



11 | A WOMANIST RETROSPECT OF MERCY AMBA EWUDZIWA ODUYOYE'S LIBERATION THEOLOGIES IN THE CIRCLE

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Abstract

The Matriarch Prof Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye remains a household name and a prophetic voice when it comes to African women theologians. Mercy grew up in a matrilineal-patriarchal Akan culture and later married into a patrilineal -patriarchal Yoruba culture. She was then a lone female ranger in theological education and faculty who also served with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). Her overarching personal experiences, which represent that of many African women who were relegated to the background in almost every facet of life, compelled her to search and gather women in ministry and/ or theology to form the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle). The context was that which did not favor women politically, economically, socio-culturally, religiously, and theologically. For over three decades, the Circle remains a prophetic voice and a safe haven for female theologians who would have remained isolated due to patriarchal systems in our cultures and religious context. Auntie Mercy as affectionately called, did not limit her endeavors only to the 'assembly' but moved further to formulate liberation theologies, which offered a framework for confronting the patriarchal systems in theology, the church, the society and African Religion and cultures. Womanism approaches feminism from an Afrocentric premise with the assertion that not all feminist experiences are the same and that of the African woman is unique, hence, the Afrocentric-Womanist paradigm is engaged in this chapter to reflect on Oduyoye's liberation theologies then and now.

Keywords: Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Liberation Theologies, Womanism, African Women Theology, Church, African Cultures, African Religion

Introduction

Admittedly, any work on Professor Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye is both a pleasant and a daunting task as there are several essays, thesis, and books in her honor (Phiri & Nadar, 2006; Gathogo, 2010; Landman, n.d.; Oredein, 2016; Siwila & Kobo, 2021). Mercy Oduyoye's background of matrilineal-patriarchal Akan culture and later a patrilineal -patriarchal Yoruba culture, her position as a Deputy General Secretary at the World Council of Churches (WCC), her involvement and presidency at the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) and a pace-setter as a woman theologian influenced her formulation of liberation theologies. She has been recognized as the mother of African women theologians and the founder of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (Oduyoye, 1986; 1990; 1995; 2022; Baloyi, 2022; Kwok, 2004; Landman, n.d.; Oredein, 2016).

Despite the many interrogations, criticisms, critique, rewriting and reflections on her liberation theologies, I deem it a privilege to also write about such a Matriarch; more so, as a Ghanaian female theologian, it is an utmost pleasure. A retrospection is basically reflecting on her work in the then and now, her works have existed for over decades, this chapter serves as a rereading and rewriting a summary of Oduyoye's liberation theologies. The chapter engages the Afrocentric-Womanist Paradigm which aids in posing some relevant contextual questions amidst reflections.

Methodology: The Afrocentric-Womanist Paradigm

Although Oduyoye's liberation theologies have been approached from a feminist perspective for decades, I argue that her approach leans more towards womanism, and womanist theology given that she asserts that the experiences of African women are not the same as compared to that of our sisters in the West. This is not to downplay the observation made by Phiri & Nadar (2006) that the realities of African American women from where womanism originate are different from that of African women in Africa. There is still the contention on whether the Circle theology is feminist or womanist, however, the bottom line is that we embrace and affirm theologies that are focused on the African women's oppression, exclusion, subjugation and the injustices towards the full

value and participation in the religious and cultural contexts and the society at large.

Oduyoye's position at the WCC compelled her to look at the broader feminist picture, however this never prevented her from making the unique case for African women. It buttresses Alice Walker (1983), the propounder of womanism's premise that "Womanist is to feminism as purple is to lavender". Womanist theology focuses on theology, ethos and praxis that center on the experiences of African women dealing with issues of culture, race, classism and sexism in the church and society (cf. Thomas, 1998; Floyd-Thomas, 2010; Gafney, 2017). It is in this light that the Afrocentric-Womanist paradigm is deemed fit for reflections on an African Woman's liberation theologies. The Afrocentric-Womanist paradigm is a combination of two conceptual frameworks: Afrocentrism and womanism to form a paradigm that poses specific contextual questions in doing African women research (Amenyedzi, 2022).

