

The Significance of Women's Leadership in African Religious Tradition and its Relevance to Contemporary Christian Women Ministry

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Abstract

Leadership is the process of winning over people to achieve the goals of the organisation. Leadership quality is a concept that is natural and cut across both sexes and in all aspect of human life. This is what African religious tradition found convenient to use particularly in Yorubá society of south western Nigeria that is sparingly present in other religions especially Christianity in the same environment. It has tremendously helped African religion to avoid unnecessary agitations for gender equality. Why is this almost absent in other religions in Yorubaland? Is it as a result of cultural background of these religions? These are some of the questions that this paper tries to find answers. To this end, thirty respondents, ten each from the three major religions in Yorubaland were selected within Ibadan metropolis for information through telephone interview and quick in-depth interviews conducted and their views content analysed. The study brings to light that culture plays a remarkable role at the background where Christianity emanated from. There, women are second class citizens, a total departure from the Yorubá society that is not completely patriarchal in nature. The study proposes that African/Yorubá culture should be accommodated within the context of Christianity more than it does now by allowing women leadership since all religions have high level of women participation-besides the fact that this Christianity is being practiced on African/Yorubá soil.

Keywords: Leadership, Women, African Religious Tradition, Culture, Christian Women Ministry

Introduction

Leadership quality is not limited to a particular sex, race of country. Rather, it is universal and cuts across every aspect of human life both secular and religion. In Yorubá traditional society, women played important roles in virtually all areas of life as leaders. They are not excluded from the political, social and religious roles in the

Yorubá society. The political and administrative leadership in Yorubaland has produced women-kings in city states like Ile-Ife where Luwoo or Olowu Gbagida nicknamed Ayare Akosulogbe was a king/leader for many years¹, Yeyenirewu was Ewi of Ado-Ekiti. She ruled for about forty years as a king and expanded the town in her time² history has

¹ Adelegan Adegbola, 2009, *Ile-Ife: The Source of Yoruba Civilisation*, Nigeria: Oduduwa International Communications, 220

² Isola Olomola, 2017, *History of Ado Ekiti (From Earliest times to the Present)*, Ile-Ife: SAPrinters Multiconcepts Co., 31

it that out of thirty-eight *Owa* Obokun of Ijesaland, five were female kings³ Ondo kingdom was established by a woman who was the first king of the kingdom. She was however distracted from political engagements, as a result, she was replaced by her son. However, she became the economic minister of the state by taking the position of *LObun* (the market lord), and she controlled the affairs of the economy. In addition to that, she was given the role of kingmaker in Ondo kingdom, a tradition that abides till today because no king would ascend the king's throne in Ondo without being subjected to the process of power transfer by the *L'Óbùn* of the community that would revalidate the surrendering of the political seat of power to the king. This is an indication that power structure is gender-inclusive⁴. Again, in the old Oyo Empire, there was the case of Oba *Orònpòtòniyùn*. She defended her territory from the Nupe warriors who tried to invade Oyo Empire⁵.

In Businesses, there are lots of women in Yorubá society who are in the forefront and leaders. There were/are women activists such as Funmilayo Ransome Kuti who was a leading activist during Nigeria's women's anti-colonial struggles. She led Egba women to protect and preserve the rights of women in Ègbaland that later extended to other parts of the country⁶. In African/Yorubá traditional religious circle, women are the leaders from time

immemorial. This is the reason why there are no anxieties in that respect till today. In Christian ministry, there are fewer women in that regard and that is the reason why there are agitations here and there for gender quality. This is the basis for this paper to find out the reasons and suggest possible ways out.

