

# The Reading 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 in the Context of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania- Ulanga Kilombero Diocese

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## ABSTRACT

The interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, which instructs women to remain silent in church, has sparked significant theological debate and continues to challenge modern understandings of gender roles within Christian ministry. This study explores the passage's meaning and its implications for inclusive leadership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania - Ulanga Kilombero Diocese (ELCT-UKD). Drawing on contextual theology and qualitative research, it examines how cultural norms, historical traditions, and theological interpretations shape perceptions of gender roles in the church. While some participants view the passage as a universal command, others argue it reflects the cultural context of ancient Corinth and should not restrict women's roles in contemporary ministry. The findings highlight the tension between traditional interpretations and evolving cultural values, with many advocating for a more inclusive understanding of scripture that aligns with biblical principles of equality and mutual respect. By uncovering both the barriers and opportunities for women in church leadership, this study contributes to the broader dialogue on gender inclusivity, offering pathways for theological reflection and institutional reform. It calls for a reinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 to promote a more equitable and empowering vision of leadership for both men and women in the church.

**Key Words:** *Corinthians 14:34-35, Gender roles, Inclusive leadership, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Contextual theology, Theological interpretations, Women's participation and Gender equality.*

## INTRODUCTION

The meaning and application of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 on the inclusive leadership of both women and men in churches has posed a great hermeneutical challenge to Bible scholars. For instance, the statement in verse 34, "women should remain silent in the churches," has caused different interpretations. To some, Paul offered a timeless rule forbidding every kind of speech by women, while others see it as a contextual issue limited only to the Corinthian churches (Ponga, 2021). Therefore, a balanced biblical interpretation is necessary to clarify Paul's instruction regarding the involvement of both women and men in church ministry.

When approaching this biblical text this blanket command that women are never allowed to speak within the assembly of the congregation most certainly raises brows. Consequently there have been numerous interpretation of Paul's words. Some believe that the passage is cultural conditioned. Other hold that what Paul prohibit in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is some kind of disruptive speech and there are those like (Wilmington,1997.p.685 & Ponga,2005.p.3) who take notice and suggest that Paul limited the participation of women only in situation where church doctrine was being judged(14:29). Wilmington goes on to make note that Others explain the seeming contradiction between 11:5 and 14:34 in terms of Paul's overriding concern for bringing order to a church in confusion. Although these and many other interpretation exist Paul's prohibition seems to have a universal application. When dissecting the contextual background and looking to the historical and socio-cultural factors of the Church in Corinth especially as it pertains to women, there are several things that need to be in view (Santiago, 2016).

Carson, France, Mortyer and Wenham inform their readers three points need to be noted in seeking to understand the passage (Carsom et al, 1994.p.1182). The first point concerns the fact that wives prayed and prophesied in Christian gatherings. Hence one observes that Paul originally referenced the allowance of women in this case

wives prophesying and praying in the Christian assembly as it would be meaningless for Paul to instruct on something that women would have been prohibited from doing.

Charles (1999, p. 381) points to a confusion in Paul's instructions, acknowledging his earlier allowance for women to pray and prophesy (1 Corinthians 11:5), only for him to seemingly revoke this permission in a later discussion on tongues, advocating for silence in church gatherings. However, Grosheide (1980, p. 341-343), on the other hand, views the prohibition in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 as a cultural restriction rooted in societal notions of shame, arguing that the generalization of women being silent in church is mistaken.

In contrast, Leon (1976, p. 201) suggests that Paul's instructions are context-specific, emphasizing the need for women to avoid disrupting societal norms, thus preserving the credibility of Christianity. This perspective underscores the influence of Greco-Roman cultural beliefs that promoted male superiority and affected the perception of women's roles in worship. Thus, this perspective indicates that the prohibition is context-specific and highlights the influence of Greco-Roman beliefs in male superiority, which may have shaped attitudes toward women speaking in worship settings.

Similarly, Kirsty, Wootton, and Jones argue in their book *"Women & Ordination in the Christian Churches"* that women are not prohibited from speaking, teaching or leading in the church. The authors examine the ministry of Jesus in the New Testament and contend that although Jesus selected twelve men as his closest disciples, there is no indication that he viewed women as inferior to men. Moreover, in many instances, Jesus emphasized that gender was irrelevant to the kingdom of God's affairs (Thorpe, 2008, p. 77).

I concur with this conclusion based on several examples from the Bible. For instance, in John chapter 4, we witness Jesus having a conversation with a Samaritan woman, who then shared his message with her community, resulting in many of them believing. Moreover, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was bestowed upon both men and women, fulfilling the prophecy of Joel. Additionally, Paul's discussion of spiritual gifts implies that they are distributed by the Spirit according to his will, without regard to gender (Wootton & Jones, 2008, pp. 77-78). Therefore, it is important to note that 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 is situated in the context of Paul's discussion on spiritual gifts, which commences in chapter 12. As spiritual gifts are granted without bias to gender, based on the Holy Spirit's discernment, it would be illogical to conclude that women should remain silent and refrain from utilizing their gifts in the church (contrary to what some interpretations suggest).

Firstly, Pelsler (1976, p. 71-106) argues that the command for women to remain silent in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 contradicts Paul's earlier instructions in verse 11:5, where he acknowledges that women can pray and prophesy in the church. As a result, it would be inconsistent for Paul to instruct women to remain silent in worship, as this would oppose his earlier affirmation of their active participation. Moreover, throughout Paul's writings, there is no indication that women should be excluded from spiritual gifts or ministry within the church. Thus, Paul recognized and encouraged women's involvement in the church, including public worship and ministry activities.

