

Making Good Women:¹ The Bequeaths of Colonial Encounters in the Making of the Clergy Wife in Ghana

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SHORT BIO

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ABSTRACT

There is a vast body of literature on how Africans have historically interacted with Christianity. One area in the discourse claims that Christianity and its extension, western education, shaped and in some cases succeeded in changing the gendered ideals and the very social fabric of society. This article deepens and adds nuance to the argument that missionary education shaped young women into prospective wives for clergymen in Ghana. Examining various works of literature, archival materials and in-depth interviews, the article reconstructs the trajectory of the clergy-wife position and concludes that missionary education aimed to remold the gendered spaces of Ghanaian society through the education of girls. However, this missionary ideal of a good woman who exemplified all the tenets of a godly Christian wife was to be found in the Clergy wife (CW). The paper concludes that the CW position led to the creation of a privileged class of women and, thus, through this creation, the missionary project of creating an ideal woman could be deemed successful.

KEYWORDS

Clergy wife, Ghana, Women, Missionary education, Christianity

Introduction

The historical study of the role of the clergy wife (from here CW), especially in Ghana, is much more recent than the creation of this role for women.² Indeed, the CW position was a result of Martin Luther's break with the Catholic church. A clear sign of doctrinal difference, Luther and the other reformers took wives, making the CW an established part of almost all other Christian denominations. The focus of this paper is to trace the historical formation of the CW in Ghana to understand how young Ghanaian girls were trained by Western educators to be CWs, simultaneously establishing the model for 'proper wives' for the emerging clergy group and the middle class

¹ The title of this paper was inspired by Jean Allman's work on Asante women and colonial encounters.

² This is in reference to the geographical area located in West Africa that was known in colonial times as the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast was renamed Ghana after it attained independence in 1957.

between 1880–1950. This paper argues that the CW position, like Christianity, was alien to Ghana and that the role of the CW came into being through the creation of the “new” Christian woman, mother and wife, by western missionaries and teachers. It further contends that unlike in the West, the formation of the CW took a different route in Ghana. Consequently, how it was perceived in the West was different from its reputation in Ghana, as these women were seen to belong to a class of women considered to be privileged in their times. While there is a vast body of literature on the complex encounters between the missionaries, colonial regimes and African women, literature on how some colonized women such as CWs emerged from such encounters is lacking. This gap is a result of the tendency to lump these women into categories such as “Christian women”, or more especially “wives of clergymen and missionaries”. This obscures their very identity and essence in their specific place in the history of what Parry aptly terms as “colonized women’s history”.³ Broadly, this paper contributes to the body of work that seeks to chart a historical map of our understanding of how a particular group of women emerged and occupied space within the colonial period, with particular emphasis on CWs.

Mainly qualitative, the primary data for this article was gathered through archival research as well as personal interviews with clergymen, CWs, and older men and women who had missionary training.⁴ Interviews were conducted between 2017 to 2023. These interviews were in two parts: the first occurred between 2017 and 2019 for my PhD thesis; the second was further interviews conducted between 2020 and 2023 with participants I had been unable to contact or who were unavailable during the earlier interview process. The first part of this paper examines the history surrounding the Western CW. This is followed by a discussion on how Christian colonial education molded African and Ghanaian girls. The last part focuses on the

³ Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, “Aspects of elite women’s activism in the Gold Coast, 1874-1890,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 37, no. 3 (2004): 463 – 482.

⁴ The interviews were mainly carried out in the Greater Accra and Ashanti regions of Ghana, the two most populous cities in the country. Participants were selected from different denominations to cover the broad categorizations of denominations in Ghana (Orthodox, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches). Participants were purposively selected, especially for those who received missionary education. This also led to snowballing as some participants recommended their surviving class mates or relatives who also received missionary education or were informed about the era.

selection of CWs among girls who received colonial education. The paper ends with some concluding remarks.

The changes in the domestic arrangements of the clergy, from celibate to married priests, marked a profound turn in the history of Christianity. Martin Luther, the proponent of the Reformation, married an escaped nun, Katy Von Bora. In what Anne Llewellyn Barstow describes as an “experiment of clerical marriage”, women in post-reformation marriage to the clergy found themselves in an ambivalent position and were not always the most welcomed figures.⁵ This was because they represented the very epitome of the reformation. These women were so hated that, for instance, the wife of Archbishop Cranmer of England is rumoured to have travelled around in a chest to prevent being lynched. She and her children eventually fled to her home in Germany.⁶ Indeed, the marriage of priests was largely rejected, especially in England until after the 1800s. This tense and unfriendly atmosphere did not initially allow their wives to be active participants in ministry work. To vindicate her place in the manor, the CW was expected to be an exemplary wife, just as her husband was an exemplary Christian husband. Among missionaries who came to Africa, Kirkwood notes that missionary wives, “were often married for the job; when a young missionary wife died, her widower would seek a replacement, very often from within the wider family circle of a missionary family”.⁷ A woman in such a position was expected to be her husband’s helpmeet, not his equal, nor his competitor but one who knew the balancing act of making her husband’s work a success without overshadowing his significance in the field. As intimated by Kirkwood, for the missionaries, especially those in Africa, “it was believed that the wives would serve as models of the female behaviour, and their husbands demonstrate the merits and virtues of the monogamous family.”⁸

