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## THE INVOLVEMENT OF AFRICAN WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA (1894-1912)

Dr. T. T. Bello



**The Involvement of African Women in the Development of Christianity in Africa  
(1894-1912)**

Dr. T. T. Bello

Religion Studies Department: Faculty of Arts Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti.

Corresponding Authors Email: [venttbello@gmail.com](mailto:venttbello@gmail.com) Phone: 07039140729

**Abstract**

**Purpose:** Women are very important in African societies. Their place in the society is very vital for human survival. They can contribute to the social, religious economic and political development of our society. This paper tried to discuss the status of women in African societies. The position of women in traditional African political and religious development will be discussed. The role placed by Africa women mostly Ekiti Women in the development of Christianity in Ekiti land. Also the role of women who are ex-slaves in the development of their rural areas in Ekiti land will be discussed. The author, will also ex-ray how Christianity came to some towns in Ekiti land through the help of women who are ex-slaves. The purpose of this paper was to express the role played by women in the development of Christianity in Africa most especially Ekiti, Nigeria

**Methodology:** The method used mostly is primary and secondary source, through the churches, individual school records and national archives.

**Findings:** From the findings of the author we were able to know that women also contributed to the growth and development if Christianity in Africa mostly in Ekiti land in Nigeria.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** One of the contribution of this paper is that it exposes the world to the fact that women are not only contributor to the developmental achievement in Christendom in the society but also charismatic.

**Keywords:** *Skepticism, solidarity, Christianity, women, ex-slave, economic and Development.*

## INTRODUCTION

Discuss regarding women in society has become widespread in academic settings only in the last decade. In earlier periods only a few, chiefly women, pondered this question. As with all matters related intimately to social change—and therefore to social conflict—factual or descriptive assessments of what the status of women in society is or has been on the one hand, and morally normative evaluations of what the status of women in society ought to be on the other hand, are intimately interconnected (Davis, 1981).

Those who favour traditional sex roles - that is, who believe that both women's and men's should remain as it has been also usually presume, at the descriptive level, that women's lives have been characterized by a constancy across cultures and through time that is conditioned by the biological reality of women's capacity to bear children. Whether the division of labour between men and women in society is understood to be dictated "by nature" or by "divine decree," the traditional view presumes that all women's lives are relatively homogeneous, repetitive with respect to social function, and characterized by minimal change. Here the assumption operates that men have been the active - agents of historical change while women provided the stability of cultural continuity chiefly within the domestic sphere or household. Until recently, such views were challenged infrequently at either the factual or the moral level (Waterhooft, 1992). Movement aimed at changing public policy with respect to women's lives began to develop in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the social conditions for such pressure greatly accelerated after World War II. As a result of this social pressure/acknowledgement that sex discrimination" exist has become widespread. Along with this moral reevaluation has come a new factual interest in the status of women historically and through social - scientific inquiry aimed at contemporary understanding. A protocol for historical scholarship is emerging that requires any characterization of the past to address gender relations explicitly. More and more, it is recognized that theories of gender relations can be developed only in cross-cultural perspective. Lively scientific, ethical, and religious debates have ensued (Davis, 1981).

On the descriptive level, rising skepticism about traditionalist assumptions regarding women has produced unprecedented amounts of new historical research and social - scientific investigation. While residence rules through the mother are not rare, and there are definite examples of matrifocal societies, societies where primary solidarity relations are sustained by women. However, most societies have had one of three forms. Some premodern simple societies have exhibited relative equality between the male gender system as a whole and the female gender system as a whole! Others were or are characterized either by "mythical" male dominance (Sanday) or by actual male dominance, some time, viciously enforced. The latter is, overall, the most frequent form of social gender relation, and invariably characterizes politically powerful and highly differentiated societies (Waterhooft, 1992)

As cross - cultural comparisons based upon this recognition of diversity accelerate, the question more and more asked by social scientists is: Why are some societies so much more disposed to male supremacy and role domination than others? We are far from having uncontroversial answers to this question. It and women in slave or indentured and/or poverty groups often are forced to raise other people's children but are prevented from nurturing their own (Sott & studies,

1981). What has become clear is that modern capitalist political economies (and perhaps, postcapitalist ones as well) have dramatically altered and reshaped gender relations and the status of women. Most pre modern societies with traditionalists political economies pattern male and female gender roles in ways that publicly constitute and sustain gender roles as a social system.

