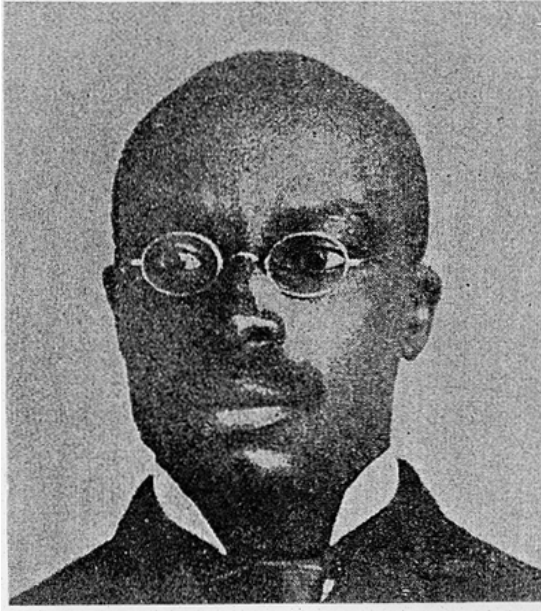


## A WEST AFRICAN AT YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL<sup>1</sup>

Moses N. Moore Jr. and Yolanda Y. Smith



**Orishatukeh Faduma**  
(YDS 1894)

The West African presence at Yale Divinity School (YDS) dates from the last decade of the nineteenth century and is linked to the “Amistad Affair” that took place more than a half century earlier.<sup>2</sup> After West African captives overpowered the crew of the Amistad in 1839 in a desperate bid for freedom and a return to their homeland, they were incarcerated in New Haven and charged with mutiny and murder. While the Mendi captives were jailed pending adjudication of their fate, YDS students and professors (most notably Josiah Gibbs and George

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<sup>1</sup> Support for this article and related research for the “Been in the Storm” project has been provided by Yale Divinity School, the Religious Studies Department of Arizona State University, and the Louisville Institute. We invite your response to this draft, which is being prepared for journal publication and other project postings. All rights reserved, copyright by Moses N. Moore, Jr. and Yolanda Y. Smith, 2008.

E. Day) came to their assistance. In addition to providing interpreters necessary for the legal defense of the incarcerated West Africans, they also began instructing them in English and Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Their efforts contributed not only to the conversion of some of the Mendi captives, but also the landmark judicial ruling granting them freedom.

Arrangements for the return of the Mendi to West Africa inspired the Reverend James W. C. Pennington (pastor of Hartford's Talcott Street Congregational Church and the first black student to "unofficially" attend YDS) to take the lead in what would prove to be an historic missionary endeavor.<sup>4</sup> This collaborative ecumenical effort would lead not only to the establishment of the Mendi Mission in Sierra Leone but also to the subsequent founding in 1845 of the American Missionary Association (AMA).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On Yale University's involvement in the African slave trade and slavery in the U.S., see Antony Dugdal, J. J. Fueser, and J. Celso de Castro Alves, "Yale, Slavery, and Abolition," (pamphlet, published by the Amistad Committee, Inc. New Haven, Connecticut, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> On the Amistad incident and the Yale Divinity School connection see Roland Bainton, Yale and the Ministry: A History of Education for the Christian Ministry of Yale from the Founding in 1701 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), pp. 152-155. See also Samuel Dexter Hastings, "The Amistad Africans," The United Brethren Review vol. 14, no. 3, 1903: 145-148 and B. Edmond Martin, All We Want is Make Us Free: La Amistad and the Reform Abolitionists (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Bernard Heinz, "The First Black Student," Yale Alumni Magazine (May 1978): 9.

<sup>5</sup> Inspired by the plight of the Mendi captives, Pennington, former pastor of New Haven's Temple Street Congregational Church (now Dixwell Avenue Congregational Church), issued a call, in 1841, for a missionary convention of blacks that resulted in the formation of the Union Missionary Society (UMS). In 1845, the UMS having previously forged an alliance with the Amistad Committee was absorbed by the newly organized American Missionary Association (AMA), which included Pennington on its founding board. On Pennington, see Herman Edward Thomas, James W. C. Pennington: African American Churchman and Abolitionist (New York: Garland, 1995). On Blacks and the AMA see Clara Merritt De Boer, "Blacks and the American Missionary Association," at <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/hidden-histories/blacks-and-the-american.html>. See also Clara Merritt De Boer, Be Jubilant My Feet: African American Abolitionists in the American Missionary Association, 1839-1861 (New York: Garland, 1994).

