

**CHURCH MINISTRY  
IN  
AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY**

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**Editors**

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### WALKING WITH THE YOUNG: A THEOLOGY OF YOUTH MINISTRY IN AFRICA *Sahaya G. Selvam*

#### 1. Introduction

Christian Youth Ministry is a faith-journey of accompanying young people towards an experience of Christ. Accompanying is a process; it is not sporadic interventions of activities done for the young. It is walking with the young. In this essay, I would like to reflect on the theological implications of the process of accompanying young people, in the African context. Taking the cue from the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24: 13-35), I would like to present Jesus as the prototype of a youth minister, thus also to trace the progressive stages in youth ministry.<sup>1</sup>

#### 2. The Context

Now that very same day, two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. (Lk 24: 13-14)<sup>2</sup>

The two disciples are on the road to Emmaus. Why are they on the road? It is Easter Sunday—“that very same day”, and these disciples are running away from Jerusalem—the epicentre of the great event! They have lost hope. They don't want to be part of the band anymore. Yet the experiences of the past three days have been so overwhelming that they cannot but talk about all that had happened. They only talk, unable to get into the depths of the events. They are blind! Where are the young people of Africa? They too are on the road. They are running away. Literally, running from the rural areas to the urban, and from the African cities to the West. They are running away from their roots. They are running away from themselves. To understand where the young people of Africa are, we need to ask a more

pertinent question, who are the young people? Let us make an attempt to answer both the questions. We can rephrase our questions as, who are the young? What is the meaning of being young today? And what are the specific situations of young people in Africa?

### 3. New Wine in New Wineskins

There are many concepts and realities that defy definition. The defining process becomes more difficult especially if that reality is in a continuous flux. Youth surely is one such reality. Let us begin with the criterion of age. Today applying the age criterion in defining youth is becoming inadequate. Consider the relativity of the age criterion in the following table:

Institution / Country	Age criterion to define youth
UN	15 to 24 years
Commonwealth	15 to 29 years
Kenya	15 to 30 years
Tanzania	15 to 24 / 35 years
Uganda	12 to 30 years
Malaysia	15 to 40 years

So, one of the problems of being young today is that the adults do not know how to define the young. Often these criteria are very relative and shaded by vested interests. The meaning of being young is also aggravated by some biological and social factors. Around the world, the onset of puberty is occurring earlier and the age of marriage is rising. John Abbott, a contemporary educationalist, explains,

In 1900 the average girl started to menstruate at about the age of 19. Now, with better food and health care, menstruation frequently starts shortly after a girl's 10th birthday. In 1900, most boys were sufficiently well established in a job by the age of 20 that they could afford to marry and start a family. The gap between childhood and becoming a fully responsible adult was measured in months rather than years. But not now, not in the year 2001<sup>3</sup>.

In the year 2001 and beyond, we confront a group of people who are not children, yet they are not ready to take up responsibility (or at least the adults do not trust that they can take it up). From speaking about "adolescence" in a more psychological sense, we spoke of "teenagers"<sup>4</sup> in the later part of 20<sup>th</sup> century, and today we just speak of 'youth'. With the new definition of youth come also new problems like:

- The age of taking up full-time jobs in urban set-ups has been largely delayed. So some young people, especially those in rural cultures, are married and considered adults, while their counterparts largely in urban cultures are still in school and considered dependent children. This leaves the young people hanging in a balance between childhood and adulthood for over 15 years. This also raises serious questions in time management; they don't have a role in society that is in any sense useful.
- Due to early onset of puberty and delayed marriage, many young people are becoming sexually active and some have become parents themselves, without having settled down in terms of a job and marriage.<sup>5</sup> Consequently besides facing the economic brunt of the situation, the young people are also exposed to health risks associated with sexual activity, including exposure to STD's, and HIV/AIDS.

The national policy-making and planning process in youth affairs, and indeed the churches in their ministry to the young, have to take into consideration these changing trends. In spite of the changing nature of youth, there is a need to define youth-hood, and to determine the age for termination of youth ministry in the churches. I would simply satisfy myself with a descriptive definition of youth: Youth-hood is a window period between childhood and adulthood, often between the onset of puberty and marriage (or another permanent form of settling down in

life), that is marked by a restless energy, fast sprout of growth, hence also by an extreme vulnerability, while being so rich in promise. Let us turn our attention to a few more specific factors that have to be taken into consideration in answering the question of where are the young people of Africa.