Both men and women as groups exercise important symbolic, productive, and consumptive functions in society.

Even in male-dominated “societies men’s and women’s collective social roles were grounded in and sustained by discrete female or male cultures. Neither gender has a monopoly on public impact because the collective functions of production and reproduction were interrelated so that all were necessary to communal well-being. The development of capitalist centralized production accelerated the splitting off of these productive functions from the household unit (see Capitalism) (Sott & studies, 1981).

This destroyed the social value of work in the household because the domicile ceased to be the basic unit where income producing activity took place. This “privatization” of the family slowly but surely eroded the collective power of women within society. The modern perception of women is that their lives are to be lived out in this private sphere. The (fairly recent) advent of the nuclear, child-centered family and urban migration weakened traditional women’s cultures. Women became more isolated from their mothers, sisters, and women friends and the social value of their culture declined (Sott & studies, 1981). The personal and political disempowerment of women was the consequence. Because these structural changes are now pervasive and touch the lives of women globally, movements seeking justice for women have emerged within and across various cultures.

One dramatic side effect of the deluge of new historical and cross-cultural research on women’s lives is methodological, it is recognized that previous social-scientific, including historical, inquiry has deeply distorted human self-understanding by rendering half the species invisible. Acknowledging the bias against women’s reality in established Moses of inquiry has also exposed other biases in historical and cross-cultural description. Prevailing views of “the history of mankind” appear now as a “view from the top,” an account of our social past rendered from the perspectives of social elites and their hire literate. To better grasp the status of women in the past, it has been necessary to reorient the focus of historical investigation from the activities of political, economic, and intellectual elites, to concentrate upon those socio-cultural relations of everyday life neglected in dominant historiography (Sott & studies, 1981).

This “feminist” or “liberation” hermeneutic, or principle of interpretation,” requires intense skepticism about generalizations regarding the past drawn from data taken from the cultural repositories of social elites. Since there is an indisputable connection between dominant moral and religious ideologies, on the one and institutions and systems of male supremacy, on the other, this hermeneutic also requires a new rigor and intellectual maturity among religious ethicists and theologians. We must ask for example, about whether religious system, that emphasize male blood sacrifice and salvation from earthly sinful existence are not male supremacist religious legitimations developed to transcend the earthy “once-bornness” of women. It remains to be seen whether the mainstream of so-called orthodox Christianity, and also Judaism can deal candidly with the mounting evidence of the connection between male supremacy and the salient characteristics of Western religious systems, as presented, for example, in the scriptures. The normative moral debate regarding the status of women does not logically depend upon these factual disputes about what is the case (Sott & studies, 1981).

These normative differences do not follow scientific debates precisely, because ideology (Jay, 1981) or one’s contemporary political and/or symbolic interest provides an intervening variable that conditions the judgment as to the seriousness of sex discrimination.” Nevertheless when moral and theological difference exists. It is because our disposition toward truth claims and our religious vision are intimately related. Whether, or to what extent, one concedes the disadvantaged status of women to be an urgent moral issue depends upon how one assesses

one's interests in relation to the status quo, and upon one's conception for what sort of world is divinely intended or makes for human well-being. Male supremacist visions of society are best sustained by image, of the historical past in which women's role and place were at least relatively fixed by nature or God. By contrast, those who believe change is morally desirable will be drawn to pluralistic characterizations of the past that incorporate human diversity (Annis, 2006).

At the descriptive level, it is clear that the material and emotional pressures on women are dramatically on the increase. "The feminization of poverty" is a recently coined phrase to characterize the discovery that well over three fourths of the very poorest people in the world are women and their dependent children. The phrase also identifies a long-term trend in the global political economy that ensures that women and their children will make up an even larger proportion for the poor in the future. Hence, it is certain that whatever the outcome of scholarly debates at the scientific level, the status of women as a normative moral question in social ethics requires urgent attention in Christian ethics now and in the future (Annis, 2006).

