

## WOMEN AND RELIGION: A CRITIQUE OF DISCRIMINATIONS AGAINST WOMEN AT SACRED PLACES IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

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### Abstract

*Sacred places and religion are the twin entities that cannot be easily separated from each other. Religion as a stubborn and persistent element is a phenomenon that cuts across race, tribes and gender. Many women have played crucial roles in religion from antiquity till modern age and such role included priestesses, prophetesses, mid-wifery, diviners, deliverers of their nation through their religious and spiritual prowess. These women role have not been given due recognition and they are unfortunately discriminated against especially at sacred places. Therefore, this paper is premised on the very important need of according and appreciating women in religions, using some major religions such as Judaism, Christianity and African Traditional Religion as background. It critically examined the cultural biases and traditional beliefs that were transferred to religion, which served as the basis of discriminations against women at sacred places. Using trado-historical approach, it was discovered that the gender role of women in religion was difficult for men to swallow hook, line and sinker as a result of certain cultural taboos and beliefs. In conclusion, it recommends that women are of the same stock with men and have served as priestesses and played other crucial religious roles in religions. Therefore, they should not be discriminated against at sacred places.*

**Key words:** Religion, Sacred places, Women, Beliefs, Discrimination

### Introduction

Religion flows through and flies on the wings of sacred places right from antiquity in its expression and worshipping rituals and ceremonies. Sacred places form a pertinent feature of religion and there is no religion that does not function and feature at sacred places. Most of the religious rites, rituals, liturgies, sacrifices, festivals, ceremonies and other activities are carried out in sacred places. It could be a resounding sacrilege to carry out any religious functions from just any place outside sacred places. This is because of the ancient belief of the non-homogeneity of space. Besides, antiquity held the belief that there are spatial realities and quality in space. Childs succinctly captures this and writes that “mythical space allows a particular content to each position which determines what kind of space it is”.<sup>1</sup> This spatial content forms the religious essence, relevance and sanctity of the space.

It is this spiritual content, which religious men experienced that responsible for spiritual and religious demarcations of space in religion as sacred or profane, holy or unholy, pure and impure. Quoting Rudolf Otto, Eliade classified this spiritual content as the feeling of terror before the sacred, before the awe-inspiring mystery (*mysterium tremendum*), the majesty (*majestas*) that emanates an overwhelming superiority of power. The numinous (from Latin *numen*, god) presents itself (at sacred places) as something “wholly other” (*ganz andere*), something basically and totally different.<sup>2</sup> The manifestation of the sacred is always regarded as something different from natural orders, something outside the world of nature but using the elemental objects in nature as vehicles to manifest itself. It may look irrational, but the manifestation impinges on religious sensibilities of man and could not be denied.

Sacred places provide atmospheres for religious worship, liturgy meeting God and interactions for the adherents of the same religious beliefs and ideas. It should be stated here that all and sundry are eligible to worship at sacred places. The custodians of faiths and other religious personages take the lead and direct others as they follow the order of the worship. This is so because it is religiously opinionated that before the rituals, sacrifice, and worship could be accepted to God, gods, divinities and ancestors, they must follow that liturgical order.<sup>3</sup>

The ubiquity of sacred places could be traced to the fact that man has incorporated elemental forces in nature as parts of his existence and they are essentials to his religious psychological upkeep. In as much nearly all religions started as nature religions and as Von Rad noted “correspondingly needed many places and many symbols in order to pin down the very numerous self-revelations of the deity”<sup>4</sup> (or divinities). The revelation of the mystery of reality in nature to religious man has made him to see sacred places everywhere around him. These places are found in waters, rivers, ponds, lakes, streams, wells, spring falls, lagoons, oceans, seas, valleys, earth, grounds, plants, trees, uncommon monuments, hills, rocks, mountains, etc. Some become local cultic sanctuaries for the worshippers for local gods while some take national outlooks like shrines of *Baal* in ancient Canaanite religion and the Jerusalem Temple for ancient Israel.