Similarly, as Pelsler points out, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul acknowledges that women can pray or prophesy as long as they have their heads covered or long hair. Furthermore, in 1 Corinthians 14:31, Paul includes women believers in the term "all" when discussing the use of spiritual gifts in public worship. Consequently, Pelsler concludes that Paul does not offer any justification for excluding Christian women from serving or ministering in any capacity within the church. This perspective aligns with the view that the Holy Spirit bestows gifts without discrimination based on gender, as discussed earlier (Pelsler, 1976, p. 107 & Wire, 1990, p. 230).

In addition, all believers, regardless of gender, are welcome to participate in gatherings for worship and bring forth psalms, teachings, revelations, tongues, or interpretations (1 Corinthians 14:26). He further argues that Paul's instructions about wives obeying their husbands are aimed at maintaining order in worship and ensuring the edification of the church body. Therefore, Gilbert's perspective is aligned with the idea that women should not be excluded from public worship or ministry within the church. He emphasizes that Paul's instructions regarding obedience to husbands should not be misinterpreted to justify the exclusion of women from active participation

in worship services. Instead, Gilbert advocates for encouraging all believers to use their spiritual gifts to edify and uplift the body of Christ, regardless of gender (Gilbert, 1893, p. 47).

Talbert (1987, p. 91-92) explains that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 should be seen as a claim made by the Corinthians, not as Paul's own opinion. He says these verses reflect the culture of that time, not Paul's teachings. Talbert points out that these verses go against what Paul teaches in other parts of the Bible, like Galatians 3:27-28 and 1 Corinthians 11:5. In those places, Paul teaches that men and women are equal in Christ. Therefore, Talbert believes these verses should not be seen as a rule against women speaking in church. Instead, they are Paul's response to a particular issue in the Corinthian church. This interpretation matches Paul's overall message of equality and unity in Christ.

Similarly, Garland (2003, p. 663) argues that these verses give instructions on how wives should act in public worship. He believes that Paul was focusing on the need for order and respect in church. However, this view only explains the cultural side of the passage and does not consider the broader theological issue. The idea of shame, as seen in the culture of that time, was tied to what society thought was proper behavior. This helps explain why Paul tells women to remain silent in church. But, Paul's other writings show that he does not want to limit women's participation in ministry, so we need to look at the bigger picture to understand his real views.

Paul's teachings on women's roles in the church go beyond this one passage. In Romans 16, Paul talks about Phoebe, a deacon in the church at Cenchreae. According to Dunn (1998, p. 887), Phoebe is the first deacon in Christianity, and she played a significant role in the church. Paul calls her both a deacon and a *prostatis*, which shows she had authority and was involved in ministry. This example challenges any view that says women should not have leadership roles in the church.

Paul also mentions other women in leadership. For instance, Prisca is named before her husband Aquilla in Romans 16:3, which suggests she had a higher status. Both Prisca and Aquilla worked closely with Paul, and they even risked their lives for the gospel. They were well-known in the early church and helped lead a house church in Rome. Junia is another example. In Romans 16:7, Paul describes her as "outstanding among the apostles," showing she had a significant leadership role in the church. Dunn (1998, p. 586-592) points out that this shows Junia was an apostle, which means she was one of the leaders of the early church. These examples of women in leadership roles support the idea that Paul did not believe women should be excluded from ministry.

Belz (2001, p. 130) suggests two ways to understand Paul's teachings on women. One way is to look at Paul's letters about his female co-workers. The other way is to examine his teachings on marriage. Belz argues that if Paul's views on marriage and women's leadership support the idea of women's subordination, then 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 could be seen as part of Paul's original teachings. But if Paul's views seem to contradict each other, it might mean this passage was added later.

Finally, O'Donovan (1996, p. 282) stresses that men and women are equal in the eyes of God, based on Galatians 3:28. He explains that both men and women should submit to one another in the church out of respect for Christ, as seen in Ephesians 5:21. He also talks about the relationship between husbands and wives. O'Donovan says that while the husband is the head of the family, like Christ is the head of the church, the husband's leadership should be loving and self-sacrificial. The husband should not dominate or mistreat his wife, but instead serve her in the way Christ loves the church.

Despite the extensive scholarly discourse surrounding 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, there remains a significant gap in contextual studies that examine the interpretations of these verses within specific local communities, particularly in the African context. While existing literature provides insights into broader theological debates and cultural considerations, there is a lack of empirical research focused on how indigenous people interpret these passages in their context by exploring the perspectives of various stakeholders within the community to understand how their unique cultural and contextual experiences shape their interpretations of gender roles in the church (Baloyi, 2010, p. 1). By doing so, the research seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about gender inclusivity in the

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania and offer insights that may inform future theological and ecclesial practices.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) is one of the largest Christian denominations in Tanzania, with over six million members. However, like many churches across Africa, it continues to grapple with issues of gender equality and the participation of women in church leadership. Although the ELCT has officially adopted policies that promote gender inclusivity, significant challenges remain that hinder the full participation of women in leadership roles (Mwambungu, 2004, p.12).

The gender-biased interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 has led to the exclusion of women from leadership roles in many dioceses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (Moshi, 2017). Even though women receive theological and leadership training, they are often not allowed to hold leadership positions because of the common understanding of this passage (Olotu, 2002). As a result, these interpretations continue to create gender inequality in church structures and deny qualified women the chance to contribute to leadership (Ngumuo, 2001, p. 32).

