



# The Role of Religion in Gender Inequality in Ghana: The Christian Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

This article seeks to discuss how religion affects gender inequality in Ghana. Religious teachings and beliefs play an important role in either promoting or hindering gender equality. Defining “religion” with a common definition has become a major enterprise for theologians. From the biblical perspective, the impact of females is rarely felt, due to the socio-cultural injunctions purported to have come from the Graeco-Roman world. The subjugation of women is still common in all spheres of life including Ghana and religion has a role to play in this phenomenon. Using the works of various scholars, this article explored the extent of the influence of religion on gender inequality from the Christian perspective. It was observed that despite its influence on social development, Religion has not promoted the needed gender equality in Ghana. The church and society, therefore, need to confront the issue of gender inequality and sanction women’s equality with their male counterparts. This study adds to the existing literature on the need to break gender inequality in all spheres of life in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## INTRODUCTION

Religion plays an essential role in Ghanaian culture, where adherents have firm beliefs in superstition, witchcraft and everything that has to do with spirituality, even ghosts, but most importantly, the majority of Ghanaians believe in the existence of God. Christianity is the dominant “religion” in Ghana. Ghana has been referred to as a Christian country on many counts by its African counterparts.<sup>1</sup> Although a secular state by legislation, Ghana is highly considered a religious one because about 71.2 percent of the population are Christians.<sup>2</sup> The culture of the people is not left out. Many religious groups emphasize the need to inculcate culture in their system of worship in order to make worship relevant to the indigenous people. In Ghanaian culture, gender roles are well established, and as evident across other cultures across the globe, there is a huge gap between how men are treated as compared to females resulting in gender inequality. Gender inequality can be defined as culturally and socially

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Bawa and Anthony Ayim, “Attitude and Perception of Ghanaians toward the Church: An Analysis of the views of Christians living in selected Districts in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 51(1-2), (2022):150–183. Assessed on 30/09/2022 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/15700666-bja10046>

<sup>2</sup> Bawa and Anthony Ayim, “Attitude and Perception of Ghanaians toward the Church,” 150-183.

created differences between men and women where both sexes do not have the same share in the decision-making and wealth of a society.<sup>3</sup>

Kamila Klingorova posits that among many important traits associated with the differentiation of gender is religion.<sup>4</sup> Admitting the complexity of the issues, some religious norms and traditions have contributed to the formation of gender inequality which has led to the subordinate role women play in society.<sup>5</sup> Religion is deeply rooted in people's experiences and influences the socio-economic and political direction of societies as indicated by Klingorova.<sup>6</sup> There is an assertion that for social geographic investigation, religion may now be a more important variable than race or ethnicity.<sup>7</sup> Gender inequality belongs to the most prevalent forms of social inequality and exists all over the world, with different effects in different regions. These differences are primarily due to cultural legacies, historical development, geographic location, and, the religious norms which predominate every society.<sup>8</sup> The differences between men and women have been understood to be the basis for inequality in society.<sup>9</sup> Catherine Ajoke Oluyemo explains why the Hebrew and Jewish societies are patriarchal in structure and have an outlook with men exercising political, religious and social leadership and women playing supportive and domestic roles.<sup>10</sup> Religion thus affects the social and cultural structures in one way or the other irrespective of one's geographical location. In light of the above, this article aims to evaluate how religion especially Christianity has affected gender equality in Ghana. It defines gender roles and gender inequality within religious and cultural contexts using the works of various scholars. It also examines the impact religion has had on the fight for gender equality.

### Defining Gender Roles in Religious and Cultural Contexts

Normally, sex and gender are used in many different contexts to mean the same thing. Some people also think that it could be used interchangeably. Generally, it is believed that, the male gender was designed to be greater than the female. This view is premised on the fact that God created the woman out of the man. Since time immemorial, gender roles have been set and provide the differences between women and men which are based on socially-defined ideas and beliefs about what it means to be a woman and a man.<sup>11</sup> The World Book Encyclopaedia's definition of gender is in line with the World Health Organization (WHO), which, uses "gender" to refer to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.<sup>12</sup> It must be noted that gender ideology is not new to Africa, though the widely discussed contemporary gender discourse has its roots in the Western world.<sup>13</sup> Ever since the celebration of International Women's year in 1975 highlighted the issue of gender equality among both men and women, issues that previously were the concerns of only voluntary women societies, have attained national and

<sup>3</sup> Cecilia L. Ridgeway, *A Theoretical Perspective on Gender Beliefs and Social Relations*, 2004. <http://journals.Ssagepub.com>

<sup>4</sup> Kamila Klingorova, "Religion and Gender Inequality: The Status of Women in Societies of World Religions", *Moravian Geographical Reports*, 23(1) (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Klingorova, "Religion and Gender Inequality," 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Klingorova, "Religion and Gender Inequality," 1-3.