Significance of Leadership

Leadership, in some clime is the process of influencing people to achieve the goals of the organisation. A process of guiding other people's behaviours towards achieving the objectives set out by the organisation⁷. While this may be true to certain level one should consider a situation where the application of leadership needed to be displayed without necessarily having anything to do with organisation like family and within friends that cannot be regarded as organisations that leadership quality must be displayed. Therefore, leadership is a quality that must be demonstrated in all aspect of life which include social, political, economic and religion. A good leader of utmost necessity must be able to lead people to attain a high performance through motivation. This is one of the significance and importance of good leadership quality. He/she must be able to initiate action, motivate, provide guidance, create confidence, build morale of the people he/she leads, build enabling work environment and be able to co-ordinate the

³ *Ilesha*, <https://litcaf.com>. retrieved on 12/1/2022

⁴ Toyin Falola, 2021, *On The Origin Of Ondo: The Ancestral Voice Of Victor Kiladejo*, <https://tribuneonlineR.com/on-the-origin-of-ondo-the-ancestral-voice-of-victor-kiladejo>, retrieved on 8/1/2022

⁵ Nina Emma Mba, 1997, *Nigerian Women Mobilized*, Ibadan: Crucible Publishers Ltd, 2

⁶ *Women in African History; (Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and the Abeokuta Women's Union)*, www.unesco.org, retrieved on 9/1/2022

⁷ Anjeza Meraku, 2017, Role of Leadership in Organisational Effectiveness in *Journal of Economics, Business and Management*, Vol5, Nil, 336

affairs of the organisation⁸. Such was the kind of roles taken by Ajanlapa (the *Osi 'wefa*) during the reign of Oba Ajiboyede in Oyo Empire in Oyo/Tapa war led by Lajomo king of Tapa that eventually led to the victory of Oyo warriors over Tapa⁹.

A leader must also be responsible and should be ready to take responsibility for his/her actions as demonstrated by Lisabi Agbongboakala who took responsibility of delivering the Egba people from the hands of Ajele- king's representatives of the then Oyo Empire who were collecting tributes from the Egba¹⁰. A leader is also an obstacle remover to allow people act with freedom and independence. As a result, leadership encourages and stimulates actions from workers or people under him/her by innovating them in planning and decision making activities¹¹. Therefore, a good leader sees the importance of every sector can contribute to the progress and moving forward of an organisation beginning from the cleaners to the top management members of such an organisation. Consequently, for an organisation to be successful depends largely on the leadership of such an organisation.

Beyond the above, some other leadership qualities are; a leader must be proficient and proactive. He/she must be able to make timely decisions, must be able to lead by good example, have the welfare of his/her people at heart, and must make available

information. Finally, he/she must be able to train followers as a team to achieve success set by such an organisation¹².

Women and their Leading Roles in African Religious Tradition

In Yorùbá culture, as in every other culture around the globe, women are viewed from different perspectives. To some people women are sheer lazy elements, crafty, cunning, wicked, evil, good and powerful. Validating this claim, Ilesanmi, in his words, is of the opinion that "women are everywhere seen physically and in dream, at work, at play, at worship, at home, on the farms and at market place; yet, as conspicuous as they are, people's views about them differ from place to place, especially culturally."¹³ An informant is of the opinion that sometimes, women themselves usually assessed themselves in this manner. Therefore, it is not a matter of prejudice from men folks.¹⁴

From the beginning of time till date, the role and importance of the Yorùbá women have been distinct in every aspect of human life, even in the time of the gods. They have played and still playing the leading and important roles in the political, economic, social and religious life of their people. According to Marjorie¹⁵, Yorùbá women were and are necessarily participants within the systems in the land. In the area of labour,

⁸ Importance of leadership, <https://7www.managementstudyguide.com>, retrieved on 23/12/2021

⁹ Samuel Johnson, 1969, *The History of the Yorubas*, Lagos: CSS Bookshops, 162

¹⁰ A. K. Ajisafe, 1972, *Iwe Irem Abeokuta*, Abeokuta: The Hardcore Society, 13-15

¹¹ Importance of Leadership, <https://www.businessmanagementideas.com>, retrieved on 23/1/2021=

¹² Leadership-Quality, Significance and Leadership Qualities, <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com>, retrieved on 5/1/2022

¹³ Thomas Makanjuola Ilesanmi, 2013, *Obinrin: A Cultural Assessment of Yoruba Women*, Nigeria: astra-J Multimedia Nig. Ltd, xiii

¹⁴ Jumoke Bolatito Adenrele, Eerindinlogun Diviner, *Personal Interview*, Olomi, Ibadan, interviewed on 14/1/2022