Furthermore, Mwambungu (2004,p.60) looks at the effect of these interpretations on the inclusion of women in church leadership. He argues that depending on a gender-biased reading of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 keeps traditional patriarchal structures in place within the church. This view not only stops women from taking leadership roles but also slows down progress toward gender equality in church settings. Hence, reinterpreting 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 in a more inclusive and contextually accurate way is essential for promoting gender equality and empowering women in church leadership.

Building on the picture described above, this study aims to examine the meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 within the context of Ulanga Kilombero, exploring how its interpretation affects the inclusivity of leadership for both men and women in the church, and evaluating whether this interpretation aligns with Paul's broader teachings on women's roles in Christian ministry.

### **Theoretical Lens**

In this study, the use of contextual theology as a theoretical framework has proven to be an effective approach for analyzing how ordinary readers interpret biblical texts within the Ulanga Kilombero context. This approach emphasizes the integration of local cultural experiences and perspectives into the interpretive process, which is crucial for understanding how biblical teachings are applied in everyday life (Ukpong, 1995, pp. 3-14; Schreiter, 1985, pp. 1-20). By foregrounding the lived realities of local readers, contextual theology allows for a deeper exploration of the intersections between Ulanga Kilombero cultural values and biblical teachings, especially regarding issues such as the silencing of women in the Church (Goba, 1983, pp. 45-67; Adamo, 2001, pp. 79-100). This framework's emphasis on dialogue between faith and culture facilitates a more contextually relevant interpretation, which helps uncover insights that might otherwise be missed through a purely Western academic lens. Moreover, it positions local readers as active participants in the interpretive process, fostering a more inclusive and transformative understanding of the Bible within Ulanga Kilombero communities.

### **Methodological Perspectives**

This study employs a qualitative research approach within an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes understanding social phenomena through the perspectives and meanings constructed by participants. Forty eight participants formed a sample for research in the following categories women, traditionalists, pastors and evangelists and church leaders interpreted 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 within their cultural and theological contexts. The primary data were collected through contextual Bible study discussions, a method that fosters open-ended, dialogical engagement with biblical texts. The discussions focused specifically on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, allowing participants to share their interpretations, raise questions, and collaboratively reflect on the passage. This approach aligns with the interpretivist paradigm by recognizing that meaning is co-constructed through dialogue and shaped by cultural, social, and theological backgrounds.

The researchers facilitated these Bible study sessions, ensuring an inclusive and participatory environment. The discussions were conducted in Kiswahili and local languages to allow participants to express their insights naturally and freely. These sessions were audio-recorded, transcribed, and subsequently translated into English for analysis.

The study employs a grounded theory approach for data analysis, allowing themes and patterns to emerge inductively from the data. The transcripts were systematically coded to identify recurring motifs, divergences in interpretation, and underlying cultural influences. This inductive process was supplemented by engagement with relevant hermeneutical frameworks, particularly the contextual Bible Hermeneutic as developed by Ukpong. This framework was instrumental in examining how indigenous worldviews and lived experiences shape the reading and interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

Given that the researchers facilitated the Bible study discussions as external scholars, potential biases and power dynamics may have influenced participant responses. Efforts were made to mitigate this by adopting a facilitative rather than directive role, allowing participants to lead discussions as much as possible. Furthermore, translation from local languages to English posed challenges regarding the retention of meaning and nuance, which were carefully considered in the interpretation of findings.

By employing a qualitative, interpretivist approach, and this study captures the lived experiences and theological reflections of the Ulanga Kilombero community. The contextual Bible study format provides a rich understanding of how this passage is interpreted within specific social, cultural, and religious frameworks. This methodological approach not only ensures depth and authenticity in data collection but also contributes to broader discussions on contextual biblical interpretation and gender dynamics in African Christian communities.

### **The Contextual Bible Reading of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 in the Ulanga Kilombero Context**

In facilitating the reading process of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, I started by asking my UKD participants about their general understanding of the text. My intention was to gauge how these individuals initially interpreted the passage, which instructs women to be silent in church. The responses revealed two main themes: some readers believed Paul did not intend to promote women's silence in the Church, while others felt his intent was to advocate for women's silence. These divergent interpretations emerged as key issues from the survey.

#### **Paul did not Intend to Advocate for Women's Silence in the Church.**

During the discussion, some participants stated that *Paul did not intend to advocate for women's silence in the church*. The responses from the participants reveal differing interpretations of Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. A significant portion of participants, including both men and women, believe that this passage reflects Paul's directive for women to remain silent in the church, with a focus on the societal shame that would fall on both women and their families if they were to speak. However, a contrasting viewpoint emerged, particularly from a majority of women and some men, who argue against this traditional interpretation. They highlight that Paul's instructions should be seen in light of the cultural context of Corinth and emphasize that the situation should not be applied universally to contemporary church practices. The passage refers to a "law" that supposedly forbids women from speaking. However, in the Ulanga Kilombero context, no such law exists. Instead, a woman's voice is traditionally valued as a means of preserving the well-being of her family (Discussion with Evangelist Mkoko, Mkusa, Msita, and others on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September, 2023).

One participant, a retired pastor, argued that in their context, women play an important role in taking care of both male and female children. His view was supported by several women who stated that they cannot remain silent because silencing them, as the church is doing now, is no different from what they believe Paul did, exploiting them and using their property for gospel evangelism while at the same time forbidding them to speak in Corinth. They emphasized that today, they cannot stay silent because their children's lives could be at risk (Mkoko, 2023).

