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Contents

1. An Exegesis of Genesis 1:26–28 in the Context of Resource Control and Revenue Allocation in the Niger Delta—Harmona, Olusegun Augustus & Folaranmi Bukola Abosede 3
2. The COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe: Critical reflections on African Spirituality and healing responses—Konyaha, E.G. 11
3. Religiosity and Entrepreneurial Risk Attitudes among Market Women in Lagos, Nigeria—Genty, Kabiru Ishola, Ajemunigbohun, Sunday Stephen & Oreshile, Ademola Sulaiman 21
4. Resolving Inter-Ethnic Conflicts: Prophet Muhammad’s Exemplary Models for Religious Leaders and Scholars—Olaniyan—Shobowale, K.O. 38
5. Women Peace-builders in Matrimonial Conflict: An Assessment of Hausa Muslim Women in Northern Nigeria 2000–2018—Tukur, Mubarak 53
6. The Contributions of Good Women of the Redeemed Church to National Development: A Case Study of Kwara Province 3—Adeyeye, Agnes Omotayo 62
7. Traditional Greetings and Islamic Ideology: Psychosocial Effects on Nigerian Muslims—Alawiye, Adegoke Naheem. 69
8. An Exposition of Muslims’ Attitudes to their Sexual Responsibilities: Noforija Town as a Case Study—Agbabiaka—Mustapha, Muinat Abiola 76
9. Underage Marriage Issues in Nigeria and the Islamic Position—Paramole, Kabir Olawale. 89
10. The Growing Influence of the National Union of Road Transport Workers in Lagos Politics: A Critical Analysis—Abdul-Wasi, Babatunde Moshood & Ifeanchio, Chukwuemeka Michael. 100
11. Murtiala Ajadi Animashaun: An Icon of Islamic Propagation in 20th-Century Lagos—Animashaun, Bashir. 118
12. Archiving Badagry-Ogu Sato Music-Dance Performance—Hungbo, Kotin Ovisemeh. 128

The Contributions of Good Women of the Redeemed Church to National Development: A Case Study of Kwara Province 3

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Abstract

The paper analyzes the contributions of women organizations in RCCG to national development in Nigeria. This work intends to look at the contribution of "Good Women", the name given to women of the Redeemed Christian Church of God to national development. Historical and phenomenological methods are explored. The historical method was used in order not to distort historical facts. The phenomenological method was applied through participatory approach in the estimation of actions taken in response to contextual differences in the Redeemed Christian Church of God. The objective of this work is to; firstly, find out how the Good Women was established, their roles/aims, their challenges. Secondly, to see how these groups contribute to the Church, communities and the nation at large also to identify strategies for meaningful contribution of Christian women group to community development. The findings in this work were that women formed organizations in the Church for the purpose of Church growth, community and national development. It is recommended that Christian women be encouraged through funding, training and recognition by the Government of the day.

Keywords: women, Christian, development, national development, RCCG.

Introduction

Women contributions to local Churches and the entire denomination make one of the most dynamic stories in the Nigerian Church. The last few decades have witnessed a growing debate over the roles and relationship of men and women in society and this has gradually extended to the Church. The question of the role of women in the Church is almost as old as the church herself. It is clear from the statement of Paul in his letter to the congregation in Corinth and to his colleague Timothy (Gal 3:28-29), that this issue was significant in more than one local congregation of the mid-first century. It is also more probable that this concerned question engendered disagreement and even controversy among early believers.

In succeeding years, this variance over the role of Christian women continued and increased.

The Church has historically taken the position that the bible is inspired revelation from God and is the rule of faith and practice. Human culture changes, evaluate traditional application of scripture's teaching to see if they are inadequate in new social structure. The same applies to the biblical teachings on the role of women in the church. The struggle of each generation is to remain faithful to what the scripture teaches without treating the interpretations and applications which the Church has made as though they were the real biblical teachings.