¹⁵ Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, 2009, *Yoruba Women, Work and Social Change*, Ibadan: Book craft, 109

domestic works were done by women. They prepared, cooked and served food. They kept the compound clean and washed clothes. They care for babies and toddlers. All these domestic works are still done by women in this contemporary time, however, with some aids. For instance, washing of clothes are done by the use of washing machine for those who can afford it but nevertheless they are still the one to operate the machine. Today, there are cooking reliefs like gas cooker, fryers and cutting supports to make the work easier. Thus, according to Motunrayo (a baby wear dealer at Agbeni Market), science and technology have made life easy these days. One can do two or three domestic works together at the same time. According to her, she can be cooking at the same time be washing clothes. She went further that even her business in the market can be done at the same time through phone and internet¹⁶

Since agriculture was the major occupation in the traditional Yorubá society in the past, women often helped their husbands in the farm during planting season and harvesting of the farm produce. As they were helping their husbands, they too would find means to make their own farm beside their husbands of which the husband has no power over as explained by Tinuade, an informant.¹⁷ They also help in the sales of these farm produce in the nearby markets. Thus, women were contributing to the income generation of the family and the society at large. In the

contemporary time, women contribute their quotas to the family income through employment opportunities in companies, ministries and some other organisations that need their services.

In the area of commerce and trading, Yorubá women were and are not found wanting. Income generating activities were /are carried out by women through trading of goods and services. Many were and are dedicated business women travelling to distance land to purchase and sell goods of different kinds like Elekodere¹⁸ spoken of by *Ìròsùn Meji* in *Ifá* divination, Efunsetan Aniwura, the *Ìyálóde* of Ibadan who was able to influence the political affairs of Ibadan in her time as a result of her enormous wealth she possessed.¹⁹ Also in this category was Omosa,²⁰ the daughter of an important chief in Ibadan. A powerful trader and civic leader who built herself up economically through trade and had opportunity to acquire male slaves and followers. A fearless and courageous woman that twice repelled Ijebu attempts to invade Ibadan when Ibadan army was fighting in Ekiti during the Kiriji war of 1878-1893.

We also have in the list *Ìyálóde* Miniya Jojolola Soetan of Egba, who had been a wealthy trader, women's political representation in the new order of things. Adire dyed fabric worn mostly by the Yorubá which had its birthplace in Abeokuta was first produced in Jojola's compound of Kemta²¹. Jojolola employed both male and female, slave and free born

¹⁶ Titilayo Falere, Business Woman, Agbeni Market, Ibadan, interviewed on 15/1/2022

¹⁷ Tinuade Odutayo, Petty Trader, Bodija Market. Ibadan, interviewed on 15/1/2022

¹⁸ Wande Abimbola, 1968, *Ijinle Ohun Emt Ifa, Apa Kinni*, UK: Wm. Collins/Sons and Co. Ltd, 63-64

¹⁹ Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, 2009, *Yoruba Women, Work and Social Change*, Ibadan: Book craft, 138

²⁰ Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, 2009, *Yoruba Women, Work and Social Change*, Ibadan: Book craft, 140

²¹ Ibiene, 2017, *The Gem that is the City of Abeokuta in Nigeria*, <https://ibiene.com>, retrieved on 7/1/2022

in her establishment and trading empire. She was the second *Ìyálóde* of Egba after Efunroye Tinubu who was also a formidable force in the political and economic history of both Egba and Lagos in her life time and beyond.²² Many Yorubá women are also involved in craftwork, weaving clothes, making of local tread for weaving, pottery, mat weaving, soap making, beads, cream and on rear occasions, hunting. They also engaged in cooked food, drinks, palm oil production, in contemporary time, mention can be made of names like Folorunso Alakija, Funke Opeke²³ to mention but few.