First of all, it is worthy to note that Afrocentric research method proposes that African research is done by African people from an African lens within an African culture; which will enable us tell our real stories instead of those told from Eurocentric perspectives which do not reflect our realities (Asante, 1987, 1988; Mazama, 2001; Mkabela, 2005; Amenyedzi, 2022). A Narrative from an interview conducted with Mercy her by Oluwatomisin Oredein is also featured in her own voice. Below are questions posed in the Afrocentric-Womanist Paradigm (Amenyedzi, 2022) and a matrix which will guide a reflexive reflection on Oduyoye's theologies.

1. What is the African context?
2. What are the essential components of the culture?
3. What is the theological/religious view of the woman in this context?
4. How are women appreciated in the context?
5. How does the situation in question affect the African woman?
6. What are the redemptive elements of culture, and how would that influence the appreciation of the African woman?
(The focus is on both Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and/or reformed/reformulated praxis)

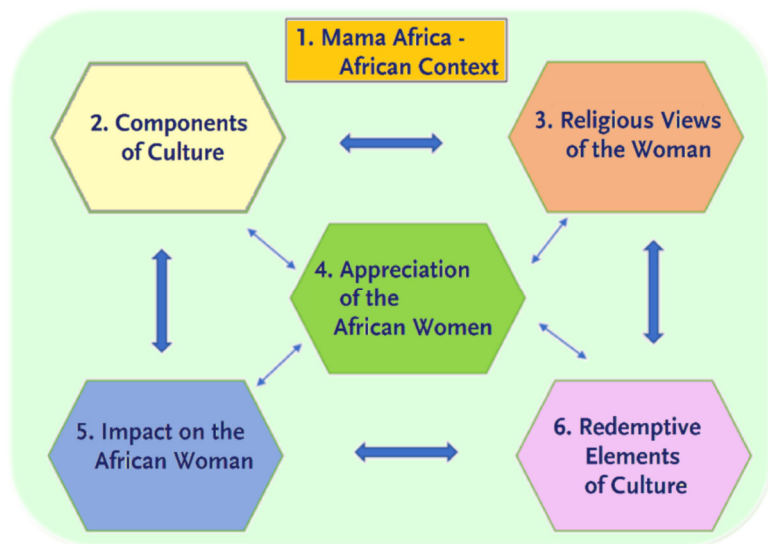


Figure 1: *The Afrocentric-Womanist Matrix*¹

The Afrocentric-Womanist Matrix shows a relationship between the various phases of the paradigm, none stands alone, however a careful interrogation of each aspect as indicated in the matrix helps in delving deeper into various aspects that could be overlooked without employing the Afrocentric-Womanist Paradigm. Hence, the focus will be on the religious, cultural, and social context in Africa regarding women as indicated as Mama Africa in the matrix. The components of culture will focus on those aspects of culture that Oduyoye highlights in her liberation theologies. I further look at how women have been appreciated or not in the church in particular and what redemptive elements in both their culture and Christianity are relevant for the recognition of the value, dignity and

¹ The Afrocentric-Womanist Matrix is used with permission, was first published in Amenyedzi SB (2022). *The Afrocentric-Womanist Paradigm*. In S. Chirongoma & V.S.W. Kiilu (Eds.), *Mother Earth, Mother Africa: World Religions and Environmental Imagination* (pp. 199-214). African Sun Media. <https://doi.org/10.52779/9781998951130/11>.

inclusion of women in the society at large, in the church and in leadership in particular. The following sections elaborate on the various phases of the Afrocentric-Womanist paradigm as shown in the diagram in a retrospection of Oduyoye's liberation theologies.