Additionally, a minority of men and a majority of women proposed an interpretation that focuses on other biblical verses that support the role of women in the church. They pointed to passages such as Judges 4:4-5 (Deborah as

a prophet and judge), Romans 16:1-2 (Phoebe as a deacon), Acts 18:26 (Priscilla teaching Apollos alongside her husband), and 1 Corinthians 11:5 (women praying and prophesying in the church). They suggested that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 might not be gender-specific because the Holy Spirit pours out gifts on both men and women. They also referred to Titus 2:3-5, where women are instructed to teach, reinforcing the idea that this passage should not be applied rigidly in their context. This aligns with the role of women in Ulanga Kilombero, where they serve as leaders and teachers in their society. As a result, they felt the text lacked clarity and needed further explanation from theologians and pastors as church leaders (*Discussion with Evangelist Mkoko, Mkusa, Msita, and others on the 10th of September, 2023*). This response aligns with scholarly interpretations that suggest Paul's call for silence was either situational or intended to maintain order in worship rather than to prohibit women from speaking altogether. The evidence from Romans 16, where Paul commends women in ministry, further supports this perspective. However, differing interpretations exist within various church traditions, influencing contemporary applications of these passages.

### **Reasons for Paul's Instruction on Women's Silence**

The inquiry into the reasons behind Paul's directive for women to remain silent in the church, as expressed in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, reveals various factors influencing this teaching. Discussions with 48 participants including women, church leaders, pastors, and traditional leaders indicate that many interpret Paul's instructions as being shaped by both Jewish and Greco-Roman cultural norms. One key argument presented was that, in the cultural context of Corinth, women were expected to demonstrate obedience to their husbands in all matters, including public and religious settings. Some participants suggested that this societal norm influenced Paul's directive, making women's silence an extension of broader expectations of female submission within the ancient world. One significant influence was the dominant cultural norms of both Jewish and Greco-Roman societies. In the cultural context of Corinth, women were expected to demonstrate obedience to their husbands in all spheres of life, including public and religious settings. This expectation of female submission, grounded in ancient societal structures, likely shaped Paul's directive to maintain the hierarchical order within the church. As scholars like Wenham (1995) have noted, these cultural norms often extended into religious life, where women's roles were circumscribed by broader social expectations (Wenham, 1995). As a result, it is essential to critically engage with the cultural and historical context in which Paul wrote, while also considering his broader teachings on equality and leadership within the church, so that the church today can better understand and navigate the balance between cultural influences and the inclusive principles of the gospel.

Another perspective emphasized that Paul's instruction was based on specific social and cultural factors affecting the Corinthian church. Some participants proposed that women speaking publicly, especially without their husbands' consent, might have been seen as disruptive or inappropriate. In this view, Paul's command was meant to maintain social harmony rather than impose a universal rule. In this interpretation, women speaking publicly without their husbands' consent might have been seen as a disruptive act that would have threatened the social harmony of the worship setting. This perspective aligns with the view that Paul's instruction was not meant as a universal rule, but as a response to particular circumstances within the Corinthian community, as suggested by scholars such as Keener (2014), who argues that Paul's instructions were contextually driven by the cultural norms of the time rather than timeless ecclesiastical laws (Keener, 2014). Therefore, understanding Paul's instruction within its specific historical and cultural context allows for a more interpretation that can better inform contemporary practices in church leadership, promoting a more inclusive approach that considers both men and women as equal participants in ministry, which may differ from current cultural practices and traditions.

Others pointed to the role of patriarchal structures, interpreting Paul's directive as a means of reinforcing male authority and preserving male honor in the church. In ancient society, male leadership was dominant, and allowing women to speak publicly might have been perceived as challenging this established order. This view reflects the patriarchal framework of the Roman world, where male leadership was seen as both normative and divinely ordained. According to scholars like Foh (1979), Paul's instruction to silence women can be understood as a way to protect the existing social order, which upheld male authority in both familial and religious spheres (Foh, 1979). Consequently, this interpretation suggests that Paul's directive was not only influenced by the cultural norms of

the time but also served to maintain the patriarchal structures that defined both society and the church, limiting women's participation in leadership roles.

A different argument focused on the possibility that some women were causing disruptions during worship services. According to this view, Paul's command was a response to disorderly conduct rather than a general prohibition on women speaking. This interpretation suggests that Paul was concerned with maintaining order and reverence in church gatherings rather than restricting women's roles permanently. Paul's directive, in this case, was understood not as a blanket prohibition but as a measure to maintain order and reverence during worship. This view is supported by scholars like Osborne (2006), who argues that the disorder in the Corinthian church likely led Paul to issue specific guidelines to ensure the worship service remained orderly (Osborne, 2006). Thus, this perspective proposes that Paul's instruction was a practical response to specific issues within the Corinthian church, aimed at ensuring worship was conducted in a respectful and orderly manner, rather than a permanent restriction on women's participation.

Additionally, some participants explored the influence of the Torah and the broader creation narrative. A minority of participants interpreted Paul's directive as rooted in divine law rather than cultural norms. They believed that Paul's reference to the law suggested a timeless theological principle, reinforcing a hierarchy between men and women that extended beyond the Corinthian context. According to this interpretation, Paul's reference to the law would reinforce a divine hierarchy between men and women that transcended the cultural context of Corinth. Such an understanding of Paul's writings is similar to the views expressed by scholars like Barclay (1976), who contends that Paul's teachings on women reflect an inherent theological stance rather than a response to cultural or situational factors (Barclay, 1976). Therefore, this interpretation suggests that Paul's directive was not merely a response to local cultural issues, but rather a reflection of a broader, divinely ordained order that should apply universally across all times and cultures.