Yorubá women and their leading roles in spirituality and African religious tradition is also worthy of note. *Ajé*, the wealthiest of all the *Irúnmolè* whose name is a reverence point while praying to acquire wealth till today was a woman. Oya, the goddess of Niger River was, according to report, the power behind Sango even to the extent of

some of the acrimony that Sango created among his followers were influenced by Oya²⁴ She was trusted by Sango and was so powerful that she nearly shared the same power with her husband, Sango. Oba was another captivating woman married to Sango that was popular in the history of the gods and goddesses in Yorubáland. Till today, she is still a woman of note through the roles she played. Though a river (Oba) yet her power of healing ailments can still be testified to till date²⁵ *Ọ̀sun*, a personification of beauty and sexuality is a guardian of Osogbo. She was believed to be the brain behind the fruitless effort of the Fulani jihadists in invading Yorubá communities when Ibadan armies defeated them in the war tagged Jalumi in Osogbo.²⁶

Ọ̀sun was the Pathfinder and Liberator of Women Folks as found in *Oseturd also known as Oduso* in *Ifá* divination System.²⁷ There *Ifá* says:

²² *Women in African History, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and the Abeokuta Women's Union*, <https://en.unesco.org>, retrieved on 7/1/2022

²³ *Woman-at-the-Top: The Strength of Character in Funke Opeke*, <https://www.thisdaylive.com>, retrieved on 12/12/2021

²⁴ Philip John Neimark, 1993, *The way of the Orisa*, USA: Harper Collins Publishers, 125

²⁵ *The Mystery behind Odo Qba and Odo Osun in Yoruba kingdom (River Oba in Ibadan and Osun in Osun state)*, <https://hive.blog/@poeticmembrane>, retrieved on 8/1/2022

²⁶ Philip John Neimark, 1993, *The way of the Orisa*, USA: Harper Collins Publishers, 139-140

²⁷ Samuel Kayode Olaleye, 2020, *Gender Discrimination in the Initiation of Women into the Ifá Cult*, Austria: Science Arena Publications, *Specialty Journal of Humanities and Cultural Science*, Vol, 5(1), 3-4

Konkoro lawo Ewì nílè Adó	Konkoro is the priest of Ado Ewi
Oorùn mú dèdè kanlè lawo òde Ijèrò	The shining sun is the priest of Ijero
Alákàn ní nbẹ lódò	It is the crab that was in the water
Ti nlù aṣakara àyà pèpè pè	That was using its chest to make a noise
A dífá fún igba Irúnmolè Olúkòtún	Cast divination for the right hand two hundred divinities
A lukin fún igba Irúnmolè Olúkòsì	Oracle was consulted for the left two hundred divinities
A dá fún Ọtálèlégbèje Irúnmolè	Oracle was consulted to for one thousand four hundred and sixty divinities
Tí wọn dátàrí ọ̀nà gbangba	On the centre of the road
A dífá fún Ọrúnmilà baba Àgbonnirègún	Ifá divination was made for Ọrúnmilà the father of Agbonmiregun
Níjọ tí wọn ntòrun bọwá sílé ayé	On the day they were coming from heaven to earth
Wọn lagbo Orò	They pass through Orò sacred grove
Wọn lagbo Ọpá	They pass through Ọpá forest
Wọn lánà tẹ̀rẹ̀ ti Olúfẹ̀ ntọ	They made a narrow path which Olufe passes
Wọn ò fi tọ̀sun sẹ	They did not consider Ọsun
Wọn wá ngúnýán	They made pounded yam
Iyan wọn nlẹ̀mọ	It was not good
Wọn nroka	Then made oka (yam flour)
Ọkà wọn ndipètẹ̀	It was not good
Wọn peégún ilé	They called household masquerade (ones father)
Eegún ilé ò jẹwọn	They did not respond
Wọn pe Orò	They call on Oro
Oro ò tilẹ̀ dáhùn	Oro rebuffed them
Wọn pe Ọpá	They call on Ọpá
Ọpá ò tilẹ̀ fọ̀hùn	Ọpá did not voice out
Aperegede Ajùbà	Openly we pay homage
Ajùbà náà aperegede	The homage was paid openly
A dífá fún yèyemi sẹ̀ngẹ̀ sẹ̀	Cast divination for Ọsun my mother
Oloòyà iyùn	The owner of iyun comb
Èyí tí gbé kòkò	The one that stayed in the secluded place
Ti wá nbágbà rúnmolè ẹ̀ jà	And fighting with two hundred divinities
Wọn wá lọ dífá lówó Ọrúnmilà	They went to Ọrúnmilà to go and consult Ifá
Wọn ní ta ló nbẹ̀bọ̀ àwọn jẹ?	To ask for the person that was voiding their sacrifice
Ọrúnmila wípé, kílódé	Ọrúnmilà asked why

