

“A critical comparison of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s notion of Christian ministry as a ‘Discipleship of Equals’ and Mercy Amba Oduyoye’s notion as a ‘Partnership of both men and women”

By

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Key words

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Abstract

This thesis is based on the recognition that there are similarities and differences between two notions of Christian ministry, that is, a “discipleship of equals” as defined by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1989) and a “partnership of both men and women” as defined by Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1990).

In this thesis, Christian ministry is assessed through the perspectives of both feminist theology and African women’s theology. The question which is addressed here is how the similarities and differences between Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s notion of Christian ministry as a “discipleship of equals” and Mercy Amba Oduyoye’s notion of Christian ministry as a “partnership of both men and women” should be understood and assessed. The main purpose of this thesis is to offer a critical comparison of these two female theologians so as to encourage new visions of Christian ministry in the contemporary church and society.

To accomplish this task, a literature survey of books, essays, and articles published on the subject of Christian ministry in feminist and African women’s theology by African and Western theologians, between 1960 and 2003, was conducted.

Two notions of how Christian ministry should be understood are offered. Fiorenza emphasizes that both women and men need to be recognized as disciples of Christ who can equally, yet within diversity, minister to God’s people by virtue of their baptisms. Oduyoye notes that reciprocity and mutuality is crucial for both men and women who minister to God’s people by forming strong partnerships through their respective vocations and ministries, by virtue of their baptisms.

This thesis argues that a comparison of the views of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mercy Amba Oduyoye on Christian ministry reveals similarities based on a shared experience of being women within a male-dominated Christian church and differences emanating from the different contexts within which they practice theology, namely, that of Euro-American feminist theology and that of African women’s theology. It is argued that there are significant differences between feminist theology and African women’s theology, with reference to their context, rhetoric, experiences and modes of expression. A critical assessment of Oduyoye’s notion of Christian ministry as a “partnership of both men and women” reveals that there is an internal problem within African theology. The predicament within which African women

theologians find themselves is that they have to struggle not only against patriarchy in church and society but also against the remaining distortions within what is deemed to be a more progressive theology. African women theologians acknowledge their solidarity with African theologians but also identify fundamental flaws within African theology. African women theologians are therefore engaged in a battle on more than one side. They need to unmask and support at the same time. On the other hand, it is clear that Fiorenza is far less critical of the feminist movement, from which she derives the term “feminist hermeneutics”. She is, of course, quite aware of the various and successive strands of the feminist movement, but she remains at least sympathetic to this movement and seeks to explore its significance for biblical scholarship and especially the Roman Catholic Church, of which she is a member. She recognises the need to complement the (sometimes reductionist) secular manifestations of feminism by highlighting the oppressive but also the potentially liberative role which religious traditions may still have in a secularised civil society.

One may therefore conclude that African women’s theology remains distinct from other feminist theologies. In a similar way, African-American womanist theologians have insisted that their situation is distinct from that of Euro-American women in what is described as the “triple” oppression of black women: being women, relatively poor, black and formerly enslaved. This calls for further reflection on the similarities and differences between African-American womanist theology and African women’s theology. Important differences which come to mind here are the legacy of slavery, differences in economic status, and military power. African women are often engaged in a struggle to secure a sustainable livelihood in ways that African-American women are not. More importantly, the relationship between American black theology and womanist theology deserves further attention in this regard.

Declaration

I declare that “A critical comparison of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s notion of Christian ministry as a ‘discipleship of equals’ and Mercy Amba Oduyoye’s notion of Christian ministry as a ‘partnership of both men and women’” is my work, and that it has not been submitted before in any other university, and that all the resources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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Signed.....

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AND WOMEN**

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CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

This thesis explores recent perspectives on Christian ministry within the context of feminist and African women's theologies. It offers a critical comparison of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's notion of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals" (1993) and Mercy Amba Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a "partnership of both women and men" (2001).

1.2 Context and relevance

The significance of this study has to be understood within the context of a number of contemporary discourses, including ecumenical debates on Christian ministry, ongoing debates on women in the ministry, as well as the emergence of Euro-American feminism, feminist theology, African theology and African women's theology.

a) All forms of Christian ministry are rooted in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Practical theologians appear to be in agreement that Christian ministry should build on the ministry of Jesus Christ (Ackermann 1986, Chaves 1997, Bass 1997, Volf & Bass 2002). While this is so, there is disagreement over the issue of the nature of Christian ministry and its various offices (especially those of bishops, elders and deacons). An examination of the history of Christianity reveals that these disputes have been in existence for a long time. Within this context, debates have also emerged on issues such as appropriate governing structures for the church (especially Episcopal, Presbyterian and Congregational), the primacy of the bishop of Rome, the hierarchy of ministries, celibacy in priesthood, and so forth. A crucial debate during the time of the Protestant reformation centred on the notion of the general priesthood of all believers, by virtue of their baptism.¹ More recent debates in both theological and non-theological circles have focused on the ordination of women and persons of homosexual orientation (Boswell 1980, Cozzens 1995, Barrett, 2002, Martin 2003). Such debates have received extensive media coverage and are well documented.

¹ There is an extensive literature on the impact of the Protestant reformation on the theory and practice of Christian ministry. See the contributions by Osborne 1989, Masue 1957, Burrows 1980, Lienhard 1984, Lightfoot 1983, McBrien 1987, Rahner 1968, Reuman 1987, & Kruse 1983 in this regard.

b) In 20th century theological reflection on Christian ministry, two important developments continue to shape current discourse in this regard, namely, the Second Vatican Council and the publication of the document *Baptism, Eucharist and ministry* by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.

The Vatican Council II has documented theological reflections on Christian ministry since the 1960s. This Council became known as the “people’s council” and was later referred to as the “Catholic Reformation”. It was not necessarily concerned with defending the faith, reinforcing canons and laws or denouncing heresies or challenges to the traditions of the Church. Instead, it focused on what it means to be baptised and called into ministry as a “whole people of God”. Vatican II is viewed as invaluable in terms of its presentation of a clear theological understanding of Christian ministry, as documented and required in the liturgical rituals and traditions of the church (see Osborne 1989, McBrien 1987, O’Meara 1983, Rahner 1968).

Recent debates on Christian ministry cannot be understood without reference to the “Lima Document”, which resulted from a meeting of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in Lima, Peru, in January 1982. The *Baptism, Eucharist and ministry* (BEM) document was an attempt at an ecumenical level to gather some consensus on the meaning of the Christian sacraments and ministry. This document is an attempt to elicit “common study and official response” (Thurian 1986) from the various churches. Virtually all the major church traditions were represented at this meeting, namely, Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Reformed, Methodist, United Disciples, Baptist, Adventist and Pentecostal (BEM 1982:3). For this research project, the aspect of Christian ministry in the BEM document is important in order to obtain an ecumenical understanding of Christian ministry. Christian ministry, according to BEM, is understood as, “The calling of the whole people of God” (BEM 1982: 20). This understanding and context of Christian ministry is based on the life led by Jesus Christ and his service through his death and resurrection (BEM 1982:20).

The aftermath of BEM is documented in six volumes, which contain various responses from the different church traditions (see *Baptism, Eucharist and ministry* Vol., II (1987), III (1987), IV (1987), V (1988), VI (1988)). Over five and a half years the Churches’ official responses to the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* texts have been documented. This process has yielded much

fruit and continues to challenge the various churches to be open to ecumenical dialogue. Some churches ordain both men and women, whereas others still ordain only men. According to the BEM document, “Differences on this issue raise obstacles to the mutual recognition of ministries. But those obstacles must not be regarded as substantive hindrance for further efforts towards mutual recognition” (BEM 1982:32).

c) Theological debates on the position of women in the ministry, especially in the ordained ministry, have gained increasing prominence since recent debates and the publication of BEM in 1982. In many churches, the ordination of women was hotly debated in the 1980s and 1990s (see Schüssler, Fiorenza & Haring 1999). While several ecclesial traditions have since then welcomed women into the ordained ministry, debates in this regard continue unabated, especially in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions. In contexts where women have served in the ordained ministry for a period of time, debates have often shifted to reflections on the position and experiences of women in the ordained ministry.² Theological reflection on women in Christian ministry should not be restricted to matters of the ordained ministry, important as that may be. Especially in feminist theological discourse, there have also emerged a number of contributions on the theology, organisation and practice of Christian ministry as such (including the ministry of the whole people of God, women as well as men, and the ordained ministry). This thesis is situated within such feminist reflection on Christian ministry.

d) Feminist theological discourse on Christian ministry has to be understood within the context of the emergence of Christian feminist theology. Feminist theology itself has to be understood within the context of various waves of feminism.

Early feminist discourse was characterised by a focus on women’s liberation, with reference to issues such as voters’ rights, equal opportunities and equal salaries. Not only did these movements revive women’s political struggles and challenges for civil rights and equal pay, they also brought forth feminist studies as a new academic discipline. Such discourse was later criticised for not recognising that the criteria which were employed for women’s liberation were often derived from the position that men occupied in society. As a result, feminist discourse shifted towards a focus on women’s experience and women’s issues, with reference to issues such as female sexuality, motherhood, domestic violence, rape, female genital mutilation, and

² See, for example, the study by Ndikumana (2004) on the ordination of women, in the Zimbabwe Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church (1975-1999).

gender stereotypes and, therefore, indicated the start of the second wave of feminism. This wave of feminism emerged as a result of the plight of women to regain their unique humanity as women (Clifford 2001, Riley 1989). This focus on women's experience was later recognised to be a necessary but one-sided correction, since this failed to take the impact of the relationships between men and women on women's lives into consideration. More recently, the focus shifted towards debates on domination in the name of the differences in gender, race, class and education. In such feminist discourse, a critique of various forms of domination is offered. There is an overwhelming emphasis on the need for relationships based on mutual respect, reciprocity, equality and mutual support.

In the literature of feminist discourse, various further waves of or approaches to feminism are discussed at some length. Maria Riley (2001), for example, classifies the various forms of feminism into four major types, namely, liberal feminism, cultural feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism (see also Tong 1989). In addition, schools of thought such as womanism and ecofeminism may also be mentioned. The term "womanism" was introduced by the African-American author, Alice Walker, in her award-winning book *The Color Purple* (1979). According to Walker, this term refers to the reflections of African-American women on their life experiences within the context of the threefold oppression related to race, class and gender.³ In Walker's essays, *In search of our mothers' gardens* (1983), the suppressed role of black women in the African-American church, the community, the family, and society is questioned.

e) Understandably, Christian feminist theology has been deeply influenced by developments in secular feminist discourse. Anne Carr suggests that feminist theology engages in a twofold critique, that is, a Christian critique of sexist or patriarchal culture *and* a feminist critique of Christianity.

Christian feminist theologies have emerged since the 1960s and 1970s, especially in North America and Western Europe. Early figures such as Mary Baker Eddy (1961) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1962) challenged the absence of women from theological schools and seminaries and encouraged women to pursue advanced degrees and careers in theology.⁴ Numerous other issues

³ Although African-American womanism is said to derive from feminism, this remains a topic of debate among African-American womanists as some claim to have no ties with feminism at all. See, especially, Hooks 1984, 1989, 1994.

⁴ These two women are significant, as they are the first who challenged not only the state at the time but also the church regarding women's participation in the public arena.

were soon added to the agenda of feminist theology: a critique of patriarchy in church and society, the legitimation of patriarchy on the basis of biblical exegesis, a reformulation of Christian doctrine in the light of feminist critique (e.g. debates on God as Father), a retrieval of the role played by women in the Christian tradition and a critique of the marginalisation of women, women's ordination and women's experiences in ecclesial praxis.

During the 1970s and the civil rights movement, feminist theologians actively encouraged women to campaign for women's equality in church and society. In the early 1980s, Christian feminist theologies became quite widespread within the context of white Euro-American and European middle-class women. This recognition of the context within which feminist theology was dominant sparked off a sensitivity to the differences in women's experiences around the globe and highlighted issues regarding justice, equality and mutuality amongst women. European and Euro-American feminist theologians recognised the need for solidarity with the women of Eastern Europe and the Third World women and men of the southern hemisphere, including Africa.⁵ As Fiorenza (1984: 14) notes,

Since a feminist liberation theology is committed to the struggle of all women against patriarchal oppression in Church and society, it seeks to transform andocentric i.e. male defined clerical theology that legitimizes patriarchal oppressions into a theology that promotes and enhances the liberation of the people of God the majority of who are women.

Following these developments, various forms of Christian feminist theologies may be identified, including revolutionary feminist theology, reformist Christian feminist theology, and reconstructionist Christian feminist theology (Clifford 2001). Theologians such as Elizabeth Moltmann-Wendel and Dorothy Sölle (Germany), Catharina Halkes (the Netherlands), Sarah Coakley (England) and Mary Daly, Elizabeth Johnson, Sallie McFague, Letty M. Russell, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (USA) made significant contributions to such schools of thought in feminist theology. Scholars such as Denise Ackermann, Felicity Edwards, Marie Henry Keane, Louise Kretzschmar, Christina Landman and Elna Mouton contributed to the establishment of feminist theology in South Africa. Given the

⁵ On the relations between Euro-American feminist theology and other forms of women's theology, see Clifford 2001, Schneiders 2000, Russell 1996, Hayes 1996, Moody 1996, Kaminski 1995, Hinsdale 1995, Loades 1990, Tong 1989, Riley 1989, Donovan 1985.

legacy of apartheid, solidarity with other women doing theology in the (South) African context was quite crucial from the incipient phases of feminist theology in South Africa.

f) Womanist theology entails a critical reflection on the experiences of African-American women in church and society. The contributions to womanist theology by scholars such as Delores S. Williams, Katie G. Cannon, Deborah A. Austin, Jacquelyn Grant, Karen Baker-Fletcher, Joy Bostic and Marcia Riggs may be mentioned here. Such womanist theologians continue to draw on feminist theology and black theology but, like their counterparts in the womanist movement, stress the distinctions between these theological discourses in order to reflect on the particularity of the experiences of African-American women in church and society.

g) African women's theology draws inspiration from discourses such as feminist theology, womanist theology and also African theology, but should nevertheless be regarded as a distinct discourse. African theology is one of many contemporary forms of an indigenous theology. It emerged after the 1960's in the wake of the process of decolonisation on the African continent and as a response to the continuing domination of Western missionary theologies on the African continent.

There is no need to review the different geographical regions in which theological works are published (West-Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa), the distinction between Catholic, Protestant, Pentecostal and indigenous (AIC) theologies in Africa, or the contributions by senior scholars such as John Mbiti, Jesse Mugambi and Laurenti Mageesa (in East Africa), Kwesi Sarpong, Kwesi Dickson, John Pobee, Kwame Bediako (West Africa), Jean-Marc Ela and Gabriel Setiloane, Siqibo Dwane and Buti Thlagale (South Africa) (Sakuba 2004). In addition, the contributions by a large number of liberation theologians and black theologians in the Southern African context also have to be taken into account in this regard.

African women's theology emerged in the 1970s as a written form of theology. African women's theology also has its roots in developments such as the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) as well as the Ecumenical Association of African Theologians (EAAT). African women's theology has gained increasing prominence over the last decade or two, especially due to the work of The Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians (The Circle) under the leadership of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, widely regarded as the mother of African women theologians. The Circle was established in October 1989 at Trinity College of Theology in

Legon, near Accra, Ghana. The Circle concerns itself with a number of issues, namely, to encourage and empower the critical study of the practice of religion in Africa, to undertake research, to publish theological literature written by African women, to promote inclusivity, to promote ecumenism and cultural diversity in the study of religion and to bring African women's theology to the attention of the people (Oduyoye 1997: 1-6). In these ways, African women's theologies seek to offer "... new visions that can renew religious life in various existential contexts" (Oduyoye 1992:8).