Finally, some participants linked Paul's instruction to the perceived limitations on women's spiritual gifts. They argued that women were not seen as capable of effectively exercising their gifts within the church. This perspective reflects broader attitudes within early Christianity regarding women's roles and their participation in leadership and teaching. This perspective reflects a broader historical understanding of women's roles in early Christianity, where their participation in leadership and teaching was often limited. As scholars such as Wessel (1992) have pointed out, early Christian communities often had restrictions on women's involvement in certain church activities, including preaching and teaching, due to perceived limitations on their abilities or spiritual authority (Wessel, 1992). Thus, this interpretation suggests that Paul's directive was influenced by prevailing views in early Christianity about women's spiritual capabilities, reinforcing the gendered limitations on women's roles in church leadership and teaching.

Therefore, the reasons behind Paul's instruction for women to remain silent in the church are shaped by the cultural norms and societal expectations of the time, including the influence of Jewish and Greco-Roman practices. These factors, along with the specific social dynamics within the Corinthian church, suggest that Paul's directive was not a universal command, but one aimed at maintaining order and reinforcing existing structures within the early Christian community. Understanding these reasons helps clarify the context in which Paul's teachings were given and highlights the importance of considering cultural and historical factors when interpreting such instructions.

### **Paul meant Women should be Silent in the Church**

The responses in this study clearly illustrate the tension between traditional and contemporary interpretations of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. The minority, who adhere to a traditional reading, view the passage as an established divine order that mandates women's silence and submission, reflecting cultural and religious norms from the ancient world. This perspective aligns with views such as those expressed by Carson (1991), who argues that Paul's instructions should be viewed through the lens of the first-century Greco-Roman context, where male authority was prominent, and such directives were aimed at maintaining social and ecclesiastical order (Carson, 1991). Those who oppose the inclusion of women in church leadership, particularly in hierarchical positions, argue that women are weak beings because they were created from the rib of a man, as stated in Genesis 2:18-22.

This is a common argument held by many. Siegel, in the article *Women, Authority, and the Bible*, states, “The woman is formed from the man’s rib, signifying both her connection to him and her subordinate position in the created order.” This interpretation suggests that women are inherently subordinate to men.

Additionally, it is claimed that because Eve was the first to fall into sin, leading to God's curse upon humanity, women must remain under male authority. This belief is often used to justify the exclusion of women from leadership roles in the church.

Furthermore, some argue that Paul did not allow women to serve as leaders in the church. Many opponents of women's leadership cite Pauline letters to support their position. For example, they often refer to 1 Corinthians 11:7-9, where Paul seemingly places women in a lower position, linking it to the consequences of the fall in Genesis. Based on this interpretation, they conclude that women must remain under the authority of men (*Discussion with Msita, 20.11.2024*).

Another frequently cited passage is 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, where Paul commands that women should remain silent in church and, if they have questions, they should ask their husbands at home. From this, opponents argue that a pastor, by definition, must speak while leading, instructing, and preaching to the congregation. If women were allowed to serve as pastors and perform these duties, it would contradict what they interpret as God's command prohibiting women from speaking in church—thus making it a sin before God.

On the other hand, the majority of respondents suggest that Paul’s instructions were culturally bound and do not necessarily reflect God’s universal will for all times. They advocate for a contextual approach, taking into account the evolution of gender equality and women’s roles in modern society. This view echoes Thiselton’s (2000) argument, which posits that Paul's teachings should be understood in their specific historical and cultural context, with room for reinterpretation in light of contemporary values and the growing recognition of gender equality in church settings (Thiselton, 2000). This division between traditional and contemporary perspectives highlights the continuing debate within the church about the interpretation of scripture in the light of changing social and cultural norms.

### **Factor That Denying Inclusion of Women in Leadership in the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese**

The study has identified two key factors that deny inclusion of women in hierarchical leadership in the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese.

### **Biblical Passages and Gender Roles in Church Leadership**

The responses from the field indicate that many church leaders and members continue to rely on traditional interpretations of passages like 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 to justify the exclusion of women from higher leadership roles in the church. This interpretation often emphasizes that women should remain silent and submit to male authority, which aligns with the historical and cultural norms within many church communities. However, there is also growing openness to more contextualized interpretations, which consider the changing societal values of gender equality and argue for greater inclusion of women in leadership positions. The findings reveal a significant divide in perspectives: traditional views continue to influence interpretations of gender roles, while some members push for a reinterpretation based on a broader understanding of scripture.

In line with this, Rosner (2010) offers valuable insights into the need for contextual interpretation. He suggests that passages like 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 were written in a particular cultural and historical setting, and their application today should take into account the context of the early church as well as modern societal changes. Rosner argues that Paul’s instructions were not universal but tailored to address specific issues in the Corinthian church. This perspective helps explain the continued relevance of such passages in shaping the role of women in church leadership today.

Similarly, Ciampa (2007) emphasizes the importance of contextualizing biblical teachings, noting that interpretations should be sensitive not only to the text's original context but also to how it applies in modern times.

As the study's findings suggest, many participants are increasingly advocating for this more flexible approach, urging that scripture be understood as evolving with time and not bound by past cultural constraints.

Keener (2014) further supports this idea, highlighting the importance of reading scripture with an awareness of both its historical context and its contemporary application. Keener argues that while early Christian communities were influenced by societal norms that limited women's roles, these norms should not restrict the church's approach to women's leadership today. Keener's work suggests that the church must re-evaluate these traditional interpretations, particularly when they conflict with contemporary values of gender equality.

Thus, the study's findings reflect a broader tension between preserving traditional views and embracing a more contextualized understanding of scripture. The exclusion of women from higher leadership roles, based on rigid interpretations of specific passages, is challenged by those who advocate for a more inclusive, context-sensitive approach to biblical teachings. As gender equality continues to gain prominence in society, it is essential for the church to reconsider how its interpretations of scripture can evolve to reflect both the historical context and the social realities of today.