#### 4. African Youth on the Road

Father Edward J. Flanagan, the founder of Boys Town (established in 1917) in Nebraska, USA, has a powerful statement: "There are no bad boys. There is only bad environment, bad training, bad example, bad thinking." Young people do not fall from the skies. They are simply the product of our society. Without getting into details, let us just look at three major transitions in the African society of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and how the present young generation is a victim of this. My intention is not really to paint a negative picture of the contemporary history, but just to raise a few questions on the situation of youth in Africa. Our reflections on the theology of youth ministry should be considered a way forward.

##### a) Population Boom and Lack of Resources for the Growing-ups

The majority of the population of Africa is young. Consider the following facts for the countries of East Africa and compare that with three other assorted countries<sup>6</sup>:

##### Population below the age of 30

Kenya	74.8%	In 1999
Tanzania	73.7%	In 1999
Uganda	78.2%	In 1999
Italy	36.8%	In 1996
India	62.4%	In 1995
USA	42.4%	In 1996

Why do African countries have high population of this age group and what does that imply? If the two decades following

the World War II could be referred to as the time of population boom in the US and in Europe, in Africa it was the time following independence since 1960's. Better health facilities and nutrients on the positive side, and effects of wars and unrest on the negative side, are said to contribute to the "baby boom". However, while in the West, due to reproductive knowledge and the pressure of industrial-capitalistic economy the baby boom was brought under control, in Africa the situation may not change even in the next decade. The loss of population due to HIV/AIDS will have to be made up! Some economists still argue that rise in population may not really be a liability to most African countries. Nonetheless, the problem is the lack of infrastructure to care for that over 70% of the population, that is considered young and largely dependant.

##### b) Transient Society and the Rootless Young Generation

Over 30 years ago, futurist Alvin Toffler warned the world, of a "Future Shock". He spoke of an accelerating level of "turnover" or transience in people's relationships — "a condition in which the duration of relationships is cut short, the throughput of relationships extremely rapid. In their lives, things, places, people, ideas, and organizational structures all get "used up" more quickly." People travel more and get transfers more; switch jobs oftener; get tired quickly of using the same clothes and shoes, and bored with old ideas faster. While this makes life more and more thrilling, it also increases stress. The first to be affected by this kind of changes are often young people.

African youth, especially in the urban set up, are already becoming victims of this stress. The rural youth get attracted to it too without being aware of the hidden trap. In the West these changes perhaps were more gradual but in Africa development is often leap-frogging and the young people are caught on the wrong foot. What is the implication of all this for churches in ministering to young people? Youth ministers are likely to meet a rootless generation that is shouting out, "Stop the world, I wanna get out!"

### c) The Impact of Westernization, Globalization and the Media

Due to the fact that children have high levels of exposure, media have greater access and time to shape young people's attitudes and actions than do parents or teachers, replacing them as educators, role models, and the primary sources of information about the world and how one behaves in it. Besides the impact on the value system, media's impact on young people is outreaching by far. For instance, researchers have found that every hour preschoolers watch television each day boosts their chances—by about 10 percent—of developing attention deficit problems later in life.<sup>8</sup> What will also be the impact of the use of computers and the Internet on the upcoming generation?

As a result of the breakdown of the traditional family, many children are lacking good parental attention during their formative period before entering school. In the U.S., for instance, the number of single-parent families has grown from 10 percent in 1965 to 28 percent in 1996. Overall, parents spend 40 percent less time with children than they did say fifty years ago.<sup>9</sup> While similar statistical data is wanting in the African context, it is a truism that Africa will soon follow suit. What is the implication of all this on youth ministry? For sure, more and more teachers and pastors are going to take up parenting roles in schools and in churches.