<sup>7</sup> Klingorova, "Religion and Gender Inequality," 1-3.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Inglehart, and Pippa Norris, *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*, 2003. <https://www.researchgate.net>. 21/08/2019.

<sup>9</sup> Catherine Ajoke Oluyemo, "The influence of culture on Gender inequality in Ekiti State, Nigeria: Implication on Women's Empowerment and Development," *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*. 4(2) (2014): 325-335.

<sup>10</sup> Robert L. Sauzy and Judith K. Tenelshof, *Women and Men in Ministry: A Complementary Perspective*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Harris, *Created in God's image, from hierarchy to partnership: Workbook for participants*, (Geneva: World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 2003), 18.

<sup>12</sup> The World Book Encyclopaedia, *S-Sn Volume 17, 2001*, 338-338a.

<sup>13</sup> Brigid M. Sackey. *New Directions in Gender and Religion: The changing status of women in African Independent Churches*, (Toronto: Lexington Books, 2006), 66-68.

international significance.<sup>14</sup> Over the years gender issues have also become a concern to the people of Ghana.

David A. Brown posits that, in every community, big or small, the institutions of social life grow and develop in their own way. As time passes, the ways in which the community does things become fixed. So the rules which govern social behaviour become the laws of the community or the nation, and how a country is governed becomes a fixed political system. These institutions may, of course, be changed, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, every community builds up its own religion. Most religions are premised on the following elements:

- ❖ The beliefs of the community about God.
- ❖ The beliefs of the community about God’s relationship with the world.
- ❖ The rules which the community follows are because of their beliefs about God.<sup>16</sup>

Michael Bergunder asserts that religious studies cannot agree on a common definition of its subject matter. Defining “religion” has been a major enterprise for many scholars, but, so far, there haven’t been any conclusive results.<sup>17</sup> As Arthur L. Greil has put it: “It seems safe to assert that no consensus on a definition of religion has been reached and that no consensus is likely to be reached in the foreseeable future”.<sup>18</sup> Every religion promotes somewhat different norms, creates different institutions, and builds on different cultural and historical foundations.<sup>19</sup> Implying that, religion has contributed either positively or negatively to matters of gender inequality. Religion is about bridging the gap between human beings and God. It is about recognition and respecting the humanity of all human beings.<sup>20</sup> According to Mercy Amba Oduyoye, “people go to church with their cultural spectacles on.”<sup>21</sup> This implies that societal and cultural norms are replicated in the church.

Religion is an important factor that influences the traditions and culture of a people. Religion is, therefore, important for understanding the place of women in any given society. E. Kweku Osam states that apart from Traditional Religion, Islam, and Christianity, various new religious movements strongly influence the lives of the people. Individually, these religions are ambivalent in their images and symbols of women.<sup>22</sup> African Traditional Religions (A.T.R.), for instance, are reputed to be more benign to women, for example, ideas of God as Father have eroded the traditional androgynous conceptions of the Supreme Being such as found in the name “Atta Naa-Nyongmo” of the Ga tribe or “Mawu Segbo Lisa” of the Ewe tribe. The Supreme Being has, therefore, assumed a high male identity. The traditional androgynous ideas of the Supreme Being however reveal that being feminine is not always seen as inferior in traditional religions. It is often hoped that the other religious groups, (apart from ATR and some denominations which allow women’s participation in decision-making) would begin to appreciate the role of women in leadership positions.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Florence Abena Dolphyne, *The Emancipation of Women: An African perspective*. (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1991), IX.

<sup>15</sup> David A Brown, *A Guide to Religions, SPCK International Study Guide 12*, (London: The Bath Press, 1975), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, *A Guide to Religions*, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Bergunder, “What is Religion? The Unexplained Subject Matter of Religious Studies” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 26 (3) (2014): 246-286.

<sup>18</sup> Arthur L. Greil, Defining religion. In Clarke, Peter B. (eds.), *The World’s Religions*, (London: Routledge, 2009). 135-149.