The linkage of YDS black alumni to West Africa was furthered when Albert President Miller (YDS 1885) was assigned to the Mendi Mission in 1878.<sup>6</sup> There Miller served as pastor to a young convert named Albert Burton Jowett who assisted him as an interpreter, “translating his sermons, as he delivered them, into the Mendi language.” Inspired by Miller, Jowett would also seek to become a missionary. Traveling to the United States, he graduated from Miller’s alma mater (Fisk University) and in 1893, more than a half century after the Amistad incident, Jowett, rumored to be the son of Amistad captive Sarah Margru Kinson, enrolled in YDS.<sup>7</sup>

Two years earlier, another West African from Sierra Leone with possible ties to the Mendi Mission enrolled as a student at YDS. This student was William J. Davis.<sup>8</sup> Born in British Guiana (Guyana) of Yoruba parentage in 1857, Davis returned with his family to West Africa in 1867. In Sierra Leone, he completed his secondary education before traveling to England to attend Wesley College and the University of London.<sup>9</sup> Upon his return to Sierra Leone, Davis, as part of a cultural reform movement that sought to mitigate excessive European religious and cultural influences, changed his name to Orishatukeh Faduma.

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<sup>6</sup> Albert P. Miller, Yale Divinity School Alumni Files; Albert P. Miller, “The Mendi Mission: Explorations into the Interior, etc.,” The American Missionary vol.33, no.8 (1879): 245.

<sup>7</sup> Albert Burton Jowett graduated from Fisk University in 1889 and entered Yale Divinity School in 1893. However, he did not graduate. Definitive documentation regarding Jowett’s parentage has not been located. See “Albert Burton Jowett,” The American Missionary vol. 34, no. 5, p. 152 and Marlene Merrill, “Sarah Margru Kinson: An Amistad Captive Comes to Oberlin,” Talk for O.H.I.O. Annual Meeting and Banquet, Oberlin Inn, April 8, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Moses N. Moore, Jr. Orishatukeh Faduma: Liberal Theology and Evangelical Pan Africanism 1857-1946, (Lanham, MD and London: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Day Williams, God's Grace and Man's Hope (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 22. For a brief profile of Protestant liberalism, see Lloyd J. Averill, American Theology in the Liberal Tradition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967); Bernard M. G. Reardon, ed., Liberal Protestantism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968); William R. Hutchison, The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1976); and Kenneth Cauthen, The Impact of American Religious Liberalism (New York: Harper & Row, 1962).

Evidencing an interest in current theological and missiological trends, Faduma authored a groundbreaking article titled “Thoughts for the Times or the New Theology.” It revealed that he shared the theological orientation of “Protestant Liberalism”--the controversial theological synthesis that emerged during the last quarter of the nineteenth century as an attempt "to bring Christian thought into organic unity with the evolutionary world view, the movements for social reconstruction, and expectations of 'a better world' which dominated the general mind.”<sup>10</sup>

Faduma’s decision to immigrate to the United States in 1890 and enter Yale Divinity School in preparation for the Congregational ministry was thoroughly consistent with the convictions espoused in his article on the New Theology. Not only was Congregationalism "the most fertile soil for liberalism," but predominantly Congregationalist Yale Divinity School and its immediate environs was one of its primary breeding grounds.<sup>11</sup> As a student at Yale Divinity School from 1891-1894, he studied under scholars who labored constructively and effectively to reconcile the old faith and new scholarship. Among his professors were George E. Day, George Park Fisher, Samuel Harris, Lewis O. Brastow, George B. Stevens, Edward L. Curtis, and Frank Chamberlain Porter. Faduma would fondly recall their influence more than fifty years after his graduation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Faduma’s article elicited a review published in 1890 in the Boston Herald, which noted, “A curiosity is a paper by a native African, Orishatukeh Faduma on "Thoughts for the Times," by which he means the new theology. This is the first time that a critic of the new theology has turned up from the dark continent, and is a curious and significant paper. When a native can write like this on subjects in which he has been obliged to educate himself, it means that we are to say nothing more against the intelligence of the African race.” Orishatukeh Faduma, "Thoughts For The Times; Or the New Theology" AME Church Review 7 (Oct. 1890), pp. 139-143; Christian Recorder (Nov. 13, 1890), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Sydney Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 775-776.