⁵ Anne Llewellyn Barstow, “The First Generations of Anglican Clergy Wives: Heroines or Whores?,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 52, no. 1 (1983): 3–16

⁶ Barstow, “The First Generation of Anglican Clergy Wives,” 6–7

⁷ Deborah Kirkwood, “Protestant Missionary Women: Wives and Spinsters,” in *Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 26.

⁸ Kirkwood, “Protestant Missionary Women,” 27.

This was the model of a CW wife that followed the missionary husband to the “wilderness” of Africa to propagate the gospel.⁹

There is an appreciable body of literature on the role that Western CWs played alongside their husbands in the propagation of the gospel in Africa, especially in the Southern part of Africa. Most of the themes that emerge from the literature on missionary CWs relate to their contributions toward their husbands’ work as missionaries. The largest part of these contributions is on the missionary CWs’ training and education of African women and girls. While the missionary men were preoccupied with the spiritual aspect of missionary work, their wives concentrated on organising women into Bible groups and forming schools for girls.

Joan Millard records a number of both missionary wives and African CWs who could either be described as helpers or partners to their husbands, depending on the level of commitment they showed in the work.¹⁰ Millard provides snapshots of the lives of African CWs, such as Mrs Magaret Makiwae, Miss Maggie Mtywaku of Peulton, and Charlotte Maxeke to mention a few. These women were described as remarkable women who worked alongside their husbands to ensure that their husbands’ calls were successful. One striking difference between the missionary CWs and the African CWs was that the African CWs had all received training in schools that had been set up by the missionary CWs. Catherine Whitehead’s¹¹ work which explored girls’ education in Africa notes that although the educational landscape for girls changed over the course of history, the initial idea that had prompted girls’ education by missionaries was a deep-seated perception of Africans as inferior to Europeans. The focus of education for African girls was, therefore, based on a domestic curriculum that sought to transform African girls into the missionaries perception of acceptable standards of womanhood based on an European model.

⁹ Abena Kyere, “For God and Man: A Study of the Clergywife” (PhD diss., University of Ghana, 2019).

¹⁰ Joan Millard, “Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Missionary Wives in South Africa: Equal partners or historical non-entities?,” *Missionalia* 31, no. 3 (2003): 59–72.

¹¹ Clive Whitehead, “Education in British Colonial Dependencies, 1919-39: A Re-appraisal,” *Comparative Education* 17, no. 1 (1981): 71 – 80.

There is a gap in understanding the formation of the CWs, especially in Ghana. This can be attributed to the fact that the CWs and the work they undertake are not perceived to be as important as the work performed by their husbands. One significant work on CWs in Ghana is by Jane Soothill.¹² Soothill's work looked at the roles that CWs play in contemporary Charismatic churches in Ghana and the conflicts that arise from their positions.¹³ What is lacking is substantial work that examines the historical ways in which the position of the CW came to be instituted in Ghana. By paying close attention to how missionary CWs and European colonisers sought to train and educate girls to become "proper" women, this paper reconstructs the trajectory of the CW position in Ghana. It broadens the literature by showing how Western and colonial misconceptions of Africans generally, and African women specifically, led to the colonial project that created a social class of women who were meant to serve as wives to an emerging middle class and, in the process, constructed a distinct class of privileged women who became CWs. This work is important not only because it furthers our understanding of Christianity and colonial intervention in the identity formation of African women but also adds to scholarly works, such as that of Jean Allman on Asante women and their colonial encounters. While the colonial agenda, as Allman shows, was to reconstruct motherhood, the process was not linear and the Asante women were active determinants of the outcome of the process.¹⁴ This meant that the need to transform Ghanaian women into the assumed roles as "proper" mothers and women was not always successful.

Let us create Women in our Christian Image

The need to train and re-train African women into acceptable, "proper" women was a common feature of the historical encounters between Africa and colonial missionary education. This was one of the crucial reasons for the creation of schools and training centers, especially for young African girls. Even before the training of young girls in womanhood projects gained ground, especially in formal settings such as schools, missionaries and CWs

¹² Jane E. Soothill, *Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power. Charismatic Christianity in Ghana* (Boston: Brill: 2007).