An examination of the cultural impact of westernization and globalization on the young people of Africa cannot really be sufficiently treated in this essay. It suffices to point out that the young generation is in the verge of a schizophrenic existence. An average African living in the city is living between two worlds. As one walks to the industrial area they walk into the western world, where the physical is not only distinct but also often separate from the spiritual. Yet, when they return home upcountry (to most people in Nairobi, home is different from house.) there is no separation between the physical and the spiritual. Therefore, as long as one lives in the city, their existence is schizophrenic—split between two worldviews.<sup>10</sup> This is but a brief description of some of the serious problems that our young people are facing.

These are situations that youth ministry in Africa has to enable young people to face up. Youth ministry in Africa has to be strategic in its approach. And Jesus' style of youth ministry offers a model of these strategies.

## 5. Youth Ministry as Relational Responsibility

And it happened that as they were talking together and discussing it, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but their eyes were prevented from recognising him. He said to them, 'What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?' They stopped, their faces downcast. Then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him, 'You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days.' He asked, 'What things?' They answered, 'All about Jesus of Nazareth.'

Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have now gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: but of him they saw nothing.' (Lk 24:15-24)

Jesus begins his ministry with the two disciples by building a relationship. In fact, in the narration, this is the section that occupies largest content. Jesus carries out the stage of relational ministry through two precise choices—firstly, finding the disciples where they are, on the road, and secondly, by listening to their story. Though he was the hero of the story, Jesus humbles himself and pretends to be "the only stranger". His listening attitudes enable them to narrate the story—their history—in their own words, thus beginning a healing process.

### a) Finding the Young On their Ground

Youth ministry, particularly in the Catholic Church in Africa, needs a paradigm shift from a mission-oriented ministry to a missionary ministry. In many parts of Africa when people are going to the church they say they are going to "the mission". 'Mission' understood here, as a style of evangelisation, whereby,

the church complex consists of the physical church, surrounded by a priests' residence, may be a dispensary, a primary school, a community hall, etc. And people go to "the mission" to get services"— food, medicine, education, entertainment, and may be also the Good News!

Mission-oriented ministry is basically development-oriented, and sometimes tend to be imperialistic charity work. Today in many parts of Africa these services are beginning to be available to people in the vicinity, provided by governments or community-based organizations. So if the church still operates under the old model then it runs the risk of becoming irrelevant, especially to young people. On the other hand, the missionary church is a community that reaches out. It finds people – especially the young – where they are. The accent on Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Church by AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa) is an expression of this missionary approach. However, youth ministry in most parts of Africa still operates under the old model. Often young people are left out of the Small Christian Communities. Can the churches take up the challenge of Jesus in his outreach approach to young people?

### **b) Listening to the Stories of the Young People**

The young people have their stories to tell. Parents have not much time to listen to their stories – they are too busy working for their children! As the number of young people in Africa who come from broken families and from single parents is on the increase, as we said earlier, are the youth ministers ready and prepared to listen to the stories of the young. Mental illness is basically a result of how an individual interprets the environment around, including the events of one's life. The breakthrough in healing that illness is in the ability to narrate that interpretation. That is what Jesus invites the two disciples to do.

Youth Ministers need listening skills to invite the young to narrate their stories. Inner conversion of the young can only be achieved by listening to them, not merely by preaching at them! Thus, "Youth Ministry may be seen as providing young people

with a safe place with caring mentors where personal stories can be told and seen in perspective of the great story."<sup>11</sup>

## **6. Youth Ministry as Biblical Ministry**

Then he said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into his glory?' Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself. (Lk 24: 25-27)

Having met the two disciples on their ground, and having listened to their narration of the events of the Holy Week, Jesus has built a relationship of trust. He knows now they are going to take him seriously. It is time now for tough love! It is time to challenge: "You foolish men!" Using the scriptures, he interprets the events of their lives in the light of faith. He offers them the Good News that even amidst the confusion of the previous week, God was still in control. Thus he restores their hope.

Fun, games, picnics, and get-togethers are important for youth groups. They are needed to establish familiar relationships within the group. But these activities are not end in themselves. If the group does not move on, soon the youth get bored with these activities. Once a relationship of trust has been built it is time to challenge the young. This is the beginning of a process of evangelisation.

Evangelisation is simply the sharing of the Good News of the presence of God in the world and in the lives of individuals. It is one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread! Evangelisation is an invitation to see that even amidst the struggles of life and in spite of human frailty, God is still in control. The evangelisation that takes the tone of sin and guilt puts off young people. On the other hand, what they really need is hope.