<sup>12</sup> All sought to clarify the issues and challenges presented to their respective disciplines by the new scientific and intellectual currents. See Bainton, Yale and the Ministry, pp. 169-170, 178-183, 189-190, 202, 219, and 225. Letter from Faduma to Dean Luther Allan Weigle, May 10, 1945. Orishatukeh Faduma, Yale Divinity School Alumni File. During Faduma's enrollment, the Divinity School also added a number of courses to the traditional curriculum,

Sharing Faduma's immersion in the liberal environs of Yale Divinity School and New Haven was a small group of African-American students including Hugh Henry Proctor, Bernard Tyrell, and Thomas Nelson Baker.<sup>13</sup> The Tennessee-born and Fisk-educated Proctor recalled that the Divinity School provided a congenial environment for students of color: "although there were many students from the South, one's color counted nothing against one, and nothing in one's favor." He also recalled that the professors of his day were "Giants." Moreover, at Battell Chapel and various local churches including Dixwell Avenue Congregational Church, YDS students had opportunity to hear some of the "ablest preachers of the country."<sup>14</sup> Proctor also noted the intellectual and academic gifts of Faduma who would become his "best friend." Alluding to the pseudo-scientific racism of the era, he exclaimed, "although his [Faduma's] parents were natives taken right from the bush, he was one of the brightest men in the class of over thirty coming from the picked universities of the world. He upset all the theories of the phrenologists and ethnologists."<sup>15</sup> During his studies at Yale, Faduma published a number of articles in the AME Church Review that reflected his successful efforts to appropriate the rich harvest of liberal theology and scholarship available at YDS.<sup>16</sup> He provided further proof with

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which reflected the impact that the new scientific and academic currents were having within progressive seminaries throughout the nation. See "Lectures at Yale Divinity School," The Congregationalist 77 (November 17, 1892), p. 448 and Edward A. Lawrence, Modern Missions in the East: Their Methods, Successes and Limitations (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1895).

<sup>13</sup> Faduma reportedly joined them in a quartet that sang "Negro melodies" in churches throughout New England and performed on at least one occasion at a YDS commencement. See Henry H. Proctor, Between Black and White: Autobiographical Sketches (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1925), pp.41-42.

<sup>14</sup> Henry H. Proctor, Between Black and White: Autobiographical Sketches (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1925), pp. 40-43, 45, 95, 106-108; A. Knighton Stanley, The Children is Crying: Congregationalism among Black People (New York, Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1979), pp. 84-85.

<sup>15</sup> Proctor, Between Black and White, p. 42.

<sup>16</sup> See Orishatukeh Faduma, "Africa or the Dark Continent," AME Church Review 9 (Jan. 1893), pp. 1-8 and Orishatukeh Faduma, "Religious Beliefs and Worship of the Yorubas in West Africa," AME Church Review 12 (July 1895), pp. 150-158. See also Orishatukeh Faduma, "Materials for the Study of the World Religions," AME

his graduation in 1894 with "Honors" and the award of a scholarship that enabled him to pursue an additional year of graduate studies at Yale.

With completion of his studies at Yale and ordination to the Congregational ministry in May 1895, Faduma applied to the American Board for appointment to an African mission post. While "under appointment of the American Board to return to Africa as soon as finances will allow," he accepted "temporary assignment" with the AMA to work in the American South. Reversing mission tradition and stereotypes, Faduma would eventually serve for almost fifty years in effect as an African missionary to those whom he described as his "kith and kin" in the American South.<sup>17</sup>

Faduma's efforts to mediate various currents of liberalism were especially apparent in his attempts at pedagogical and missiological reform. Among the more progressive and controversial of his proposed educational and missiological reforms were his advocacy of equal educational opportunities for females; respect for Islam and indigenous African religious traditions; and calls for the indigenization (Africanization) of Christianity. Central to his progressive pedagogy and missiology was the conviction that God is "the revealer of all truth, whether scientific, religious, social, mathematical [or] legal." Consequently, "all truth is divine whether uttered by a Christian, Mohammedan, Hindu or Pagan."<sup>18</sup>

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Church Review 12 (April 1896), pp. 461-473 and Orishatukeh Faduma, "Drawbacks and Successes of Missionary Work in Africa," Sierra Leone Weekly News, (Apr. 20, 1918).

<sup>17</sup> "Rev. Orishatukeh Faduma," American Missionary 58 (Jan. 1904):15.

<sup>18</sup> On the relationship between Protestant liberalism and progressive educational reform see H. Shelton Smith, "Christian Education," in Arnold S. Nash, ed. Protestant Thought in the Twentieth Century: Whence and Whither? (New York: Macmillan, 1951), pp. 225-246; George A. Coe, Education in Religion and Morals (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1904); and George A. Coe, A Social Theory of Religious Education (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1917). See also Orishatukeh Faduma, "Lessons and Needs of the Hour," Sierra Leone Weekly News, Oct. 5, 1918; Orishatukeh Faduma, "African Negro or Education," Sierra Leone Weekly News, Aug. 3,