### **The Position of African Women**

The women in traditional African Political and Religious organization seem very closely linked with the status of women in African traditional life. This could be so because "Religion plays a vital role in measuring the status of African women. In African generally, and Nigeria in particular culture has largely obscured the part of women in development. The women themselves seem not to have recognized their own contributions to the overall development of their own until very recently" Most homes in Nigeria see the women as mere appendages of the men who should forever remain subservient, a perception which scholars, such as (Okpeh, 2005) and Enemuo, 1999) have several implications for women participation in diverse societal endeavours.

Women are therefore regarded as weaker sex by men seen as second class citizens" and treated as properties of the men Labeodan remarked that "the average Yoruba women regarded herself as definitely subject to the man, her Lord and master." This is a peculiar feature of our society, given that, most societies are male dominated. Thus the male domination syndrome ranges in areas of culture, education, economy and socio-political scenes, which the woman suffers. While commenting on the above reality, Bruce" aptly pointed out that women find it rather cumbersome to fit into societal endeavours because, traditionally, the men are perceived as the bread winners and wielders of economic muscles of the home. In this situation, the women are accustomed to keep in Kegley and Withkopf (1990) silent as hewers of wood and fetchers of water combined with frequent pregnancy, child-birth and breast feedings" traditional sex stereotypes tend to place a ham on women's effective participation in development process within the African context. However, it should be noted that women in African traditional societies were a resource in development, many contributed immensely to socio-political and religious organization of kingdoms and empires that once existed, but now they are marginalized and have nothing to show for all their labour within the context of traditional African society. They wear a gloomy position, appear exploited, oppressed, down trodden and almost ostracized Williams.

However, it is obvious that optimal development in a nation is possible only if the labour power within all available social categories is fully tapped. When no conscious effort is made to harness, and appreciate the contributions of women who constrainable development is illusive. If the whole nation's participation is crucial, then the role of women in the country's development must be as distinctively defined and appreciated as those of men.

## **Women and Development in Traditional African Society**

Aqeret (2002), in support of the notion that women in traditional African societies are not only exploited, but also denied the opportunity of sitting side by side with men to contribute to decision making on serious issues that border on national development argues, women in most countries of the world are educationally, politically, economically, and socially disadvantage as a universal phenomenon. Women in traditional African societies are subjugated, exploited, and marginalization (Adereti, 2002). Globally, women constitute about half of the world's population (Adereti, 2002) and the 2006 population census in Nigeria put women's population at approximately 70 million, which is half of the total population of about 140 million. They perform several critical roles in the development of their various societies, but then, they still come under undue pressure and discrimination that diminish their contributions (Kegley & Withkopf, 1990).

The place of women in the society is vital for human survival. Women can contribute to the social, religious, economic and political development, if they are given change like their men counterpart. Traditionally, gender has referred to grammatical classifications in languages, and sex has referred to the biological classifications to which gender is analogous. The traditionally and social accepted roles of women in Nigeria are those of child bearing, housekeeping and source how fanning. Before the advent of Western education, emphasis was to prepare the girlchild for the natural roles of mother hood and her training was conducted through observation and imitation of her mothers (Ojo, 2009).

Earth is mother and mother is earth-Catherine Acholonu has rightly noted that the image of women as the principle temptress and destroy is foreign to African peoples. Traditionally Africans view women as the primeval mother of all, deserving or worship and veneration; the provider of justice, riches, wisdom and children. Women as temptress, woman as destroyer, are themes that arrival in African with colonialism, Christianity and Islam (Galiano 2003). So therefore we should know the role played by African woman in the development of Christianity mostly the Ekiti women accidental who were free slaves. Women like Mary Oja of Ode-Ekiti and Helena Fatoregun Doherty of Ijero-Ekiti.

### **The Role Played by Mary Oja of Ode Ekiti in the Development of Christianity in Ekitiland**

Mary Oja was captured as a slave girl at her tender age. This was the reason why she was not recognized by her people when she came back home. Oja was a native of Ode-Ekiti in the Gbonyin Local Government Council of Ekiti State from the Fabomi's family of Ode-Ekiti (Personal Communication, 2001). She was carried from Ode to Lagos as a slave girl and was resold to the slave dealers across the present Nigerian borders. Fortunately for Mary Oja, she was one of those free slaves who regained their freedom and brought to Lagos. Oja became a converted Christian in Lagos and took a baptismal name of Mary at Christ Church, Marina, Lagos in 1982 (Galiano, 2003).