Tẹ ẹ fi tobìnrin inú yín ẹ?	They refused to marginalized the woman among them
Wọn ní Ọṣun lobìnrin inú àwọn	They said it was Ọṣun that was a woman among them
Ọrúnmilà wá ní	Ọrúnmilà said
Kí wọn lọ fi t'Ọṣun ẹ kíá kíá	They should go and obey Ọṣun
Wọn wa fi t'Ọṣun ẹ	They harking to her voice
Wọn gúnván	They made pounded yam
Iyan wọn ò lẹmọ	Their pounded yam was okay
Wọn rokà	They made Oka,
Ọkà wọn ò dípètẹ	Their ọka was good
Wọn pe Orò	They call Oro
Orò dún	Oro voiced out
Wọn pe Ọpá	They call Opa
Ọpá nǹwọn	Opa answered them
Njẹ iye wa báwa pénimọ	Oh you osu! Come to our aid today
Ọṣun a fimọ jẹ tirẹ ò	Ọṣun we respect you
Iye wa báwa pénimọ	Oh osu! Come to our aid today
Gúnván gúnván ilé Ìdó	The pounded yam maker of Ido
Obìnrin ní í ẹ	Is a woman
Gúnván gúnván ilé Ìdó	The pounded yam maker of Ido
Ọṣun a fimọ jẹ tirẹ ò	Ọṣun we harking to your voice
Òkè lóde Ìbàdàn	Oke in the city of Ibadan
Obìnrin ló bọba	It was woman that gave birth to the king
Kọba ó tó dọrìṣà	Before Oba became divinity
Ẹ jẹ ká lọ	Let us go
Ka lọ rẹ é kúnlẹ fòbìnrin	And knee for women
Gbogbo ẹlẹgbẹ mawo	All the initiates
Obìnrin ló bọba	It was woman that gave birth to the king
Kọba ó tó dọrìṣà	Before Oba became divinity
Obìnrin ló bíwa	Women gave birth to us
Káwa ó tó dèniyàn rere	Before we became good human beings
Ẹ jẹ ká lọ rẹ é kúnlẹ fòbìnrin	Let us go and knee down for women
Obìnrin ló bí wa	Women gave birth to us
Ẹbáni kóre yẹyẹ f'Ọṣun	Join me to hail Ọṣun
Ore yeyé mọlẹ òrìṣà	Homage to the mother of the divinities

Ọ̀sun was one of the principal ministers of Olodumare. She came down from heaven to the earth through the chain like other divinities. This is buttressed by Jumoke Adenrele an Ọ̀sun devotee and diviner of Eerindinlogun that is associated with Ọ̀sun goddess.²⁸ In the opinion of Adeoye,²⁹ all the divinities came batch by batch with each batch containing sixteen? However, in the case of Ọ̀sun, they were seventeen in her group and she was the only female among them. They conspired against her, wherever they went, they never allowed her to participate to participate in whatever they were doing. As a result of that, Ọ̀sun was thwarting their efforts. When they later realized that all their struggles came to not, they went to Ọ̀rúnmìlà for enquiry. Ọ̀rúnmìlà asked them why they did not call Ọ̀sun to participate in whatever they were doing. They responded that because she is a woman. Ọ̀rúnmìlà rebuked them, and told them that henceforth, they should be involving her in whatever they were doing. They did and everything went well with them.

Ogungbile³⁰ is of the view that Ọ̀sun's knowledge of the cosmic order and her participation in the formation of human beings affords her the capability of

influencing human destiny. This is complex with the fact that she was married to Ọ̀rúnmìlà who empowered her with Eerindinlogun system of divination which she used so well. Her involvement in the formation of human beings that afforded her the capability of influencing human destiny has to do with her knowledge of the cosmic order and her childlessness made her divorced Ọ̀rúnmìlà and later married Sango. When she got to Sango's house, the problem persist, as a result, she went to consult Ọ̀rúnmìlà again on what to do for her to have her own children. She was diagnosed through *Ifá* and was told that she would bear children of her own, but she must offered sacrifice. She did and became pregnant. For the sake of Ọ̀sun, Olodumare opened the gate of heaven and allowed a lot of children to follow Ọ̀sun home from heaven. All the children that were given birth to during that period on earth recognized Ọ̀sun and pay homage to her. Ọ̀sun plays many roles in life as giver of children, diviner, and the leader of the *Àjé*-witches, beauty, ruler and healer. She is an upright goddess. This is the reason why she is being praised in this manner;