### **The Missionary Orientation in the ELCT-UKD**

Historical records indicate that after World War II (1938-1945), many men died in the war, and women took on many family responsibilities, including those previously seen as men's duties. With the arrival of the Germans and their introduction of plantations, which required labor, social transformations occurred. Men's traditional roles as heads of households in childcare were taken over by women and grandparents. This situation raised women's awareness of their abilities to manage their households. The study reveals that, during the German colonial period, women were often tasked with jobs that were traditionally men's, such as building huts, preparing fields, and farming. Religious activities, however, were left to elderly men who were not employed for manual labor (Mahali, 2002, p. 185).

According to Musa Dube, most missionaries who came to Africa suppressed local cultures, driven by an imperialist agenda not suited for the continent. These missionaries were often accompanied by colonists, who had interests in securing land or resources. While their objectives were sometimes similar, their methods differed: colonists used force and violence, while missionaries employed the Bible and church structures to exert control (Dube, 2001, pp. 52-60).

In the case of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Ulanga Kilombero Diocese (ELCT-UKD), the arrival of the Danish Lutheran mission in 1949 brought some restrictions, especially in the Ulanga mission area, which was part of the Southern Synod led by Rev. Tygesen and his wife. Although women were allowed to study in Bible schools, they were not allowed to become evangelists or deacons. Only men were recognized and trained as ministers, evangelists, and deacons, while women were relegated to roles like cleaning the church. This ideology, which was adopted by local leaders, continued to limit women's participation in church leadership (Mdegella, Kilimhana, and Kasumba, 1891-1991, p. 29).

Things began to change in 2003 when the UKD decided to address these restrictions. They realized that excluding women from ministry caused misunderstandings among Christians, as it seemed to suggest that men and women were not equal. After the departure of the Danish Lutheran Mission, the UKD established the Department of Women and Children to reintegrate women into their traditional roles within the church (Mpendaye, Interview on November 16, 2024).

### **Influence of Theological Teaching from Danish Lutheran Mission**

Pastors and evangelists in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania - Ulanga Kilombero Diocese (ELCT-UKD) who have received theological training from the Danish Lutheran Mission (DLM) tend to interpret biblical texts, like 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, with a more egalitarian perspective. This influence is a result of exposure to Western theological teachings (Discussion with Group of Pastors, June 2, 2023). In urban areas, where congregations are more familiar with progressive theological views, pastors are more likely to adopt an inclusive interpretation. In contrast, pastors in rural areas, where traditional cultural values are more deeply rooted, are

inclined to interpret these texts in a more restrictive way. This contrast reflects broader societal differences in exposure to global theological ideas versus local cultural practices (Interview with Pastor Nwaka, June 2, 2023).

In conclusion, the theological training received by ELCT-UKD pastors plays a significant role in shaping their interpretations of key biblical texts such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Many pastors in the diocese, initially trained by the Danish Lutheran Mission, were introduced to egalitarian Western theological perspectives, which have shaped their views. Consequently, these pastors tend to hold a mixture of traditional and contemporary views on women's roles in the church. While most still adhere to a restrictive interpretation that prevents women from teaching or speaking, a notable number are more open to interpretations that support greater inclusion and equality for women in ministry. Despite emerging movements advocating for egalitarian practices, traditional views on limiting women's leadership in the church's hierarchical structure remain strong. This divergence highlights the ongoing challenge faced by the ELCT-UKD in reconciling its theological heritage with evolving cultural and scriptural understandings of gender roles (Discussion with Pastors Mkwando and Duma, August 10, 2023).

While colonial influences and the Danish Lutheran Mission have brought some changes, traditional gender norms continue to hold sway in these communities (Ngana, August 20, 2023). In many households, men expect their wives to be trained by their mothers in domestic and agricultural tasks, as the mother's role is seen as crucial in preparing future wives and mothers (Mpapai, August 20, 2023). In some areas, men and women are acknowledged as equal in the image of God, yet their roles are perceived as distinct, with men typically expected to lead and women to be submissive (Churu, July 25, 2023). Mr. Msalike, a retired Chairperson of Elders in Ifakara District, noted that men expect their wives to be obedient, humble, and respectful (Msalike, June 26, 2023). Similarly, Mrs. Balali, the current Chairperson of Elders in Mlimba District, emphasized that women are often seen as incapable of leadership, with their humility sometimes interpreted as inferiority (Balali & wife, August 20, 2023). Although women in these communities effectively carry out their roles, they are not always seen as decision-makers within the family. These responses highlight the enduring influence of traditional gender norms in these communities, which are shaped by both cultural expectations and the historical legacy of colonialism and the Danish Lutheran Mission (Mrs. Lubida & Ngowo, August 2, 2023).

### **Treatment of Women in Public within the Ulanga Kilombero Context**

In the Ulanga Kilombero context, women's treatment in public generally reflects societal norms that acknowledge and respect their vital roles in both family and community life. Women are seen as essential sources of life, with their contributions playing a central role in the day-to-day functioning and overall well-being of society. In particular, among the Ndamba, Pogoro, and Mbunga communities, women are highly valued for their roles in family and societal continuity. They are responsible for giving birth, nurturing children, and guiding the next generation, all of which are fundamental to the preservation and growth of society.

Women also hold significant responsibilities as household heads, managing domestic affairs and ensuring the welfare of the family, especially in the absence of their husbands. Their roles extend beyond the home, as they are actively involved in community life, contributing to decisions that affect both the family and the broader society. In these communities, women are respected and their decisions are highly valued in both domestic and public matters. They participate in governance and decision-making processes, holding respected positions in their communities (Ngowo, August 20, 2023).