The roles of men and women in the church are more clearly stipulated than in the secular. However the Church must be ready and prepared to give answers to the hostile world for its views. It is pertinent to know that women comprise the large majority of active Church members and they are the sustaining force in almost every congregation. In that note, women cannot be ignored in participation but we find out that the Church is more rigid than the secular society in her approach to gender issues. The church unlike the society which opened up avenues for women to participate in any sphere of the society, still kept some roles as men's role and restricted women from such role. In the early Church the role of women was highly recognized and appreciated, women participated as deacons, companions of Paul and other apostles, Church leaders (Rom 16:3-5) and rulers (Rom 16:1). Much has been written about the roles of women in the church by great scholars, theologians and others. This article will feel the full weight of all the passages involved from every side of the topic and also try to reflect on previous articles on this topic to some extent, while moving ahead with a degree of originality.

An Operational Meaning of Development

The concept of development is dependent upon numerous definitions. For example, Walter Rodney, defines it as a many-sided process. Adeyeye (2014: 210). At the level of the individual it implies increased responsibility and material well-being. Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the expansion of physical, financial, ecological, social and demographic segments. It is also pivotal to note that, women play numerous roles in the general public which are fundamental for development. Another concept of change is that of the mind leading to a complete mastery over nature in which case the humanity of man is no longer subjugated to nature. For our purpose, religion and development are outfitted towards the change of people from the condition of nature and the need to make meaning out of an otherwise monotonous existence.

The Operational meaning of National Development

The term "national development" is exceptionally broad and extensive. It incorporates all parts of the development of a nation in particular, politics, religion,

economy etc. It is a dynamic and progressive advancement of the general public. Besides, it is both qualitative and quantitative. Vaizey (2020:76) defines national development as the effect of all citizens, forces and addition to stock physical, human resources, knowledge and skill.

A Historical Account of RCCG

The RCCG was founded in 1952 by Rev. Josiah Olufemi Akindayomi (1909-1980) following his involvement in other churches. Akinkoye (2010:41-45). Rev. Akindayomi chose Enoch Adejare Adeboye as the next General overseer. Enoch Adeboye was a lecturer in Mathematics, University of Lagos, Nigeria, as at the time he joined the church in 1973. Adeboye initially became one of the interpreters translating Akindayomi's sermons from Yoruba to English. He was ordained a pastor of the church in 1975, and his appointment as leader (General Overseer) of the Church was formalized by the posthumous reading of Akindayomi's sealed pronouncement. In 1990, Redeemed Christian Church of God Bible School was founded, Adogame (2004:25-48).

Rice's (2020:23) writing in *The New York Times*, calls the RCCG "one of [Africa's] most vigorously expansionary religious movements, a homegrown Pentecostal denomination that is crusading to become a global faith". The church leaders preach that in the future "In every household there will be at least one member of Redeemed Christian Church of God in the whole world." Ukah (2003:73). In 2008, it had 14,000 parishes and 5 million members in Nigeria and other countries, Atoyebi (2014:30). The International Parish is structured in different areas throughout the world. The local parishes are now grouped into regions, with 25 regions in Nigeria. It is also organized throughout most of the world. Notable special spiritual programs are the Holy Ghost Service which holds on the first Friday of every month in Nigeria. There is the annual Holy Ghost Convention (August) and the Holy Ghost Congress (December) in Nigeria and beyond with diverse schedules. Without any doubt, it is glaring that the Redeemed Christian Church of God was founded on human beings managed by the Holy Spirit.

The Establishment of 'Good Women' in the RCCG

The National Women's Ministry is established with a vision to reach out, empower and edify women in RCCG and in the surrounding communities where the ministry exists; by so doing these women would be able to fulfill their God-given purpose. This ministry is strategically positioned to be able to utilize and harness all talents, gifts and resources to build up women in the body of Christ. As the Church grew, the wife of the founder Esther Akindayomi had to train as *agbebi* or *iya abiyamo*, a local midwife, to assist in the delivery processes of pregnant women. This was a means of helping people in the Church. According to Esther Akindayomi, an eyewitness, growth of the Church was slow but as time went on, with the help

of the Holy Spirit coupled with a lot of outside crusades, visitation, and house-to-house evangelism, the Lord began to gather souls for His Church.