An African Woman Theologian: Prof Mercy Amba Ewudziwa Oduyoye

The first phase of the Afrocentric-Womanist paradigm establishes the context of the study. Here, the focus will be on the African religious context and Mercy Oduyoye herself. A brief biography helps us locate the chapter in the appropriate context. Auntie Mercy is from the Akan tribe of Ghana, a daughter of a Methodist minister Charles Kwaw Yamoah and Mercy Yaa Dakwaa Yamoah, born on her grandfather's cocoa farm in October 1933. The mother's lineage is originally from Amakom near Kumasi but, migrated to Akyem and finally settled in Asamankese in the Eastern Region while her patrilineage is from Apam and Ekwamkrom in the Central Region. She is a royal from the paternal line. Mercy had a firsthand experience of stranding beads which was her grandmother's profession, an experience that shaped her theology a great deal and reflected in her famous book *Beads and Strands: Reflections of An African Woman on Christianity in Africa* (Oduyoye, 2002; Russell, 2006; Amoah, 2006; Oredein, 2016).

Oduyoye's secondary education was at the Achimota school, a prestigious school up to date. She then continued to the Teacher's Training College in Kumasi, now the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. She practiced as a teacher while she self-tutored herself to write the Advanced Level examination which led her to the University of Ghana where she studied theology. She had an opportunity to also study at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom on a staff development program. Her academic career ranged from teaching at the girls' high schools and universities both in Ghana and Nigeria and then to the ends of the world, also, through her presentations and publications. She has been awarded several Doctor of Theology/Divinity *Honoris Causa* by renowned universities in Africa and beyond. Her position as the Deputy General Secretary at the WCC, her involvement in the youth department

of the WCC and her positions at EATWOT all shaped her theologies. As a lone ranger female theologian on the global platform amongst men, and a pacesetter in feminists/womanist theologies, her significant contributions to African theology and liberation theologies in general cannot be overemphasized. Her relentless efforts led to the birth of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle). She has been accorded a lot of accolades and censure as a wise woman theologian, mother of African feminist theology, misfit, a troublemaker and many more (Oduyoye, 2002; Russell, 2006; Amoah, 2006; Oredein, 2016). The paradoxes surrounding her life, I can safely say she might be perceived at some point as an enigma especially when men could not comprehend why she was doing theology coupled by questions like “what is she doing here?” (Oredein, 2016:158)

Then, when Oduyoye began formulating her liberation theologies, the context was mostly patriarchal that had somehow entrenched the subjugation of women as inferior in the society at large, in the socio-cultural, economic, political, and most relevant to her works, the religious contexts. Oduyoye’s emphasis has been on the enormous contribution to the sustenance of the family, and society, yet unappreciated beyond the roles of wifehood and motherhood despite the significant roles women play especially in matrilineal cultures like the Akan tribe of Ghana where she hails from (Oduyoye, 1986; 1990; 1995; 2022). I avow that even though there has been significant progress in the church and society regarding women issues, there are still grey, thin and thick areas that are not yet resolved such as women leadership in certain denominations. Some cultural practices that do not favor women still linger.

Religion, Culture and Womanhood in Africa

The second phase of the paradigm asks: what are the essential components of the culture? What it means to be a woman in Africa is featured in this regard. Mama Mercy’s own experiences of growing up in a matrilineal-patriarchal socio-cultural context in Ghana vis-à-vis that of her matrimonial context, a patrilineal patriarchal context in Nigeria gave her a firsthand experience with the African cultures she writes about. It has been indicated that, her approach has been both soft and firm (Phiri &

Nadar, 2006). Kwok (2004) maintains that her approach is a cultural hermeneutic and although she is not explicit in using postcolonial theories, she has a postcolonial approach.

She identified paradoxes and ironies in both cultures which also reflect in other African cultures about the worthy contribution of women to the survival of the family and society yet normally trivialized and delimited to servitude and procreation. She aligns motherhood to poverty in the sense that women (mothers) give their all to the sustenance of the family until they have nothing to give except their poverty yet unacknowledged, moreover, she is expected to depend on the man for survival (Oduyoye, 1985; 1995; 2002; Kanyoro, 2006; Russell, 2006; Amoah, 2006). The interesting observation Oduyoye made then was in the wake of global liberation fights and activism mainly on racial grounds, and later gender related. African men had deceived themselves that there was no problem that needed to be addressed regarding women liberation. Feminism was perceived as foreign and those who toed that line were deviants. Little did they know that the African woman needed a voice but was silenced. Thankfully, African women found a voice in Aunty Mercy who was indeed a misfit and later in many others (Oduyoye, 1985; 1990; 1995; 2002).