Women in these societies not only perform crucial roles in family and community life but also occupy leadership positions, such as heads of families, community leaders, and political figures. Their leadership is seen as natural and beneficial for the community's welfare. Furthermore, women often have control over economic resources, making critical financial decisions, including those related to property ownership and business management. They hold a high social status, participating actively in social and cultural ceremonies, and are key figures in preserving community traditions and culture (Mrs. Churu & Mr. Msalike, June 25, 2023).

Despite these significant contributions, the representation of women in higher leadership roles within the Diocese remains limited. Some women have made notable achievements, such as heading the women's department and

serving as parish secretaries, yet these roles are still few compared to their male counterparts. This reflects the ongoing progress in women's empowerment, but also highlights the challenges and limitations that still exist, with varying levels of female representation in leadership roles within the Diocese.

### **The Parallelism between Paul's Prohibition of Women Speaking in Public in Corinth and Modern Practices in the Local Church**

The majority of participants in the study agreed that while women can speak in church today, they still experience a form of *silence* due to their exclusion from decision-making roles within the church. This reflects the ongoing issue of gender inequality within religious institutions. Despite their active participation in church activities, women in the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese often find themselves sidelined when it comes to leadership positions, even though they frequently outnumber men in these activities. There is a strong call for women to be given more opportunities to lead, which marks a significant departure from traditional gender norms that have historically excluded women from positions of authority within the church.

Historically, women were not allowed to serve on the altar, but the recent inclusion of female servers is seen as a positive step forward. However, many believe that more needs to be done to elevate women to higher leadership roles, addressing persistent gender inequalities within the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese (Discussion with Ngowo, 20th August 2023, and Mrs. Balali, 1st June 2023). The recognition of women's abilities and contributions is growing, but it remains limited in terms of leadership opportunities.

The biblical passage of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, where Paul prohibits women from speaking in the church, was influenced by the societal norms of ancient Corinth, where women were expected to remain silent and submissive in public settings (Witherington, 1995; Fiorenza, 1983). In the context of the Ulanga Kilombero Diocese, however, practices have evolved to allow women to speak in church. Despite this progress, women continue to face limitations when it comes to participating in key decision-making roles. This highlights the discrepancy between their ability to speak in church and their exclusion from leadership positions, revealing the ongoing gender inequality, even in the face of some advancements (The Majority Perspective of Local Leaders and Traditionalists, 2023).

### **The Position of the Church towards Gender Inclusivity in Leadership.**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) upholds a theological perspective that emphasizes equality between men and women while recognizing functional differences in their roles. From an ELCT standpoint, Genesis 2:18-23 does not imply a hierarchical structure where man is superior to woman but rather underscores their mutual partnership, interdependence, and shared responsibility in God's creation.

The passage in Genesis 2 describes the movement from incompleteness to completeness rather than from superiority to inferiority. When God declares, "*It is not good for the man to be alone*" (Gen 2:18), it indicates that humanity was incomplete without the woman. In ELCT teachings, this completeness is seen as God's intentional design for partnership in marriage, family, and community, where both man and woman contribute equally to the fulfillment of God's plan.

The phrase '*ēzer kenedō* (helper suitable for him) does not suggest inferiority. In the Old Testament, the word '*ēzer* is often used to describe God as a helper of His people (e.g., Psalm 33:20). The ELCT understands this as signifying a complementary role rather than subordination. Man and woman are created to work together in harmony, each contributing uniquely but equally to the family, church, and society.

The creation of woman from man's rib (Gen 2:21-22) is understood in ELCT theology as a symbol of unity, equality, and partnership rather than hierarchy. The imagery of the rib highlights the closeness and interdependence of man and woman, reinforcing their equal value in God's creation. Adam's exclamation "*This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*" (Gen 2:23) affirms woman's equal standing, not as someone inferior, but as someone who shares in his humanity and divine purpose.

The ELCT often refers to Genesis 1:26-27, which states that both man and woman are created in the image of God (*imago Dei*), reinforcing their equal dignity and worth. This theological foundation is used to affirm that

gender-based discrimination has no place in the church or society. While there may be differences in roles within the family and community, these differences should not justify the marginalization or oppression of women.

Based on this understanding, the ELCT supports the involvement of women in ministry, including their ordination as pastors. The church rejects interpretations of Genesis 2 that promote the subordination of women in the church or family. Instead, it emphasizes mutual respect, shared leadership, and equal participation in the work of God's kingdom.

In conclusion, the ELCT understands Genesis 2:18-23 as a theological foundation for gender equality rather than hierarchy. The creation of woman from man's rib signifies partnership and unity, and the term *helper* is understood as complementary rather than subordinate. While roles may differ, equality remains central to the church's teachings on gender and leadership.

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania – Ulanga Kilombero Diocese (ELCT-UKD), women are allowed to serve as pastors and evangelists, leading congregations and owning their ministerial responsibilities. However, when it comes to higher leadership positions, such as Church District Pastor or other executive roles, there remains a significant challenge. While the church policy allows women in leadership, the practical implementation is hindered by cultural and theological perceptions that continue to limit women's advancement. Some pastors within ELCT-UKD still preach using passages like 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:12, interpreting them in a way that restricts women's roles in church leadership. These interpretations reinforce the perception that women should focus primarily on domestic responsibilities rather than holding high-ranking church positions. As a result, despite the church's acceptance of women in ministry, the mindset of many leaders and members has not fully shifted toward equality.