Each of these sacred places has its own priests and on rare cases priestesses who function at these places. It is on this rarity of women functioning at sacred places that stares on the face. It is this uncommon responsibility of prophetesses, priestesses and women personages at sacred places that this paper addressed in the light of the religious contributions of women in many religions.

### **The Contributions of Women in Religions**

#### **a. Jewish Religion-Deborah and Huldah as Examples**

The Jewish scripture attests to the fact that women are part of the creatures, created by God<sup>5</sup> (Gen. 1-2). The logical conclusion drawn from this is the fact that the primal parents, Adam and Eve worshipped God together. Thereby, showing the examples to Cain and Abel to follow suit (cf. Gen.4:1-3). Looking at the roles of women in antiquity, especially their religious roles in Judaism, women were more limited than in Greek society. The education of women was limited as well as their participation in religious matter as revealed to us on the pages of the scripture. However, the prominent roles of prophetesses Deborah in Judges 4 and 5 and Huldah in 2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34 stare us at the face in the midst of patrimonial marginalisation. Belleville aptly reveals the astonishing contributions of women to Judaism when she writes, “in fact, synagogue records, burial markers, inscriptions, and works of art show that a surprising number of Jewish women played significant roles in their local congregation”<sup>6</sup>.

This was contrary to the portraits of women on the frames of the many Rabbis who did not see anything good in women.

Prophetess Deborah was a one-woman battalion in ancient Israel when Jabin came against Israel with “nine hundred chariots and multitude”. Israel only had against one thousand foot soldiers against these hundreds of chariots and a great multitude (cf. Jud.4:1-7). Her courage in the midst of fear, oppression and terrorism against Israel for twenty years was historical and noteworthy. She dared Sisera, chief of army of Jabin and his chariots. Her political contributions led to the freedom of her nation from servitude. De Vaux<sup>7</sup> notes that in Deborah’s day, there was neither shield nor spear among the forty thousand men of Israel yet, she gained victory for her nation through her spiritual qualities. Besides, she was a prophetess second to Miriam in Israelite

history. As a prophetess, she heard from God, received visions, guidance and divine communications from Yahweh to guide her nation.

Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time ... And the children of Israel came up to her for judgement – Jud.4:4-5.

This portrays that she was recognised as a woman-judge in Israel. As a prophetess, she was the custodian of spiritual things as at that time. Agreeably, she might not be in the temple to officiate as a priestess and she could not offer offerings that could be acceptable to Yahweh because she was not a priestess. It could be inferred that where was sitting, judging Israel, there was a local sanctuary there. This was so because palm trees were planted in isolated places as isolated trees in biblical times.<sup>8</sup> As a result of her religious cum political contributions, Deborah was honoured as heroine in ancient Israel.

Huldah was another woman who religiously contributed to her nation. The reformation prophesied by a prophet from Judah in I Kings 13:1-2 was carried out by Josiah. The apostasy of Judah led to the deserialization of the temple and in the process of cleansing it, and the Book of the Law was found. Men read it to the king but the interpretation was given by a woman prophetess Huldah. By implication, this woman had the knowledge of the Law and she could interpret it. By duties, prophetess Huldah was responsible for keeping the royal or priestly wardrobe, a duty she should not have been given if considered as inferior fellow. Peterson has suggested that she lived in the “west of the temple complex in the upper Tyropoeon valley in the commercial quarter of Jerusalem”.<sup>9</sup> She should be regarded as a prophetess who has close connection with the temple in Jerusalem. Besides, she was distinguished as a result of her prophetic gift.

During critical periods and issues, Israel sought the face of Yahweh for divine direction. The divine custodians or channels of communication were the prophets. For instance Moses sought the face of God on behalf of the Zelophad's daughters-Numbers 36:1-13; Saul sought a man of God-1Sam. 9:6-10; Jehoshaphat and Jehoram sought the face of God-2 Kgs. 3:11-14. This was the usual practice in ancient Israel. All these prophets were men. But in this crucial time, during the reformation by Josiah, it was a woman that was consulted for divine guidance.