African women's theology has made significant contributions in ensuring that gendered injustices are named albeit that these are not the only form of injustice which women experience in areas of work, worship and decision-making. As women's theologies challenge the subordination of women in church and society, the concerns of women affected by social injustices such as racism, poverty, and cultural oppression are also highlighted. The contributions to African women's theology by scholars such as Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Western Africa), Mary Getui, Musimbi Kanyoro and Teresa Okure (Eastern Africa) and Denise Ackermann, Musa Dube, Isabel Phiri and Betty Govinden (Southern Africa) may be noted here.

1.3 Delimitation and statement of research problem

Feminist and African women's theology raise a number of important questions with regard to Christian ministry. What are the contributions made by feminist and African women's theologies to discourse on Christian ministry? How do feminist and African women's theology compare with each other on the notion of Christian ministry? This study will offer a critical comparison of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mercy Amba Oduyoye's notions of Christian ministry. On the basis of the discussion thus far, the problem that will be investigated in this research project may be formulated in the following way:

How should the similarities and differences between Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's notion as "discipleship of equals" and Mercy Amba Oduyoye's notion of ministry as "partnership of both men and women" be understood and assessed?

This formulation requires further conceptual clarification and a demarcation of the scope of the study:

a) Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is the Kristen Stendahl Professor of Divinity at the Harvard Divinity School. The main focus of her research and teaching is on questions pertaining to biblical and theological epistemology, hermeneutics, rhetoric and the politics of interpretation,⁶ as well as issues of theological education, radical equality and democracy.⁷ As an outstanding Roman Catholic biblical and feminist theologian, Fiorenza also seeks to interpret the Bible from a woman's perspective on the basis of a "feminist hermeneutics" (1984: 10).

In her book entitled *Discipleship of equals. A critical feminist ecclesia-logy of liberation* (1993), she traces her own "cartography of struggle" as a Roman Catholic feminist theologian. This book has been highly acclaimed by international publishers, scholars, academics and theologians. In this book, Fiorenza coins the notion of "discipleship of equals". She challenges the Roman Catholic church's hierarchical and patriarchal structural setting in the Euro-American context. In particular, she challenges the notion of ordained ministry as a male-dominated work environment, where men occupy most leadership positions. She argues that if women are striving towards the ordained ministry in this day and age, they need to change their course and strategy urgently as they ought to strive for the leadership position of bishop rather than priest. In doing so, the male patriarchal structures of the church as a whole can be toppled and radically transformed into something which is more welcoming, embracing and open to the "whole people of God". Fiorenza continues to highlight the plight of Roman Catholic women, as they are still not permitted to enter the ordained ministry. It is within this context that she seeks a new understanding of Christian ministry as the "discipleship of equals" (Fiorenza 1993).

b) Mercy Amba Oduyoye was born on 21 October 1934 in Asamankese in Ghana. She is the director of and a teacher for the Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture, which is based at Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana. Oduyoye is well known internationally as a speaker and author. For a number of years, she has served as Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. Her writings cover fields such as biblical exegesis in the African context, ecumenical theology and, most significantly, gender issues (Oduyoye 2001, 2002).

⁶ See, especially, Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origin* 1983, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* 1984, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* 1991, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* 1992.

⁷ See, especially, Fiorenza's *Discipleship of Equals: A Critical Feminist Ecclesia-logy of Liberation* 1993, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* 1994, *Feminist Theology in different context* 1996, *The Non-Ordination of Women and the Politics of Power* 1999, *Sharing Her Word and Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Interpretation* 2001.

In her book *Introducing African women's theology* (2001), Oduyoye coins the notion of Christian ministry as a “partnership” between women and men. This book is the first of its kind to be published by an African woman theologian. International scholars, academics and theologians have widely welcomed this work. In her work on Christian ministry, Oduyoye seeks to hold together the positive cultural concepts regarding both men and women who have been created for partnership. This process leads to an understanding of other theories on Christian ministry regarding ordination and women's experiences in the ordained ministry from an African perspective (Oduyoye 1988, 1990, 1992, 2001, 2002, Kanyoro 1992, Edet 1988, Amoah 1988, Okure 1988). Within this context, she also highlights the need for African women to be liberated from male patriarchy and dominance in both church and society.

c) This study will focus on the similarities and differences between Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's notion of Christian ministry as a “discipleship of equals” and Mercy Amba Oduyoye's notion of ministry as a “partnership of men and women”. It will engage in a critical comparison of their notions of Christian ministry as expressed in their English language theological publications, including books, journal articles, essays, edited volumes and post-graduate theses. Only English language publications will be considered in this study. This excludes a number of potentially important contributions by Fiorenza in German.

1.4 Procedure

In this thesis, I will show that an examination of the views of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mercy Amba Oduyoye on Christian ministry reveals similarities based on a shared experience of being women within a male-dominated Christian church. On this basis, both Schüssler Fiorenza and Oduyoye maintain that all persons who are baptised are duly called into ministry for the purposes of being in partnership with one another, (i.e. female and male). The community of believers may therefore be characterised as a discipleship of equals. Christian ministry therefore includes the “whole people of God” by virtue of their baptisms.

There are also significant differences between feminist theology and African women's theology with regard to the context, rhetoric, experiences and modes of expression which are employed in these two theological discourses. Even though they may use words that are similar and concepts that are closely correlated with one another, these different modes of discourse shape the

connotations of the discourse. This also applies to discourse on Christian ministry, which seeks to address the gender inequalities still prevalent in church and society in various contexts. Furthermore, the contribution of Oduyoye should be understood within its rhetorical context, namely as a movement within the larger field of African theology. In general, African women's theology seeks to affirm the quest in African theology for an indigenous theology that will address the challenges that Christianity in Africa has to contend with. Although African theology may be regarded as a progressive theology, African women's theology should also be understood as a resistance against the forms of patriarchy which are embedded in African society and churches and which are often assumed, condoned, and legitimized, explicitly and implicitly, by African male theologians. African women's theology therefore seems to be engaged in a battle on two fronts. It seeks to come to terms with the legacy of Western colonialism and mission and to confront patriarchy in the African context. This indicates an important difference in rhetoric between feminist and African women's theologies.

This argument will be developed in the following three chapters:

In chapter 2, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's position on Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals" will be investigated on the basis of her publications on this theme. This will be done on the basis of a description of her personal background and conversation partners and the hermeneutics which she employs, a detailed analysis of the concept of a "discipleship of equals" and a critical survey of secondary literature on Fiorenza's contribution in this regard.

In chapter 3, Mercy Amba Oduyoye's position on Christian ministry as a "partnership of both men and women" will be investigated, following the same pattern.

Chapter 4 will entail a critical comparison and assessment of Fiorenza and Oduyoye's contributions on Christian ministry. The discussion in this chapter will form the main thrust of this study. It will be based on the analysis offered in chapters 2 and 3. It will also draw on additional literature on Christian ministry and on feminist and African women's theologies.

In a brief concluding chapter, a few perspectives will be offered on the significance of understanding Christian ministry within the context of feminist and African women's theology.

CHAPTER 2

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza on Christian ministry

2.1 Introduction

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's (1989) notion of Christian ministry as the "discipleship of equals" is based on her belief that God calls both women and men, by virtue of their baptism, into ministry. Fiorenza first coined the notion of a "discipleship of equals" in her book entitled *In memory of her: A feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins* (1989). In this work, Fiorenza highlights the lives of women who played an important role in the early history of Christianity. She develops this notion in more detail in her work *Discipleship of equals: A critical ecclesiology of liberation* (1993).

In this chapter, I will discuss Fiorenza's notion of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals" by, firstly taking a look at who she is as a person and how her work has contributed towards the field of feminist theology, church history and Christian ministry. Secondly, I will focus on feminist hermeneutics, which Fiorenza employs in New Testament studies, and on church history as she also uses feminist hermeneutics to develop her notion of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals". Thirdly, I will focus on Fiorenza's notion of Christian ministry and describe and assess this notion. Fourthly, I will offer a critical assessment of the notion of a "discipleship of equals", as employed by Fiorenza.

2.2 Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's background

2.2.1 Life and career of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza was born in Germany, grew up in Fraconia, a Catholic community and, in later years, became an American Catholic scholar (1993: 39). As a child, she was reared in a Roman Catholic home, where she was introduced to various customs, teachings and

traditions of the Catholic faith. At an early age, she began to read and enjoy the stories of the saints. She notes that a significant number of these saints were women, ranging in their careers through "... teachers, mystics, missionaries, abbesses, soldiers, queens and peasants" (1993: 40). According to Fiorenza (1993: 40),

Many of these stories did not limit women to the roles of wife and mother within the nuclear family; rather they illustrated women's outstanding contributions in the history of the church and the Western world. These women were creative, independent, and influential.

In 1963, she became the first woman to obtain a theological degree in Würzburg, Germany. Her work *The ministries of women in the church* was completed in 1962, submitted as a licentiate thesis in pastoral theology in 1963 and eventually published as a book in 1964. In 1970, she completed a doctorate in New Testament studies on the understanding of priesthood in the Book of Revelations. Both these earlier works were written in German and were later translated into a number of different languages. She has also written several commentaries on the Book of Revelations and edited a number of volumes on aspects of religious propaganda in Judaism and early Christianity. She later became full professor of New Testament and Theology at the University of Notre Dame in 1980 and then distinguished Talbot professor of New Testament at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1987.⁸

At present, Fiorenza is the Krister Stendahl professor at Harvard Divinity School and has received a number of honorary doctorates, scholarships, and awards, both nationally and internationally. She is a founding co-editor of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, co-editor of *Concilium* and also serves on a number of professional boards, societies and, advisory committees. She served, for example, as president of the Society of Biblical Literature in 1983, is a consultant to the task force on women in the church of the Catholic Theological Studies Association, and is a member of the task force on women in early Christianity of the Catholic Biblical Association. Fiorenza is married to Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, a professor at the Harvard Divinity School, and has a daughter, Christina (Clifford 2001: 62).

⁸ This information is drawn from Fiorenza's online CV at www.ars-hetooric.net/Queen/Editor/Schussler.html

Many feminist scholars have been influenced by Fiorenza's scholarly contributions, and this is what some of them have to say about her work. Rebecca Chopp (1997: 397-398) describes Fiorenza's work in the following way:

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is a trained biblical scholar and theologian. Her biblical work focuses on the Book of Revelations and equalitarian movements in early Christianity. Her work in feminist theology covers the authority of the Bible, ecclesiology, theological education, and recently, Christology. Fiorenza's work is characterized both by a historical argument about the nature of early Christianity and revisioning of the nature and norms of theology. ... Fiorenza's theological position is that of a pragmatic critical theory – an attempt to let theology name the sufferings and desires of people in the midst of Christian emancipatory praxis.

Anne M. Clifford describes Fiorenza's career in similar terms to those of Chopp in that both of them recognize her critical analyses not only as a biblical scholar but also as a liberation theologian. Both these scholars also highlight Fiorenza's pioneering work in the area of "feminist theological reconstruction" in antiquity. Clifford manages to trace Fiorenza's work from the time of the appearance of her first book in German in 1964. Clifford also notes that, since the appearance of this contribution by Fiorenza, one of the major focuses of her work has been on women in the church. Furthermore, Clifford observes that, in this book, Fiorenza sought to reflect on her own experience and struggles as a laywoman in the Catholic church. Clifford (2001: 62) explains,

Since that time she has consistently argued for a reformulation of ecclesiology that would give proper attention to the ministry women have done are doing in the church. ... Throughout her career she has been critical of male-dominated academy that has marginalized women and the contributions of women to the history of Christianity. Therefore, she is not only committed to recovering the voices of women in Scripture and the Christian tradition from the silence of neglect, but also actively encourages women to continue this type of work as theologians.

Throughout her career, Fiorenza has made significant contributions to the field of biblical and feminist theology. She has written and published a number of books and articles throughout her career. Some of her major publications include the following: *In memory of her: A feminist theological reconstruction of early Christian origins* (1983), *The Book of Revelation: Judgment and justice* (1976), *Bread not stone: The challenge of feminist biblical interpretation* (1984) and *Discipleship of equals: A critical feminist ecclesiology of liberation* (1993). The various topics that Fiorenza covers in these publications range from cartographies of struggles, early Christian communities, women and church ministry, feminist spirituality, male patriarchy, feminist ministry, “ekklesia of women”, “women-church” to “discipleship of equals” and many others.

2.2.2 Conversation partners

Through these publications, Fiorenza has engaged in conversations with feminist theologians and secular feminists on issues regarding patriarchal relations as well as hierarchical structures. These relations and structures are prevalent in most churches and societies today.⁹ Fiorenza succeeds in addressing these communities by making use of her knowledge and background work as a New Testament scholar and feminist theologian. Her argument is the following: “... although the Bible originated in a patriarchal culture in antiquity, it has elements that are potentially liberating not only for women but also for any person experiencing oppression in patriarchal systems today” (Clifford 2001: 54).

Within the context of feminist theology, Fiorenza’s approach can be described as reconstructive.¹⁰ Her studies in the field of historical reconstruction, with specific reference to women in early Christian movements, are also important “conversation mechanisms”. Within these conversations, Fiorenza aims to reinterpret texts from a particular perspective, which stems from her affiliation to a particular type of Christian feminist theology, namely “reconstructionist reformist” (1993: 10).

⁹ This phenomenon cuts across the various denominations at present. However, the Catholic Church stands out in this regard as it still refuses to ordain women to the priesthood.

¹⁰ This term is a branch stemming from the various other strands of contemporary feminism.

According to Fiorenza (1993: 10), such a kind of feminist theology "... draws its theological power ... from the Christian tradition of the *basileia*, the vision of God's alternative world, a vision of justice, human dignity, equality, and salvation for all". Different types of methodologies are present within reconstructive reformist feminist theology. However, the work of reconstructive feminist theologians such as Fiorenza shows a few similarities with that of other types of feminist theologies, namely, "revolutionary" and "reformist" forms of feminist theology. What they have in common is a strong commitment to highlighting "constructive alternate interpretations" from various biblical texts and also identifying "liberating elements" for the liberation of both women and men (Clifford 2001: 54).

Fiorenza also aims to address the Catholic community in the hope of "enlightening" the church on issues such as the non-ordination of women. On the one hand, Fiorenza directly addresses the Roman Catholic communion on this issue, but on the other hand, she also directs her conversations toward the wider "... one holy Catholic and apostolic church". It is within this paradigm that Fiorenza argues that the notion of women's ordination to the ordained ministry is indeed "... the lowest rung of the hierarchical ladder" (1993: 23). Fiorenza states, "ordination means subordination" (1993: 34). Working to achieve any office in the authority structure of the church only perpetuates a system that is inherently unjust, according to Fiorenza. These radical statements by Fiorenza contribute to the ongoing debate on the ordination of women in the Roman Catholic Church.

Fiorenza argues that feminism and a hierarchical Catholic church are incompatible with one another. She suggests that by toppling the "kyriarchy", which has become just another form of "patriarchy", the Catholic Church will hopefully realize its blatant discrimination against all women.