<sup>19</sup> Amanda Sinclair, ‘Leading with Body.’ In *Handbook of Gender, Work and Organization*, edited by Emma Jeanes, David Knights and Patricia Yancey Martin, (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2011), 117-30.

<sup>20</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Women in Religion and Culture: Essays In Honour Of Constance Buchanan*, (Ibadan: Sefer Books Ltd. 2007), 16-17.

<sup>21</sup> Oduyoye, *Women in Religion and Culture*, 16-17.

<sup>22</sup> E, Kweku Osam, “The Effects of Religion and Traditional Barriers on Women’s Potential for Development,” *New Life Theological Journal of the Humanities*: 2, (1998): 85.

<sup>23</sup> Osam, “*The Effects of Religion and Traditional Barriers on Women’s Potential for Development*”, 86.

## Religion and Gender Inequality

John Parratt asserts that, though Christianity has throughout history often been a powerful factor in advancing the status of women, their position in many societies is still depressed. They are frequently regarded as second-class citizens, within the churches as well. Parrat further posits that, women's value is often considered only in their relationship to men usually as wives and mothers rather than as individuals in their own rights. He again argues that in many churches, the ministry of women is restricted.<sup>24</sup>

Adasi states that ‘an important dimension that confronts religion has, throughout history been “historical perpetuation of unjust, exclusion practices that have legitimized male superiority in the very social domain.”’<sup>25</sup> Such discrimination has always been purported to be supported by scriptural texts which are used to legitimize it. Women who tried to resist this institutionalized subordination of women were in one way or the other shut up or counter resisted.

Edem Dovlo also argues that Religion is an important factor that influences the traditions and culture of a people.<sup>26</sup> This is because it gives them an understanding of being and existence. Religion thus influences inter-human relationships as well as the relationship of humans to the external world and its resources. Religion is, therefore important for understanding the place of women in any given society. Religion must, therefore, be an essential part of any attempt to redress discrimination against women, as well as any discussion aimed at positively changing the roles of women.<sup>27</sup> The author shares the views of Dovlo that this inhibits the fullness of life not only for women but for men and society at large.<sup>28</sup> The relation between religion and gender equality can be explained by the assertion that societies with higher religiosity accept the authority of religious teachers, who advocate a patriarchal organisation of society. This author supports the views of Norris and Inglehart that those women who adhere to the dominant religions, might also not be inclined to take part in their society’s public life, due to their upbringing and the social traditions surrounding them. Nevertheless, many religious institutions are always helpful for women in economic and social distress.<sup>29</sup> In the author’s view, the influence of religiosity on gender inequality is a global issue.

Apusigah discusses the role of women in religious activities in Ghana. She states that women are relegated to the background in all spheres of life including religious activities. Males have the singular right to perform such religious activities as consultation of oracles, libation pouring and or pacification of the gods. It is only in a few cases that priestesses take charge and that is even rare. For instance, among the Fafra, some households are headed by females, and in times of decision-making, these women have to rely on male relatives in the extended family to perform leadership roles on their behalf, hence making their male relatives the nominal heads of their households.<sup>30</sup>

Although women are more religious and active in organized religious activism than men, religious institutions are usually saturated with men making all the key decisions.<sup>31</sup> The Church as a community has not done much to challenge cultural, religious and societal inhibitions to build a dynamic community of women and men, unlike the secular world, where women are in various

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<sup>24</sup> John Parrat, *A Guide To Doing Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 ), 61.

<sup>25</sup> Grace Sintim Adasi, *Gender and Change: Roles and Challenges of Ordained Women Ministers of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana*: (Gavoss Educational Plc Ltd., Accra, 2016), 4.

<sup>26</sup> Edem Dovlo, “The Effects of Religion and Traditional Barriers on Women’s Potential For Development,” *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, 11: (1998): 85.

<sup>27</sup> Dovlo, “*The Effects of Religion and Traditional Barriers on Women’s Potential For Development*”, 85.

<sup>28</sup> Dovlo, “*The Effects of Religion and Traditional Barriers on Women’s Potential For Development*”, 97.

<sup>29</sup> Inglehart, and Norris, “Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Cultural Around the World”.

<sup>30</sup> Agnes Atia Apusigah, “Gender, Vulnerability And The Politics Of Decision-Making In Ghana: The Case Of The Upper East Region.” *Ghana Journal of Development Studies* 1 (2005): 6-26.