Ogunkunle rightly captures this unique difference and submits that “the fact that the King's five officers, who were equally religious leaders, sought out prophetess Huldah suggests that she was highly regarded for her prophetic role.”<sup>10</sup> Huldah distinguished herself by her prophetic gifts and roles at critical time in Israel. She also showed remarkable quality of her religious status by the interpretation of the Law even above men of this period. In support of Huldah's religious contributions and arguing from a feminist perspective, Tucker submits that “only Huldah could interpret the significance of Deuteronomy to the devout King Josiah, Achor, and Asaiah... Thus, the spiritual leadership of a woman affected the history of the whole nation”.<sup>11</sup>

#### **b. Religious Contributions of Women in the New Testament**

The pages of the New Testament opened with the roles of a woman, prophetess Anna in Luke 2:36. One astonishing feature of her life was that she practically lived in the temple. And this woman was a widow of about eighty four years and she lived a life of fasting and prayers. The prophetic role she played was associated with the highest sacred place- the Temple in Judaism. She probably prophesied in and outside the temple. One thing about this woman was that though we did not have her messages on the pages of the New Testament yet she was undoubtedly recognized as a prophetess.

Anna was allowed to enter the temple not on the basis of her Jewish origin, because she was a prophetess. The record in Luke 2:36-38 whets our appetite for more about this woman of the temple, the highest Jewish place of worship, but Luke did not give more than this. We conjecture that Anna continued the Old Testament trends of the special religious roles of women as prophetesses in the New Testament. Bellevile arguably submits that “if there is one gift women consistently possessed and exercised throughout the history of God’s people, it is this one”.<sup>12</sup> As a prophetess, she espoused more on the Messianic hope, promise, birth and fulfilment to people in the temple when Jesus Christ, the Messiah was born and brought for dedication in the temple.

### c. Women in the Ministry of Jesus Christ

Predicated on the premise that Jesus Christ is the highest sacred personified, He did not discriminate against women during His ministry. Taking the Lucan treatise, more roles are specifically given to women in the infancy narratives and ministry of Jesus Christ. It was a woman who carried His pregnancy, (Lk.1:26-36); it was a woman who authenticated the message delivered by angel Gabriel about His Lordship (Lk.1:39-44); it was a woman who encouraged His mother to believe (Luk.1:45); it was a woman who expatiated more to His mother to believe (Lk.1:45), it was a woman who expatiated more on His Messiahship (Lk.2:36-38).

As Jesus started His ministry, it was a woman, His mother, Mary, who was instrumental to His first miracle in Johannine treatise (John 2:4-11). The sacredness of Jesus Christ did not forbid Him from healing women and accepting their domestic services (Mt. 8:14-15; Mk. 1:29-31; Lk. 4: 30-39). Jesus did not abhor women as a sacred Being; so He healed them and touched them contrary to the conventional practise of not touching a woman in the public in His days. He touched Simon’s mother-in-Law and the woman with infirmity for eighteen years (Matt. 9:18-26; Lk. 13:10-17).

It was not only the infant stories that present women in the life of Jesus, they also featured in His works and teachings. This aspect shows the relevance of women in His miracles, healings and teachings. Many women received their healing, deliverance and miracles. For instance, Simon’s mother-in-law, Mary Magdalene, on unnamed woman with infirmity for eighteen years, and the woman with the issue of blood among others received their healings (Mt.8:14-15; Mk.5:25ff; Mk.1:29-31; Lk.4:38-39). Even young girls were healed by the Saviour like Jairus’ daughter and a girl of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk. 5:21-24, Mk. 7:24-30). Sinful women that were discriminated against were forgiven by Him. After this they were given a command and power to go and sin no more. Hurley captures this episode clearly and submits that “Jesus as depicted in this episode does not have power over men and evil spirit alone; He can also deliver men and women without discrimination from physical diseases.”<sup>13</sup>

In the ministry of Jesus, women were parts of His teachings and parables; the parable of a lost coin of a woman-Lk.15:18-10; the persistent widow-Lk. 18:1-11; He discussed with a woman in the public-the woman of Samaria-Jn.4:1-42; He received gifts of money from women-Lk.8:1-3; He watched a widow who gave her all for the service of God in the temple-Lk.12:41; He was a guest in the house of Mary and Martha-Lk.10:38-42; Jn.11; the ten maidens (Mt.25:1-3); the question of marriage and divorce (Mt.19:3-12); the request of the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Mt.20:25-28) and the rest showed that contrary to the order of the day, Jesus forbade and broke the yokes of discrimination against women.