2.3 Fiorenza's hermeneutics

2.3.1 A feminist hermeneutics

Fiorenza's position on Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals" has to be understood on the basis of her work on the early history of Christianity and the particular feminist hermeneutics which she employs in this regard.

A feminist hermeneutics focuses on making women the subjects of interpretation and allowing women to be the builders of religious meaning. Making women the subjects of interpretation is important not only because of the extensive institutionalised silencing of women in biblically based religions but also because it is vital that women, and not male attitudes about women, become central. Allowing women to be builders of religious meaning brings the interest of women, especially the desire for liberation from all manifestations of patriarchy that dehumanise women and men, to bear on the interpretation of biblical and extra-biblical ancient texts. Fiorenza explains: "feminist hermeneutics refers to the theory, art, and practice of interpretation of biblical and other ancient extrabiblical texts in the interest of women" (Ruether, cited in Russell & Clarkson 1996: 99).

The type of feminist hermeneutics which Fiorenza employs consists of two main components, namely, a "hermeneutics of suspicion" and secondly, as a reconstructive tool whereby biblical texts are given "new" and unique meanings. A feminist hermeneutics of suspicion is a form of action that raises our awareness in order for both men and women to take into account their negative cultural sexual roles and attitudes on the Bible. Patriarchy is understood to be the initial position that affects biblical texts and their interpretations in the larger Christian tradition (Fiorenza 1984: 15). The main concern of a feminist hermeneutics of suspicion is therefore to investigate and scrutinize biblical texts for their possible androcentric assumptions and positions. Such an examination must include how various biblical texts portray women in narratives and laws and neglect women's experiences. A hermeneutics of suspicion is not primarily concerned with what is said about women but also with the silences that surround these issues (Fiorenza 1984:15-16). Fiorenza (1984: 16) therefore states,

A feminist hermeneutics of suspicion also questions the underlying presuppositions, androcentric models, and unarticulated interests of contemporary biblical interpretations.

The fact that we study only the statements of biblical writers about women but not about men reflects an androcentric theoretical-cultural paradigm that understands man as the paradigmatic human being and woman as the “other”, the exception but not the rule.

The other strategy that Fiorenza employs is that of a hermeneutics of reconstruction through remembrance. According to Fiorenza (1984: 17), a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of remembrance fit together. They fit together as feminist hermeneutics is not satisfied with only unmasking patriarchy. A hermeneutics of remembrance reclaims the past suffering of women and of all persons subjugated through enslavement, exile, and maltreatment, and treats it as a “dangerous memory”. A “dangerous memory” invites us today to join in solidarity with all persons past and present who struggle for human dignity. As Fiorenza states, “... a feminist biblical hermeneutics of remembrance has the task of becoming a dangerous memory that reclaims the visions and sufferings of the dead” (1984: 19).

Furthermore, a feminist hermeneutics of remembrance presents theoretical models for historical reconstructions that place women in the centre of biblical community and theology. Fiorenza argues that a feminist hermeneutics of remembrance can reclaim early Christian theology and history as women’s own theology and history. It is therefore correct to assume that “women as church” have a long history and tradition that can claim the discipleship of equals as its biblical roots. Fiorenza (1984: 20) describes the notion of a feminist hermeneutics of remembrance as one which

... has as its primary task to keep alive the *memoria passionis* of biblical women as well as to reclaim our biblical heritage. This heritage is misrepresented when it is understood solely as a history of patriarchal oppression; it must also be reconstituted as a history of liberation and religious agency. ... The history and theology must not be allowed to cancel out the memory of the struggle, life, and leadership of biblical women who spoke and acted in the power of the Spirit.

Fiorenza employs this feminist hermeneutics in her readings of the New Testament and other biblical texts, as well as in the reconstruction of Christian history and ministry as an integrated field of practical theology. The way in which she uses these strategies in the reading of the New

Testament and other biblical texts and in the application of Christian ministry has to do with “conscientisation”.¹¹

The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire was the first person who stated that conscientisation is the process whereby one learns to “name” and “...change oneself and one’s situation” (Freire 1970: 100). This notion has to do with critical thinking and reflection as human beings continuously find themselves in situations where they have to ask critical questions relating to identity and subsistence.

Fiorenza argues that a “critical feminist liberationist interpretation” is similar to such a kind of conscientisation, whereby people who become informed through this process of conscientisation can identify and acknowledge their own domination and mistreatment. Only on this basis can these persons reflect critically on their particular course of action as they have now not only been enlightened but have also been empowered to seek and obtain liberation (Fiorenza 2001: 94).

Fiorenza refers to this strategy as “... a critical feminist rhetoric of conscientisation” (Fiorenza 2001: 96). In applying such a strategy in biblical interpretation and in the reconstruction of Christian history, she implies that the text as well as the context becomes important. Thus, Fiorenza explains, “What we see depends on where we stand. Our social location or rhetoric context is decisive for how we see the world, construct reality, or interpret biblical texts” (Fiorenza 2001: 96-97).

According to Fiorenza, this kind of critical feminist rhetoric of conscientisation does not only comprise of theory; the practice is equally important. In this way, a feminist biblical interpretation of liberation is achieved within the framework of emancipatory activities, both in society and religion. According to Fiorenza, the results of such a rhetoric creates a “grassroots democratic space”¹² in which feminist and other readers, listeners and hearers can contribute to scrutinise the meaning and importance of a biblical text in contemporary social-political locations and cultural-religious rhetorical situations (Fiorenza 2001: 97).

Furthermore, the significance of a critical feminist rhetoric of conscientisation with regard to Christian ministry becomes imperative. It is within this framework that Fiorenza wants to ensure

¹¹ For Fiorenza knowledge is power and must be used to empower and equip people at all levels to voice their opinions and concerns.

¹² Here Fiorenza (2001: 97) and the writer want to highlight that people at all levels need to be ensured of a space that is open and comfortable for them to tell their stories or reveal their status, as in the case of HIV/AIDS.

that women from diverse backgrounds conscientise themselves with the necessary information and skills to overcome patriarchy within both church and society. According to Fiorenza, they are to take serious cognizance of their unique identities and abilities as women, their rights as human beings and their initial calling through the sacrament of baptism into ordained or non-ordained ministry.

2.3.2 A feminist hermeneutics and early church history

In her work *In memory of her: A feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins* (1983), Fiorenza highlights the “problem of women’s history”. The history of women has typically not been documented by women themselves but by men who continue to occupy positions of leadership and power in church, academia and society. According to Fiorenza, if church history and its biblical exegetes define and understand early Christian history in terms of the patriarchal household, then it becomes imperative to investigate not just women’s role but, as the first step, to consider the middle-class background of biblical exegetes and church historians. After this, the second step would be to examine household structures and their religious meaning in Roman Hellenism.

Fiorenza argues that it is not so much the social-structural setting of these Hellenistic women that should be examined but that one should investigate the impact of their conversions to Christianity. In other words, we need to investigate and evaluate the overall imposition of the Christian faith on such a cultural patriarchal philosophy and, more importantly, to what extent the Christian church supported emancipatory tendencies (1983: 91). In following these steps, Fiorenza creates a model, “...of social interaction and religious transformation, of Christian “vision” and historical realization, of struggle for equality and against patriarchal domination” (1983: 92).

She argues that women’s history should be interpreted as a history of the discipleship of equals. Her argument is based on the literary sources of the Jesus movement in Palestine and the Christian movement in the Greco-Roman cities. On the basis of this argument, Fiorenza attempts

to show that the early Christian movement was inclusive of women's leadership and can therefore be called "egalitarian".¹³

Fiorenza sees herself engaged in a critical process of revealing the hidden agendas of what she calls "male stream" biblical hermeneutics. In her book *Jesus Miriam's child: Sophia's prophet* (1995), Fiorenza (1995: 3) sets out what she means by revealing the hidden agendas of "male stream" biblical interpretation. For example, as in the title of the book, she indicates the following:

By naming Jesus as the child of Miriam and the prophet of Divine Sophia, I seek to create a "woman"-defined feminist theoretical space that makes it possible to dislodge christological discourses from their malestream frame of reference. The hermeneutical-rhetorical creation of such a space intends to decenter hegemonic malestream christological discourses and to reframe them in terms of a critical feminist theology of liberation.

In another instance, Fiorenza sets out not only to "liberate" malestream biblical hermeneutics but also succeeds in opening up new avenues and vistas of reading, teaching and preaching. What is striking about this work of Fiorenza is the way in which she uses the text from Luke 1: 39-40 where Mary, the mother of Jesus, is depicted as going into a hill country to seek counsel from another woman, Elizabeth. Here, Fiorenza creatively identifies a hermeneutical key that draws attention to this kind of metaphor, which represents the difficulties of "the intellectual territory and 'hill country' of hegemonic Christology," (1995: 33). This may also allude to the difficulties of challenging accepted ways of reading the New Testament portraits of Jesus, challenging the notion of Christian history as "his-tory", to highlight history as "her-story" also.

Fiorenza has expounded the interpretation of the narrative in The Gospel according to St. Mark in her book *But SHE said: Feminist practices of biblical interpretation* (1992). In this book, Fiorenza discusses what it means to interpret scripture from a feminist perspective. She also poses the question as to what constitutes a feminist reading of the scripture (1992: 6). Fiorenza uses this same feminist hermeneutics in her understanding of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals".

¹³ Fiorenza (1983: 92) uses this term to refer to Jesus as a teacher who treated everyone with equality, dignity and integrity.

On the basis of her work on feminist biblical interpretation and historical reconstruction, Fiorenza highlights the emergence of what she calls “the *ekklesia* of women”. For Fiorenza, this concept stands in opposition to the “patriarchal household of God” (1983: 285). In the epilogue of her book *In memory of her: A feminist theological reconstruction of early Christian origins*, Fiorenza (1983: 344) introduces this concept in the following way:

Ekklesia – the term for church in the New Testament – is not so much a religious as a civil-political concept. It means the actual assembly of free citizens gathering for deciding their own spiritual-political affairs. Since women in a patriarchal church cannot decide their own theological-religious affairs and that of their own people – women – the *ekklesia* of women is as much a future hope as it is a reality today. ... A feminist Christian spirituality, therefore, calls us to gather together the *ekklesia of women* who, in the angry power of the Spirit, are sent forth to feed, heal, and liberate our own people who are women (1983: 344).

Ekklesia comes from the understanding of the egalitarian social relations of the followers of Jesus, namely, a “discipleship of equals” (Fiorenza 1983: 344). Fiorenza asserts that this “discipleship of equals” was replaced by a hierarchical, patriarchal ecclesiastical structure during the second or third century. According to Fiorenza, “To embrace the gospel means to enter into a community. ... The gospel calls into being the church as the discipleship of equals that is continually recreated in the power of the Spirit” (1983: 345). For Fiorenza, the concept of the *ekklesia* of women is an expression of the unique liberatory message of the Christian gospel.

Fiorenza highlights two key objections which may be raised with regard to this notion of the *ekklesia* of women. The first objection is “... that the church of women does not share in the fullness of church” (1983: 346). Fiorenza (1983: 346) acknowledges this point, but argues that, “... neither do exclusive male hierarchical assemblies ... share in the fullness of church”. For Fiorenza, just as men have been part of the church for centuries, women have also been part and have also played important roles in the development of Christian spirituality in the church.

The second objection is that this may encourage a form of “reverse sexism”, as opposed to the appeal for women to be in “mutuality with men” (1983:347). According to Fiorenza, this

objection does not take the presence of patriarchal oppression, domination and power seriously enough. Fiorenza (1983: 347) notes that the objection often implies that quick answers are suggested to the matter after "... having paid lip service to the structural sin of sexism".

Fiorenza uses two examples based on critical feminist hermeneutical strategies to illustrate her argument on this particular point. These examples include the notions of "reverse imperialism", that is, the gathering together of poor peoples from under-developed countries such as South and Central America, and "reverse colonialism", that is, also the gathering together of colonialisied continents and countries such as Africa and Asia. Fiorenza poses the challenge by asking whether we make use of such terms as described above to explain our understandings of such actions, bearing in mind that "reverse sexism" is the term alluded to when Christian women want to gather as the church. Fiorenza (1983: 347), therefore, states the following:

We do not do so because we know too well that the coming together of those exploited does not spell the oppression of the rich or that the oppressed are gaining power over white men and Western nations, but that it means the political bonding of oppressed people in their struggle for economic and cultural survival. Why then do men feel threatened by the bonding of women in our struggle for liberation? Why then can churchmen not understand and accept that Christian women gather together for the sake of our spiritual survival as Christians and women persons? It is not over and against men that we gather together but in order to become *ekklesia* before God, deciding matters affecting our own spiritual welfare and struggle.

In an essay, "Discipleship of equals: Reality and vision", Fiorenza further explains what she means by a "discipleship of equals" (Fiorenza 1997). Here, Fiorenza uses a particular biblical text from St. Mark's gospel (Mark 7: 24-30, Mt. 15:21-28) to illustrate how a "discipleship of equals" is possible. Fiorenza relates the story of a Greek woman from Syrophenicia and her young daughter, who is possessed by an evil spirit, and Jesus. According to Fiorenza, the woman is referred to as an outsider who turns Jesus' argument against itself and who also overcomes Jesus' prejudice due to her young daughter's need for healing. According to Fiorenza (1997: 1), this Greek woman from Syrophenicia, an outsider, has conquered, "By opening up a future of well-

being for her daughter ... not only has [she] become the symbolic foremother of those who struggle for the liberation of wo/men. She is also the apostolic witness for a radical religious political vision. ...” In this discussion, Fiorenza illustrates how women are often depicted as the “invisible” characters in biblical texts, but if one takes a closer look at the text, one will discover that women have made contributions throughout the ages and therefore form part of the “discipleship of equals”.

2.4 Christian ministry as a “discipleship of equals”

2.4.1 Discipleship of equals: The concept and meaning

According to Fiorenza, Christian ministry encompasses all believers who must gather together as a discipleship community which embraces the values of the reign of God. Such a vision of Christian ministry as the “discipleship of equals” is characterised by commitment, accountability, and solidarity in the *ekklesia* of women which, in turn, become the life practice of such a feminist vocation. The understanding of Christian ministry as a “discipleship of equals” is a central embodiment and incarnation of the vision of a “new church” which is in solidarity with the oppressed and the “least” of this world.

In her work *Discipleship of equals: A critical feminist ecclesiology of liberation* (1993), Fiorenza highlights the plight and day-to-day struggles of women either seeking to be included into Christian ministry, that is, through ordination, or those who still encounter endless problems within the ordained ministry. It is within this framework that Fiorenza makes use of her own feminist theological struggles in the academia, church and civil society. She firstly highlights her struggles in academia to either conform to a hierarchical and patriarchal leadership or not, as not many woman (if any at all) are visible within those leadership structures in academia. Secondly, she highlights her plight (and that of others) as a Catholic laywoman who is not permitted to the ordained ministry solely because she is a woman and the ordained ministry is reserved for men only. Thirdly, Fiorenza has to deal with the various kinds of dualisms and double standards still prevalent in society.