¹³ Soothill, *Gender, Social Change and Spiritual Power*.

¹⁴ Jean Allman, "Making Mothers: Missionaries, Medical Officers and Women's Work in Colonia Asante, 1924- 1945." *History Workshop Journal* 38, no. 1(1994): 23 – 47.

had taken it upon themselves to re-train African women. Through their Eurocentric lenses, Europeans developed very negative perceptions about the place and positioning of African women in African societies. European missionaries held on to the perception that beneath the charming infantile exterior of the African woman lurked a ravenous sexually-loose human, whose soul and being required immediate redemption. For instance, Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch noted that

the ‘early missionaries’ views were distorted by their prejudices; they found the traditional African kinship model and methods of upbringing incompatible with Christianity and emphasized women’s apparent licentiousness and shamelessness.¹⁵

There was, therefore, the need for “women missionaries to introduce and make real the Christian ideal of marriage and the family”¹⁶ to Africans. However, as has been rightly noted by Allman, “those entrusted with making ‘proper’ mothers in Britain’s African territories – missionaries, nurses, teachers and women medical officers – carried with them the social baggage”.¹⁷ The “social baggage” that these “trainers” carried meant that the product of their education was to be a different African who met the requirements of what was considered proper Christian and Western education.

Efforts by women missionaries, especially CWs to organize women into Bible Study Groups and other groups were seen as one way to provide women with the needed education. The aim of such groups included educating women on how to be mothers, wives, and good Christian women. For instance, Deborah Giatskell provides an example of a South African women’s prayer group’s mandate. The resident CW, Mrs Burnet, in her speech in 1916 exhorted the women to pray for their families and “train their children for the Lord”.¹⁸ The women in the prayer group were admonished

¹⁵ Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women. A Modern History*, trans. Beth Gillian Raps, (Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 45.

¹⁶ Allman, “Making Mothers,” 34.

¹⁷ Allman, “Making Mothers,” 25.

¹⁸ Deborah Giatskell, “Devout Domesticity? A Century of African Women’s Christianity,” in *Readings in Gender in Africa*, ed. Andrea Cornwall (London: The International African Institute, 2005), 180.

to: a) Sweep and clean the house every day; b) Keep your things and your family clean and good; and c) If you have children, teach them the Christian faith. Do not let them run naked. (AP. African Women's Prayer Union (Manyano) Rules).¹⁹

Women in Kumasi in the Asante (Ashanti) region of Ghana received similar instructions from European missionary women and medical officers who were working among the Asantes women. The women in Kumasi were also instructed on child health care and motherhood. This was taken further by the Methodist mission teachers and students (Ghanaians) who went into the town on weekends to visit homes. Indeed, some of the teachers took it upon themselves to bathe, clean, and powder children in their bid to show Asante women how to care for their children.²⁰ The similarity of instructions and training between these two societies (Mayano in South Africa and Kumasi in Ghana) separated by great geographical distance proves the consistency of the Western colonisers' ideas about Africans and what was needed for them to become proper women. In Kenya, Eleanor Higgs notes that Christian Mothers' groups became the fora for the instruction, propagation, and promotion of the colonial ideal of motherhood and mothering in Kenya.²¹ Scholars like Deborah Gaitskell have argued that such instructions went beyond the creation of gendered identities and responsibilities to the creation of race differentiation and superiority, and further to what Jean Allman describes as "maternal imperialism".²² The underlying reason for directing African women on how to maintain their homes and families was the instructors' belief that African homes and family arrangements were deficient. This invariably meant that a new African mother and wife had to be created, one who was better than the unconverted, one who could not be morally disparaged. Additionally, apparent from the above instructions given to the women of the prayer group is the superior feeling and orientation of the white CW who had the burden of teaching these African women basic hygiene and good Christian home management.

¹⁹ Gaitskell, "Devout Domesticity?", 180.

²⁰ Allman, "Making Mothers," 37.

²¹ Eleanor Tiplady Higgs, "From "Imperial Maternalism" to "Matricentrism:" Mothering Ethics in Christian Women's Voluntarism in Kenya", *The African Journal of Gender and Religion*, 25(1), 2019: 24. <https://doi.org/10.14426/ajgr.v25i1.896>.

²² Allman, "Making Mothers," 35.