Paul the apostle has been criticized and labelled as anti-feminist by many scholars. This is due to some passages like 1 Corinthians Chapter 14 verse 34; and first Timothy 2:11-12. The influence of such passages in the teaching of Paul has been attributed to both the Jewish and

Roman backgrounds, coupled with pro-feminist cult in the Greek- world then.<sup>14</sup> But looking at the ministry of Paul critically, prominent women featured. They were mentioned in the pages of the New Testament and commended for their contributions to the ministry of Paul. The responsibilities of the ministry were shared with Paul by many women.

Great women who were practically active in Paul's ministry were mentioned on the pages of the New Testament. Phoebe, for instance, was commended for her role as a deacon of the church in Cenchrea and a great benefactor of Paul and host of others (Rm. 16:1-2). Priscilla, a woman was referred to as a "co-labourer" with Paul even to the point of death (Rm.16:3); one Mary "laboured much" in the ministry with Paul, (Rm.16:6); Junia was mentioned as a kin and "co-prisoner" with Paul and "of note among the apostles" (vs. 7). Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis were women "who laboured much in the Lord" (vs. 12). Syntyche and Euodia are addressed as "co-labourers" with Paul (Phil.4:2-3) and Chloe (1Cor.1:10).

All these instances show that these women participated in the work of the ministry with Paul. They were saved by Jesus Christ, given the spiritual endowments and gifts for the work of the ministry. "This is an expanded playing field for women can also be attributed to the increased roles for women in the early Christian era"<sup>15</sup>. Contrary to what people paint Paul as anti feminist, the above submissions show that women are a cause for thanksgiving (Rm.16:4) and worthy objects of sincere and personal greeting (Rm.16:3,6,7,13,15; Col. 4:15; 2 Tim.4:19) in his letters. He evangelistically tagged them as "co-workers", or "co-labourers", "co-prisoners" and sometimes hard labourers "who risked their own necks for my life" and people who contended at his side for the sake of the ministry (Rm.16:3, 9; 1 Cor.3:9; Phil. 4:3; Col.4:11). The first European convert in the ministry of Paul was a business woman, named Lydia (Acts 16:11-15). Many women in Thessalonica were also converted to Jesus through the efforts of his evangelistic campaigns (Acts 17:4, 11-12). Women in the New Testament era played many roles as revealed to us. In the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, they featured in His annunciation, magnification, presentation in the temple and boyhood without discriminations.

### Discriminations against Women at Sacred Places in African Context

The discrimination against women in African context could be summarized with a popular song among the Yoruba thus:

*Awo egungun l'obirin l'ese  
Awo gelede l'obirin l'emo  
B'obirin ba f'oju k'oro,  
Oro a gbe*

meaning,      Women could only be members of the cult of masquerade  
                  They could at the same time belong to *Gelege*<sup>16</sup> cult  
                  Any woman that dares *Oro*,  
                  *Oro* would consume her.

This shows that at sacred places in African religion, women's allowance, equality and participation are limited. The religious socialization among the Africans is gender biased. Oyeronke opines that "gender is informed by assumed capabilities for individuals based primarily on their sexual anatomy".<sup>18</sup> It is assumed that by gender, women are incapacitated to do some things in the society due to discrimination on the platter of sex. As a result, they are kept back and

prevented from certain religious functions. This society concept was carried to religion and hence it favours our patriarchal society even at sacred places.