In this work, a number of her essays which deal with key issues in feminist theology and the feminist religious movement are included. Fiorenza highlights the milestones in the attempts of Christian feminists to reclaim their spiritual ability, to define biblical texts and the Christian church. Fiorenza also encourages Christian feminists to articulate a feminist religious vision of justice and liberation. Fiorenza (1993: 2) writes,

More than ever before, the women's movements in society and religion need a critical feminist analysis of patriarchal religious structures and a critical feminist theological articulation of liberation. By tracing my own unfolding journey of vision and struggle and by relating it to the collective struggles of women in theology, I seek to intervene in the contest over who has right and authority to define and claim biblical religion.

With this notion of a "discipleship of equals", Fiorenza calls upon women to gather, to be sent out to feed, heal, clothe, and liberate all people. She envisages a ministry and spirituality that seek to liberate women and men so that all may recognize their identity as children and servants of God. Those who have heard this call are challenged to be responsible and to foster an ethos of cohesion amongst women in order to ensure the well-being of their future and the future of others.

In the introduction of her book *Discipleship of equals: A critical ecclesiology of liberation*, Fiorenza explains the meaning of the notions of "equality" and "discipleship". Fiorenza states that these two concepts are often misunderstood when it is assumed that women should become like men in their call to Christian discipleship. This is typically defended with reference to Jesus being a male. Fiorenza (1993: 10) notes the following with regard to the terms *equality* and *discipleship*:

Equal rights and equality are usually associated with liberal feminism, which is said to fight for the right of women to become men. Consequently, combining this term with discipleship is considered by some to be an argument for women's equal opportunity with men, to follow as disciples in the footsteps of Jesus, the man, and to imitate his example.

Fiorenza's aim in introducing the notion of a "discipleship of equals" is "... to demystify the cultural and theological constructs of femininity and masculinity that are dualistic, heterosexist, and essentialist as ideological obfuscations of the multiplicative structures of patriarchal domination" and not to "divinize" sexual dissimilarity (1993: 11). Fiorenza's argument does not suggest the incorporation of women into male, hierarchal systems and conventions, nor does she want to "... theologically reinscribe (white, heterosexist) feminine identity as divine equality"; she seeks a discipleship of equals, which reflects the kingdom of God (1993: 11-12).

Fiorenza's own understanding of the notion of a "discipleship of equals" is captured in the following formulation:

... *ekklesia* as a *discipleship of equals* that can make present the *basileia*, the alternative world of justice and well-being intended by the life-giving power of G-d as reality and vision in the midst of death-dealing powers of patriarchal oppression and dehumanization. ... The discipleship of equals must be *basileia* discipleship. (1993: 12)

This formulation calls for further clarification on the use of terms such as "disciple", "equality" and the "basileia tou Theou" as a critical corrective to patriarchy and "kyriarchy".

The term "disciple" is a rendition of a Greek term for "learner" and indicates someone whose allegiance is to an educator or a group. Discipleship does not only mean an obligation to a message, leader and vision but also "a way of life" (1997:1). The difference between the terms "discipleship" and "equals" must not be understood as advocating similarity under the appearance of universality. Instead, it seeks to highlight equality and diversity as the central background to discipleship. Fiorenza (1997: 2) explains:

In the discipleship of equals, wo/men have equal status, dignity and rights as images of the divine, an equal access to the multifarious gifts of the Spirit, Sophia. Each and everyone enriches the discipleship community of equals with their different experiences, vocations and talents. In short, the concept of "discipleship of equals" seeks to map a

radical democratic vision and reality that articulates an alternative to kyriarchal structures of domination.

For Fiorenza, patriarchy is closely linked to what she calls *kyriarchy*. The term patriarchy refers to the rule of the master over those subordinated to and dependent on him. Kyriarchy, in this instance, should be understood in terms of how it is defined in classical socio-political terms within Western societies. Western society and family are not simply male-dominated but also patriarchal in orientation and structure. Due to this notion, powerful, influential men have had and still have power and control over those subordinated to and dependent on them.

According to Fiorenza, “kyriarchy” refers to women’s status and way of being, not only in terms of gender but also in terms of the class, race, country or religion of the men to whom they “belong” (1997:1). The Western kyriarchal scheme of domination was warped not only by sex-gender ideologies but also by colonialist theories of lower races and cultures. Women, in particular, were deemed to be at the bottom of the racial pyramid of advancement (1997: 1-2).

For Fiorenza, these two notions, that is, the belief that all are created equal and the notion of *ekklesia* as the decision-making body, are both incongruent with the reality of the conventional and contemporary church. According to Fiorenza, *ekklesia* is an alternative to the vision of kyriarchy, which needs to be understood in terms of that which is “radically democratic”.¹⁴ If one takes a look at the church, one could ask whether the church is democratic or not and, furthermore, should the church be democratic or not? However, a “radical democratic” vision is realized and personified over and over again in the transformative liberation and freedom struggles of all marginalized and exploited creatures.

Fiorenza adds that the Greek term *ekklesia* is normally translated as “church”, even though the English term “church” originates from the Greek term *kyriak* meaning belonging to the lord or master. Fiorenza points out that the rendition of *ekklesia* as “church” is therefore ambiguous. She comments,

¹⁴ According to Fiorenza, justice for all who are oppressed and marginalized can only be obtained if serious action is taken through a process of vigorous campaigning for the rights of all humanity.

Ekklesia is best rendered as “democratic assembly/congress of full citizens”. The translation process, which transformed *ekklesia*/democratic assembly into kyriak/church, indicates a historical development that has privileged the kyriarchal/hierarchical form of church over that of a democratic congress or discipleship of equals. Thus, the same word “church” in English entails two contradictory meanings: one derived from the patriarchal household in antiquity which was governed by the lord/master/husband/father of the house, to whom freeborn women, freeborn dependents, ... both women and men, were subordinated. The other meaning of church = *ekklesia* understands the equality of its members in terms of citizenship and friendship. This meaning of “church” evolves from the vision of democracy in antiquity and modernity. (1997: 3)

It is at this point that Fiorenza raises a concern with regard to Western democracy as it has realized equality only in patriarchal ways. This process is problematic in that it has “... restricted leadership for a long time to elite male citizens only” (Fiorenza 1997:3). However, Fiorenza asserts that the numerous liberation movements have and are still constantly inspired by the vision of radical democracy even though these movements are threatened and will soon cease to exist as “...many of these movements are wrecked by ruthless economic exploitation, ...” (1997: 3). For Fiorenza, a situation where the majority of people are still oppressed financially, politically and socially and where a minority holds the “upper hand” with regard to resources is disconcerting. This means that the rich will continue to become richer, whereas the poor will, firstly, remain poor and, secondly, become even poorer (Fiorenza 1997: 3).

Fiorenza rejects this vision, as it is not congruent with the vision of the *basileia*. The term *basileia* is normally translated as “kingdom” or “rule” and/or referring to “... the alternative world of justice and well-being intended by the life-giving power of G-d as reality and vision...” in the midst of ongoing patriarchal oppression and human degradation (1997: 6, 1993: 12). For Fiorenza, the discipleship of equals is based on the commission of Jesus that all disciples through the power of the Holy Spirit ought to share the good news of the gospel in a way which envisions an alternative world liberated from hunger, poverty, sexism, racism, discrimination and domination (1993:12).

Fiorenza argues that the vision of the *basileia* cannot be realized within a community which is patriarchal, hierarchal and exclusive. “God’s *basileia* is realized in Jesus’ table community with the poor, the sinners, the tax collectors, and prostitutes with all those who ‘do not belong’ to the ‘holy people’, who are somehow deficient in the eyes of the righteous” (1993:121). In other words, women are just as much included in the vision of the *basileia* as are men, in that this is essentially what God intended through His son, Jesus Christ. Fiorenza aptly states that,

The *basileia* of God is experientially available in the healing activity of Jesus. While there is much discussion as to whether miracle stories are historically “authentic”, there is insufficient attention paid to the vision of being human that is realized by the power of God active in Jesus. The *basileia* vision of Jesus makes people whole, healthy, cleansed, and strong. It restores people’s humanity and life. The salvation of the *basileia* is not confined to the soul but spells wholeness for the total person in her/his social relations. (1983:123)

The implications of this for Christian ministry are that this kind of vision seems to be largely absent. In preaching, reading and teaching from pulpits, as well as in academic discussions, this kind of vision is often either misconstrued or misinterpreted or, in, some instances, just not mentioned. This understanding is acknowledged with particular reference to the way in which patriarchal and hierarchical structures continue to dominate the day-to-day operations of the church and society. In many instances, the church is still a male-dominated environment in which male-dominated interpretations of texts and teaching are encountered on a large scale. Perhaps it could be argued that it is no surprise that transformation is slow in other areas such as combating poverty and violence against women and children, as well as general injustices to those who are marginalized.

Fiorenza’s notion of the discipleship of equals is perhaps one way in which Christian ministry could be viewed as a creative means which stimulates new ways of critical reflection and communication. A discipleship of equals also allows women to create for themselves a unique space within which to collaborate on issues such as identity, self-empowerment, spirituality and many other ethical and societal concerns. However, Fiorenza also deems it important for men to

be included in the discipleship of equals as both women and men are called to minister by virtue of their respective baptisms. Only on these premises can all humanity be completely “healed”, nurtured and strengthened to live their lives to the fullest measure of that which God intended for all of creation.

2.5 Assessment of Fiorenza’s notion of Christian ministry as a discipleship of equals

In response to Fiorenza’s notion of Christian ministry as a discipleship of equals, the following questions and comments may be raised. These concerns reflect my personal context as a female theological student, called to Christian ministry.

The first concern relates to Fiorenza’s view of Jesus as an egalitarian teacher. Several other New Testament scholars, for example, Elizabeth Johnson (1993, 1997), Letty Russell (1979, 1987, 1993), and Rosemary Radford Ruether (1992) share Fiorenza’s view that the life, teaching and ministry of Jesus can be characterised with the notion of a discipleship of equals. Nevertheless, as other scholars have argued, this may paint a too idealistic picture of Jesus. The way in which Jesus is portrayed is made to fit the views of contemporary expectations. Scholars such as Richard Hays (1996), William Spohn (1995), Ross Kraemer (1985), Cornel West (1985), and others mention the following aspects that do not support an egalitarian portrayal of Jesus.

Richard Hays (1996: 274) criticizes Fiorenza’s application of texts on the grounds that her choice of texts is too limited and vastly selective. Hays also criticizes her exegesis, particularly her use of the Greek term *ekklesia* to refer to the political assembly of free citizens, whereas within the New Testament context the word has no political overtones, referring simply to the assembly (1996: 275). Hays and ethicist William Spohn share the concern that Fiorenza’s emphasis on contemporary experience as normative could result in the eventual fading away of any historical biblical interpretations of various biblical texts. Hays (1996: 282) writes that,

[t]he danger of Fiorenza’s work is that her approach might ultimately undermine the authority of the New Testament so thoroughly that its liberating power would also be lost,

as the church finds its identity increasingly shaped by the ideas of liberal democracy and the apparent dictates of contemporary experience.

Spohn echoes this sentiment that “[o]ne wonders whether there is much scripture left for Christian ethics in this approach. ...The end result of Fiorenza’s complex project is a moral argument that seems minimally religious” (1995: 73). Similarly, these arguments could be waged against Fiorenza’s assertion that Jesus was an egalitarian on the basis of “selective interpretative methods”, according to both Hays and Spohn.

Cornel West (1985: 4) points to the “privileged status of Jesus Christ” in Fiorenza’s work and the degree to which she continues in the Kiekegaardian-Barthian tradition (1985: 4). Although applauding her position of faith, West criticizes the view of Jesus which Fiorenza presents as a “woman-identified man ...as if a reincarnate Jesus would join the contemporary feminist struggle against patriarchy” (1985: 4). West considers this a “presentist” reading of the gospel and the type of “ahistorical moralism” that Fiorenza criticizes in the other feminist theologians (1985: 4). According to West, if Jesus is portrayed in this manner, then Jesus could just as well not have been an egalitarian teacher for this would mean that Jesus would be biased in approach towards men.

Ross Kraemer (1985: 6) shares West’s views on Fiorenza’s work and his criticism of the “feminist Jesus” that emerges from the reconstruction. Kraemer questions whether the praxis of Jesus can actually be accurately reconstructed, and whether ultimately “all historians, Fiorenza included, are destined to rewrite history in their own images” (1985: 7).

Sara Butler’s criticism of Fiorenza’s book *Discipleship of equals: A critical feminist ecclesiology of liberation* (1993) is directed to Fiorenza’s arguments, which are not aligned to the Catholic church’s basic hierarchical foundation. According to Butler, Fiorenza experiences herself as being in a marginalised and barred position by the mere fact that she is a female layperson. Butler is of the opinion that Fiorenza’s critical theology of liberation is entirely based on her “...experience of oppression and also her struggles against it” (1994: 460). Butler also finds Fiorenza guilty of not being sufficiently critical of “feminist philosophy”. Butler questions how Fiorenza can value differences of culture, class, sexual orientation, and “...yet fail to assign any value to sexual difference” (1994: 461). Thus, Butler (1994: 461) argues,

One need not abandon the idea of complementarity altogether just because some theories of sex complementarity are inadequate. Denying the personal relevance of bodliness (an attitude revealed in her disparaging descriptions of marriage, motherhood, and consecrated virginity) hardly serves to promote women's dignity.

Although Butler makes a strong case against Fiorenza's notion of Christian ministry as a discipleship of equals, she also seems to overlook a few points. These points include the blatant oppression and discrimination of women as second-class members in the church even though women form the foundation and firmament of the church as the body of Christ. Fiorenza is therefore right when she seeks to unravel the historical reconstruction of women's history within the Christian tradition and highlight the plight of women in their desire to serve as equal disciples with men.

A second concern is that the concepts of "equality" and "egalitarian" as employed by Fiorenza are of modern origin and foreign to the thought and social reality of the ancient world. John Crossan formulates this concept aptly, "If Jesus did indeed establish 'an absolute equality of people' that denies the validity of any discrimination between them and negates the necessity of hierarchy among them, this absolute social novum must be demonstrated beyond any shadow of a doubt" (1994: 71). This, in my opinion, is also what is lacking in Fiorenza's notion of a discipleship of equals.

Thirdly, the terms "equality" and "equal" do not seem to be used in the New Testament texts to assert equality of all believers or to describe the social or economic relations characteristic of the Jesus movement in particular. I have decided not to focus too much on Fiorenza's exegetical and hermeneutical work in this study, but to take a closer look at the various texts that Fiorenza uses to construct her arguments. Fiorenza uses these terms in a way which looks very attractive in terms of their contemporary meaning. These are often terms which appear in liberatory texts, ideas, views and discussions. However, "equality" as a term needs to be understood at various levels. For example, when parents treat their children in an "equal" way, does this mean that they should give each child the same or does it mean that each of them is treated "equally" on the basis of what they need at different levels. In other words, the parents treat their children with "equality" in terms of their varied and respective needs with regard to the fact that they are all

different and therefore need unique and different degrees of attention, concern, support, care and other needs.

I therefore argue that Fiorenza needs to clarify these two terms, “equal” and “equality”, with specific reference to Christian ministry as a discipleship of equals. Women and men should be treated as equals in all spheres of church ministry and the broader society but according to their different attributes and characteristics in terms of what each can offer. We should therefore also guard against the notion of “assimilation” in terms of equality. Assimilation in this context means that people are accepted into a particular group on the basis that they eventually end up being like the dominant group. On the surface, the dominant group might be agreeing to the fact that everyone is different, but with closer reflection, they are expecting that others become like them in order for them to be completely accepted into the group. How does one deal with such differences between men and women with particular reference to women’s presence within Christian ministry?