We should not, however, lose sight of the fact that organising the women together and teaching them also provided the colonial CW with a sense of purpose and responsibility. Most of these wives had relocated with their husbands to Africa although they themselves were mostly not on any contractual arrangement with the churches and did not have clearly defined rules of engagement.²³ They had, as was the norm, followed their husbands into the “wild” because the men were either missionaries appointed by the church or colonial officials who had been transferred to Africa. In their situation, wives found that the responsibility naturally fell on them to be in charge of teaching the women. While some were trained, most of these women did not have the training to undertake such responsibilities, and instead relied heavily on the cultural knowledge and assumptions of the European good wife and mother.²⁴ Later, more unmarried women will be sent to the field to serve as teachers.²⁵

These efforts at training and re-training older women were not always successful. Indeed, cultural barriers, the issue of race, and Western women’s belief of their inherent superiority were stumbling blocks to the transmission and receiving of the message. To most of the African women included in the training, it was seen, at best, as a pastime that allowed them to spend time with the ‘white women’ and obtain foreign items such as powder and medicine, and, at worst, it was a form of amusement. Thus, the Asante women for instance attended such meetings “on their terms and not because they wanted to learn a “better’ way”.²⁶ The Ghanaian women were quick to recognize the superior position that these white women assumed and while they would engage them, they were not ready to abide by the new norms of womanhood and motherhood that were the motivation of such

²³ Valentine Cunningham, “God and Nature Intended You for a Missionary’s Wife: Mary Hill, Jane Eyre and Other Missionary Women in the 1840s,” in *Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 85, 97.

²⁴ Millard, “Nineteenth and Early Twentieth,” 62 – 63.

²⁵ Kirkwood, “Protestant Missionary Women,” 32; Cecillie Swaisland, “Wanted-Earrest, Self-Sacrificing Women for Service in South Africa: Nineteenth-Century Recruitment of Single Women to Protestant Missions,” in *Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 76.

²⁶ Allman, “Making Mothers,” 40.

meetings. However, the training of girls did not have these nuanced dynamics, as will be evident in the discussions below. In young African and Ghanaian girls, the colonialists and missionaries found the perfect targets for their resocialization agenda.

Making Women: Ghanaian Girls and Colonial Education

From the ongoing discussions, it can be noted that that inability of the CWs and other women missionaries to retrain older African women led them to redirect their energies to training younger girls. This seemed more productive as younger children were more likely than the adults to uncritically imbibe new knowledge. In this respect, the Methodists, Basel mission, and Catholics were some of the first missions to set up girls' schools, especially in Ghana. These schools were more like training centers that aimed to "mould proper Christian women and mothers through daily routine".²⁷ A disturbingly common idea of making a new woman, wife, and mother acceptable to Western sensibilities propelled the education of young African girls. Indeed, to produce the right kind of women, the missionaries sought to alter the very physical appearance of African girls. In a letter to a friend, Mrs. Price, the daughter of Robert Moffat, recounted that "In civilized and especially Christian countries, a slender figure is admired, unlike the fat African model...the more civilized and more Christ-like the Bakwena become, the more they would admire slenderness and not fatness".²⁸ The purpose of the educational tenets was to reorganize converts' original understanding of their gendered roles and expectations. Miescher, for instance, relates that, "they [Presbyterian] outlined the gendered behaviour of male and female converts, their relations towards children, their work, etc, as well as their behaviour towards authority [which] was to be altered to suit the new Christian being".²⁹

Missionary education began with the aim of producing young men who could read and write, primarily to serve as interpreters and, eventually, as

²⁷ Allman, "Making Mothers," 35.

²⁸ Adrian Hastings, "Were women a special case," in *Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 115.

²⁹ Stephen Miescher, "The Challenges of Presbyterian Masculinity in Ghana," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana New Series*, no. 9 (2005): 103.

missionaries. Women were not needed to train natives who could be literate enough to spread the gospel. As a result, a group of young educated men were created and came to be known as *Akrakyefo* (an Akan word meaning “the educated ones”). David Kimble observed that “the main openings for mission-trained Africans lay naturally in the mission field. The brightest boys were trained as teachers, interpreters, catechists, or local preachers and some of them proceeded to ordination”.³⁰ These educated young men were noted to have a “sense of privilege of belonging to an educated elite minority”³¹ that could read and write and had access to western products and lifestyle. In the same vein, as will become evident in this paper, the best girls would be selected as wives for these men, especially for catechists, local preachers, and men who intended to be ordained.

Fiona Bowie concisely sums up how “girls in mission schools were usually prepared to be good wives and mothers based on a European model, and their education was largely domestic-cooking, cleaning, sewing, laundry work, hygiene and so on, as well as farming”.³² The need to provide a correspondingly educated African wife arose as a result of the emerging educated African husband. There was no doubt that an educated Christian man would need a wife who could run a household and organise the domestic domain to suit his new status. The ideal of a monogamous Christian household was espoused as the model family and it went without saying, for instance, that the catechists and priests were expected to be the ones promoting such ideas through their domestic arrangements.