### **a) Word of God as Signpost in the Maze of Life**

In this process of evangelisation the appropriate use of the Bible becomes vital. In Africa today, there is a temptation for

Bible study groups to be polemic and apologetic – attacking others and defending oneself. Often Bible study is done in order to be able to argue with the people of other Christian sects and to accuse each other on very trivial issues. This approach is neither progressive in faith formation of the young, nor is it interesting to the more mature among them. I strongly believe that the Scriptures were not written for us to argue upon. And I think, this use of Scriptures is only a way of killing the Christian faith.

On the contrary, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus uses the Scriptures to find meaning in the confusing maze of the lives of the disciples. This is what young people long for, even if apparently young people are asking some polemic questions. Perhaps they think that this is what the church is capable of. Biblical reflection for young people needs to be existential. Sometimes an exegetic approach may be needed to recognize the existential meaning of the text. The existential approach basically restores hope. It draws them to the person of Jesus Christ—“Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?”

#### b) A moment of Choice

When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them saying, ‘It is nearly evening, and the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them. (Lk 24:28-29)

Christian faith is based on freedom. However good it is, the Christian message is not to be shoved onto anyone. Jesus would often end his preaching with that option for personal choice — “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” On the road to Emmaus Jesus offers the same choice to the two disciples. Though he had taken the initiative to make the first evangelical proposal, subsequent continuation of the deepening process will depend on the two. So Jesus pretends to go on, to disappear from their midst, to bring the process to a premature end. But the two invite him to stay with them and to continue the process of growth in faith.

The youth minister makes the first approach towards an

evangelical suggestion with the young. The Christian proposal is to be made attractive through the stages of Relational ministry and Biblical ministry. But the young person’s decision to be part of the continued process is important. To move towards the climax of the Christ experience in youth ministry the personal commitment of the individual is called for. Youth minister should also have the inner strength to respect the decision of the young, even when the initial proposal is rejected by individual’s choice. When rejected, the minister may have to examine his methodology, but never doubting the richness of the Good News, nor condemning the individual.

### 7. Youth Ministry as Catechetical Leadership

Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. (Lk 24: 30)

Having assured of their invitation to Him to stay with them, Jesus now takes them to a process of catechesis. Evangelisation is the sharing of Christian faith, catechesis is the deepening of that faith. Jesus uses a liturgical act to carry out this process. He carries out a set of meaningful rituals —“he took the bread, said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them”. The two disciples were not merely spectators of the drama of rituals but were participants in an experience. The end of catechesis, and of liturgy in particular, is religious experience.

#### a) Young People and Religious Experience

“Young people are not interested in religion”, is an often-heard complaint, especially among youth ministers. Is this true? Let us look at this a little more deeply. All religions are made up of three major elements: Code, Creed & Cult. Code is made up of the ethical norms of a religion, that offers a direction to an individual’s life in terms of good and evil, virtue and sin, taboos, etc. Thus the code preserves the institutional aspect of the

religion. Creed is the belief system of a religion, that offers an explanation system for the crucial existential questions like, who is God, how did the world come to be, what is the meaning of human existence, what happens after life, etc. The third aspect of a religion is cult. Cult is a set of rituals (liturgy) and religious practices that answer the transcendental need of the human person. It offers the possibility of experiencing the Divine.

The three elements of religion cater to three major aspects of a human person, at different stages of their development. Code caters to the social dimension. It builds the institutional aspect, especially in childhood and in old age. It offers security, stability identity, and a sense of belonging. Creed caters to the intelligence, especially in the process of passage from childhood to youth-hood. It offers a "logos"- meaning of life and an explanation system. Cult caters to the spiritual need of the individual, especially in the transition from youth-hood to adult life. It paves the way to Supreme realization.

In traditional societies children are often socialized into the religion of their parents. This socialization is particularly carried out by the introduction of the child into the institution and the repetition of major tenets of the religion by rote memory. However, at the onset of adolescence, the awakening of the physiological, intellectual and social dimensions is accompanied by a religious and spiritual awakening. Young people expect more from their religion. Together with more rational explanations for the subtler aspects of creed, they seek deep experience of the Transcendent being. This is often interpreted by institutionalised religion as rebellion "Young people are not interested in religion!" Many young people may even prove this point by turning to music, drugs and sex for their experience of transcendence. And the problem with these means is that they make the young people addictive and leave them with greater emptiness.