However, the main concern for this thesis is to discern whether this notion of Christian ministry as a discipleship of equals is theoretically consistent, historically ingrained in biblical traditions and central Christian beliefs. Furthermore, I agree that this notion of Christian ministry which Fiorenza suggests is perhaps one of many visions that we can subscribe to as an alternative to the male-dominated, patriarchal vision of Christian ministry. However, this vision of Christian ministry is not sufficient as it has not taken into consideration the cultural and traditional perspectives of Christian ministry within other contexts, such as that of Africa, where the subordination of women and patriarchal structures of church and society are strongly ingrained and entrenched in traditional beliefs and historical rituals, not to mention in the vast array of religious beliefs. To address this fundamental problem with regard to Fiorenza’s notion of Christian ministry as a discipleship of equals, I will focus on the scholarly contributions of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, an African feminist theologian from Accra, Ghana. She has contributed in the quest for a more inclusive notion of Christian ministry, taking into account her religious and cultural background as an African woman. Unlike Fiorenza, Oduyoye employs the phrase “a partnership between both men and women” that should be the aim of Christian ministry.

CHAPTER 3

Mercy Amba Oduyoye on Christian ministry

3.1 Introduction

Mercy Amba Oduyoye refers to her vision of Christian ministry as “a partnership of both women and men”. She introduces this vision in her book *Introducing African women’s theology* (2001), after developing it since 1986 in a number of other works. According to Oduyoye, this vision of Christian ministry as a “partnership of both men and women” was sparked by the various debates on whether women should be ordained or not. However, these debates became even more important in Oduyoye’s context, as the role of women in the African culture was disputed in recent discourse.

In this chapter, I will investigate Oduyoye’s background and work as an African woman theologian. I will first look at her as person, teacher, scholar and theologian, with specific reference to her contribution towards the establishment of women’s theology in Africa. Secondly, I will explore a few of her main conversation partners. Thirdly, I will outline the cultural hermeneutics which Oduyoye and other African women theologians employ. Fourthly, I will introduce Oduyoye’s vision of Christian ministry as a “partnership of both men and women”. Finally, I will offer a critical assessment of this vision.

3.2 Mercy Amba Oduyoye’s background

Oduyoye’s vision for Christian ministry as a “partnership of both men and women” has to be understood against her personal background, her teaching experience in Africa, her ecumenical involvement and, especially, her work in the context of the Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians (The Circle).

Mercy Amba Oduyoye (née Yamoah) was born on 21 October 1934 in Asamankese, an Akyem area in Ghana. She is a Ghanaian Methodist and married Adedoyin Modupe, a Nigerian Anglican, in 1968. Oduyoye is formally educated in the fields of pedagogy and theology. She pursued her theological studies at the University of Ghana, Legon and at Cambridge University

in the United Kingdom. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in religion and a Master of Arts degree in theology. She was a high school teacher in both Ghana and Nigeria, after which she served on the faculty of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, where all her colleagues happened to be male. In addition, she has been visiting lecturer at theological institutions in other African countries, Canada, Europe, and the United States of America. During her years of teaching in the African context, Oduyoye had to address women's issues such as abortion, early marriages, forced marriages, and teenage pregnancy (Oduyoye 2001: viii). Throughout her teaching career, Oduyoye emphasised that "Christians in Africa must deal with the gap between 'Christianity preached' and 'Christianity lived'" (1986: 9).

Oduyoye's professional services to the ecumenical movement span 13 years, 3 of which were served as Youth Education Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), another 3 years as Youth Secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches, and then as Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches for 7 years (1989-1996). Oduyoye has also served on various ecumenical and theological bodies, for instance, the Standing Commission of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.

Throughout her career, Oduyoye's special interest has been the role of women in African churches and in Christian theology. She established an Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture at Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana in 1989. It was her initiative that brought into being The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (The Circle), which was founded at Legon in October 1989. The Circle came into existence as the result of the meeting of African theologians in December 1980, the attendance of individual academic theologians in the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), and the Ecumenical Association of African Theology (EEAAT), as organized by the Conference of African Theological Institutions (CATI). As initiator and pioneer of The Circle, she has been instrumental in highlighting African women's theology and its objectives, which include a study of the practice of religion in Africa with a view to showing how cultural factors, religious beliefs and myths affect women's lives both positively and negatively, sometimes prohibiting women's development. Another important objective of The Circle is to publish theological works written by African women, especially ones dealing with religion and culture. At present, Oduyoye is the Director of the Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture, Trinity Theological

Seminary, Legon, Ghana. Her most recent initiative involves raising funds to complete a building project called the *Thali ta Cumi* centre on the premises of Trinity Theological Seminary.

Oduyoye has published widely on missiology and women-centred theology. Her books as author, co-author or editor include the following: *Hearing and knowing: Theological reflections on Christianity in Africa* (1986); *With passion and compassion* (1988), co-edited with Virginia Fabella, *The will to arise: Women, tradition, and the church in Africa* (1992), with Musimbi Kanyoro as co-author, *Daughters of Anowa: African women and patriarchy* (1995) and *Who will roll the stone away? The ecumenical decade of churches in solidarity with women* (1995), which was edited by Oduyoye and published by the World Council of Churches. Oduyoye received three honorary doctorates in theology and ecumenical leadership, namely, from the University of the Western Cape (1989), the State University of Amsterdam (1991) and the Chicago Theological Seminary (1995).

3.3 Conversation partners

Oduyoye's life work also has to be understood within the context of her main conversation partners. These include, primarily, women engaged in ecclesial ministries in the African context, African (male) theologians, and the leadership in churches and academic institutions, especially in Africa, but also include those involved through her ecumenical work in other developing countries as well as Euro-American feminist scholars and theologians.

It has always been Oduyoye's main aim to teach women on issues of faith, the Bible, social challenges, culture and basic human rights. Oduyoye seeks to find creative ways of informing African women of their unique character traits as women and showing them that because of these traits, they too can attain various leadership roles to contribute towards a more equal and just society. These creative ways include practical exercises in which various local women are recruited from a particular church to be trained as workshop facilitators. These women are particularly exposed to various leadership styles and skills which they can implement once they return to their respective communities to train other women with regard to various issues such as abuse, power, HIV/AIDS, and so on.

Oduyoye also communicates her central concern, that is, women's role within church and society, to leaders of the various local communities by employing the cultural practice of a 'queen

mother'. Within each community, a 'queen mother' is elected on the basis of her age as it is usually an elderly woman who has experienced life and can, it is hoped, mentor and nurture other young women in their roles of becoming leaders in their own rights. 'Queen mothers' are subsequently trained to teach other women about their roles as wives, but also as single women. Through this medium of communication, Oduyoye enlightens women at grassroots level about their dignity and rights as human beings. Oduyoye points out that this is no easy task as women are constantly faced with negative criticism, not only from conservative men in their communities but also from women. Thus, Oduyoye contends that this is an ongoing process, in which cultural dialogue needs to be emphasised.

Oduyoye has been one of the first African women theologians to converse with African male theologians on matters including culture, identity, Christianity, ecumenism, patriarchy, hierarchical structures prevalent within church and society, and so forth. She has often been in conversation with well-known African male theologians such as John S. Mbiti, John Pobee, Tinyuko Maluleke, and Jesse Mugambi. Oduyoye's main aim when she communicates with these theologians is to engage with them on issues that are not only important for male theologians or African men in general but also for female theologians and women in Africa. In this context, the issue of culture and the rights of women are high on the agenda. The notions of leadership and ownership become crucial issues when Oduyoye engages with male African theologians. According to Oduyoye, the notion of reciprocity is crucial for dialogue and understanding between women and men in any culture, country or continent.

Oduyoye maintains close ties with the leadership of various churches in Africa and around the world. Oduyoye, in particular, targets women at leadership levels in the church as her conversation partners, even though she realizes that they are relatively few in number. Other African women theologians, such as Isabel Phiri, have joined Oduyoye in urging that more women take up leadership positions in the church. They do this by critically looking at how the African traditions and cultures play a pertinent role in keeping women away from leadership positions in the church and, inevitably, in society.

Oduyoye also ensures that academic institutions do not neglect their pivotal role in ensuring that women receive equal access to learning resources. It is within this context that the establishment of The Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians (The Circle) and the building of the

Tali ta cumi centre at Trinity theological seminary in Legon, Ghana stands out. The centre is an added resource aimed at the constant development of women (in particular) and men across Africa and the globe. Also, the fact that Oduyoye has been honoured by a number of academic institutions allows her to remain in constant contact to enhance academia and promote women in leadership roles in these various institutions.

Oduyoye is also in conversation with Euro-American feminist scholars such as Letty M. Russell, Sharon, Katie Canon, Delores Williams, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth A. Johnson, and so on. On an annual basis, Oduyoye receives invitations from various feminist scholars to act as visiting lecturer in their particular schools, departments or faculties. At these occasions, Oduyoye often shares ideas on issues such as globalization and its effects on Africa, specifically focusing on women, who remain the majority in care-giving and nurturance within communities. Other issues include diversity and its challenge to church and society from an African context, HIV/AIDS and the plight of women and orphans around the globe.

In the course of this project, a comparison will be drawn between Oduyoye and Fiorenza in terms of their conversation partners. This will be done in order to assess whether there are significant similarities and/or differences between these two theologians on the basis of their overall notions of Christian ministry. Thus, the critical question is whether Oduyoye and Fiorenza are, in fact, proposing similar visions of Christian ministry, that is, a discipleship of equals and a partnership of both men and women, or completely the opposite. This will be assessed in chapter 4 of this project.

3.4 Oduyoye's notion of a cultural hermeneutics

In the previous chapter, we saw that Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza employs a feminist hermeneutics. Oduyoye also reflects on the hermeneutics which she employs in her work. She describes this as a "cultural hermeneutics". In this section, I will investigate the meaning and significance of this notion of a cultural hermeneutics to understand Oduyoye's work and her position on Christian ministry as a partnership of both men and women.

For Oduyoye, hermeneutics does not refer primarily to the interpretation of biblical texts. Instead, the focus of her work as a theologian (and not a biblical scholar) is the appropriation of Christianity, that is, the gospel and the Christian faith within the African context. In this context, Oduyoye highlights the importance of taking the individual's experience into consideration when

reading and interpreting any biblical text. In this way, the context of the reader is noted as it impacts positively or negatively on how one reads and interprets biblical texts. Because biblical texts have often been interpreted by males (white and black) and became construed in many ways, Oduyoye has searched for creative ways of interpretation in order to appropriate the Good News and the Christian faith for both men and women, specifically within the African context.

In order to address this theological task, Oduyoye suggests that a cultural hermeneutics is especially suitable. For Oduyoye, 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. She argues that within the African culture, everything is not liberating, and therefore African women's approach to interpreting the Bible is crucial. According to Oduyoye, "Any interpretation of the Bible is unacceptable if it does harm to women, the vulnerable, and the voiceless" (2001: 12). Thus, she suggests that there are two ways of using culture as one criterion for adequate biblical and theological interpretation.

The first way is to take one's own experience and context seriously when interpreting the Bible, socially and/or ethically. If one's own experience is seriously taken into account, then it poses a challenge. The challenge is to link one's own experience and reality with other individuals' realities and experiences. In so doing, we become aware of others' stories and circumstances of renewal and growth. The second way in which culture can be used in cultural hermeneutics is by creating "a hermeneutics of liberation" in order to recognise the constructive aspects of culture and to endorse them. According to Oduyoye, it becomes the responsibility of everybody in and outside the community to contribute towards this all-important development of a hermeneutics of liberation. Oduyoye (2001: 12) thus states,

So cultural hermeneutics directs that we take nothing for granted, that we do not follow tradition and ritual and norms as unchangeable givens, 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.

From within an African context, Oduyoye contends that when engaging in cultural hermeneutics, one has to confront the challenge of grappling with one's culture while resisting those waiting to misuse and abuse it to undervalue a person or group. However, due to decades of oppression and impositions of Western traditions and culture, Africans have undermined themselves and their identities have been compromised and have become obscured. Oduyoye clearly states that a cultural hermeneutics seeks criticism from "within", and not an "imposition from without". According to Oduyoye (2001: 17), the main aim of cultural hermeneutics is to uncover the liberative messages from various cultural codes, myths, symbolisms and rituals.

However, it should be mentioned that cultural hermeneutics is a process by which we interpret everything through cultural eyes. This is not a new insight, except that Oduyoye and a few others have stressed that this also applies to the cultural experiences of African women. From this point of view, African women have acknowledged culture as a preferred device for domination. The experience of all colonised people has been that of triple oppression, namely, in terms of race, class and culture. Oduyoye therefore argues that what African people have to compete with is not only manifold cultures but also multiple oppressions. This leads to women and men falling into the trap of continuous patriarchal oppressive schemes. Therefore, according to Oduyoye, strategies for changing attitudes, viewpoints and practices are needed in opposing the existing patriarchal structures and schemes. Oduyoye thus states, "We always ask of culture, how do I understand this experience, how does it relate to my context, who is benefiting? Is it just?" (2001: 12). According to Oduyoye, a number of Euro-American feminists, of whom Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza is the forerunner, have made African women aware of the need for a hermeneutics of suspicion.¹⁵ The kind of cultural hermeneutics which Oduyoye proposes includes both a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of culture. This combination is crucial for Oduyoye as "... it shows African women taking a critical stance on African culture as well as promoting its commitment to wholeness and enhancement of life in the community" (2001: 13-14).

This is also important for the appropriation of the Gospel in an African context. It has to be made relevant for people living and practising their Christian faith in and around Africa. It is within

¹⁵ See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's works *In memory of her: A feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins* (1989) and *Discipleship of equals: A critical feminist ecclesiology of liberation* (1993).

this framework that the characteristics of African women's theology become important. These characteristics emphasise issues such as assertive communication by African women for women (including the wider African community) and their commitment to transformative and liberative practices when appropriating the Good News in various African communities. Oduyoye therefore contends that African women theologians are assertive in terms of communicating African women's own ideas and opinions on various issues. African women theologians help give those African women and men a voice who, for some or other reason, are not able to make their own voices heard. According to Oduyoye, African women theologians recognise and collaborate within the contexts of a variety of genres of women's theology. However, although some of the issues, such as the cultural oppression of women, may seem the same in some instances, Oduyoye (2001: 15) argues that although the contexts are similar, they are not necessarily the same. This approach becomes important as African women theologians strive to make their own voices heard through authentic experience and interpretation of the Gospel.

Furthermore, African women's theology is not restricted by different theories but makes an effort to move towards the issues of obligation, support and a transformative praxis. African women's theology starts from the premise of storytelling. It is within this framework that African women theologians ask the question, "What is the meaning of the story?" After this initial step of questioning the meaning of a particular story, the next step includes reflection. Reflection and procession are two key steps in understanding the various experiences of individuals, be it from whatever particular religious perspective. Oduyoye therefore contends that African women theologians "... identify what enhances, transforms or promotes in such a way as to build community and make for life-giving and life enhancing relationships" (2001:16).