The role of Josiah's wife as a traditional birth attendant was very significant in the ministry of her husband. The traditional birth attendant is a form of traditional profession for some mature women who live in rural areas where modern health clinic are not easily available. Even in some places where these clinics are available, some women prefer to seek the assistance of these attendants for so many reasons such as the high cost of healthcare delivery, the unfamiliar circumstances of modern health clinic and the impersonality of the staff of such clinics. Above all, traditional birth attendants that functioned within the religious institutions such as the C&S provide a more holistic approach to healthcare because they recognize the spiritual basis of certain forces, like witchcraft which they prayed against as they facilitate birth deliveries. Every C&S Church had a women's delivery room attached to it where pregnant women give birth to their babies in the presence of other mature women to help and pray for safety to both mother and child.

The Good Women Fellowship (GWF) was commissioned in 1998 by Pastor (Mrs) Folu Adeboye, the wife of the General Overseer of The Redeemed Christian Church of God; Pastor (Mrs.) Adeboye is passionate about women fulfilling God's purpose for their lives. She is dedicated to helping women uncover the hidden treasures deposited in them by God. Our Mother in Israel also draws on her own life experiences and freely shares them with women all around the globe. These experiences and her teachings play a great role in transforming the lives of women.

Through Good Women Fellowship, we receive guidance on how to spiritually impact our personal lives and lives of those around us, how to prayerfully take a stand for our family and appreciate who we are in Christ. Kwara province 3 carved out of the old province 2 in the year 2010. It started with 26 areas and 72 parishes. In recent time two additional provinces has been carved out; province 5 and 6. In 2017, Kwara province 1 supported Kwara province 3 to birth province 5 and in 2018, Kwara province 3 supported other province to birth, Kwara province 6, presently, there are 23 areas and 86 parishes that made up the province.

The provincial headquarters was formerly Liveliest people parish at Oro road but when the need to build a bigger structure arise, a new land was acquired along Odota and the Liveliest cathedral was built which now becomes the provincial headquarters.

Their Aims and Roles

No doubt, women are the major active members of the church and they belong to one or more departments/units in the church as the case may be.⁹ below are the roles of the Good Women in RCCG Kwara Province 3.

- They play major roles in taking care of the children, teaching and raising them in the way of the Lord.
- They ensure that women serve and function in all the various units/

departments in the church (choir, ushering, children, Sunday school, prayer warrior, welfare, protocol etc.)

- They impact people with the knowledge of the word of God through their various programs within and outside the church
- There are many varieties of program traceable to the Good Women of RCCG Kwara Province 3, which will be highlighted in the latter part of this article

Their Impacts Within/Without

The story of the Bible is not complete until women are found in prominent places. There are so many roles played by women in the growth of the Province, Odusan-ya (2020:20). Listed below are the contributions of women to the growth of Kwara Province 3.

- i. The Good Women of Kwara Province 3 constructed a maternity for the Province as part of their contribution to the Province.
- ii. The Good Women in the Province holds a bi-monthly prayer and praise program where pregnant women and those waiting on God for the fruit of the womb gather to praise God and pray to God. This birthed evangelism as women tell of the goodness of God and invite other women to be partaker of the goodness of God thereby enhancing the growth and development of the province, Cherry (2016:35).
- iii. The Good Women convention is an annual gathering of all women in RCCG. This convention is based on the levels of administration in RCCG. There is the Regional, Area and Provincial base women convention. It is a time when women come together to worship, pray, intercede and share the word of God together for their spiritual growth. Rodney (1972:1).
- iv. There is nothing women cannot give to promote the gospel; this is true among the women of RCCG Kwara Province 3 as they give out of their resources to promote the gospel. They donate food, clothes, shoes and money to the new converts in rural areas where the gospel is being taken to by the evangelism team.
- v. The women also collaborated with Christian Social Responsibility (CSR) for prison evangelism in Oke-Kuraa and Mandala, where the inmates were being preached to and items such as Bible, provisions were being given to them. They also join hands with the children department to visit the orphans and motherless babies' homes. They went with gifts and food items.
- vi. They also empower people to be self-employed. They teach them soap making, disinfectant, hat making, bead making etc. they provide them with material and finance them to start making what they learnt. They also give financial empowerment to traders among them.
- vii. The Good Women of RCCG Kwara Province 3 organizes a program to give support to the widows. The program is tagged "Jesus' Widows". They gather the widows together, they sing praise, pray together and teach them the word of God. They also give them gifts, food items and clothes Miller (2013: 190).