Oduyoye picked up the issue of African women's impoverishment which was usually ignored until they had to find their own voice. Their bodies have been used for experimenting drugs; women are usually excluded from economic and political decisions that affect them, for instance though women farm lands, they do not have a say in ownership in most cases. There are taboos in most cultures that affect their health and wellbeing. African women cannot claim to belong to the category of under employed because they work over 40 hours a week but unpaid as their labor remains undocumented. Christianity, Islam, Western cultures, and androcentric ideologies all contribute to the impoverishment of women in Africa (Oduyoye, 2002).

She asserts that, in Africa, the idea of a free woman is unwelcomed, a woman must be attached to a man, a father, a husband or an uncle to be respected or dignified. It is problematic for a woman to remain single, even a successful woman who is single equally experiences stigmatization. Another most important matter of concern has been on rituals;

there are several rituals at various stages of life from birth, puberty, marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, widowhood, and death. While as Africans, rituals are significant both for male and female, it is prudent that dehumanizing rites are abolished or redeemed to ensure the dignity and value of especially women who suffer most in such instances (Oduyoye, 2002).

Oduyoye's assertion of the influence of Christianity and Islam on African culture cannot be overemphasized, mostly in the negative sense where these religions are perceived to be superior hence taking away those importance values that depicts our true identity. It is important to note that recent theological discourse on the continent and beyond emphasizes contextualization and inculturation in doing theology and missions, perhaps her voice and that of other African theologians are breaking through.

Oduyoye on Liberation and Theology in Africa

Phase three of the Afrocentric-Womanist Paradigm focuses on the theological/religious views of the African woman. This section highlights the theologies of an African woman theologian. Mercy Oduyoye is an African woman theologian, as a theologian, she addresses general theological issues and then as a woman she concentrates on those theologies that are liberating to women in general and African women in particular. Broadly, she highlights issues of African religion, being an African and Christian, colonialism and Christianity, salvation, culture, gender, discrimination, oppression, peace and justice and most significantly approaching these theologies from a feminist/womanist dimension. Oduyoye has since time immemorial proposed that the spiritual and secular must be held together when theologizing, which is the point of departure for Public Theology. Perhaps, she must be also recognized as a mother of African public theology (cf. Oduyoye, 1986; 1995; 2002; Agang, Forster & Hendriks, 2020).

In defining **theology**, this is what she has to say: "suffice it to say that Christian theology is done wherever people reflect on their situation in the context of the gospel. Hence various expressions of Christian theology are sometimes referred to as contextual theology" (Oduyoye, 1986:2).

This is to say she leans towards contextual, lived, living and public theologies if we should name what she does. Oduyoye acknowledges the significance of Third World theologies and black theology in South Africa in the liberating theological discourse. She maintains that in doing theology in Africa, the African context must be taken into consideration while determining the methods of engagement. However, she indicated that this did not mean Western methods and frameworks were going to disappear just like that. Mercy Oduyoye is of the opinion that the fight for freedom from colonization birthed liberation theologies in Africa (Oduyoye, 1986; 2002). In fact, African theology though has gone a long way, we still grapple with Eurocentric approaches, theories and theologies laying at the center of seminaries in Africa. This is not to say there have not been any progress, the Circle just as Auntie Mercy dreamed of, has enormously contributed to framing feminist and womanist theologies.