Oduyoye's notion of a cultural hermeneutics also suggests the use of the category of cultural liberation as a particular heuristic key to appropriate the meaning of the Gospel and the Christian faith. This category is expressed in another important characteristic of African women's theology, namely, the idea that theology is characterised by storytelling, whereby ordinary people are given the opportunity to understand their faith and being in relationship with God and others. Similarly, Oduyoye contends that African women's theology is essentially characterized by "a narrative theology" (2001: 17).¹⁶ The assumption is that through stories, people connect with

¹⁶ See other African women theologians such as Christina Landman, Betty Govinden, Teresa Hinga, Bette Ekya, Rosemary Edet, and Denise Ackermann.

each other in terms of that which corresponds with their own life story and that of the actual story being told. These common elements can include feelings of hurt, pain, devastation, destruction, oppression, brokenness, alienation, joy, happiness, contentment, and so forth. Due to the nature and experience of telling one's own story, it is often the case that one can find "healing" and perhaps liberation from all that stands in the way of living together in harmony and living life to the fullest. Oduyoye adds that such a kind of theology is nevertheless "... consciously perspectival, because its intention is to share the point of view of African women on issues that affect all of Africa, as well as those they considered as having global implications, even if they are generated outside Africa" (2001: 17).

The significance of Oduyoye's work in this regard is highlighted by two main challenges posed by cultural hermeneutics. The first is that women (in general) have to wrestle with cultural practices more than men. Women are the ones who are constantly expected to conform; if they fail to do so, they will be labelled negatively, causing discrimination against them to continue like a vicious cycle. Secondly, they have to interpret scripture in a way that enhances the lives of all in the community. In other words, women are always conscious of their roles as life givers and caregivers, and therefore they seek life-enhancing relationships. With regard to the first challenge, Oduyoye questions how cultural practices are expressed within a religious context, namely, Christianity in Africa. It is within this context that Oduyoye once again highlights what the role of African women theologians is. Furthermore, in searching for suitable responses, they also need to investigate and appropriate suitable hermeneutical tools for biblical interpretation. With regard to the second challenge, Oduyoye emphasizes the desperate need for African women theologians to interpret the Bible for themselves. Therefore, Oduyoye states, "Women, fed on the understandings of men, are now doing their own reading. An area of great interest is the study of the Bible" (2001: 19). However, as noted before, this process of cultural hermeneutics is not entirely new, as it is generally applied to the experiences of African church women, men and their truncated ministries. An important theologian who has also contributed to this field of studies is Musimbi Kanyoro.

In the above, we have taken a look at cultural hermeneutics as employed by Oduyoye to investigate how and why African women theologians find it essential that cultural hermeneutics 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 extracted from both the Bible and African culture. These life-giving values should be enhanced in all spheres of society and the church.

The abuse and oppression which African Christian women experience within the church result not only from skewed interpretation, teaching and preaching but also from cultural practices. Oduyoye (1992:9-24) observes that this has led to low self-esteem in many women. Women have internalised this by accepting that they are inferior persons just because they are women. This has significant implications for the ordination of women, especially since the church itself stands divided on this issue. All too often, women see the church as alienating because of discrimination in the church against those who are marginalised (including women and children, gays, lesbians, the disabled, those who are HIV-positive). This raises numerous further questions around perceptions of the church amongst African women. According to Oduyoye (2001: 82), "Women speak of the Church's neuroses and double standards with regard to human sexuality. Hypocrisy reigns in the Church when it is men who need to change their ways".

This applies to women's experiences within the context of Christian ministry too. Ordained women are often placed as associate pastors where a male clergyman is still the authoritative figure over the particular female clergyman. The same could also be said of lay women within the church as their various experiences of pain and hurt are all too often not heard and not treated seriously. It is often the case that women make crucial contributions to the church behind the scenes (supposedly where they ought to be), while men take the credit whenever the outcomes are deemed to be successful (Oduyoye 2001: 82). Oduyoye comments that if the church views itself as a redeemed community of believers, the priesthood of all believers should become a reality in the church. It is within this framework that Oduyoye proposes her vision of Christian ministry as a partnership of both men and women.

3.5 Christian ministry as a partnership of both men and women

"Partnership of women and men, ordained or not, is the true image of the Church of Christ" (Oduyoye 2001: 86).

When Oduyoye makes this statement, she does so from the vantage point of seeing the church divided against itself in terms of the unity of the genders, that is, male and female. Furthermore

Oduyoye's motive for such a notion of Christian ministry as a "partnership between both men and women" stems from her reflection on the oppression and marginalisation of women within and outside the church and within their respective cultures. Also, this notion stems from Oduyoye's own conviction that all have been called by God to serve him with the various charisms which they have received from His hand. It is thus Oduyoye's argument that all people have been created in the image of God and are called to be "Christ-like" (2001: 86). According to Fiorenza and Oduyoye, through the act and sacrament of baptism all persons are recognized and accepted as part of the body of Christ, irrespective of gender, culture, race, and or religious affiliation. This is to sketch a background to Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals".

In addition, Oduyoye accuses the church of not being critical enough of itself in terms of gender discrimination and injustices. The sins of idolatry and unequal power structures which oppress people instead of empowering and enhancing the lives of Christians as well as those around them are still clearly prevalent in the way that these oppressive obstacles are justified time and again within various religious and secular circles and debates. According to Oduyoye (1990: 13), this kind of faith is not merely detrimental to humankind but also to the entire creation, which forms part and parcel of God's purpose and mission for the world. Oduyoye (1990: 13-14) thus states, "We do not empower women to challenge oppressive structures in the global community ... We as women and men are called to repent, and together we say: 'We will roll the stone away'."

This notion of Christian ministry which Oduyoye proposes is also strongly connected to the contributions which she made while serving as one of three deputy general secretaries of the World Council of Churches during the late 1980s and early 1990s. As a result of her work during this period, Oduyoye and others were instrumental in bringing about what has been called the ecumenical decade of the churches in solidarity with women, in 1990. Oduyoye (1990), in her book *Who will roll the stone away? The ecumenical decade of the churches in solidarity with women*, emphasises one of the most pertinent challenges that women were able to pose to the Church at the time. In and through this book, Oduyoye gives a clear account of the reasons behind the decision to launch the Decade, the different ways it was launched in various parts of the world and the expectations around it.

In her book *Introducing African women's theology: Introductions in feminist theology* (2003),

Oduyoye discusses her notion of Christian ministry as a partnership between both women and men to do Christ's work among God's people because they have been baptised into Christ.

In her work on Christian ministry, Oduyoye seeks to maintain the positive notion that men and women have been created for partnership. She emphasises that all persons are equal and that this is significant, particularly within the African context. She stresses the need for African women to be liberated from male patriarchy and dominance in both church and society. She believes that women have a crucial role to play to ensure their own rights and liberation. Her argument is that all persons who are baptised are duly called into ministry in partnership with one another and as a discipleship of equals. In this regard, Oduyoye draws on the ecumenical notion that Christian ministry includes the "whole people of God" by virtue of their baptisms.

It is within this context that Oduyoye proposes the notion of Christian ministry as a partnership between both men and women. Oduyoye discusses this notion of Christian ministry in various publications. As a result of gender inequalities in Christian ministry in a divided church, Oduyoye (2001:85) 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.

Following these observations, a number of features of Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a "partnership of both men and women" may be highlighted.

a) Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a *partnership* may be understood as a response to the oppression and marginalisation of women within and outside the church and from her conviction that all have been called by God to serve with the various charisms which they have received. She maintains that all have been created in the image of God, and all are called to be Christ-like. Through baptism, all persons become part of the body of Christ, irrespective of gender, culture, race, or previous religious affiliation.

b) Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a partnership between men and women is also based on her understanding of the Greek concept *koinonia*, which is a "community of believers constituting a communion" (2001:85). Her argument is that *koinonia* implies a community of sharing and participation. The concept of justice forms an important part of *koinonia* (Oduyoye 1995). The notion of *koinonia* plays a vital role in the ecclesiology of The Circle. In this context,

the notion of *koinonia* serves as a powerful reinforcement of mutuality in the partnership between men and women. Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a "partnership between both men and women is also based on her understanding of the Greek concept *koinonia*, which is a "community of believers constituting a communion" (Oduyoye 2001: 85). Together with other African women theologians, Oduyoye focused on *koinonia* as a particular concept of ecclesiology at The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians' (The Circle) conference in 1996. At this conference, women from across Africa named, wrote and discussed the inequalities and deficiency of democracy in the church. Due to the lack of democracy and injustices towards women in the church, the overall "second class" treatment of women become apparent, and thus women are not recognized and treated as persons who have full citizenship in God's household. Furthermore, African women theologians such as Amarech Getachew, Vidila Vuadi, Molee Boame, and Nkebi Lwamba all agree with the fact that injustice prevails as long as there is still a great need for women to make decisions in the church. This also contributes to the violation of human rights for both men and women within church and society. Thus, according to Oduyoye, the concept of *koinonia* is powerful and fitting, as the notion of mutuality becomes a central premise for Christian ministry as a "partnership between both men and women".

c) The partnership of men and women is further characterised by the term *solidarity* (Oduyoye 1990). According to Oduyoye, the term solidarity suggests mutuality and reciprocity. Oduyoye defines solidarity in the following way: "Solidarity is walking hand in hand, and developing strength through unity so that common interests are protected and common aims are achieved" (1990: 43). According to Oduyoye, such solidarity implies that churches are called to work hand in hand to ensure that the rights and needs of women are highlighted. Oduyoye insists that the church is made up of both men and women and should therefore not be viewed exclusively as a men's club. Through its solidarity, the church should recognize that women rely on men and vice versa. Men need to learn to rely on women in bringing about communion within the body of Christ (Oduyoye 1990: 49). Oduyoye cautions that women cannot address gender injustices on their own; they need the help, participation and co-operation of men in order for the church to be the "servant of the servants" to a broken and wounded world. This should be done in a way which does not allow women to fall into the trap of assimilation within the prevalent structures of dominance, patriarchy and hierarchy. Oduyoye states that the term *solidarity* is one of those

words we can only understand through experience.¹⁷ According to Oduyoye, the term *solidarity* includes both mutuality and reciprocity. Thus, the definition of solidarity that Oduyoye offers is one that includes unity as a point of reference to enhance the development of widespread well-being and frequent aspirations that are accomplished. Oduyoye, in her own words, states, “Solidarity is walking hand in hand, and developing strength through unity so that common interests are protected and common aims are achieved” (1990: 43). However, Oduyoye also cautions against the fact that solidarity does not always uphold “life-affirming” goals, particularly when the focus is on “biblical solidarity” (1990: 45).

The theme of solidarity which Oduyoye explicates is the overall challenge to the church. She elaborates that if the church seeks to be in solidarity with women, then it first needs to assess its biblical solidarity with women and, second, its solidarity with humanity. According to Oduyoye, a further meaning of solidarity includes that the churches are called to work hand in hand to ensure that the rights and needs of women are highlighted, in both church and society. In helping us to understand this notion of solidarity, Oduyoye states that the church is made up of both men and women, and therefore the church should not be viewed as a men’s club exclusively. By being in solidarity, the church must recognize that women must rely on men and visa versa; men need to learn to rely on women in bringing about true communion within the body of Christ (Oduyoye 1990: 49).

d) Such a vision for the church will not be sustainable without the formation of partnerships and the sharing of ecclesial responsibilities. For Oduyoye, this is where the problem with patriarchy lies. She says, “The present state of the partnership of men and women in all cultures, on all continents and in all churches, is a state of sin” (1990:53). How should partnerships between men and women be accomplished? Oduyoye suggests a few ways: 1) by ensuring equity in representation within the various church bodies, 2) critical reflection on the visible participation of women, and 3) avoiding quotas and numbers in representation. Oduyoye (1990:54) emphasizes that women’s presence within the various decision-making bodies of the Church “... is an index of recognition of one’s responsibility to be in active partnership.” In order to have a firm understanding of Oduyoye’s notion of Christian ministry as a “partnership between both men and women”, the church needs to grapple with the affirmation of women’s humanity in all

¹⁷ See Mercy Oduyoye’s work *Who will roll the stone away? The decade of the churches in solidarity with women* (Geneva: WCC, 1990) for her own account and experience of what solidarity is, from her context.

spheres of life, as Christians as well as non-Christians. The question as to what exactly constitutes the church becomes crucial in this regard.¹⁸ However, the point that Oduyoye wants to make is that the image of the church is not reflective of both men and women. It is her opinion that “eucharistic ministry” should not be viewed outside the underlying context that the very power and status which comes with such a calling must be seen within “... the context of the responsibility to serve” (1990: 51). This is essentially what women recognize in the church, according to Oduyoye, and precisely what women are striving for within the church, and, in so doing, they will also reflect this image in the wider society. However, Oduyoye cautions against an over rigid application of this view as she acknowledges that women cannot do it all on their own. Therefore Oduyoye (1990: 52) states,

... women are called to unveil their true womanhood, to reinvent themselves, to piece themselves together from the bits of humanity various cultures and religions have left for them, reproduce women’s own images of true humanity. ... women must become self - defined human beings.

Out of the left-overs of the fabric of history, women will make a cloth of many colours. A quilt which will force both church and society to notice the variety of ways of being women. Women will demonstrate that the wonderful diversity of human character, accepted in the case of men, also exists among women.

From these observations, it is evident that Oduyoye’s notion of Christian ministry not only poses a challenge to the church but also to cultural norms and practices that continue to distort, suppress and undermine the contributions by women in church and society. One may argue that Oduyoye’s use of the term “partnership” is closely intertwined with the community-orientated goal of African cultures.

¹⁸ For the purpose of this discussion, this particular concern cannot be comprehensively dealt with, as this would disturb the overall argument of what Oduyoye essentially means by a notion of Christian ministry as a “partnership between both men and women”. However, various other resources may be consulted in this regard: see Avery Dulles (1974), *Models of the Church*; Mary Hunt (1999), “ ‘We women are church’: Roman Catholic women shaping ministries and theologies,” in *The non-ordination of women and the politics of power*, edited by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Hermann Häring; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1993), *Discipleship of equals: A critical feminist ekklesia-logy of liberation*; Rosemary Radford Ruether (1985), *Women-Church: Theology and practice of feminist liturgical communities*.

3.6 Assessment of Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a partnership of both men and women

In response to Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a partnership of both men and women, the following questions and comments may be raised.

a) What is the nature of equality within the partnerships between men and women? Partnerships are common in the business world and in relations between industrialised and developing countries. In such partnerships, forms of hierarchy typically prevail. How can the notion of partnership as a characteristic of Christian ministry avoid such pitfalls?

b) Isabel Apawo Phiri, the chairperson of The Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians questions the practical value of such a notion of Christian ministry within the context of African churches, which do not allow women in leadership positions. Phiri (1997) suggests that the fact that women still do not occupy leadership positions in the church is no longer a theological question, but a cultural one. According to Phiri (1997:73), "African cultures do not allow women to lead men." Given the influence of African culture on the ways in which people think, communicate and make sense of the world in which they exist, one may question the feasibility of Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a partnership of both men and women. How are women to deal with male clergy who feel threatened by women who are educated and assertive? This also poses questions regarding the inculturation of Christianity and Christian theology within African culture.

c) The danger of assimilation should be noted in any attempt to incorporate women into decision-making bodies. Women cannot be in partnership with men if this implies assimilation into the dominant male culture. As African women theologians may ask: Whose partner should women be? To what extent will women be able to negotiate their own identities and to avoid simply adopting male forms of leadership in the church?

d) How does one allow for cultural diversity in Christian ministry as a partnership between men and women? Is this notion of partnership sufficiently inclusive to express a global vision for Christian ministry?