As we said earlier, modern youth find themselves in "an abyss of meaninglessness". The speedy growth of dehumanizing technology; the consequent loss of dignity of the human person; the rapid changes in social, political, economic and religious structures has contributed to this. Therefore there are a growing

number of young people who are seeking help in their search for a harmonious way of living. The popularity of the New Age Movement and the Eastern techniques of meditation, especially in the West and even among the urban youth of Africa, are the signs of the deepest yearning of the modern youth for genuine religious experience.

### **b) Catechesis Towards Religious Experience**

The catechetical stage of youth ministry has twin tasks. Firstly, to offer deeper rational explanations for the tenets of the creed. Secondly, this is to be carried out in an experiential manner, particularly through meaningful liturgical celebrations, in such a way that catechesis would lead the young towards religious experience. The explanation for faith and the experience of the same are inseparable elements of true religion.

Mere adherence to the rubrics of the liturgy may not guarantee such a religious experience, though some rubrics may still be needed to preserve the mystery aspect of the liturgy. Both, the faith explained and the faith celebrated, have to be participatory if they should cater to the needs of the young. In fact, a well celebrated liturgy is the re-enactment of this journey to Emmaus: gathering of the congregation (Relational ministry), listening to the Word of God (biblical ministry), celebration of Eucharist (catechetical ministry), the communion (Christ experience) and commissioning – being sent out to share the experience with others. Thus liturgy leads the young to religious experience. And for a Christian, the result of religious experience is the acceptance of Jesus as the Christ.

### **c) Christ-Experience: the Summit of Christian Youth Ministry**

And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight. (Lk 24: 31)

This is the climax of the journey. The two disciples' eyes are opened. They recognise the stranger as the Christ. The 'Aha' experience! This is religious experience – experience of the God



in the person of Jesus Christ. Having completed the task now Jesus disappears from their sight. This event of disappearance is not an abandonment but an act of trust. Jesus is no more out there physically but he has become a consciousness deep within people. The ultimate summit of any Christian youth ministry is Christ experience. This is what distinguishes 'youth ministry' from 'youth work'. Youth ministry believes in empowering the young deep within themselves. It is aimed at restoring hope among the young. It is personal, experiential and empowering. It is a *metanoia* – change of consciousness. Youth ministry is consummated when a fragmented consciousness has been made whole in a Christ-consciousness. Once this has been achieved the youth minister can disappear. In fact, his presence in the lives of the young person who has experienced Christ will be different. The youth minister can vanish because the young people themselves now become youth ministers.

## 8. Youth Ministry as Peer Formation

Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?' They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, 'The Lord has indeed risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread. (Lk 24:32-35)

Having experienced Jesus as the Risen Lord, Cleopas and his companion cannot withhold their conviction. They undertake the journey of eleven kilometers that very night to share their experience with others. They want to restore hope among their fellow disciples. The Word of God goes in a hurry. The cycle of Christ experience continues. If youth ministry is aimed at Christ experience, and the variety of activities in the youth group or youth center facilitates this process, and if young people reach the climax of that journey, even if they are few, then the experience invariably always leads to service. Peer ministry and service are important aspects of youth ministry. Peer ministry is an effective means of ensuring the continuity of youth ministry

An African proverb emphasises:

"The hand that is closest to the ear scratches it best." Hence the late Pope John Paul II urges the Church in Africa in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, "In order to meet these challenges, young people themselves should be called upon to become the evangelizers of their peers. No one can do this better than they."<sup>12</sup>