The other most important term is “**liberation**”, as used here presupposes the existing of an unjustifiable situation that has to be eliminated. All limitations to the fullness of life envisaged in the Christ-event ought to be completely uprooted. Jesus came that we might have life and have a more abundantly” (Oduyoye, 2022:68-69). To Oduyoye (1986; 2002), creation itself is liberation, when God created the universe, it was delivered from chaos, created out of pain indicating the nature of God who brings meaning into chaotic situations. Also, the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt portrays a God who delivers His people from oppression and struggles. The creation, exodus, and the sending of Christ into the world show a God of redemption. God the owner of the world is in charge and expects us to respond to Him rightfully otherwise it becomes sin not to even recognize His presence and His work among us. She narrates:

From this perspective we hear the narrator telling of the existing disharmonies of our world: disharmony in nature, caused by human excesses and irresponsibility (Gen 3,4,6). To tell this tale of woe, the narrator begins with a scene in which God is “absent” (Gen 3:1-7). The woman talks about God with a Serpent (the opponent of God); the man stands by not taking part in this God-talk (theological disputation) but also completely forgetful of his responsibility to God who had commanded that the fruits of that tree was not to be eaten... but knowing the law does not necessitate obedience. (Oduyoye, 1986:93)

God's redeeming presence and love are evident at this point, then in the exodus and then in sending Jesus Christ to save us. In the nutshell, she sees **creation as liberation, the exodus as liberation and the Salvation of Jesus similarly as liberation**. In this sense, to the African Christian what liberation or redemption from oppression means is relevant in our theologies. Redemption not only from colonialism and the oppressor's rule but also from dominant oppressors in our cultural and religious context who subjugate marginalized people such as women. To her, **patriarchy is sin needing redemption from the oppressors**. Some of the major questions she poses are: What are the implications of Jesus's death in African cultures and religions, African religion, Christianity and Islam? Salvation brings deliverance from both spiritual and physical struggles. Embedded in salvation is reconciliation leading to peace and justice. Yahweh is a warrior who crushes the oppressor to win victory and liberty for His people (Oduyoye, 1986; 1995; 2002).

To Oduyoye (1986; 2002), the Christ of Christianity is concerned about every human need which explains the quest for humanity for salvation. Therefore, the willingness of Africans to accept salvation through Jesus Christ is a journey towards liberation from slavery as in Egypt, oppressions, dehumanization and injustice. Another thing she emphasizes in her theology is covenant and community whereby God is a god of covenant. God had a covenant with children, he had covenant with Adam and Eve and with the Israelites and in the New Testament through Jesus Christ. This is relevant to Africans as we are a people of covenant especially blood covenant at many levels expressed in different forms, rituals, and ceremonies.

Neighborhood and neighborliness also feature prominently in her theologizing, these are vital in a community. It is important to ask the question: who is my neighbor? The neighbor is not just one next door in that there are several levels of relationships where neighbors are encountered, among nations, race, ethnic groups and more. Even unacknowledged neighbors are still neighbors and Jesus said when we are kind to our neighbors, if we love our neighbors as ourselves and if we care for the needy then we have done it for Him that is the essence of neighborhood and neighborliness (Oduyoye, 1986; 2002). It is also worthy to note that Auntie Mercy has for decades mentioned **ecological issues** which is

now a significant theological discourse in the Circle (cf. Chirongoma & Kiilu, 2022). Oduyoye (2002) is of the opinion that in God's economy when he created the world, everything was good and sustainable and codependent. The problem is when there was exploitation, and when women are not seen as image barriers of God, co-creators with God and co-managers of God's economy. The next section elaborates on her feminist/womanist theologies.

Oduyoye on Liberating Women Theology, Ethos and Praxis

The Afrocentric-Womanist Paradigm then proposes an interrogation of how women are appreciated in the context. Now, the focus will be on Oduyoye's feminist/womanist theologies. This is how she describes what she does in an interview:

Oluwatomisin: I've seen in your work that you identify as an African women's theologian. I've also seen in your work that you identify as an African feminist. What does it mean to be an African women's theologian? How would you describe your brand of theology?

Mercy: Ok, we—I'm saying "we" because by the time I got on the open market as it were—there were more of us. I was the one that decided that we would call ourselves African women theologians. Because that's the simplest—we are Africans, we are women, and we are theologians. We were kind of off-line people. We were a minority. People were wondering "What are they doing here?" So, we wanted to state clearly that we are women, African, we are theologians. I didn't have any of these nice words like womanist and feminist to go on. And also it was important for us to identify ourselves as women, because the theologians in Africa – and now I'm talking the seventies, sixties to seventies – they were all men. So, we have to underline the women when we talk about African women theologians (Oredein, 2016:158).