<sup>31</sup> Pyong Gap Min, “Severe Underrepresentation of Women in Church Leadership in Korea Immigrant Community in the United States’’: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 47, no. 2: (2008), (Accessed: 13/08/2019. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20486090>)

professions occupying responsible positions. For Oduyoye, this shows how Christianity reinforces the cultural conditioning of compliance and submission and leads to the depersonalisation of women.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, religion plays a key role in whether women get an education or not because of the beliefs and norms of the various religious sects. Among certain religious groups where women are supposed to be dependent on their husbands, they are less likely to be encouraged or helped to pursue their educational goals, particularly in relation to higher education. Such ideas may in turn discourage women from pursuing higher education. For instance, conservative religious groups may offer programs that help girls to be better housekeepers rather than providing the skills necessary for non-domestic and alternative roles in society. This can affect gender relations in societies because women will only be taught domestic work in preparation for marriage whilst men will be given technical skills which in turn bring income.

### **The Role of Culture in Religion and Gender in Ghana**

Culture and religion are bedfellows hence Churches in Ghana are conscious of the pertaining cultural norms wherever a branch is planted. For instance, the Akan culture does not allow women to take part in the decision-making process just like that of the Jewish culture,<sup>33</sup> especially, when it comes to leadership positions. This, to some extent, may have had some influence on the practice of the church because Ghanaian Christians value the tenets of their culture and this translates to Church administration. In most ancient societies and as often occurs in current times, leadership positions have become the prerogative of men based on the legislation attributed to Moses that, women could inherit properties only when male heirs were absent (Numbers 27:1-11).<sup>34</sup> Hence religion is not the only system that contributes negatively to matters of gender inequality but culture also plays a key role.

Many socio-cultural issues affect women in the Ghanaian society. For example, the status of women in Ghanaian culture is seen in some cultural practices and proverbs.<sup>35</sup> Oduyoye has noted that some of these utterances violate the rights of women and these abound in the idioms of all Ghanaian languages. The author agrees with this assertion that such sayings which are meant to subdue or marginalize women constitute verbal violence.<sup>36</sup> For instance, in Akan culture, an outspoken woman is sarcastically referred to as “Obaa akonini”; which literally means, ‘a female cock’. It is known that the cock crows early in the morning, but hens do not, and so a man reserves the right to speak and his words are considered final. Hence an outspoken woman is not entertained in Akan culture. She is seen as usurping the authority of men. This notion has negatively affected some women so much that they refuse to voice their opinions even when the need arises due to fear of being victimized.<sup>37</sup> Such a notion should be discouraged outright since it kills creativity and keeps the ideas of women in the dark. In light of the above, women should be allowed to express their views both in society and the church respectively.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and strands, Reflections of An African Woman on Christianity in Africa*, (Great Britain: Bell and Bain Ltd., Glasgow, 2002), 72.

<sup>33</sup> William Barclay postulates that no nation ever gave a bigger place to women in the home and in the family things than the Jews did; but officially the position of a woman was very low. Women had no part in the synagogue service; they were shut apart in a section of the synagogue, or in a gallery, where they were not to be seen William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study: The letters to Timothy, Titus & Philemon*, (India Theological Publications, 2001), 89.

<sup>34</sup> Ruth B. Edwards, *The biblical foundations in theology: The case for women’s ministry*, (Great Britain: SPCK, 1989), 23-24.

<sup>35</sup> John K. Boakye, (*An analysis of the activities of the women’s ministry in Assemblies of God, Ghana and its implications for church growth*, A thesis) submitted to the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture , Akropong, 2012, 48.

<sup>36</sup> Oduyoye, *Women in Religion and Culture*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Boakye, *An analysis of the activities of the women’s ministry in Assemblies of God, Ghana and its implications for church growth*, 49.

<sup>38</sup> Boakye, *An analysis of the activities of the women’s ministry in Assemblies of God, Ghana and its implications for church growth*, 49.

Generally, religions across the globe respect women for the crucial role they play in family life, especially as mothers and wives. They do not, however, advocate emancipation in the sense of total equality with men.<sup>39</sup> Religion reinforces traditional gender roles of women which compromise gender relations in communities. This means that in many religious groups women are expected to be dependent on men whilst men expected to play the dominant role in supplying necessities to the household.<sup>40</sup>

That is why gender equality does not usually receive the serious attention and consideration it deserves within the policy/political arenas and also in civil society circles.<sup>41</sup> Gender disparities are prevalent in Ghana and closing the gender gap and enhancing women's participation in development is essential not only for building a just society but is also a pre-requisite for achieving political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security among people on a sustainable basis. Under colonialism, there was no attempt to address the position and status of women in traditional society.<sup>42</sup> Dzodzi Tsikata, further maintains that the subordinate position of women is strengthened by socio-cultural practices and a socialization process, which socializes women to accept these practices and inequalities.<sup>43</sup> The time has come to review such policies which downplay the role of women in leadership positions.