<i>A ì í sin Ọ̀sun</i>	We do not venerate Ọ̀sun
<i>Kí á se àbòsí</i>	And be deceptive.
<i>Bí ènìyàn bá sin Ọ̀sun</i>	If one venerates Ọ̀sun
<i>Tí ó se àbòsí</i>	And is deceptive,
<i>Bí ladekoju ba ro ilé rẹ tan</i>	If ladekoju finished destroying his/her house,
<i>Yòò tún ro ònà olúwarẹ</i>	She would also destroy his/her path.
<i>Owukewuke ti i jẹ ọmọ bí itale.</i>	Owukewuke that stings like grub ³¹

²⁸ Jumoke Bolatito Adenrele, Eerindinlogun Diviner, *Personal Interview*, Olomi, Ibadan, interviewed on 14/1/202

²⁹ C. L. Adeoye, 1985, *Igbagbo ati Esin Yoruba*, Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited, 30

³⁰ David O. Ogungbile, 2001, Eerindinlogun: The Seeing Eyes of Sacred Shells and Stones in *Osun Across the Waters, a Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas*, USA: Indiana University Press, 189

³¹ Wonuola Efunronke, Osun Devotee, *Personal Interview*, Bode Market, Ibadan, Interviewed on 14/1/2022

As a result of the above reasons, the Yorùbá will not underrate women most especially the spirituality aspect of their lives. The Yorubá men knew that women are configured with enormous power spiritually. According to Aribisala,³² they are either belong to *Aje-witches*, *Emere*, *Omo omi-marine* or *Egberun* cults. This is the reason why their presence are felt in all the religious cults in Yorubá society. Even the dreaded *Oro* cult that women are forbidden, they have their roles to play in the cult. In *Ifá* cult that some Babalawo believed that women should not belong, they are found there and their roles in the cult are very vital most especially in the initiation of a new *Ifá* priest. Information gathered revealed that any cult that enact a law prohibiting women, it is these same women that are behind such laws.³³ Therefore, women are held in high esteem in all the religious cults in Yorubá society. Where they do not lead physically, they lead spiritually. When they are not at the forefront leading, they are leading behind giving order. They are always in charge and this is the reason why there are no agitation for discrimination from women in all the religious cults in Yorubáland.

The Relevance of Women Leadership in African Religious Tradition to the Contemporary Christian Ministry

As earlier said above, there is no discrimination against women as far as leadership in African/Yorubá religious

tradition is concern till date. Everyone knows their duties and are performed as at when due as we were informed.³⁴ This is the reason why there are no agitations in African/Yorubá religious tradition as found in other religious groups and I think this is worthy of emulation by these religious groups so as to put to rest this kind of anxieties. In the first instance, women are more spiritually conscious and sensitive than men. This is the reason why they always out numbers men in all religious gatherings. Besides, their activities in any religious cults surpasses that of men beginning from the cleaning of the environment to other activities like singing and chanting poetic praises of the deity by the priestesses and senior advocates of the deity which sometimes lead to audience participation.³⁵ It is a known fact that women are better dancers than men. Dancing takes an important aspect in the worship of any deity in religious tradition of the Yoruba and women are fully involved in this. This is what the researcher observed to be true in one of the services he attended at *Ose Meji* temple, Oja Oba area here in Ibadan. Such exercise gives on lookers and children free opportunity to be educated in such an act.