There is a clear connection and semblance in the instructions and training that young girls in these schools and institutions received. A report, for instance, given about the missionary Catherine Langham in the *Mashonaland Quarterly Journal* of 1915 in Zimbabwe (then Southern Rhodesia) reveals that:

After nearly thirty years working under the auspices of the SPG at a variety of mission schools throughout Southern Rhodesia, she

³⁰ David Kimble, *A Political history of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850-1928*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 62.

³¹ Miescher, “The Challenges of Presbyterian Masculinity,” 121.

³² Fiona Bowie, “Introduction: Reclaiming Women’s Presence,” in *Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 13.

recognised a specific need for a school where African women could be prepared for marriage with men from the emerging social elite who had received a Western-style education and who were working as professional men, teachers, priests and government clerks.³³

Modupe Labode also reiterated that:

Boys were taken into a home (home schools) to learn how to live in a civilized manner and prepare for their future, public roles in society. This training was not an end in itself, and the end of education for boys was to produce leaders. The girls were supposed to learn how to provide suitable homes for such leaders.³⁴

Vocation and training centers that were set up in Ghana, then the Gold Coast, bore the same trappings of the provided domestic training. The idea of educating girls was also steeped in Western gender ideals that clearly defined gendered roles and expectations. Adasi rightly observed that the wife of missionaries “concentrated on teaching girls and women in the basic European education of reading and writing, in female roles of housewifery and cookery, needlework”.³⁵ Writing on the legacy of the Presbyterian Ministry in Ghana,³⁶ Botchway mentions the Abokobi³⁷ Girls’ Institute, stating that it:

produced well-educated and trained young women as prospective wives of local Ministers, Teacher-Catechists, Evangelists, and other men in the congregations. Church agents and responsible families rushed to the Abokobi Institute to choose life partners. Thus, from its introduction in 1860 up to 1905 when it fizzled out, the Abokobi

³³ Kirkwood, “Protestant Missionary Women,” 36.

³⁴ Modupe Labode, “From Heathen Kraal to Christian Home,” in *Women and Missions: Past and Present. Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*, ed. Fiona Bowie, Deborah Kirkwood, Shirley Ardener (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993), 131.

³⁵ Grace Sintim Adasi, *Gender and Change. Roles and Challenges of Ordained Women Ministers of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana*. (Accra: Gavoss Education PLC, Ltd, 2016), 25.

³⁶ The Presbyterian Ministry was started by the Basel Mission of Switzerland. The first missionaries arrived in Ghana (then Gold Coast) in 1828.

³⁷ Abokobi is one of the communities located in the Ga East Municipality in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. In 1854, Basel mission settled and set up their townships known as Salems and Abokobi was one of them.

Girls' Institute produced competent, resourceful, industrious wives and mothers for church and country.³⁸

A Catholic vocational school for girls that was instituted in Cape Coast, Ghana, in 1940 is noted to have grown "out of a domestic science course for girls preparing for marriage".³⁹ Housecraft, needlework, and laundry were some of the main courses which young girls could study. A course in domestic science was taught at all levels, from grade one to four as well as at advanced levels. The content of these courses varied according to the level. Courses taught in grade one included the art of cleaning, laundry, and cookery. Grade two courses involved topics such as the ideal home, the family's food, and family wash (which included baby clothes, bath, sleep, routine, and diet). At the advanced level four, the course was divided into two main categories: the young wage earner, and the wife and mother. For this paper, the focus is on the course for the wife and mother. There were two courses under this category: Native Marriage and Christian Marriage and its Sanctity, and Preparation for Motherhood. Topics under the course on marriage included dangers of expensive weddings and foods suitable for weddings. Topics on motherhood included pre-natal care, diets, clothes for baby, diet for baby, etc It is noteworthy that the main aim of these courses was:

To train useful independent citizens and good homemakers...Girls should learn how to be thrifty in matters of dress, but at the same time they should be encouraged to take pride in a neat and attractive appearance, and the work they do should not only help them to become good wives and mothers but perhaps might also enable them to earn money by doing simple dressmaking, needlework, and embroidery.⁴⁰

³⁸ Francis Botchway, "Origins, Heritage, Birth of Presbyterian Church of Ghana," accessed March 3, 2019, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Origins-Heritage-Birth-of-Presbyterian-Church-of-Ghana-383219>.

³⁹ Information taken from Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), Accra, Ghana. From the document titled: Catholic Vocation Schools in Cape Coast, Gold Coast, 1949.

⁴⁰ Information was taken from Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), Accra, Ghana. From the document titled: "Catholic Vocation Schools in Cape Coast, Gold Coast, 1949".

From the excerpts above it is clear that girls' education was considered important in preparing girls for marriage, although women were also considered as active participants in the workforce who required relevant education to succeed in those areas. The use of the word 'perhaps' clearly indicates that the primary expectation from this education was not for women to become income-earners but, rather, for them to become wives and mothers. Thus, while the outcome of men's education was to be active participants in the workforce as earners, women were educated to perfect the art of domestic duties.