One day in Lagos, the spirit led Mary Oja to go to Ode-Ekiti to preach Christian message to the people of Ode in 1896. By the time she got home (Ode) she could not be recognized because she left her hometown when she was in her tender age. She did not know her father's house but she could still remember her family as "Bomi" or "Fabomi" but nobody recognize her in her father's family. The moment she was able to locate her father's amity she was happy for the re-unity with her family again. She started the introduction of Christianity in Ode in 1901 because that was her motive of coming to Ode-Ekiti, her hometown (Galiano, 2003). On November 27, 1912 when Tom Harding was touring the Local are he passed through Ode to Omuo. He came late in the evening to see the Oba of Ode. Mary was one of those that came to

meet the white man (missionary) and welcome him at Olode's palace. Mary Oja interacted with the white man and his entourage. This gave her opportunity in addressing her people, that if they accepted the Christian Faith, they could also interacted with the white man too (Personal Communication, 2001).

At first, people were afraid to join her in the Christian faith, but one Awodumila was the first man to join her as a convert, but Awodumila's father was the priest of a god called Olu-Oke who was not happy that his son becomes a Christian. But the son said that he would rather die than not to be a Christian. The father reluctantly allowed him to be a Christian. He was later baptized and named Michael. Michael Awodumila and Mary Oja started preaching from house to house for soul winning. But the people of Ode were not happy especially with Awodumila whose father was the priest of the god of Olu-Oke. Awodumila was to be the next priest of Olu-Oke. With interest, Michael and Mary proceeded in the evangelization of the people and more souls were won to the faith. Mary Oja persuaded the people to bring more of their children. She started teaching Yoruba alphabets to the ones released by their parents. Many of the converted adults were baptized and educated. Among the earliest converts, apart from Awodumila, was Daniel Iyn, who was the first to be sent out for the work of evangelization and to study more (Personal Communication, 2001). He became a very versatile preacher when he came back looking through the preacher's book of St. Mary's Church, Ode, the name of Daniel Iyun was prominent. Mary Oja went out to preach at places like imesi-lasigidi with Kumuyi as a preacher. Kasumu, a man from Kabba area was the first catechist at Ode and Kumuyi and Imesi Lasigidi. "Mama Eko" was another name given to Mary Oja at Ode-Ekiti. She paid the salary of these catechists from her own purse. Michael

Awodumila was the first Baba-Egbe of St. Mary's Anglican Church. Ode-Ekiti. Mary Oja died in 1917. The name St. Mary was named after her to show appreciation of her contribution to the development of Ode-Ekiti and environments like Imesi-Lasigidi. Isinpekude (Isinbode), Egbe and Omuo (Personal Communication, 2001). Another woman also contributed to the development to Christianity in Ekitiland she is Helena Fatoregun Doherty a Princess from Ijero Ekiti.

### **Helena Fatoregun Doherty**

Helena Fatoregun Doherty, a renowned woman evangelist was born into a royal family of Oba Agbeleja Odudun I, the Ajero of Ijero-Ekiti present headquarters of Ijero local Government in Ekiti State. She was born about 1828. She was one of the Christian pioneers of Ekitiland. Her blood brother became the Ajero Arojoye of Ijero-Ekiti.<sup>20</sup> Princess Fatoregun loved buying and selling when she was a young lady. She also loved traveling to villages around Ijero town one day, as she was traveling to Armoko, twelve kilometers to Ijero to sell her but she could not be found. Later it was discovered that she had been taken captive as a slave girl in another town outside Ekitiland, but luckily for her, she was not taken outside Nigeria. The palace and the whole Ijero people went into sorrow because her whereabouts could not be located. For many years Helena Fatoregun' I was in bondage in a place hidden from the family (ADeniran, 1973).

