exacting judge watching our every move but “when this single cultural vision became blurred, the Reformation proclaimed God the loving father forgiving our every move” (Ramshaw 1998:41).

It is generally agreed that God is beyond sexual distinction. To be adamant about a gender specific deity in order to make male or female gods “the horizons” for development of specific gender identities, is unacceptable. I have added my voice to those who believe that it is not important to find the maleness or femaleness of God so that we (Christians), who are either female or male can align ourselves with God and thereby affirm our superior nature, but that we find our common humanity (Pillay 2009:98). While today there are arguments for the use of feminine metaphors for God, there is also a move to retrieve the male head-ship of God and human relationships in popular culture and certain Christian circles.<sup>37</sup>

Two questions arise: How is one to ignore the fact that God incarnate, in Jesus of Nazareth, was male; or that the father-son image is one of patriarchal hierarchy? Many feminist theologians (myself included) have argued that if the Trinity is considered to be a non-hierarchical relationship of mutuality and reciprocity it may be divested of its patriarchal hierarchy – a hierarchy made obvious when we consider that God the Father is above the other Persons when we (Anglicans) make the sign of the cross. But how? Gail Ramshaw 1998 offers some insight on how to divest the Trinity of patriarchal hierarchy. The inter-connectedness of the three persons constituting the Trinity is key to dispelling the God-head as a “self-sufficient monad” (Ramshaw 1998:51). The coexistence of the Three is contrary to what the title might ‘father’ suggest, “that the father is prior to or greater than the son” (Ramshaw 1998:52). Instead, the inter-connectedness suggests that the one God must be plural in order to be a singular self. Ramshaw says that, in meeting Christ and experiencing the Holy Spirit Christians can call God the “I-who-I-are” (1998:52). Ramshaw offers three reasons why the Three are inter-connected, which I use almost verbatim (1998:52).

Overstressing what is known as “the First Person” results in deism – one big God up in the sky often who writes down every good and evil deed in the great book high up in the skies. An emphasis on the First Person results in the perception of a deity far removed from my reality. This reminds me of a painting that hung in my grandmother’s

---

<sup>36</sup> For some women the dominant male metaphors for God do not offer them any identification with the divine; while others have emphasized the femininity of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity; and still others argue for the need of the equivalence of feminine and masculine metaphors for all three persons of the Trinity.

<sup>37</sup> See Pillay (2012; 2015)

house. It was the eye of God (with the sky as background) that followed my every move. God was 'up there.'

Overstressing "the Second Person" places Jesus in the hero myth context. It's only another story about a male saviour. Anyone can be a hero. For this myth I need not go to church. Overstressing "the Third Person" can result in pantheism. The spirit of life is in everything. Sacredness is in what you see. There is nothing beyond us to draw us into a holiness greater than ourselves.

However, if the Three are kept in balance, says Ramshaw, "nothing can be said about any one that does not include the truth about the other" (1998:52). While this argument serves to address the question of holy hierarchy perpetuated by 'Father-God' language it might also serve as a resource to address the gender hierarchy in the church – and by extension in the family and society.

## Concluding Remarks

One of the concerns of women is that the ordination of women, far from changing the situation, will simply lead to the creation of female clericalism alongside male clericalism.

This is the concern expressed by the Archbishop of Cape Town, Njongonkulu Ndungane, in his address at the twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations of the ordination of women hosted by the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia on 29 July 1999.<sup>38</sup> In *The Journey Onwards* part of his speech Archbishop Ndungane also made reference to 'the essence of the Trinity' as the basis for unity in diversity of "the Godhead." Considering these two points raised by Ndungane, I want to make two observations to mark (more a lament than a celebration) the twenty-fifth anniversary of the ordination of women in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA).

Far from women priests creating female clericalism alongside male clericalism, women (and male) parishioners contribute to male stereotyping of priesthood because many still look up (only) to 'father (see *footnote 26*). This is because the 'fathers' of the church are reluctant to give up the male privilege and status inherent in patriarchal hierarchy. Secondly, 'unity' does not mean sameness. Therefore, the ordination of women to the priesthood, after years of struggle to acknowledge women's calling, means that it cannot be business as usual. The status quo cannot prevail as a woman cannot be honorary male priest or 'father' – lest their newly liberated voices are drowned by androcentricism, inherent in patriarchy. Therefore, the church should take seriously the call to offer a theology – alternative to the currents that seek to retrieve male headship and defend patriarchy as benevolent to women. Now, on with the celebration: The Synod 1992 decision to ordain women has indeed created "new possibilities of leadership." Despite the fact that not all dioceses agreed on the matter, and the concession that "bishops opposed to the ordination of women could not be compelled to ordain them," many women can now follow their calling to the priesthood; there are two women bishops in the dioceses of Swaziland and False Bay respectively; and, for the first time, a woman is leading the church's only residential college, the College of the Transfiguration situated in Grahamstown.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> <http://trushare.com/52SEP99/se9925on.htm>, accessed 21 July 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Ellinah Wamukoya became the first woman bishop in ACSA when she was elected Bishop of Swaziland in 2012 followed by the consecration of Margaret Vertue in False Bay Diocese. Revd Dr Vicencia