Women in African traditional religions as well as society have played prominent roles. Many heroines in religion and society have been produced by women. Some of them even hold important chieftaincy titles in recognitions of their prowess and contributions.<sup>19</sup> Some hold such titles such as *Iya Oba*, *Yeye Oba*, *Erelu*, *Iyalode*, *Iyalaje*, *Iyaloja*, *Iya Elewe Omo*, *Iya Awemo* and so on. However, there are some cults that women cannot not be initiated into in Yoruba such cults include the *Ogboni*, *Osugbo*, *Ekpo* and *Ekpe*. Practically speaking, among the Igbo in eastern Nigeria, priestesses do not feature in the traditional religious worship. These cults are patriarchal in nature and are institutions of power that control and govern the Igbo traditional societies. Among the executives of the *Ogboni* only a woman is allowed and that is *Erelu*.

Ibitokun<sup>20</sup> cites another instance in Yoruba religion where *Oro* and *Egungun* cults are strictly for men. They are religious cults where men play dominant roles and women play secondary roles. In the sacred groves where the *Oro* and *Egungun* would dress up before appearing to the public, women are forbidden. They could only follow masquerades as praise-singers and dancers. They appear to be accommodated only in the areas of theatrical performances and not in the groves of secret rituals proper.<sup>21</sup> Having understood the discrimination against women, a time came when they rose up to challenge this. Ibitokun captures it rightly and reports the “Gelede” of Ketu-Yoruba is a means devised by womenfolk to break the patrimonial domination jinx. Aged women who had passed menopausal age dominated this cult and they were given all sorts of names. In order to show men their mystic and supernatural pre-eminence “our mothers” began to kill indiscriminately and this led to the men conceding to the male-female balancing<sup>22</sup>.

As part of the discrimination against women at sacred places, only few women are priestesses in the worship of the divinities. Yet, at festivals and ceremonies associated with powerful local or state divinities, as Uwalaka notes, “women not only prepared the required delicious dishes with a great sense of commitment but they featured prominently at the traditional dances which added aesthetic colours to the celebrations. However, there was a preponderance of priests over priestesses in traditional religious worship”.<sup>23</sup> Even there are some divinities that are believed that only permit male priests alone. Quoting Ezeanya, for instance, Uwalaka writes that the “*Ajala* cult, the Earth and fertility goddess of the people in Nneato in Anambra state has no priestesses”<sup>24</sup> Yet the divinities would accept the clapping, singing, dancing, jubilation of women and eat the food for rituals and sacrifice prepared by women. By rite of passage, there are cults and festivals that only accept the food prepared by women in Yoruba religion. Only in fertility cult like River *Osun* in Osogbo and *Olokun* cults are women allowed. For instance, the *Arugba* of River *Osun* must compulsorily be a virgin young lady from the royal family.

### Discriminations against Women at Sacred Places in Indigenous Churches in African Context

Sacred places feature normally in many classical indigenous Pentecostal and *Aladura* churches. These sacred places are found on the hill tops, rocks, mountains, waters, wells, grounds, sanctuary, altars, inner chancels, monuments and so on. Religious activities are carried out at these places with various religious and spiritual purposes. All and sundry are called to come for worship and blessings at these places. However, when it comes to officiating, men take the lead. The discrimination against women at sacred places in the indigenous churches starts from the church auditoria. In Cherubim and Seraphim Church and Christ Apostolic Church for instance, women are

not allowed to step into the place called chancels or “altar” where the pastors, prophets and other male ministers officiate.

Adegoke reports that “the Cherubim and Seraphim most sacred place is the church which is referred to as House of Prayer (Mt.21:13; Isa.65:7) with a chancel or an altar on the eastern side, with an inscription “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty” written on the entrance. Only the elders and the leaders (usually men) of the service are permitted to sit there and they must be in their proper regalia”.<sup>25</sup> He goes further, “female members are not authorized to enter the chancel or altar of the prayer house or praying ground”.<sup>26</sup>