In the discussion above I have explored Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a "partnership of both men and women". In the first instance I investigated Oduyoye's background as an African woman theologian. Secondly, I assessed the conversations which Oduyoye has with different partners. Thirdly, an investigation was made of the kind of hermeneutics which Oduyoye employs namely, cultural hermeneutics. Fourthly, I also explored Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a "partnership of both men and women" in more detail. Lastly and most importantly, I also offered a critical assessment of Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry with the overall aim of highlighting the similarities and differences between Oduyoye's vision of Christian ministry as a "partnership of both men and women within an African context to Fiorenza's vision of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals" in a Euro-American context.

CHAPTER 4

A critical comparison between Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's notion of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals" and Mercy Amba Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a "partnership of both men and women"

4.1 Introduction

The main aim of this project is to explore the similarities and differences between the notions of Christian ministry in the works of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mercy Amba Oduyoye. In the previous chapters, I traced the contributions by these two scholars with regard to the notion of Christian ministry. I focused on their personal backgrounds, their main conversation partners, the hermeneutics which they employ and, finally, their notions of Christian ministry. I demonstrated that Fiorenza's notion of Christian ministry has to be understood within the context of feminist theology, while Oduyoye's contribution in this regard has to be understood within the context of African women's theology.

In this chapter, I will offer a critical comparison of Fiorenza and Oduyoye's positions on Christian ministry, following the same pattern. The first two sections of the chapter will offer a comparison of the contexts within which Fiorenza and Oduyoye work and the partners with whom they engage in conversation. In the third section of the chapter, I will discuss the similarities and differences with regard to the forms of hermeneutics which these two authors employ. The fourth and main section of this chapter will then focus on Fiorenza and Oduyoye's views on Christian ministry. I will argue that there are significant similarities between the notions of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals" and a "partnership of both men and women", especially with reference to the connotations of gender equality, reciprocity and solidarity. Nevertheless, there are also important differences between these two notions, especially with reference to the modes of expression, the implied rhetorical thrust and the rhetorical context within which these concepts are used.

2.2 Rhetorical contexts

Fiorenza works within feminist theology, while Oduyoye works within African women's theology. There are similarities between these two discourses with regard to the oppression of women. However, precisely on this point, there are also differences which are related to the

cultural and ethnic orientations of these two authors. More importantly, there are differences with respect to their social contexts in terms of class and race. Such differences are illuminated by similar distinctions between feminist and womanist theology. In Oduyoye's case, one must take into account her need to respond to the legacy of colonialisation, cultural and linguistic imperialism and the ambiguous history of Western mission.

Fiorenza is of German descent and now works and resides in the United States of America. Oduyoye is of Ghanaian descent and works both in Ghana and Geneva, Switzerland. Fiorenza is therefore primarily based in the so-called First World whereas Oduyoye's contributions respond primarily to the Third World. Fiorenza and Oduyoye are both well-respected scholars and theologians. As women theologians, they often find themselves in a male-dominated working environment. They both speak of the need to ensure that all people realise their full humanity in and through Jesus Christ. Fiorenza and Oduyoye agree that both women and men are called by God to do Christ's work by virtue of their baptism. Although they use terminology that is quite similar to express their notions of Christian ministry, there are significant differences with reference to the different contexts within which they engage in theological reflection, namely, that of Euro-American feminist theology and that of African women's theology, respectively. These differences shape their overall understanding of Christian ministry.

Oduyoye and Fiorenza practice theology from different cultural backgrounds. Oduyoye does theology from an African women's perspective, whereas Fiorenza does theology from a Euro-American feminist perspective. Both of them focus on issues relating to the place of women in a patriarchal context - both in church and society. Oduyoye, for example, offers a critical analysis of African culture with specific reference to the patriarchal oppression of women. According to Oduyoye, African culture is comprised of different rituals and folktales. The latter, in particular, becomes important as Oduyoye demonstrates how different stories are told in which women end up being portrayed as the "weaker" character or the "bad wicked witch". Oduyoye writes, "Folktales with witches as characters usually portray them as old women, occasionally benevolent and wise, but more often malevolent" (1995: 41).

It is Oduyoye's aim to deconstruct this kind of negative portrayal of women in the African culture (Oduyoye 1995: 40-51). She believes that this part of African culture must be transformed so that women and men are viewed and understood as "co-creators", creating a vibrant vision of

life and well-being for the entire community (Oduyoye 1995: 184-187). It is within this framework that Oduyoye and Fiorenza strive to give women, who for long had to be content with what men offered in most sectors of society, a voice and space of their own.

Fiorenza deconstructs various biblical texts that have almost succeeded in making women completely invisible in the church, academia and society. Her aims are to re-read and re-interpret scripture, to unmask and reveal the different leadership roles, positions, and contributions of women in ancient texts.¹⁹ Fiorenza has received numerous accolades for this initiative, but has also received a fair share of criticism as well.

According to Fiorenza and Oduyoye, the purpose of such deconstruction is not to “eliminate” men from the “equation” completely. Instead, the aim is to ensure that both women and men become enlightened and transformed to offer a ministry of partnership and equality.

Although they come from different backgrounds in terms of country of origin, language, culture, socialization, economics and tradition, they share the common experience of being women. However, their actual experiences are different with regard to issues of oppression. This is precisely the point that many African-American womanist theologians make when they refer to the “triple” oppression of black women.²⁰ This is often one of the important distinctions that womanist theologians make when asked what the difference is between Euro-feminism and African-American womanism. On the basis of Fiorenza and Oduyoye’s different racial orientations, my argument is that their particular experiences of oppression differ from one another. There are various factors influencing this notion. The differences include factors such as affluence and poverty, social orientation, scarce versus available resources, exposure versus restriction, and belonging to a colonised people as opposed to a colonizing people.

This does not imply that they do not have any similar experiences with regard to oppression. The fact that, as women theologians, they experience oppression due to the prevalent patriarchal, hierarchical and male-dominated structures in church and society is an important point in common. This commonality is recognized as a point of departure for common theological work. Most women theologians agree on this point in order to deal with the divisive discrepancies between the various racial and class settings (Clifford 2001: 79-85).

¹⁹ See Fiorenza’s work.

²⁰ See the work of Katie Canon, Delores S. Williams, Bell Hooks, Marcia Riggs, and others.

Another element that Oduyoye and Fiorenza have in common is emphasizing women's issues of oppression, invisibility and voicelessness in church and society. Furthermore, both of them seek to find alternative ways of envisioning the various roles and contributions of women in the past and present. Both theologians make use of the process of deconstruction (i.e. Fiorenza in biblical studies and church history and Oduyoye in African culture as well as history) in an attempt to topple prevalent patriarchal structures and male chauvinistic attitudes and mindsets. Such attitudes, mindsets and structures still restrict women to a large extent. However, although this is a common initiative of both theologians, they go about it in different ways. Fiorenza aims to deconstruct ancient biblical texts, and Oduyoye seeks to deconstruct African culture. They do so firstly by the way in which they choose their conversation partners and secondly by employing different forms of hermeneutics, that is, feminist and cultural hermeneutics. These two aspects will be discussed in the next two sections.

4.3 Similarities and differences of conversation partners

The rhetoric employed by Fiorenza and Oduyoye should not only be understood in terms of the discourses within which they participate and their respective social contexts. It is also important to reflect on the significance of their more immediate conversation partners.

The first similarity between Fiorenza and Oduyoye's conversation partners is that both theologians speak to oppressed women in Christian ministry. Fiorenza, in particular, addresses the Roman Catholic community, whereas Oduyoye converses with the ecumenical community. These communities often include other feminist and womanist scholars from religious and secular backgrounds. Fiorenza and Oduyoye challenge the notion of patriarchal oppression.

A second similarity is that Fiorenza and Oduyoye address the leaders within such religious communities. In particular, they seek out women in leadership roles within various congregations. The main reason is that Fiorenza and Oduyoye agree that women need to create a space for themselves in order to address their concerns. In this way, the notions of unity and solidarity amongst women become solidified. This may then become a foundation for women to gain strength from each other's life experiences and to strive for creative ways of enlightening women (as well as men).

Thirdly, both theologians maintain strong communication links with a number of academic institutions. Various universities and theological seminaries have honoured both Fiorenza and Oduyoye. Both theologians have also received numerous invitations to these academic institutions as visiting lecturers. In this way, Fiorenza and Oduyoye continue to contribute to theological discourse, in particular to Euro-American (Christian) feminism and African (Christian) women's theology. Nevertheless, Fiorenza and Oduyoye differ from one another in terms of the main context within which their conversation partners are situated.

Fiorenza addresses the Roman Catholic church in particular as it still prohibits women from the ordained ministry. In Fiorenza's opinion the Roman Catholic church continues to oppress women in its teaching and preaching practices regarding the role of women in both church and society. Although Oduyoye also seeks to address oppressed women, she does so from an ecumenical perspective. In this way, experience becomes the important mechanism through which Oduyoye communicates with other women. However, the difference between Fiorenza and Oduyoye at this point is that Oduyoye is faced with additional challenges of African culture as well as Western notions of Christianity within Africa.

The second difference is that Oduyoye's conversation partners include various African (male) theologians to help address the common concerns of patriarchy in church and society. It is indeed important to see the situatedness of African women's theology within the context of African theology. African women's theology may be regarded as one expression of African theology in that it resists colonial forms of domination and control, in that it calls for a retrieval of African culture, and especially in the ways in which it draws from the experiences and narratives of suffering and pain of African women. African women theologians therefore affirm the emergence of an indigenous African theology and often express their solidarity with African male theologians. At the same time, they seek to challenge the forms of patriarchy which are assumed, condoned and legitimised, explicitly and implicitly, in African theology. They call for a far more critical appreciation of African culture. They also need to resist the temptation of underplaying the seriousness of patriarchal culture in order to present a united front in celebrating indigenous African culture.

This indicates that there is an internal problem within African theology. The predicament within which African women theologians find themselves is that they have to struggle not only against

patriarchy in church and society but also against remaining distortions within what is deemed to be a more progressive theology. African women theologians acknowledge their solidarity with African theologians but also identify fundamental flaws within African theology. African women's theology is therefore engaged in a battle on more than one side. They need to unmask and support at the same time.

One may therefore argue that African women's theology remains distinct from other feminist theologies. In a similar way, African-American womanist theologians have insisted that their situation is distinct from that of Euro-American women in what is described as the "triple" oppression of black women: being women, relatively poor, black and formerly enslaved.

This calls for further reflection on the similarities and differences between African-American womanist theology and African women's theology. Important differences which come to mind here are the legacy of slavery, differences in economic status, and military power. African women are often engaged in a struggle to secure a sustainable livelihood in ways that African-American women are not. More importantly, the relationship between American black theology and womanist theology deserves further attention in the future.

The main argument in this chapter is that these two theologians differ from one another in terms of their conversation partners. In both cases, their main conversation partners are women who are engaged in Christian ministries but whose contributions are not appreciated or are suppressed by a predominantly male church leadership. In this sense, the connotations of their two notions of Christian ministry are quite similar. However, their subsidiary conversation partners differ from one another (for Fiorenza, male academics and non-Christian feminist scholars – whom she needs to persuade that Christianity can be defended against feminist criticism, and for Oduyoye, African theologians (mostly male) as well as ecumenical leadership).

4.4 Similarities and differences of feminist and cultural hermeneutics

In chapter 2 of this thesis, it was noted that Fiorenza employs a hermeneutics of suspicion and remembrance. In chapter 3, it was noted that Oduyoye makes use of cultural hermeneutics. I will first discuss the similarities and then the differences between these forms of hermeneutics.

The first similarity which is identified is the ideology-critical dimension of both feminist and cultural hermeneutics. Fiorenza, in particular, has made significant contributions in this regard. Her introduction of a “hermeneutics of suspicion” has become quite influential, especially in feminist circles. Oduyoye does not offer a theoretical exposition of a hermeneutics of suspicion, but she often engages in readings of the Bible which resist the cultural legitimisation of male role responsibilities in church and society.

A second similarity is that both Oduyoye’s cultural and Fiorenza’s feminist hermeneutics encourage women to become the subjects of interpretation and to resist any tendency of male clergy and laity to read the Bible on behalf of women. In so doing, both theologians encourage women to read and interpret biblical texts for themselves and also as a way to enhance not only themselves but also the entire community of believers.

A third similarity is that Fiorenza and Oduyoye both distinguish between a critical and a reconstructive dimension of their forms of hermeneutics. The aim of such a reconstructive dimension is to encourage and to uncover a sometimes hidden but liberative meaning in texts which may otherwise be used to oppress women. Fiorenza describes the reconstructive dimension as a “hermeneutics of remembrance” in which both oppressive and liberative early readings of the biblical texts are recalled as a source of inspiration for contemporary women to address an analogous plight within which they are situated. The reconstructive dimension of the “hermeneutics of liberation” Oduyoye proposes is quite similar to Fiorenza’s notion of a “critical feminist liberationist interpretation”. Both scholars therefore emphasise the category of liberation for women and other marginalised persons as a description of the rhetorical thrust of the biblical texts.

Fourthly, both Fiorenza and Oduyoye highlight the contextual nature of hermeneutics. As Fiorenza (2001: 96-97) states, “What we see depends on where we stand. Our social location or rhetoric context is decisive for how we see the world, construct reality, or interpret biblical texts.” Likewise, Oduyoye (2001: 12) states, “We always ask of culture, how do I understand this experience, how does it relate to my context, who is benefiting? Is it just?”

Finally, both a feminist and a cultural form of hermeneutics recognize that hermeneutical theory would be useless if it does not facilitate a liberative praxis. For Fiorenza, hermeneutical theory may indeed offer a helpful instrument for oppressed women in their struggles. In a very similar

way, Oduyoye emphasises both the theoretical and practical aspects of cultural hermeneutics within an African context.

On this basis, let us now take a look at some of the significant differences between feminist and cultural hermeneutics. There are numerous references to the Bible and exegetical discussions in Oduyoye's work. As a biblical scholar, Fiorenza's work offers a more detailed and perhaps more sophisticated reading and analysis of biblical texts. One may infer from this that Fiorenza's work has a more overt biblical orientation. However, this observation would mask an important aspect of the rhetorical thrust of their forms of hermeneutics. In labelling her hermeneutics as "feminist", Fiorenza is quite aware of the scepticism regarding the Bible in Western feminist circles. She often acknowledges that both the production and the interpretation of biblical texts reflect patriarchal interests. She recognises the need to defend the very possibility of using the Bible as a resource and a source of inspiration in feminist agendas. By contrast, in labelling her form of hermeneutics as "cultural", Oduyoye typically assumes that the Bible plays a vitalising role in the (sub) cultures of women's movements in churches in Africa. Her conversation partners would typically read the Bible with a hermeneutics of trust, not suspicion. In a somewhat playful and creative manner, they would make use of references to the biblical characters to describe, understand and assess their own contexts. This is epitomised by the work of The Circle for Concerned African Women Theologians, where biblical stories and stories from the experiences of African women are often juxtaposed. Although the connotations of Fiorenza's feminist and Oduyoye's cultural hermeneutics are quite similar, their rhetorical thrust is not the same. The critical and liberative potential of a feminist biblical hermeneutics has to be defended amidst many rival resources in the feminist movement. By contrast, a cultural biblical hermeneutics has been widely and enthusiastically adopted in the context of The Circle.