## Reference List

- Ackermann, D., 1991. Being Woman, Being Human. In: D. Ackermann, J. Draper & E. Mashinini, eds. *Women Hold up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Southern Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, pp. 93-105.
- Ackermann, D., 2003. *After the Locusts: Letters from a Landscape of Faith*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Archibald, C., 1996. *Inventory for AB2546*, Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand (2006).
- Bompani, B., 2017. The Anglican Church of Southern Africa. In: D. Goodhew, ed. *Growth and Decline in the Anglican Communion: 1980 to the Present*. London: Routledge, pp. 128-144.
- C.P.S.A, May 1992. *Conference Report*, Johannesburg: C.P.S.A.
- Cannon, K., 1994. Can we be Different but not Alienated?. In: D. Lois, ed. *Feminist Theological Ethics*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Chitando, E., 2015. Reflections in ubuntu and masculinities in the context of sexual and gender-based violence and HIV. In: E. Mouton, G. Kapuma, L. Hansen & T. Togom, eds. *Living with Dignity: African Perspectives on Gender Equality*. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, pp. 269-284.
- Daly, M., 1973. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston: Beacon.
- Howard, T. A. a. N. M. A., 2016. Introduction. In: T. & N. M. Howard, ed. *Protestantism after 500 Years*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-23.
- Johnson, E., 1993. *She who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*. New York: Crossroads.
- Klein, B., 2004. On Becoming and Being a WomanTheologian in South Africa: In Convwersation with Denise Ackermann.. *Journal for Theology in Southern Africa*, 118(Special Issue), pp. 40-52.
- Lindberg, C., 2010. *The European Reformations*. Second ed. Oxford: Wiley=Blackwell.
- Lindberg, C., 2014. *The European Reformations Sourcebook*. Second ed. Oxford: Wiley\_Blackwell.
- Makgoba, T., 2009. Foreword. In: *Ragbag Theologies: Essays in Honour of Denise M. Ackermann - a Theologian of Praxis*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press, pp. 1-4.
- Maluleke, T., 2009. *An African Perspective on Patriarchy*. ont Fleur, Stellenbosch, IAM: Inclusive and Affirming Ministries, pp. 31-34.
- McCoy, M., 1992. *Hear God calling women*. Johannesburg, C.P.S.A.
- Nadar, S., 2009. Circles of Abundant Life – A Tribute to Denise Achermann. In: M. Pillay & S. a. L. C. Nadar, eds. *Ragbag Theologies: Essays in Honour of Denise M Ackermann, A Feminist Theologian of Praxis*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press, pp. 147-156..
- Ndungane, N., 2008. God, Gender and the Christian Life. In: *Faith in Action*. Cape Town: Lux Verbi, pp. 301-310.
- Oduyoye, M. A., 2009. Women in the Ministry: A Continuing Challenge. In: M. Pillay, S. Nadar & C. Lebruyns, eds. *Ragbag Theologies: Essays in Honour of Denise Ackermann, A Feminist Theologian of Praxis*. Stellenbosch: SunMedia, pp. 29-35.

---

Kgabe became the first woman Rector of the College of the Transfiguration when she was appointed in 2014.

- Phiri, I., 2004. African women's theologies in the New Millennium. *Agenda, No 61*, pp. 16-24.
- Pillay, 2012. Challenging Patriarchal Masculinity in 'Act like a lady. Think like a Man: A Feminist theo-ethical Perspective. In: *Sacred Selves: Essays on Gender, Religion and Popular Culture*. Cape Town: Griffel, pp. 81-100.
- Pillay, M., 2013. The Anglican Church and Feminism: Challenging the 'Patriarchy of our faith'. *Journal of Gender and religion in Southern Africa*, 19(2), pp. 53-71.
- Pillay, M., 2015. Mighty men, mighty families: A pro-family Christian movement to (re)enforce patriarchal control? In: E. M. C. a. M. Pillay, ed. *Ecclesial Reform and Deform Movements in the South African Context*. Stellenbosch: Sunmedia, pp. 26-46.
- Pillay, M. N., 2003. Women and the Church. Solidarity in Suffering in the context of HIV/AIDS. In: *Building a human rights culture: South African and Swedish perspective*. Falun, Sweden: Stralins, pp. 142-163.
- Pillay, M. N., 2009. Women in the Church: Toward Developing Community in the context Of HIV and AIDS. In: *Compassionate Circles: African Women Theologians Facing HIV*. Geneva: WCC.
- Ramshaw, G., 1998. *Under the Tree of Life: The Religion of a Feminist Christian*. New York: Continuum.
- Riswold, C. D., 2009. *Feminism and Christianity: Questions and Answers in the Third Wave*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books.
- Storkey, E., 1985. *What's Right with Feminism*. London: SPCK.
- Streufert, M. J., 2010. Introduction. In: M. J. Streufert, ed. *Transformative Lutheran Theologies*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, pp. 1-11.
- Swart-Russell, P. & Draper, J., 1991. A Brief History of the Movement for the Ordination of Women in the Church of the Porovince of Southern Africa. In: D. Ackermann, J. Draper & E. Mashinini, eds. *Women Hold up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Souther Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, pp. 220-237.
- Trelstad, M., 2010. Putting the Cross in Context: Atonement through Covenant. In: M. J. Streufert, ed. *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, pp. 107-122.
- Tutu, D., 2000. *No Future without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday.
- Tutu, D., 2002. Foreword. In: *The Earthstory in the New Testament Volume 5*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, pp. 7-8.
- Tutu, D., 2002. Foreword. In: N. B. a. V. Habel, ed. *In The Earthstory in the New Testament Volume 5*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, pp. 5-7.
- Walker, A., 1983. *In search of our mother's gardens*. London: Women's Press.
- Whiford, D. M., 2008. *areformation and Early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research*. Kirksville: Truman University Press.