The only category of women that could be allowed into these places are sexually inexperienced young female members because of their sexual purity. Only “a female child who has had no sexual experience and have not experience(d) menstrual circle may go into the chancel should a need arise in the absence of male member”.<sup>27</sup> This raises some heart throbbing questions: Why exposing the sexual experience of the female members in the name of gaining access to an altar? Is conjugal experience among the legally married members a sin? Or is it a barrier or condition to gain access to where it is believed you have the blessing of God in His sanctuary? Is menstrual circle dirt, blemish, filthiness and a mark of defilement to women? Is it not God-given and part of their beauty as women? This is discrimination and the same goes in Christ Apostolic Church. Yet these altars or chancels are being kept tidy during the week and on Saturdays in preparation for Sunday services by some leading women in the church. Upon delivery of a child, male or female, women remain “unclean” for the next at least forty to eighty days and are not allowed to come to the church-House of Prayer in both churches. During the monthly flow, it would be sacrilege for menstrual period to be brought into the house of prayer in Cherubim and Seraphim Church, though Christ Apostolic Church does not emphasize this. Also, women under this condition cannot be baptized especially in Cherubim and Seraphim Church.

On the issue of holy or sacred waters and wells, limitations are also placed on women. For instance, at Christ Apostolic Church, Promised Land along Akure-Owo Express road, the sacred well there, named “Babalola Olomi Iye”<sup>28</sup> is strictly for men when it comes to its fetching and distribution. Omoyajowo reports on a holy water at Okesen Cherubim and Seraphim church, which is for healing and bathing. “The well was specially dug, dedicated and reserved for those purposes. There is only one man, a custodian in charge. He writes there is an Apostle in charge of the well, popularly known as “Baba Olomi Iye” (the father with living water)”.<sup>29</sup> It is religiously believed that men are purer than women when it comes to spiritual matters. In order not to bring defilement to these sacred wells and maintain their sanctity, women must be kept afar.

Women are also discriminated against on the sacred mountains. This was our conclusion when we visited some of these sacred mountains. For instance, when we visited the sacred mountains at Efon Alaaye and Ido-Ile (formerly Ido-Ajinare), women are forbidden from gaining entrance to some selected sacred places there. These sacred mountains welcome both men and women for prayers and worship. But there are sacred places that are marked with stones and marbles and these places are forbidden to women. Ikudayisi,<sup>30</sup> during an interview granted, reported that after Joseph Ayo Babalola prayed on the sacred mountain at Erio Ekiti, he demarcated a particular place for prayers and he gave specific instructions that women should not be allowed to enter into these places. Till date this is kept as a rule against women but they do not see it in this light but following divine instruction.

The spiritual potency of these sacred places is believed to be kept alive as long as women do not have contact with them. This presupposes that women are agents of pollution and defilement. This could be an erroneous belief against the personhood of women. In many of these

places, we find women as seers, prophetesses and *Iya-Aladura* (mothers of prayers). They minister effectively as their male counter parts would do. Many great politicians, businessmen, contractors and male priests inclusive would consult women religious leaders in time of need and distress, but in time of comfort and at sacred places, they would be marginalised.

This marginalization prevented them from enjoying the spiritual benefits of touching the sacred grounds, earth, circles of prayers of great men such as Joseph Ayo Babalola, Moses Tunolase Orimolade and the likes. Besides, lest the women gain entrance to the sacred places in the chancels and others, they are not ordained to key positions like the men. So, we find in Christ Apostolic Church, women ordination has never been thought of. In Cherubim and Seraphim Church, Adegoke reports that similar discriminating tradition exists. "Female member cannot be ordained as the spiritual father of the church nor can a female member be anointed as the supervising prophet or the supervising Pastor/Evangelist".<sup>31</sup>

### **A Critique of the Discriminations against Women at Sacred Places**

It has been observed that discrimination against women even in the religious realms was as a result of cultural bias in the society and imposition. The Judeo-Christian scripture teaches that both man and woman were *created in the image and likeness of God*. The image and likeness of God in man was not superior to that of the woman. Both were blessed and given the authority to rule over the animals and nature. Yet, the writer of Genesis story of the fall portrayed the woman as an agent of the fall and responsible for the depravity of mankind in general.