## 9. Youth Ministry as Accompaniment

Youth ministry is a journey of accompaniment. It is a path that leads to Christ experience. It is a journey of accompaniment. As the journey moves from Relational ministry to Christ experience the path becomes narrower. This is the experience of any youth group that is engaged in serious ministry. When a minister forms a youth group and begins youth ministry, usually there is a large number of young people and quite enthusiastic. However, when young people are taken through the other steps of Biblical ministry and Catechetical ministry, the going gets tough. And some members are prone to drop out. This is not a bad sign at all, nor is it the failure of the youth minister. Often youth ministers are tempted to judge themselves harshly. But this is simply the process of birth and death of youth groups. However, if the journey is continued without discouragement until the summit there is now a new birth. New youth ministers are born. The cycle continues. The journey continues with another group of young people. The young come and go, but youth ministry continues.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This reflection is a development on the Wedge Model of Youth Ministry proposed by Lyman, Coleman and Kimball. See, Don Kimball, *Power and Presence* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), p.145, as cited in, Jerome K. Finn, *Building Youth Ministry in the Parish* (Winona: St. Mary's Press, 1993), p.18. It is also based on the pastoral experience of the Salesians of Don Bosco in working for the young in the past 150 years, in 132 countries now. The Salesians belong to a religious congregation within the Catholic Church, founded by Don Bosco in 1859. They are over 34,000 men and women who minister to the young through activities related to education,

evangelisation, catechesis and the mass media.

<sup>2</sup> All scripture references in this article are from *New Jerusalem Bible*.

<sup>3</sup> John Abbott, "Battery Hens or Free range Chickens: What kind of Education for what kind of World?" European Council of International Schools Annual Conference, The Gray Mattern Memorial Address,

Website: [www.21learn.org](http://www.21learn.org)

<sup>4</sup> 'Teenager' is a term that entered the Oxford English Dictionary only in 1954, and refers to ages between 13 and 19. See, Abbott as above.

<sup>5</sup> Consider the predicament of a girl who reaches puberty at the age of 12 and is married at 26, as compared to a girl (in 1900's) who reached puberty at the age of 19 and was married the next day! According to Tanzania Demographic & Health Survey of 1996, the median age at first intercourse is 16.9 years. TANESA survey of 1997 on sexual exploitation of schoolgirls in selected schools in Mwanza region holds that 75.8% of class 7 students had had sex; and by age 16 years, 80.1% had had sex. (See, Kuleana, *The State of Education in Tanzania – Crisis and Opportunity*, September 1999, p.59)

<sup>6</sup> From *Encyclopædia Britannica* – CD ROM, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Random House, 1970), p.44.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.pediatrics.org/> (October 11, 2004)

<sup>9</sup> See, Don Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), p.132.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph K. Njino, Renato Sessana, Jon P. Kirbi, *Communicating the Gospel Message – Spearhead*, no. 120, (Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1992), p.42.

Renato (Kizito) Sessana actually speaks about "an average mchewa in Malawi".

<sup>11</sup> Dean Borgman, *When Kumbaya is Not Enough: A Practical Theology for Youth Ministry* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), p.xviii.

<sup>12</sup> *Ecclesia in Africa*, 1994, no. 93.

## 6

### ORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE CONTEXT OF AFRICAN TRADITION, CHRISTIANITY AND MODERNITY

*Auli Vähäkangas*

#### 1. Introduction

The Lutheran Dioceses of ELCT have various practises and understandings on ministry. The variety of practices has its roots in history. Missionaries brought the practice and theology of ministry from their own countries.<sup>1</sup> The burning issue of the new century continues to be the discussion on apostolic succession.<sup>2</sup> Historical episcopacy seems to become a common type of episcopacy among the twenty dioceses of ELCT.

Historical background is not, however, the only explanation for the various practises of ministry. The three existing cultural categories can be classified as *kienyeji*, traditional; *kikristo*, Christian; and *kisasa*, modern.<sup>3</sup> These cultural categories have influenced the practise and theology of ministry of the various units of the ELCT. In connection to ministry *kienyeji* refers to the traditional practices in African traditional religion (ATR) and to traditional values of African community. In connection to ministry, *kikristo* is connected to the historical background of the various dioceses and also to biblical and dogmatic position of ministry. *Kisasa* is used in this paper to denote those cultural practices and beliefs which result from education, modernization, urbanization, and even globalization in Tanzania. These historically motivated cultural categories help the dioceses to find their way of ministry, but these different categories also lead to a tension between different frames of reference while formulating the understandings of ministry.

Ministry in ELCT has been the focus of various researchers. The previous research has been dealing for example with episcopacy as a sociological trend,<sup>4</sup> cultural influences to the