Their Challenges and Areas of Improvements

Women played major roles in the ministry of Jesus. At his birth, Anna, an 84 year old widow who had been praying for the coming of the Messiah, received Jesus into the Temple with thanksgiving (Luke 2:36-38). Likewise, women also contrib-

uted immensely to the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles. Mary Magdalene was among the faithful disciples of Jesus along with other women who contributed to Christ ministry out of their substance. Priscilla joined hands with her husband Aquila to support the ministry of Apostle Paul (Acts 18:2, 26). Dorcas was also a woman who affected the life of everyone around her (Acts 9:36). Women are preservers of life. Moses' mother through the wisdom of God preserved the life of Moses who later became the preserver of life. Ruth was an infidel but got married to a child of God, discovered her purpose as a woman; when the lineage of Christ is being rolled out today, the name of Ruth will be mentioned. Women should be allowed to use their God given talents or gifts. When there are women with outstanding knowledge and spiritual gifts they should be embraced. Any church led by the Holy Spirit should give women opportunities because the Holy Spirit does not discriminate. In Joel 2:28-29, the word of God says "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh", men and women inclusively. The Holy Spirit has used and is still using women in greater dimensions; the church should therefore join hands with the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the lives of women. Their challenges are numerous but for the sake of this publications, I will highlight the major and obvious ones which are listed below:

- i. They lack financial aids to make their effort in community development successful.
- ii. They are not enough favorable policies that will enable Christian women group to contribute their quota to community development.
- iii. Majority of these women groups lack personnel to help advocate their plights.
- iv. Not enough encouragement and support from their male counterparts.

Summary and Conclusion

In the course of this research work, a variety of findings have been explored for better understanding of the roles of a woman in the church. The roles of women and their importance in the ministry of Jesus and that of the apostles were considered which should serve as inspiration to other women in ministry. The Old Testament focuses on the social and religious roles of women which are interwoven. The New Testament also supports this religious and social role of women which is evident by their supportive roles to Christ and the Apostles ministry. The debate about women occupying leadership roles in the church was also discussed as well as the general role of Christian women in religion. Lastly, the history and growth of RCCG Kwara Province 3 in relation to the roles, impact and contributions of Good Women to her growth and development is ascertained. The assistance and support rendered by the Good Women in terms of supporting church projects, serving as a church worker/minister, organizing programs and outreaches, taking care of the widow, caring for the sick, and helping the less privileged, training the young ones in the way of the Lord, training them in various trades in order for them to stand alone in a trading business was also noted in the research

The roles women play in society cannot be overemphasized. Women, married or not, can look to other worthy women for guidance for living godly lives. All women should strive to fulfill their God-given roles in their own families, so as to gain honors for themselves, for their families and for God. Christian women have an added responsibility in displaying modest and virtuous behavior, dressing, speech and conduct.

Women add a lot to the church body, their role is a somewhat debated and heated topic. The role of women is meaningful and complex, there are women with outstanding spiritual gifts and the bible is full of encouraging passages that suggest that women have their own roles to play in the church, society in their families. They submit themselves to their husband and the church authority, they trust in God, very hardworking, they give when it also comes to their giving in evangelism and above all they are also a major contributor to the growth and development of the church.

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