As said earlier, beyond keeping clean the temples, shrines and groves of the deities by women, they are also the caretakers of the emblems and tools of worship of every deity because of their meticulous nature. Since they are the caretakers of these

³² Tope Aribisala, Osanyin Priest, *Telephone Interview*, Inalende, Ibadan, Interviewed on 15/1/2022

³³ Eniafe Durotolu, Herbs Trader, Personal Interview, Bode Market, Ibadan, Interviewed on 14/1/2022

³⁴ Fadoju Awotale, Ifa Priest, *Personal Interview*, Mogaji Owe, Moniya, Ibadan, Interviewed on 12/1/2022

³⁵ Thomas Makanjuola Ilesanmi, 2013, *Obinrin: A Cultural Assessment of Yoruba Women*, Nigeria: astra-J Multimedia Nig. Ltd, 115

places of worship, they sometimes create taboos for the devotees to obey to preserve the sedateness of the sacred place and the deity. This validates the earlier point raised that forbidden laws and orders are made by women even against their women folks since they perform most of the rituals and sacrifices to the deity. Therefore, they are there to prevent unauthorised persons from getting close to the mysteries of such a cult. It is their duty therefore to keep the purity and sacredness of the deity, themselves, and those who may likely come in contact with the worship centres as the researcher was rightly educated by an informant.³⁶

The grip of women on religion and spirituality give them an advantage to control the minds of men and direct them at spiritual level. While men dominate the external political arena, women took hold of the cults. This is done to create equilibrium in Yoruba society and this has been on from time immemorial. Thus, creating peace, love and harmony within the religious cults.

Unlike Judaism, the traditional religion of the Jewish people from which Christianity emanated (Judaism, the religion practiced by Jesus Christ from whose name and lineage of Christianity belief originated) that relegated women to the background. History has it that Judaism has traditionally been a patriarchal religion where women were relegated to a lower status than men. The traditional domain of women in Jewish life was the home. Although women were responsible for preparing

food, for example, it was the male rabbi who regulated the practice of *kashrut*, the Jewish dietary laws which states foods that are appropriate to eat.

Also, religious activities that took place in the public sphere outside the home, such as study, prayer, and acts of loving-kindness, were considered mandatory only for men. Women occupied a subsidiary space in the Jewish house of prayer and were scarcely admitted to the study house at all.³⁷ In summary, the role of women in Judaism is determined by the Hebrew Bible, the spoken and unwritten law (the corpus of rabbinic literature), by custom, and by cultural factors. Although the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature mention various female role models, but religious law treats women differently in various circumstances.³⁸

In Genesis 1-3, God created all things and specifically in Genesis 1²⁶ God said "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness". This may possibly be the beginning of man domination over women in Jewish culture and religion. Although it was argue in Genesis 2 that God created the man before the woman, but it does not draw any conclusion about authority from this.³⁹ This was the tradition that Apostle Paul met and followed in his ministration all through.

Throughout the Old Testament period, men had advantage over women in their custom and in law. However, despite the fact that men had advantage over women, there are examples of women who had important roles to play in the life of the Jews. For

³⁶ Awosola Taiwo Fatoosin, Ifa Priest, *Personal Interview*, Alemuloke Area, Sanngo, Ibadan, Interviewed on 10/1/2022

³⁷ *Feminism and Judaism the Pluralism Project*, <https://pluralism.org>, retrieved on 12/1/2022

³⁸ *Women in Judaism*, <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>, retrieved on 11/1/2022

³⁹ *Women in Church Leadership - a Series of Study Papers*, <https://bibilia.com>, retrieved on 12/1/2022

instance, God chose Deborah to be a prophetess and a judge as found in Judges 4⁵. As a leader, she dispensed both the civic and religious order that all Israelites obeyed. Again, God used Huldah the prophetess to give authoritative words to Hilkiah the priest and other men in II Kings 22^{14,20}. God also gave Esther civil authority over Jews in the Persian Empire, Esther 4¹⁵. From the look of things, women, in Jewish land had more freedom of action in social contexts than legal and religious statuses. This is seen in the progress and influence they had from mid-nineteenth century till date. Wealthy and privileged Jewish women were noticeable in the social arena and they played important role in their various communities in countries like France, England, Russia, United States of America and Germany where they resided. They were involved in the political and social revitalization of Jewish communities as demanded by the situation then.⁴⁰

However, in the time of Jesus ministry, women in the Ministry and Teachings of Jesus were treated with more respect than was common in that culture. They had important roles to play in his ministry. Among his women leaders were Mary Magdalene who was a loyal disciple of Jesus. She was among the few that used her money to finance the ministry of Jesus. She travelled with Jesus and his disciples, Luke 8¹⁻³, John 20¹¹⁻¹⁸. Another woman of note was Mary (sister of Martha) who maintained a close relationship with Jesus and his ministry. The Bible upheld that she

was present when Jesus brought Lazarus back to life. She was the one that anointed the feet of Jesus with costly oil, Mathew 26⁶⁻⁷. Martha also associated with the ministry of Jesus and used her resources to serve his disciples. She was a generous and hospitable woman, Luke 10³⁸⁻⁴².