Oduyoye's use of the term "cultural hermeneutics" has to be understood against the background of debates on Christianity and culture within the context of African theology. With her male colleagues, Oduyoye recognises the need for authentically indigenous African expressions of biblical interpretation. Some form of contextualisation, inculturation or indigenisation may indeed prove liberating, given the dominant legacy of Western mission in African churches. At the same time, Oduyoye recognises that African cultures have been distorted through patriarchy in the past and that the use of the term "African culture" may continue to mask patriarchal oppression in churches and local communities. A cultural hermeneutics therefore has to maintain

a vigilant and critical stance even as it seeks to affirm African culture, especially the cultural expressions of women's groups. By contrast, one may argue that Fiorenza is far less critical of the feminist movement from which she derives the term "feminist hermeneutics". She is, of course, quite aware of the various and successive strands of the feminist movement, but she remains at least sympathetic to this movement and seeks to explore its significance for biblical scholarship and especially for the Roman Catholic Church, of which she is a member. She recognises the need to complement the (sometimes reductionist) secular manifestations of feminism by highlighting the oppressive, but also the potentially liberative, role which religious traditions may still have in a secularised civil society.

A second difference relates to the different characteristics of feminists and cultural hermeneutics. Feminist hermeneutics is characterised by the reclaiming of Christian theology and history as women's own theology and history. The emphasis on theology and history is significant, as feminist theologians believe that for many years, theology and history have reflected the events, thoughts, arguments, dialogues, and debates of "white" European males only. Fiorenza contends that the ideas and thoughts of "white" males" have been "accepted" as the norm for the rest of society. In Fiorenza's opinion, this is, but should not be, the case, and therefore she continues to embark on a mission to reconstruct theology and history so that it includes the voices of women from any particular background in the fields of history and theology.

Within cultural hermeneutics, the aspects of theological and historical reconstruction are not as pertinent as in feminist hermeneutics. The reasons for this could be that cultural hermeneutics is still fairly new in its existence as a discourse within African women's theology and other African theologies. However, cultural hermeneutics in its short existence was able to highlight a number of important characteristics such as a "theology of relations", "inter-relationships", "intentional dialogue", "narrative theology" as well as one's own unique experience. The kind of characteristics identified within cultural hermeneutics are not necessarily clearly visible within feminist hermeneutics. The reason for this could be that feminist hermeneutics has emerged within a Western, individualistic context, whereas cultural hermeneutics is established within an African, communalistic context. In other words, in cultural hermeneutics, the community is valued more, in contrast to feminist hermeneutics, which values the individual. Cultural hermeneutics is thus based on the important notion of relations, which is ever present within African theology and religion. In other words, cultural hermeneutics is used as an instrument to

highlight the important significance of relationships, which form the “vital force” of life within African theology and religion (Sakuba 2004).

On the basis of this comparison of the form of hermeneutics employed by Fiorenza and Oduyoye, I will now explore the similarities and differences between Fiorenza’s notion of Christian ministry as a “discipleship of equals” and Oduyoye’s notion of Christian ministry as a “partnership between both men and women”.

4.5 A comparison between a discipleship of equals and a partnership of both men and women as notions of Christian ministry

Oduyoye and Fiorenza both recognise various problems which women often experience within the context of Christian ministry, including a lack of recognition for their ministries, an undermining or marginalisation of the leadership roles played by women in local initiatives, a lack of availability of resources and church financing for women’s projects and the domination and paternalism which women experience from their male counterparts in Christian ministry. Oduyoye argues that the church remains divided against itself since double standards are applied regarding the recognition of the ministries of men and women. Likewise, Fiorenza emphasises the plight of women within Christian ministry by tracing her own cartography of struggle as a Catholic layperson and theologian. Both these theologians are concerned that such practices within the context of Christian ministries merely mirror similar practices in society, where women are treated as “second class” citizens on the basis of cultural traditions and role expectations within social institutions.

It is clear that although Oduyoye and Fiorenza come from different backgrounds and practice theology from different contexts, they agree that all believers, men and women, have to participate in Christian ministry by virtue of their baptism. These two women have a common concern that the equal significance of the ministries of women and men should be recognised and that these ministries should be allowed to complement each other. This is not only necessary for the liberation of women in the context of Christian ministry but also for the sake of the liberation of men who are equally trapped in oppressive structures. Both Fiorenza and Oduyoye subsequently argue for a new vision of liberation, justice and equality for all people within the

context of Christian ministry. On this basis, they aim to ensure that men and women participate together in renewing and re-building life-sustaining relationships.

Despite these similarities, the terminology which is employed by Fiorenza and Oduyoye to characterise Christian ministry is obviously not exactly the same. Fiorenza suggests a vision of Christian ministry as a “discipleship of equals”, while Oduyoye speaks of a “partnership of both men and women”. The question which has to be addressed here is whether the differences between these terms are purely semantic or whether their connotations differ significantly from one another. In the discussion below, I will identify at least three important differences in this regard.

The first minor difference is that Oduyoye’s notion of Christian ministry as a “partnership of both men and women” is derived from her understanding and interpretation of the Easter event in The Gospel according to St. John. The Commissioning event in The Gospel according to St. Matthew forms the point of departure for Fiorenza’s notion of Christian ministry as a “discipleship of equals”.

The second difference is with regard to the different concepts which Fiorenza and Oduyoye use to describe and explain their respective notions of Christian ministry. Fiorenza’s notion of a “discipleship of equals” is based on her understanding of the Greek term *ecclesia*.²¹ According to Fiorenza, this term denotes an alternative vision for church and society. This alternate vision refers to another Greek word, *basileia* – which, according to Fiorenza, refers to a “new world”, free from hunger, poverty, domination, injustice, and inequality. Fiorenza argues that it is essentially within this context that men and women can be transformed and united to bring forth wholeness and ensure the well-being of creation.

Oduyoye’s concept of Christian ministry as a “partnership of both men and women” is not as sophisticated and detailed as Fiorenza’s. Oduyoye’s notion of ministry relates to her understanding of the Greek term *koinonia*. Her argument is that *koinonia* implies a community of sharing and participation. The concept of justice forms an important part of *koinonia* (Oduyoye 1995). The notion of *koinonia* plays a vital role in the ecclesiology of The Circle. Oduyoye (2001:85) remarks that *koinonia* refers to community. In this context, the notion of *koinonia* serves as a powerful reinforcement of mutuality in the partnership between men and women.

²¹ Fiorenza spells this term in her own way, that is, *ekkleisia*.

Both theologians use Greek terms to explain their respective notions of Christian ministry. The difference (and similarity) is that each theologian in her own unique way tries to envision a “new world” free of patriarchy, domination, inequality, injustice and disunity. This in itself is another example, which proves that although these two theologians use different concepts to explain their respective notions of ministry, they end up arguing for the same cause. However, what is interesting to note is that the two notions of Christian ministry which Fiorenza and Oduyoye suggest also reflect the particular time and space in which both have theologised since the early 1960s. Fiorenza, in her approach, uses terminology that is religiously based, that is, within Christianity. The manner in which she defines the terms “disciple” and “discipleship” is biblically based. However, Fiorenza adds her own understanding of these terms by stating that “discipleship” does not only include the aspect of obligation to a particular message or leader but, in essence, is a “way of life” (1997: 2).

Oduyoye uses terms that are of a more contemporary nature in comparison to Fiorenza. This could indicate the influence of modernity or simply be highlighting the significance of relationships within African tradition and culture. The term “partnership” is also biblically based although this specific terminology is not precisely present in the Bible. One may argue that Oduyoye’s application of the term “partnership” is integrated with the community-orientated goal of the African culture. The theme of solidarity becomes central in this regard as African women’s theology seek to unite with all those who suffer injustice, discrimination and rejection on the bases of their religious affiliations, sexual orientation, gender and racial affinities.

Both theologians view their respective notions of Christian ministry as the ‘true image’ of the church. The envisioning of an alternate world includes the constant challenge of calling the church to renewal. Fiorenza and Oduyoye (as well as other scholars and theologians), through their experiences in work and church, have observed that the church is not what it holds itself up to be in terms of its commission and overall mission to the world. The church is challenged to seriously reflect on a number of issues which Fiorenza and Oduyoye (and others) have raised with reference to the prevailing structures of oppression and patriarchy within the church, community, educational institutions, working environment and society. The ‘true image’ (i.e. the desired image) of the church is one of unity, equality within diversity, and the *basileia* vision of Jesus Christ.

Following this discussion, a few implications of Fiorenza's notion of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals" and Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a "partnership of both men and women" may be highlighted.

Firstly, Fiorenza recognises the need to balance the (sometimes reductionist) secular manifestations of feminism by highlighting the oppressive but also the potentially liberative role that religious traditions may have in a secularised civil society. However, one may argue that these religious traditions have long faded away, particularly in Western society. How then is it possible to retrieve the liberative role from something which is no longer relevant to more progressive people in a mostly secularised context?

Secondly, Fiorenza's notion of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals" is characterised by the reclaiming of Christian theology and history as women's own theology and history. Fiorenza contends that the ideas and thoughts of "white" males have been "accepted" as the norm for the rest of society. She therefore continues to embark on a mission to eradicate all forms of patriarchy by ensuring that the voices of women from any particular context are heard and made known. How then should one understand the vision of a "discipleship of equals" if there seems to be such a great disparity in terms of men's and women's roles and contributions in the past and present and for the future? One may argue that such a vision of Christian ministry is perhaps too idealistic as so much ground needs to be covered in order to, firstly, "restore" women as unique beings and, secondly, as equal citizens to their male counterparts.

Thirdly, Fiorenza's notion of the Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals" is based on her understanding of the Greek term *ecclesia* which is further characterised by another Greek word, *basileia*, - which, according to Fiorenza, refers to a "new world" free from hunger, poverty, domination, injustice, and inequality. Fiorenza claims this to be an alternate vision wherein men and women can be transformed and united to bring forth wholeness and ensure the well-being of creation. One can ask how feasible such a vision of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals" is for the church today if it is continuously faced with other kinds of challenges and demands such as HIV/AIDS, poverty, starvation, human sexuality, race, corruption, financial constraints (due to high unemployment rates) and others. Is the church even able to start addressing the gender injustices and inequalities at a level which almost cries a 'state of emergency'? Or is it only women's problems and battles that they need to address, as they are the

ones seemingly who have a problem with the way things are ordered and structured in both church and society?

Firstly, according to Oduyoye, “Partnership of women and men, ordained or not, is the true image of the Church of Christ” (Oduyoye 2001:86). Oduyoye’s notion of Christian ministry as a *partnership* may be understood as a response to the oppression and marginalisation of women within and outside the church and in terms of her conviction that all have been called by God to serve God with the various charisms which they have received. Secondly, Oduyoye’s notion of Christian ministry as a partnership between men and women is based on her understanding of the Greek concept *koinonia*, which is a “community of believers constituting a communion” (2001: 85). Her argument is that *koinonia* implies a community of sharing and participation.

Thirdly, the partnership of men and women is further characterised by the term *solidarity* (Oduyoye 1990). According to Oduyoye, the term solidarity suggests mutuality and reciprocity. Oduyoye cautions that women cannot address gender injustices on their own; they need the help, participation and co-operation of men in order for the church to be the “servant of the servants”.

Fourthly, such a vision for the church will not be sustainable without the formation of partnerships and the sharing of ecclesial responsibilities. For Oduyoye, this is where the problem with patriarchy lies. She says: “The present state of the partnership of men and women in all cultures, on all continents and in all churches, is a state of sin” (1990: 53). How should partnerships between men and women be accomplished? Oduyoye suggests a few ways: 1) by ensuring equity in representation within the various church bodies, 2) critical reflection on the visible participation of women, and 3) avoiding quotas and numbers in representation. Oduyoye (1990: 54) emphasizes that women’s presence within the various decision-making bodies of the Church “... is an index of recognition of one’s responsibility to be in active partnership.” One can thus ask the following questions in relation to such a vision for Christian ministry, that is, a “partnership of both men and women: a) How does one allow for cultural diversity in Christian ministry as a partnership between men and women? b) Is this notion of partnership sufficiently inclusive to express a global vision for Christian ministry?

From these observations, it is evident that Oduyoye’s notion of Christian ministry not only poses a challenge to the church but also to cultural norms and practices that continue to distort, suppress and undermine the contributions by women in church and society.

In the discussion above I have critically compared Fiorenza and Oduyoye's visions of Christian ministry. This study was conducted primarily to investigate the similarities and differences between the visions of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals" and a "partnership of both men and women". Significant differences were highlighted with particular reference to their conversation partners, the rhetorical context of each female theologian and the modes of expression used by Fiorenza and Oduyoye respectively.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 Conclusion

Now that we have come to the end of our discussion on the similarities and differences between Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's notion of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals" and Mercy Amba Oduyoye's notion of Christian ministry as a "partnership of both men and women" it may be helpful to offer a brief summary.

In this thesis, I have argued that an assessment of Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mercy Amba Oduyoye's views on Christian ministry reveals similarities based on a shared experience of being women in a male dominated Christian church and differences emanating from the different contexts within which they theologize (that of Euro-American feminist theology and African women's theology with reference to the context, rhetoric, experiences and modes of expression). In chapter 1, I noted that the significance of this study has to be understood and assessed within the context of ecumenical debates on Christian ministry as well as the emergence of Euro-American feminist theology and African women's theology. I argued that there are significant similarities and differences in these two forms of theological discourse and that these shape Fiorenza and Oduyoye's notions of Christian ministry.

In chapter 2, I investigated a number of publications by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza to assess her understanding of Christian ministry as a "discipleship of equals". In chapter 3, I investigated a number of publications by Mercy Amba Oduyoye to assess her understanding of Christian ministry as a "partnership of both men and women". The main argument of this thesis is found in chapter 4, where I offered a critical comparison of Fiorenza and Oduyoye's notions of Christian ministry. I suggested that there are significant differences between feminist theology and African women's theology with reference to the context, rhetoric and modes of expression.

One may therefore conclude that African women's theology remains distinct from other feminist theologies. In a similar way, African-American womanist theologians have insisted that their situation is distinct from that of Euro-American women in what is described as the "triple" oppression of black women: being women, relatively poor and formerly enslaved. This calls for further reflection on the similarities and differences between African-American womanist

theology and African women's theology. Important differences, which come to mind here, are the legacy of slavery (where one has to distinguish between the descendants of former slaves and the impact of slavery in the countries from where slaves were captured), differences in economic status and military power. African women are often engaged in a struggle to secure a sustainable livelihood in ways that African-American women are not. More importantly, the relationship between American black theology and womanist theology deserves further attention in this regard.

On this basis of this comparison, I would like to offer the following final comments on an appropriate notion of Christian ministry within the South African context. Firstly, Christian ministry should be understood in terms of the "priesthood of believers" and or a calling to the "whole people of God". Secondly, male clergy and laity need to be informed to fully embrace the gifts and talents of their female counterparts whether they are lay or ordained leaders. Thirdly, theological seminaries and institutions need to ensure that all students are well informed of the variety of visions available for Christian ministry, with particular reference to gender roles in both church and society.

Thus, it is imperative that further research be conducted with particular reference to the visions of Christian ministry as a true "partnership between both men and women" and an ever-transforming "discipleship of equals" in both the contemporary and future church and society.

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