The Best Girl for the Clergyman: Requirements for the Selection of a Clergy Wife

As noted earlier, only the best of the trained girls were selected as wives for the clergymen, men who held respectable positions in both the missionary circles and society at large. Since the best of the educated, trained boys were reserved for the church, to work as catechists, local preachers, and clergymen, the best of the educated, trained girls were reserved as wives for such men. Archival records, historical scholarly pieces, as well as interviews with women who attended such institutions, and other relevant key informants, provide rich sources for piecing together the story of the Ghanaian CW.

Archival records document the story of the missionary Thomas Birch Freeman and his Ghanaian wife. Both Reverend Freeman's first and second wives died shortly after they arrived on the Gold Coast. The western coast of Africa was nicknamed the "Whiteman's grave" as a result of the number of European lives that were lost due to tropical diseases such as malaria.⁴¹ For his third wife, Freeman was advised to marry a native woman, who was in the person of Rebecca Insaadoo.⁴² Insaadoo was identified as a young woman who had received missionary training and taken further studies in European and Christian home-making with her cousin, Madam Fosua Parker (an European and Christian-trained woman). The records note that Insaadoo attended the School formed by Mrs. Wrigley in September 1836

⁴¹ Adasi, *Gender and Change*, 2016.

⁴² Information on Mad. Rebecca Insaadoo taken from the Public Records and Archives Administration Department from file titled, "Mrs Rebecca Freeman".

and there she had a good training in English and sewing in addition to the good tuition she had already had from Mrs. Sarah Parker in Domestic Science and Nursing, and thereafter she became very helpful to the missionaries.⁴³

The training that Insaidoo received made her useful to the Europeans and it was recorded that when the Governor Winniett became ill, it was Insaidoo who nursed the governor back to good health. It was aptly noted that:

Amongst the Female members of the Mission, and who would understand the language, and who would be able to take care of him, the choice fell on her, Rebecca Insaidoo, who was of a good disposition, amiable, willing, and ready to help always, and who had a good knowledge of attending to and nursing a European. She lived with him as a godly Matron, a good housewife and a very ready help to the Mission and the Missionaries; a very good mother, until her husband Rev. Thomas Birch Freeman was called to his rest on the 10th day of August 1890.

Again, in 1868, Sophia Afia Nyam, a young woman from the Akuapem royal lineage, was selected to be the wife of Theophil Opoku, the first Ghanaian to be ordained as a priest by the Basel mission. Sophia was educated and trained in home sciences and domestic training from the Basel mission.⁴⁴

Another story recorded the Ghanaian Presbyterian reverend minister, Rev. E.K.O Asante and his wife, Felicia Anima Ntim. Their story also falls within the pattern of Freeman and Insaidoo. When Rev. Asante needed to marry, his mother assisted him in selecting a wife. The young woman who was selected was Felicia Anima Ntim, who had “proper Presbyterian qualifications, [was] raised in a teacher’s household, and had recently graduated from the Agogo Girl’s School which sought to educate girls as Christian wives and mothers”.⁴⁵

⁴³ The school is now known as the Wesley Girls High School, one of the most renowned girls’ high schools in Ghana.

⁴⁴ Ulrike Sill, *Encounters in the Quest of Christian Womanhood: The Basel Mission in Pre- and Early Colonial Ghana* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2010).

⁴⁵ Miescher, “The Challenges of Presbyterian Masculinity,” 90.

In an interview with the Principal of the now Agogo Principal Women's University College, she revealed that pioneering Presbyterian schools that were set up for girls in Ghana were established to train girls to serve as wives for the emerging middle-class men, especially those who worked in the church. The Principal further shared that, the training in the Agogo Girls School, as it was then called, was tailored to suit the requirements of what she termed "the Presbyterian woman's training", who was expected to be,

A well-behaved, well-mannered, hard-working and God-fearing woman. She was to be the first woman to be considered when a clergyman or a man of repute wanted a wife. I am a priest and I can attest to the fact that pastoral work requires a very well-prepared spouse. Of course, there was always the underlying colonial perception that Africans needed to be trained to be 'proper'. However, these institutions also provided the first batch of women who could read and write and that should count for something. If you look at it from that perspective, then these women could be said to have been privileged in their days because they received an education which allowed them to be part of the new class of the "educated" as far back as 1931 when the school admitted its first batch of students.⁴⁶

In other interviews, women who received training in Agogo reminisced about their time at the school. They stated that Agogo's training turned them into "good women", indicating that the training was "strict" and the principals and teachers ensured that rules were followed to the letter. The training entailed house management, cooking, house cleaning and other academic subjects. One woman who attended the school recalled that men who needed good wives came to Agogo:

Men from Akropong Training College, other men and especially clergymen came to seek wives among us. I was recommended to my husband and it was always a great honour for a girl to be recommended. I was hard-working, loved nature, and I was calm and very neat. When my husband needed a wife, I easily came to mind. Everybody said I was the one to be married and my training too had prepared me for that so I was not found wanting. I was

⁴⁶ Grace Sintim Adasi, Principal of the Agogo Presbyterian Women's College of Education, interview by Abena Kyere, July 31, 2022.

educated, and I had received training which ensured that I could be a good wife. I think that is why most of us were recommended as wives. In our culture, when you are about to marry, your mothers sit you down and teach you how to marry, but Christianity is not our culture. The men went to school to be clergymen or do whatever, so it was right that we also went to school to receive training to be their wives. Any man was lucky to find an Agogo-trained woman as a wife.⁴⁷

There are observable patterns in the narrations above. Whether from archival records or in the interviews with living persons who had attended these schools, all the wives were recommended or selected due to their Christian educational background. Further field interviews proved that such a pattern was, indeed, the norm in the time frame under discussion. In the absence of a parent, a young clergyman or catechist⁴⁸ in need of a wife would often, as is the Ghanaian custom, share his desire with his family or a respectable elder in the church. If the young man had a woman in mind, her Christian and educational background was thoroughly verified and further recommendations were made based on her character. If there was no young woman in mind, the elder either consulted with other elders of the church for a recommendation or consulted teachers at the girls' schools to assist. This is when the best of the girls who were being trained were then recommended to be married. A young woman to be recommended for this position was, among other things, expected to possess exceptional qualities. Coming from a good Christian family was considered an added advantage and as vital as good character traits. This is reminiscent of the stories of Rebecca Insaadoo and Animaa Ntim above.

⁴⁷ Betsy Gladys Addo, interview by Abena Kyere. August 10, 2022 at Agogo, Ghana (Madam Betsy indicated she was 80 at the time of my visit).

⁴⁸ It must be noted that the position of a catechist functioned almost like that of a priest. This is because most towns and villages did not have priests, and catechists performed all the roles expected of a priest. Again, although some Ghanaian Christians qualified for the position of priest, the racist stance of missionaries prevented the early ordination of Ghanaians, who were, thus, left to occupy positions such as catechists. This is significant since a young woman who married a catechist could be equated to one married to a priest.

According to an eighty-five-year-old catechist's wife who received missionary education and training, the prospective bride was expected to come from a good Christian home.⁴⁹ It was also anticipated that she was:

Respectful, patient, hardworking, and welcoming. She should not be selective, should not be talkative, should be ready to listen, have a deep interest in God's word, and above all should know how to cook properly. However, the first and the last (respectful and good culinary skills) characteristics were most cherished in such a woman.⁵⁰

The insistence on the last two requirements (respectful and possession of good culinary skills) for a CW is borne out of the reputation of the manse as a place of hospitality. A clergyman explained that the manse, (popularly known as the 'Mission house' in Ghana) was everyone's home.⁵¹ This was because the clergy and his home was a symbol of hospitality, and anyone who wants advice or any form of help could freely walk in for assistance. In the case of travellers, especially Christians, the manse served as the first point of call. In such instances, the most obvious anticipated sign of welcome was food and any wife in a manse who did not know how to cook was considered an embarrassment to the husband and the church. Indeed, not only was the wife expected to know how to cook, but she was also expected to know how to cook numerous types of food, both local and European (especially in the colonial past), so that if her husband was ever to entertain a foreign missionary, her cooking would be acceptable. It is important to note that these expectations continue to be required of CWs. Thus, with the required missionary training, the right family background, and a recommendable character, a young woman stood in the enviable position of being recommended as a CW. To be a CW was, therefore, perceived as a position of privilege.

⁴⁹ Maama Akweley, interview by Abena Kyere. July, 2018 at Abokobi, Ghana. Abokobi was one of the earliest places Presbyterian missions settled and set up schools for girls in Ghana.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ebenezer Bosomprah, a final-year student of the Trinity Theological Seminary, Interview by Abena Kyere. August 3, 2018.