Again, in the early church, women were among the prisoners of Saul when he was persecuting the church. They travelled with Jesus and provided for him.⁴¹ They also worked with Paul apostle during his ministration, Phil. 4³. He permitted women to speak edifying messages in the Corinthian church. Therefore, his restrictions on women in leadership had been argued were rooted in culture or based on specific circumstances in his churches, and it is not necessary for the church to consider that restriction permanent. However, thanks to the reform movement of the 19th century that have taken some measures to balance the role of women in the religious circle. The fruit of which produced Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, Sally Priesand, Amy Eilberg as Rabbi in the synagogue, though in American Judaism, because it is still a controversial issue within Conservative Judaism who did not sanction women's ordination and Orthodox Judaism that is against women rabbis and other Jewish movements.

In contemporary Yorubá society, there are notable women in Christian ministry who are leaders. Such names like Pastor Funke Adejumo of Agape Christian ministries,⁴² Pastor Funmi Daniels founder of the

⁴⁰ Kruger, Steven F. 1997, *Becoming Christian, Becoming Male?* In *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler, New York: Garland. 21-41.

⁴¹ *Women in Church Leadership - a Series of Study Papers*, <https://bibilia.com>, retrieved on 12/1/2022

⁴² 2018, *All you Need to know about Popular Female Preacher*, <https://pulse.ng>, retrieved on 13/1/2022

Unveiled Woman Network,⁴³ Reverend Tope Ogunnoiki, the presiding minister of Grace Ville Chapel International, Funke Adetuberu of Faith Chapel International, Bishop Bola Odeleke who is a pastor, evangelist, preacher, founder and general overseer of Power Pentecostal Church, Prophetess Mary Olujuwon Olubori of Rock of salvation Apostolic Church, Rev. Mother Esther Ajayi of Love of Christ Generation Church⁴⁴ and many more will feature in the list. However, the population of these women preachers/leaders are still minute compare to their male counterparts.

Conclusion

Leadership roles of women in African religious tradition had been explained in various capacity both in secular and religious roles. In secular, women are leaders at home in taking care of all members of the family through cooking, cleaning and other domestic shores. They are the best educators of children since they are closer to them than men. Therefore, they keep that leading roles. Politically, they are not found wanting. Notable figures have been mentioned earlier in this paper and their contributions politically to the progress of their various communities. Women excel in various

businesses. Of note are people like Opeke, Alakija mentioned in this study.

On religion, the spiritual consciousness of women gave them the leading advantage over men as far as African religious tradition is concern and this is the reason why women are in charge and sometimes in control. Emulating this stance by other religious groups in Nigeria especially Christian ministry will not be a bad thing, to allow these women discharge their potentials in serving the Creator as the spirit led. Women should be encouraged to share what they have learned from the Scriptures when the church gathers. The mutual teaching recommended in Colossians 3¹⁶, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms and Hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" and in I Corinthians 14²⁶ that "how is it then, Brethren when you come together, every one of you has a Psalm, has a doctrine, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation let all thin be done to edifying" is not limited to men alone. Rather, to every believer of the words. This may even lead to solving some of the family feuds that may likely allow them (women) practice what they preach as we have in African/Yoruba religious tradition.

⁴³ Esther Ijewere, 2018, *As a minister of the gospel and a preacher, one major challenge I've faced is the gender Issue - Pastor Funmi Daniels*, <https://guardian.ng>, retrieved on 13/1/2022

⁴⁴ Tayo Fajarin Oyediji, 2019, *10 female Pastors who run big churches & why celebrities rush to them*, <https://www.citypeopleonline.com>, retrieved on 13/1/2022