Christianity was introduced to Mama Doherty by her slave master and she became a Christian. She was baptized and Helena was given to her as her Christian name. She was also married to a Christian husband called Doherty. Thus, Princess Helena Fatoregun became Helena Fatoregun

Doherty. According to the official record of Christ Anglican Church of Ijero-Ekiti, her husband was a strong member of St. Peter's Anglican Church in Lagos; hence she also became a strong member of the Church. Mama Fatoregun loved her town. According to Chief J. A. Ologunde" she was always home sick" so, she will always remember Ijero town by keeping it in mind

knowing full well that before she left Ijero, the town was in spiritual darkness, she planted it in her mind to launch Christian faith there one day (ADeniran, 1973).

In Jero, as at 1883, there were two main problems: no learned person to be the secretary to Ajero of Jero and the problem of spiritual darkness. To solve these problems, one Mr. Ogunleye was sent to Ijero to solve these problems by Princess Helena Fatoregun Doherty. Mr. Ogunleye was a native of Ipoti-Ekiti and the name of the Ajero of Ijero then was “Oba Oyiyo Saye Ekiti Kete” (an Oba who made life pleasant evangelist who love caring for young ones. He was staying in the house of one Mr. “Agidigbi Asorin” near the market of Ijero for some reason, Ogunleye could not say long at Ijero. He was at loggerhead with the king (Ajero) by joining a party in the town called “Ipayes that was not in good term with Ajero (ADeniran, 1973). This led to the quick departure of Mr. Ogunleye; but before he left, he had one pupil, one Prince Solomon Adeyanju.

After the departure of Mr. Ogunleye from Ijero, there was a little setback to evangelism in Ijero Ekiti. The sons and daughters of Ijero in Lagos, mostly at St. Peter’s Church, Lagos came together and sent another man, Mr. George Olulode (Which was later changed to Olugbode). He was also a strong member of St. Peter’s Church, Lagos to Ijero as another evangelist in 1895. Olugbode was accompanied to Ijero by Revd. Oyeboode and Bishop Philips. George Olugbode came again to Ijero as the second evangelist (Adebiyi, 2003) At Ijero, he was living with Chief Sapaye of Ijero for one year before the mission house was built for the Church. He was introduced to Ajero and the chiefs in the town. Apart from the work of evangelism, he also taught the children how to read and write. Mr. Olugbode was given free hand to operate. He established a school where he had eight pupils, including Eyeowa, Fasuba) Adeniran, Oyewole, Ajayi and some of pupils outside Ijero town, like Odunlade from Ikoru and Dada from Ipoti. Some of these pupils became Christians and were baptized.” Olugbode’s work was moving progressively in Ijero both in Christian faith and education.

In 1896, mummy Helena Fatoregun Doherty came back to Ijero her hometown for the first time since she had been taken away as a slave (Bello, 2008). Her coming home brought joy to her and the family for the re-union. What brought, joy to Mummy Doherty most was the fact that Christian faith was becoming strong in Ijero and its environment. The homecoming of Helena Fatoregun Doherty was brought and festivity to the people of Ijero, even the Ajero of Ijero. The joy of Mama Doherty had no bounds as she saw Mr. and Mrs. George Olugbode with the eight pupils of Olugbode in the classroom in the mood of listening to the teaching of Olugbode. Not teaching alone, but also evangelizing them in the word of God. She joined Mr. Olugbode and the pupils in evangelizing the people. She also brought some copies of Yoruba books containing ABD alphabets with which Olugbode started teaching the pupils. Mummy Doherty was a prayer warrior in her Church in Lagos, that idea of prayer she brought to her Church at home and the people at home imbibed it. She contributed greatly to the development of Christ Anglican Church. IjeroEkiti.<sup>25</sup> Her contribution to the building of the first building of the Church could not be underestimated. The foundation of Christ Anglican Church was laid on the 16<sup>th</sup> January, 1896 by Bishop Philips for financial reasons, she went back to Lagos and took one Mr. Okunato along with her to be trained as evangelist. At Lagos she was still struggling endowed Christ Church, Ijero with two thousand pounds (£200) so as to be able to maintain the Church at the same time for the progress of the educational progress of Ijero people. Helena instructed the first resident Vicar of Christ Church, Ijero to make sure that he buried her before moving away from Ijero. The first resident vicar of the Church, Rev. J. a. Sowumi was transferred to Christ Anglican Church Ijero on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December 1912.