Isabel Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, prominent members of the Circle call Oduyoye's method as "Treading Softly but Firmly" where she makes her strong case for women but has adopted gentle and wise ways of sending her message across to enable good audience (Phiri & Nadar, 2006). I have argued early on that her work leans more towards womanist theology.

In 1985 and 1988, the WCC launched a decade for women and this was for the council to focus on women issues for the next decade also based on the then UN declaration in 1979 to end all forms of discrimination against women. The UN conference in Nairobi in 1985 sparked the fire which led to the WCC decade in solidarity with women. This was a call in solidarity with women in identifying the sinful act of discrimination and being deliberate an intentional about the inclusion of women in the ministry and praxis of the churches. The yellow book became the blue-print for the WCC internationally (Oduyoye, 1990). In her book *Who Will Roll the Stone Away? the Ecumenical decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women*, she shares her passion on the need for the global church to stop the sin of discrimination against women while reporting and mapping up WCC's decade for churches in solidarity with women (Oduyoye, 1990). She indicates:

Since it is the church I specifically want to call to task, I am broadly defining church as an organization for performing Christ-like functions in the world. I want to examine the church's attitude to the growth of women into Christ-like persons. I speak broadly, then, of Christianity and Christian churches (Oduyoye, 2002:69).

In addressing the sin of discrimination of women in the church as she normally puts it, she identifies that the starting point is to affirm the full humanity of the woman who is equally created in the *imago Dei* and no less a human being. She stressed on the patriarchal systems in the society at large, African cultures and religion, which are also replicated in the church. Biblically, the exodus account reflects a people in oppression who were saved by God. In the process there were women (midwives) who refused to join in the oppressor's rule and schemes. They feared God so they would not kill the babies of the Israelites as commanded to do. Jochebed the mother and Miriam her daughter found a way to keep Moses alive. Then Pharaoh's daughter who defied the father's orders to kill the Hebrew boys by saving one, and bringing him right into the palace (Oduyoye, 2002).

Moses emerged from the efforts of the aforementioned women called by God to deliver His people from oppression. It is important to note that aside Pharaoh, were the task masters who were 'accredited leaders' of the children of Israel and the Israelites who turned against Moses. Liberation

does not happen in a vacuum, God uses men and women alike in the process. It is also possible to mistake the desert for the promised land. The God-factor must be recognized in the fight for liberation otherwise, it becomes problematic. Oduyoye sees oppression as communal sin which also happens in the church and contends that *Gye nyame* (except God) meaning without God nothing holds. We need God and God-Talk to address the oppression and subjugation of women in the church and the society at large. A major issue regarding women in the church is leadership and ordination (Oduyoye, 2022).

Although the feminine aspect of God has been overlooked, it cannot continually be ignored. The gender of God is not the issue of contention here but the nature and his expression is what we focus on in this regard. In Africa, God has been described as a fatherly mother or a mother father. God is portrayed as a parent, mother or grandfather however, in theological circles, male theologians construct God as a male, who had male priests, with a son who has male disciples who became the apostles. There seem to be no room for woman leadership in the church and society. It must not be forgotten that women played a major role in the exodus as mentioned above and the resurrection message was entrusted to women who were sent to convey the message to the disciples (Oduyoye, 1990; 2002).

The Plight of Women in the Church in Africa

In phase five of the Afrocentric-Womanist Paradigm, the quest is to ascertain how women are affected by the situation in question. Oduyoye identifies the effects of patriarchal notions in the society, culture, African Religion, and the church on African women. Christianity reinforces culture to promote sexism in the church. The impact of colonization and westernization on the subjugation of women cannot also be underrated as the women are to remain silent while they obey, submit and follow prescribed values without question. Then she made a case that female voices were ignored in theologizing, however, thankfully the Circle has granted a prophetic voice to African women theologians who are on top of issues in the church and society. This does not mean that sexism is over but at least there is some God-Talk going on (Oduyoye & Kanyoro, 1992).