Women in antiquity played major roles in religious but the Rabbis in Judaism would not stop this discrimination even in the synagogue. The education of women was limited to age twelve when males would begin serious theological study of the Torah. In the eyes of the Mosaic Law, men and women were considered equal members of the covenant people of Israel. Deborah judged Israel as a prophetess and her spiritual prowess was recognized for twenty years in Israel. Undoubtedly, she would have been permitted to operate at sacred shrines of ancient Israel. Huldah was in charge of the royal or priestly robes in Jerusalem, near the temple. She offered plain and practical help to her nation in time of need. If she had been discriminated against, the nation would have lost her prophetic help and service in the time of distress in Judah.

The pages of the New Testament open with one prophet, Anna who ministered before God day and night in the temple. Her ministry was linked to messianic hope of the nation. If the Holy Spirit of God could lead her to go to the temple because of the Messiah's-Jesus' dedication, surely God did not sanction our gender biases against women at sacred places. She was not considered to be a walking dirt and defilement when she came to the Jewish highest sacred place-the temple.

Jesus Christ, the Sacred personified, did not discriminate against women rather He felt convenient with women in the public, private house of Mary and Martha, and even travelling with them (Jn. 4; Lk.8:1-3; 23:49). A woman with sickness of eighteen years He liberated and treated as a "daughter of Abraham" (Lk.13:16) and had a theological debate with a woman (Jn. 4:19-26). He used a woman as a model of unequal piety when a widow donated her all in the sacred temple of the Jews (Mk.12:41-44). Women could touch Him, even one with haemorrhage and an adulteress who also anointed Him (Mk.5:25-34; Lk.7:36-50). She did not only anoint Him, she washed His feet with her tears, wiped the tears with her hair and she kissed His feet. Yet, Jesus did not condemn her nor discriminate against her. It could be stated that repentant heart, pure heart and faith in God supersede the ceremonial expectations at the sacred places. Jesus saw her faith and she was saved by that faith (Mt.7:50). In the case of the woman with haemorrhage, it was her

“faith” that made her whole while the same “faith” saved an adulteress woman while they were with the sacred personified.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

It is appropriate to conclude this study on the note that sacred places are special religious spots that quickly appeal to the religious psyche of people during worship. They enhance the level of the concentration of people in prayers and aid their faith in God or divinities that they would be heard. Once they have come to where God or divinities have once manifested their powers, people held the notion that they have come to the “abode” of God or houses of the divinities. It is either a fact or fallacy that sacred places are non-homogenous in nature. The experience of religious men has proved that space is non-homogenous. God and divinities manifest in some places for man to have encounter with the incorporeal world. These places should exist without gender bias.

The cultural and societal segregations against women should not be forwarded to religious arena. But it is unfortunate that it is man’s headship at home as a status quo of the society that is transferred to the church patriarchal authority even to the sacred places against women. Society portraits of man as the head responsible for the discriminations against women and these affect the approach and treatment of women as second class citizens at sacred places. Also, the society portraits of women as evil, dirty, fragile, gullible, weak and untrustworthy are carried over to religious worship and cultural practices in some arena. Yet in some religious circles and operations, women are never doubted as diviners, rain makers, medicine women, *Iya Awemo, and Iya Elewe-omo* when it comes to fertility and curing infertility.

Women should be appreciated rather than discriminated against in religious settings. Creation speaks positively on the beauty of women and their warmly gifts. Both men and women are saved by the same God and demand to serve God as heirs of salvation. It is sin that defiles. It is capable of defiling man and woman and disqualifying both from gaining access to the sacred places. Therefore, man and woman should endeavour to be morally pure in the presence of God. Spiritual purity of the heart and spirit should be maintained while coming to the presence of God rather than the superiority of men over women at sacred places. Women are not walking dirt and defilements and their monthly biological experiences should not be used as excuse for the perpetuation of the discriminations against them at sacred places.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>B.S. Childs, *The Myth and Reality in Old Testament* (London: SCM Press Ltd.), p.83

<sup>2</sup>M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The nature of Religion*. Trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), p.11.

<sup>3</sup>Nabofa, *Introduction to the Study of Religion* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan External Studies, n.d), p. 38.