Helena Fatoregun Doherty died on the 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1923 at the age of about ninety eight (98) years. “For the contribution of Mama Fatoregun and in appreciation of her pioneering



work, her long suffering and endurance, her care and cure of the sick people and the continuation of her good work by her only son and grandchildren in Ijero, the people of Ijero and its environment deemed it fit that, the name, “Doherty should be honoured and highly esteemed. Hence, the founding father of Ijero community named a school after her name “Doherty,” as” Doherty Memorial Grammar School in Ijero-Ekiti in 1954 so that the name could be immortalized forever in Ijero-Ekiti. Within her mind whether to return back home so as to complete the work of evangelism she deserved. She came back to Ijero finally on July 27, 1897 as full time evangelist in Ijero and Ekiti in general (Bello, 2008).

The entry of Mummy Doherty to Ijero brought house-to-house evangelism and staging of crusade was introduced to Ijero streets, even outside Ijero town like Ikoro, Ipoti, Ara-Ijero. Illoro (Oro), Odo-Owa (Odo-Eyin), Iroko, and Idao. This was the period of the growth of Christianity in these areas. She did not stop the work of evangelism in Ijero area alone, she went as far as Osi-Ekiti, Ido-Faboro, Usi, Illogbo, Ifaki and Igbole (Adebisi, 2003). When Helena was in one of her evangelical journey, she met with Babamuboni one of the Ekiti great evangelist at Ise-Ekiti

(Adebisi, 2003). Both of them were ex-slaves at the time or the other. She also went as far as Emure, Ikere and Orun-Ekiti. The meeting of Babamuboni and Mama Doherty strengthened evangelical work in Ekitiland as a whole. There was a record of Helena Fatoregun Doherty that she extended her evangelical zeal to Ora-Igbomina and Ila-Orangun, all in the present Osun State (Adebisi, 2003).

She was a prayerful woman, when she prayed, God answered her prayer. “She was regarded as a prophetess and a leader.” Her home was known as Wasimi because her home is a place of rest for people that were in trouble or sickness. Pregnant women rushed to her for safe delivery. She used to cure sickness with herbs and prayer. She was also helper for those that were in need. Mostly the homeless babies also had her home as an abode of peace and a place of refuge during the time of persecution because of Christian faith. She brought the idea of Church titles to Ijero and the whole Churches in Ekiti imbibed the system of giving chieftaincy titles to people in Anglican Churches. Mummy Doherty struggled and labored tirelessly for the building of the Anglican Church at Ijero.

She was at a time responsible for the payment of the salaries of the Church agents in Ijero Anglican Church, in the Churches in the environment. Adebisi wrote that Mummy Doherty single-handedly donated two hundred pounds (£200) when the building of the old Christ Anglican Ijero was in progress. The building is now been used as Church hall. It was also recorded that she raised thirty-five thousand pounds (£35,000) from her friends from Lagos and the whole congregation of Christ Church, Ijero could only raise forty-four pounds (£14) for the building fund: of the Church Helena Fatoregun Doherty lived a fulfilled life. She had only one son (Adebisi, 2003).

## **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Summary**

In the above discussion, one will know that women are valuable beings in Africa and not ordinary tool. It is obvious that in the traditional African societies women are very important and more involved in political, economic and religious activities despite much discrimination they faced.

### **Conclusion**

Conclusively, one will see that African women are industrious, reliable, responsible and virtuous. It was observed that women are being used before as tool that is not important in

African societies but nowadays their worth should not be underestimated in the society. The concluding matter is that women in Africa cannot continue to be useless like African societies were thinking because of their culture and tradition.

### **Recommendation**

The author is recommending that women should not be underrated again in African societies. What a man can do, woman can also do it. So the power of women should not be underrated in the African societies. The status quo of women in Africa should be maintained. Women must not be look onto as second class citizen in the society. Women should also be allowed and given the opportunity to practically contribute their own quota to the development of modern African Communities.

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