Concluding Remarks

Gender relations was one of the areas in which the most damaging effects of colonial encounters were felt by African women. From the erosion of their powers to sidelining them politically and, sometimes, actively collaborating with existing patriarchal structures to oppress women. But it also provided the space for women to be mobile in the newly emerging African elite and middle class. In this paper, I have discussed how the Christian and colonial authorities sought to shape women into what they considered the right form of womanhood. While this did not succeed with older women, educational institutions successfully trained young girls to be suitable Christian wives. It must, however, be noted that these women were not “created” in isolation but rather side-by-side with men who equally needed educated wives. Although, in comparison to their male counterparts, the education of the women was rather inadequate, it provided the women with an opportunity to be part of an emerging elite social class. Moreover, it was these schools that later morphed into educational institutions that produced female teachers and public servants. It has been recorded that these women also began to see themselves as an educated group who could only marry men from their “class”. Indeed, there was the fear that such women would renounce an uneducated husband.⁵² This is perhaps the kind of privilege alluded to by some of the voices in this paper.

Particularly for the women who became CWs, the position was, indeed, considered a privileged one. Subsequently, the norm in Ghana is that the CW is held in high esteem and respected by the congregation.⁵³ While the old requirement for gender-specific education may no longer be obligatory, the expectations, roles, and privileges of CWs continue to hold the same weight in faith communities or churches. For instance, CWs are offered special seats in church, are honored with special titles, and are the recipients of gifts that range from items to domestic service.⁵⁴ In later African Independent Churches, the above conventions of conduct and

⁵² Denzer LaRay, “Preface: Nothing So Sweet,” in *Women Writing Africa, West Africa, and the Sahel*, ed. Esi Sutherland-Addy and Aminata Diaw (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2005), 189.

⁵³ Kyere, “For God and Man,” 122.

⁵⁴ Kyere, “For God and Man,” 123.

responsibilities, along with the privileges applied when it was instructed that the CW,

[s]hould dress in a special way, be honoured with a special seat in church, and be called spiritual mother, no matter how young she may be...she must learn to take delivery of babies and, where spiritually competent, should be allowed to conduct evening prayers, Friday clinic, and to preach. It has also been agreed that if they have zeal, wives will be trained to become prophetesses.⁵⁵

Respondents insisted that women continue to be recommended for young clergymen who needed wives. In the absence of missionaries or a school where such wives could be selected, young unmarried clergymen intimated that they sometimes relied on other CWs or older women to recommend a woman from the congregation as wives. Similarly, in the absence of training schools, some denominations have CW associations where they have constant meetings to discuss issues pertaining to their roles, how they could be helpful to their husbands' jobs and, what is expected of them. Older CWs in such associations serve as mentors to younger and newer CWs, although such mentorship was not considered by some CWs as effective for the roles they were expected to play in either the church and society. In one instance where I had the chance to attend the annual meeting of the Presbyterian Clergy wives, one of the concerns raised was the lack of formal and organized training they received before becoming CWs.⁵⁶ As a result, the CWs petitioned the chair of the district to make arrangements in former preparatory schools, such as the Agogo Women's College, where wives or fiancées of clergymen could receive some months or weeks of training before their husbands were ordained. They complained that the expectations on them as CWs required receiving some form of formal or organized training, as it was done historically when the schools were initially set up to train prospective wives. The CWs were did not request for the re-institutionalization of a Domestic Science education that girls received under missionary guidance. What they suggested was the introduction of some basic, structured training and knowledge in the roles required of them and the requisite skills to successfully play these roles. In other words, the CWs

⁵⁵ Brigid Sackey, *New Directions in Gender and Religion: The Changing Status of Women in African Independent Churches* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 167.

⁵⁶ 22nd Biennial Conference of Asante Akyem Presbytery Ministers' Spouses Conference of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana July, 2022.

were articulating a realization of a knowledge gap that, by their estimation, did not exist when girls attended preparatory schools before marriage. This request implies that the CWs felt that the missionary effort to mold girls into “good women” was to a large extent, an effective enterprise that needs to be revisited. Perhaps they believed they could take a leaf out of the pages of what it meant to be trained to become a “proper woman”.

This article traced the complex historical “formation” of the position of the CW in Ghana by showing that the education the girls received was gendered and domestic. While it might not have been a particularly enviable position to be a CW in the West, the Ghanaian case tells a different story. It was, indeed, a privilege for girls or young women to be recommended for the position. However, the position was consciously created through a Western-gendered ideology of expected roles and positions for men and women. A CW was, thus, expected to fulfill the missionary and Western concept of acceptable womanhood.

Undoubtedly, the creation of the CW position has left in its wake a stupendous weight of expectations that continues to be required of the women who find themselves in the position. Considering the circumstances in which it developed, these women have been held to a moral and cultural standard that sets them apart from other wives. The absolute conviction that they are “the best” has steadily transformed into an established set of expectations for CWs throughout Ghana's Christian history. Consequently, the CW position that came into existence bears a different history and position to that of the Western CW. The processes through which these women were molded illustrates, to a large extent, the success of the missionaries' bid to create a new kind of African and Ghanaian woman who operated within a monogamous, Christian home.

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