Even the church fathers like Augustine of Hippo, and the great reformer Martin Luther did not favor women in their theologies, rendering women as inferior. The biological nature of women has been used to discriminate against them. In most African initiated churches, women are not allowed entry to the place of worship during menstruation, after delivery and sexual intercourse, the head cover is another contention. Who defines the humanness of a woman is vital in this conversation. If it is God. Then we must all embrace who God has made us all to be, both men and women, in His image. Sexuality seem to be a taboo to discuss in the church, moreover this is a lived experience that cannot be separated from the woman. She proposes that understanding the sexuality of both men and women will enhance relationships in the church, devoid of hierarchical and power systems (Oduyoye, 1997; 2002).

Redeeming the Identity of the African Woman in the Church and Society

The final stage of the Afrocentric-Womanist Paradigm seeks for the redemptive elements of cultural and religious context and how that would influence the appreciation of the African woman. Oduyoye is passionate about the recognition and affirmation of the oppression and subjugation of women as sin. It is then that need for redemption will be acknowledged as sacred with God lying at the center 'Except God' intervenes. This means that women will be valued as image bearers of God and co-managers of God's economy beyond their roles in the kitchen and biological role of procreation. The women who had been with Jesus on the resurrection morning wandered and spoke about who would roll the stone for them to be able to minister to Jesus. The stone, the obstacle was already rolled away when they got there, and the most important message of the resurrection was entrusted to women to even tell the Apostles. The stone is rolled away hence the church in Africa must rise up to this knowledge and allow women to freely partake and respond to their call (Oduyoye, 1990).

In calling the church to account, there is continuous discrimination against women both from the pulpit and the patriarchal structures. Mercy criticizes and challenges the African Church to redeem Christianity from the image as a force that pushes women into accepting rules that hamper the free and full expression of their humanity as it has to do with class, race, and gender. The exclusion from performing rituals and priesthood based on the image of God as a male and leadership as the prerogative of men has blinded the church from noticing the absence or presence of women. Hebrew scripture and culture have been used to discriminate disproportionately against women in the church. Matriarchal cultures, and certain significant roles in African cultures and Religion such as that of the queen mother in Ghana who even has power over the king and priestesses at the shrines who minister to men should give a clue to using culture as an intervention in redeeming the image of women (Oduyoye, 1986; 1990; 2002).

The God that is preached in Africa is portrayed as one that has ordered the oppression of women so they must obey and submit without question. On the contrary, many African women experience God differently and cannot be subjugated since we have found freedom in God in Christ who empowers spiritually which must be expressed in many ways. The Christology we must embrace as African women is one that uphold Jesus as our loving liberator from oppression (Oduyoye, 1997).

The call is for the church to join in solidarity with women to redeem the image of the woman, the theology, praxes and ethos of the church and culture. There are various levels of redemption that need to be considered. Solidarity does not always mean the will of God as in the case of Adam and Eve and the Tower of Babel accounts in the Bible. Solidarity is when all people join together with God to end oppression just like the midwives in Egypt although they were not directly affected. Men and women must equally join in the God-talk to bring redemption to women (Oduyoye, 1990; 2002). Cultural rituals and religious tradition that dehumanize women must be likewise redeemed.

CONCLUSION

The chapter was a retrospection on Professor Mercy Oduyoye's liberation theologies through an Afrocentric-Womanist lens. As an African woman theologian myself and a minister, her experiences and theologies mirror my own experiences. We as African women are grateful for the many voices that have risen from the Circle on many issues that confront us as women in the religious and cultural contexts. We are also grateful for the men and churches who through the efforts of the WCC decade for women pledged their solidarity to end oppression. Despite this progress, I can still say that African women still encounter discrimination, subjugation, and inhumane rituals from the cultures and religions. Mercy Oduyoye has been a prophetic voice and remains so for African women in general and African women theologians. She keeps echoing **the stone is rolled away; Talitha Qumi: Damsel Arise** (Oduyoye, 1990; Oduyoye & Kanyoro, 1992).

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