<sup>4</sup>G Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology Vol. 1* trans. D.M.G (London: SCM Press, 1975), p. 227

<sup>5</sup>See G.L. Archer Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction on the historicity of Adam and Eve* (Chicago: Moody Press), p. 206-208.

<sup>6</sup>L.L. Bellevile, *Women Leaders and the Church: Three Crucial Questions* (Benin: Beulahl and Publishing Ministry, 2000), p. 20-21.

<sup>7</sup>R. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* trans. John McHugh (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973), p.216

<sup>8</sup>F.N. Hepper, "Trees" in *New Bible Dictionary*. J. D. Douglas *et. al.* (eds.) (Illinois: Tyndale house Publishers, 1982), p.1216.

<sup>9</sup>R.D. Peterson, "1 and 2 Kings" in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version of the Bible 12 Vol. 4 (1 Kings-Job)*. Frank E. Gaebelein *et. al* (eds.) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), p. 284.

<sup>10</sup>C.O. Ogunkunle, The Prophetess in the Religious Life of Israel: A Case Study of Huldah. *Biblical Studies and Women Issues in Africa* (Ibadan: NABIS, 2003), p. 60-61.

<sup>11</sup>R.A. Tucker, *Women in the Maze Questions and Answers on Biblical Equality* (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1992), p.69.

<sup>12</sup>Bellevile, p.56

<sup>13</sup>J.B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p.82ff.

<sup>14</sup>H. Amolo, The Role of Women in the New Testament. *Biblical Studies and Women Issues in Africa* (Ibadan: NABIS, Vol. 1 2003), p.145-148

<sup>15</sup>Bellevile, p.47

<sup>16</sup>Gelede is a women's cult popular among the Yoruba women in Ketu Lagos. It was dominated by aged women as a counterpart to men's *Oro* cult as a result of men's domination of *Oro* cult.

<sup>17</sup>O. Oyeronke, *Gender in Yoruba Oral Traditions* (Lagos: Concept Publications 2009), p.9.

<sup>18</sup>D.O. Alabi, A Theological and Religious Critique of the Personhood of a Woman in a Patriarchal Context. *The Feminist-Womanist Dialectics: A Critical Source Book*. Y.O.O. Akorede *et al* (eds.) (Porto-Novo: Editions Sonou D'Afrique), p. 306.

<sup>19</sup>B.M. Ibitokun, African Drama and Yoruba World-View (Ibadan: University Press, 1985), pp. 117-119.

<sup>20</sup>See Ibitokun, Ritual and Entertainment, the Case of Gelege in Egbado-Ketu. *Nigerian Magazine*,136 (1981): 55.

<sup>21</sup>Ibitokun, p.55f.

<sup>22</sup>M.A. Uwalaka, *Women in Religion and Nation Building. Orita*, XXIV/1-2 (June & Dec. 1992): p.13.

<sup>23</sup>Uwalaka, p.14.

<sup>24</sup>J. Adegoke, *The Cherubim and Seraphim Church: Beliefs and Practices* (Osogbo: Iwaloye Adegoke Press, 2007), pp.40,74.

<sup>25</sup>Adegoke, p.74.

<sup>26</sup>*Christ Apostolic Church, Promised Land* is a branch of CAC World-wide. It is a Prophetic Church that has a dug well called *Babalola Olomi Iye* (Babalola, Owner of the living water).

<sup>27</sup>J.A. Omoyajowo, *Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church* (New York: NOK Publishers International, 1982), p.158.

<sup>28</sup>T. Ikudayisi, *An Oral Interview* granted on request during our visit to Mount of Mercy, a prominent sacred mount in Christ Apostolic Church situated at Erio-Eki

<sup>29</sup>See B.H. Nathanson, Reflections on the Silent Woman of Ancient Judaism and Her Pagan Roman Counterpart. *The Listening Heart: Essays in Wisdom and the Psalms in Honour of Roland E. Murphy*. In K. Hoglund *et.al* (eds.) (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1987), pp.259-60.