### **The Church and Gender Imbalance**

Brigid M. Sackey gives four reasons why women are not allowed to take leadership positions/roles in some churches:<sup>44</sup>

Firstly, all the mission churches in Ghana were established by European missionaries who practised the patriarchal system where women played supporting roles and never took the lead. The prevailing status quo has since remained in practice. Secondly, the practice of educating men for office work in the British colonial administration, with its accompanying ideas of superiority and inferiority which have persisted to date is another factor. She explains that these are beliefs embedded in traditional Ghanaian culture and some Christian leaders and churches have incorporated them into their code of operations. They buttress their stance by referring to the Levitical laws on how women should be treated. Thirdly, biblical restrictions, especially those imposed by Paul have also become the basis for discrediting women's leadership in the church (1 Corinthians 14: 34-35; 11 Timothy 2, 12). Fourthly, the description of women in traditional mythology has found its way into the Church. In Akan mythology, for example, limitations have been placed on women on how far they can rise in leadership. Women have been blamed in folklore as being the cause of the separation between God and man based on the narration in Genesis. Women are therefore seen as progenitors of evil which led to the downfall of mankind. Hence the effort of women in church is often downplayed by their male counterparts which should not be so because, despite their limitations, they have a lot to offer if given the opportunity.

In Sackey's view, the gender inequality that is currently prevailing in the Church has also been attributed to Western influences, particularly, British colonial policies. These policies affected the position of women adversely by giving preference to men in the public domain, relegating women to the background.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Klingorova, "Religion and Gender Inequality, 1-3.

<sup>40</sup> Dovlo, *The effects of Religion and Traditional Barriers on Women's Potential for Development*, 97.

<sup>41</sup> Dzodzi Tsikata, *Gender training in Ghana: Politics, issues and tools*, (Soagakope, Woeli Publishing Services, 2001), 259-260.

<sup>42</sup> Tsikata, *Gender training in Ghana: Politics, issues and tools*, 33.

<sup>43</sup> Tsikata, *Gender training in Ghana: Politics, issues and tools*, 36.

<sup>44</sup> Sackey, *New Directions in Gender and Religion*: 66-68.

<sup>45</sup> Sackey. *New Directions in Gender and Religion*, 61-62.

The leadership of women in the Church and their participation in liturgical functions is one of the issues in the contemporary gender debate.<sup>46</sup> According to J.Y.M. Edusa-Eyison, some of the traditional barriers to women's participation are dependent on various interpretations of Scripture. The favourite authority for the exclusion of women is that Paul did not permit women to teach, or have authority in the church. Women are, therefore, to be silent (1 Corinthians 14: 34-35 & 1 Timothy 2:11). This interpretation however contradicts the essence of mission and the Church's ministry. It would be highly out of tune with biblical scholarship to contend that the Great Commission and that of Jesus' summons in Acts 1:8 were directed to only men. If the Church abides strictly by those traditions, then nearly two-thirds of the number of Christians will be excluded from participation in the Lord's service. Such traditions, therefore, need to be reviewed.<sup>47</sup>

### **Developmental Strides made by Women over the Years**

Despite the challenges that have been stated in previous sections, women have made strides in various sectors of the economy. The current intake of women into the University to read all sorts of courses has increased though not satisfactory because some religions still do not encourage women to pursue higher education. Positive gains have however been made and the days when the education of girls was considered valueless because it was thought they would end up in the kitchen are gradually coming to an end.<sup>48</sup>

Florence Dolphyne supports this position that Ghana still can boast of women in all the major professions; there are women lawyers, judges, doctors, engineers, pilots, university lecturers and professors, bankers, accountants, administrators, and so on. These professionals have made, and are still making valuable contributions to various aspects of national life. In spite of the increasing number of highly qualified and competent women, the number of women in policy-making positions in government and on statutory bodies is still very limited.<sup>49</sup>