One participant in the discussion recalled a particular executive council meeting where a question was raised about why all Church District Pastors were male. The response from one pastor was particularly harsh, stating outright that women could not be allowed to hold such positions. This incident highlights the deep-rooted resistance to change and the ongoing debate about gender roles in leadership within the diocese (The Executive Council of the Diocese, 2023). This contradiction raises an important question: if ELCT-UKD permits women to serve as pastors, why are they still restricted from higher leadership positions? The issue is not just about church policy but about changing perceptions and dismantling deeply ingrained beliefs that hinder women's progress. There is a need for continued discussions, theological education, and advocacy to ensure that women receive equal opportunities not just in pastoral ministry but also in the highest decision-making roles within the church.

Despite historical and cultural barriers, the ELCT remains committed to promoting gender equality, advocating for the inclusion of women in leadership, and addressing disparities in education, employment, and decision-making within the church and society.

In adding to that there challenges that hinder the women in leadership position. Cultural influences also play a significant role in limiting women's leadership. In many Tanzanian communities, traditional beliefs assign specific roles to men and women, with men being regarded as natural leaders while women are expected to focus on domestic and supportive roles. These cultural values have influenced church structures, making it difficult for women to access leadership positions. Some church members believe that male leadership reflects God's natural order, based on the creation narrative in Genesis 2:18-23, where Adam was created first and Eve as a "helper." In some congregations, women are discouraged from speaking in decision-making meetings, reinforcing male dominance in leadership. Traditional rites of passage and social norms further strengthen the perception that men should be the primary decision-makers. Although ELCT-UKD promotes gender equality, cultural resistance slows down the process of integrating women into leadership roles (Kisenime, 2024)

Historical church practices have also contributed to the limitation of women in leadership. Church leadership in ELCT-UKD, like many other Christian denominations, has traditionally been male-dominated. Early missionaries often structured church governance in ways that favored men, reinforcing the idea that leadership should be reserved for them. This historical precedent continues to influence church structures today. Limited opportunities

for women in theological training, lack of mentorship for aspiring female leaders, and the dominance of men in key church councils and decision-making bodies make it difficult for women to rise to leadership positions. Although ELCT-UKD has taken steps to ordain women and appoint them to leadership roles, the presence of systemic barriers means that progress is slow (Mpendaye, 2024).

Another major challenge is the tension between maintaining theological and doctrinal traditions versus embracing change. Some theological traditions within ELCT-UKD resist gender-inclusive leadership due to concerns about compromising biblical authority or adapting too much to modern social trends. Some leaders fear that allowing women full leadership might contradict long-standing beliefs and weaken the church's foundation. However, others argue that the Lutheran doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) supports gender equality. They also point to the Reformation's emphasis on breaking oppressive traditions in favor of biblical truth, suggesting that the church should continue reforming unjust gender structures. The early church also evolved in its leadership structure, allowing flexibility in applying biblical teachings. The challenge remains in balancing respect for tradition with the need for theological and social progress.

In conclusion, the limitations on women's leadership in ELCT-UKD are influenced by biblical interpretations, cultural traditions, historical church practices, and institutional structures. However, the church is gradually working towards gender equality by addressing these barriers through theological reflection, cultural transformation, and institutional reforms. While challenges remain, there is hope that the church will continue evolving to provide equal opportunities for both men and women in leadership.

### **Promoting Inclusive Leadership through 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35**

The majority of participants argue that addressing cultural norms and perceptions that perpetuate gender stereotypes is essential in promoting inclusive leadership. They propose several approaches to reinterpret 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 in a way that supports both men and women in church leadership:

Church communities should engage in open and respectful discussions on the interpretation of passages like 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35, ensuring that biblical principles of love, equality, and mutual respect are emphasized. This dialogue can help bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary understandings of gender roles in leadership.

Recognizing that societal norms have evolved, the church should adopt a flexible interpretation of the passage. Instead of using it to restrict women's leadership, the text should be understood in its historical and cultural context, allowing for more inclusive applications today. Empowering both men and women to engage deeply with Scripture is crucial. The church should provide theological education that challenges traditional views that reinforce gender restrictions, fostering a more balanced understanding of biblical teachings on leadership.

1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 should be approached with an inclusive perspective that values the contributions of both men and women in leadership. By recognizing and encouraging the diverse gifts within the church community, leadership roles can become more accessible to all, regardless of gender.

The church should emphasize biblical texts that highlight women in leadership roles, such as Deborah (Judges 4-5), Priscilla (Acts 18:26), and Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2). These examples can be used to challenge restrictive interpretations and affirm women's capacity for leadership.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study investigates into how interpretations of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 have influenced gender inclusivity in leadership roles within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania's Ulanga Kilombero Diocese (ELCT-UKD). Traditionally, these verses have been cited to limit women's participation in church leadership. However, contemporary scholarship suggests that such passages were context-specific, addressing particular issues in ancient Corinth's church practices.

Beyond theological interpretations, the study reveals that missionary orientations have significantly influenced current understandings of gender roles. Missionary teachings often imposed patriarchal structures that have persisted over time, affecting women's participation in church leadership.

In the Ulanga Kilombero context, while women actively contribute to family, community, and church life, they often face barriers to leadership roles due to deep-seated cultural and institutional norms. To achieve genuine inclusivity, it's essential for the church to reinterpret scripture in light of evolving societal values, promote theological education for women, and challenge cultural norms that sustain inequality.

By balancing respect for historical scripture contexts with its transformative message of equality in Christ, the ELCT-UKD can lead by example. Through open dialogue, reassessment of traditional norms, and reforming church practices, the diocese can empower both men and women to fully embrace and serve in their divine callings.

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