Women have also made gains in the Church. After overcoming several barriers, women can currently hold leadership positions in the Church and society across the world and their efficiency and effectiveness cannot be underplayed.<sup>50</sup> Ghana is no exception and in recent years has experienced a paradigm shift with more women heading state, church and educational institutions. The Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology—KNUST for the first time in 2020 appointed a female Vice-Chancellor for a four-year tenure in the person of Rita Akosua Dickson. In the same vein, the University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, also appointed Nana Aba Appiah Amfo as the first female Vice-Chancellor. Emelia Naa Kwansua Agyei-Mensah has been appointed as the new registrar of the University of Ghana, Legon-Accra. Likewise, the recent past saw Georgina Theodora Wood being appointed as the first female Chief Justice of the Republic of Ghana. Jean Adukwei Mensa, a lawyer was also appointed and is currently serving as the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission of Ghana. She succeeded Charlotte Osei who was the first woman to be appointed to Head to that position.

In the area of religion, several women have also established vibrant Christian ministries across the country such as Christie Doe Tetteh (Solid Rock Chapel), Lyanne Koffi (The Lord's Garden Ministry), Selina Baidoo (Selina Ministries International) among others. Various prayer camps are also led by women across the country.

Furthermore, the Mainline Protestants Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the Pentecostal Churches have contributed to the growth of socio-religious development of women in Ghanaian society. They aim at giving meaning and purpose to life, reinforcing social unity and

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<sup>46</sup> J. M. Y. Edusa-Eyison, "Women In Church Leadership: Focus On The Methodist And Presbyterian Churches In Ghana," *Trinity Journal of Church And Theology*, (2), (2000), 57.

<sup>47</sup> Edusa-Eyison, *Women In Church Leadership*, 59-60.

<sup>48</sup> Dovlo, *The effects of Religion and Traditional Barriers on Women's Potential for Development*, 97.

<sup>49</sup> Dolphyne, *The Emancipation of Women: An African perspective*, 45-50.

<sup>50</sup> Mary L. Pflanz, *Women in Positions of Influence: Exploring the Journeys of Female Community Leaders*: PhD Thesis, Graduate College, University of Nebraska, 2011, 4.

stability, serving as an agent of social control of behaviour, promoting physical and psychological well-being, and motivating people to work for positive social change. It must be noted that, if not for the missionary work done in Gold Coast, Ghana would have fallen off in terms of education, agriculture, health and other important socio-economic developments to facilitate the holistic development of its people. These Churches as enumerated above have come a long way in the fight for women's empowerment. Currently, women can become ministers and elders in all Christian denominations apart from the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>51</sup> However, more work needs to be done to ensure that women are not hindered in their quest to make their contributions to the church.

### **The Way Forward**

Christ's final teaching to women is contained in His post-resurrection words to Mary Magdalene concerning His ascension (John 20:17) by asking her to convey His words to the others, which she did (John 20:18).<sup>52</sup> This goes to emphasize that the role of the woman in religion should not be downplayed. History has relegated the woman to the background for far too long. Much effort has been made to bring women to the light in the Christian context and more work needs to be done to ensure that the woman takes her rightful place in decision-making to foster growth and development. Christianity has contributed significantly to promoting the role of women in leadership positions as far as religion is concerned. Other religions can emulate this to ensure that all women, regardless of their religion are given the needed support to achieve their maximum potential to foster continuous societal development.

### **CONCLUSION**

The paper has examined the role of Religion in gender inequality in Ghana from the Christian perspective. It has become evident that not only do religious activities hinder gender inequality but culture is understood to be promoting gender inequality in society, as the established norms are passed on from one generation to the other.<sup>53</sup> However, in recent years, women in general (and Ghana in particular), have become more empowered due to the increased awareness of creating equality and have moved from the back seat to the roles of bread-winners, decision-makers and leaders in their immediate families, society and at the national level. Irrespective of these progressive developments, the contribution of women in the church and national leadership still falls short of what is expected, given the value women bring to decision-making. This can be attributed to the perceived marginalization which still holds strong in most developing countries like Ghana. It must be noted that the contribution of women is invaluable, and they must therefore be encouraged to develop their God-given potential in church and society. This would promote overall growth and development.

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<sup>51</sup> <https://gh.opera.news/gh/en/religion/>

<sup>52</sup> Roji T. George, *Distinct Qualities of the Select Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel: A Character Study*, *New Life Theological Journal*, 2, (2012), 72.

<sup>53</sup> Oluyemo, *The influence of culture on Gender inequality in Ekiti State, Nigeria*.

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