Faduma calls for the liberalization of Protestant missiology and his numerous contributions to the missiological debates of the era did not go unnoticed. In 1895, he was invited to Atlanta to participate in the Congress on Africa where he delivered a number of pioneering papers. The Missionary Review of the World, one of the foremost missiological journals of the era, praised his presentations as "the excellent views of one of the most highly and broadly cultured natives concerning missionary work." Almost thirty years later, it again acknowledged Faduma's enlightened and liberal missiological insights with publication of his reflections on Islam and Christianity in Africa.<sup>19</sup>

Faduma had gone South in 1895 naively declaring that the "New Theology" of Protestant liberalism was "destined to uproot American prejudice against the Negro, elevate and purify the state [and], the church, conquer Anglo-Saxon haughtiness, and make all nations confess that 'God is no respecter of persons.'"<sup>20</sup> However, he found the "New Theology" no match for the South's resurgent racism. Reflecting on his experiences in the South, he bitterly recalled

In the United States Anglo-Saxon teaching on race ideals is that all race varieties other than his are inherently inferior and dependent . . . . In state, church, and society, the idea is put into practical operation in such a way that the best in the Negro is treated as filthy rags. In the Southern states

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1918, pp. 24, 31; and Orishatukeh Faduma, "The Study of Science in Elementary and Secondary Schools," Sierra Leone Weekly News, Oct. 7, 1922.

<sup>19</sup> "Addresses on the Congress on Africa," Missionary Review of the World (Sept. 19, 1896), p. 693. See Orishatukeh Faduma, "Christianity and Islam in Africa: A Native African's View of the Situation," Missionary Review of the World 48 (Nov. 1925), pp. 865-868. See also Orishatukeh Faduma, "Drawbacks to Missionary Work in Africa," Missionary Echo 24 (Apr. 1917), pp. 54-56; and Missionary Echo 24 (May 1917), pp. 71-72. For the Congress on Africa and Faduma's presentations see J. W. E. Bowen, ed. Africa and the American Negro: Addresses and Proceedings of the Congress on Africa (Miami 1896, 1969).

particularly, the idea is enforced by means of the argumentum baculinum--bruteforce--and all kinds of class legislation which the imagination can devise.<sup>21</sup>

By the summer of 1913, these conditions encouraged Faduma's migration to Boley, Oklahoma where he joined similarly disillusioned African-Americans in the "Back to Africa Movement " headed by Alfred Sam. Having long nourished the dream of a selective black return to Africa, he became an enthusiastic and important recruit of this Pan-African-oriented commercial, missionary, and emigrationist venture, which anticipated the more widely known movement later led by Marcus Garvey.<sup>22</sup> Upon the eventual collapse of the "African Movement," he remained in Sierra Leone as a minister, and educator until returning to the United States in 1923.<sup>23</sup> Re-associating with the AMA, he continued to work for another two decades as a missionary educator in the American South.

While there are consistent themes and concerns cogently presented in Faduma's numerous writings, he did not develop a systematic presentation of his mature theological convictions. Like most of his fellow West African and African-American clergy, he

<sup>20</sup> Orishatukeh Faduma, "Thoughts for the Times: Or the New Theology," AME Church Review 7 (Oct. 1890), pp. 139-143.

<sup>21</sup> Orishatukeh Faduma, "The African Movement," African Mail (Dec. 4, 1914) and Orishatukeh Faduma, "Some of My Experiences in the Southland," The Expected (July 1943), p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> Orishatukeh Faduma, "The A.M.E. Church and Kittrell Normal Institute," Christian Recorder (Apr. 16, 1890): 289. On the similarities and parallels between the "African Movement" and Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, see J. A. Langley, "Chief Sam's African Movement and Race Consciousness in West Africa," Phylon 32 (Summer 1972):164-178, also Robert A. Hill, ed., The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 536-547.

<sup>23</sup> Orishatukeh Faduma, "The African Movement," African Mail (Dec. 4, 1914) and Orishatukeh Faduma, "Some of My Experiences in the Southland," p. 9.



addressed his existential situation as a preacher and pastor rather than as a theologian. He was in short, a "practical theologian" who was more concerned with praxis than with sustained reflection upon praxis. Thus, his occasional writings reflect his continuous efforts to apply his theological beliefs on behalf of the beleaguered African and African-American communities. For example, the deadly influenza epidemic that ravaged Sierra Leone in 1918 provided the context for his public reflections on the problem of evil and suffering. In the midst of this tragedy, he drew upon the soteriology of theological liberalism to offer solace to members of the Sierra Leone Christian community who found their traditional theological beliefs of little comfort.<sup>24</sup>

The sparse materials that are available relating to Faduma's final years provide little in-depth insight into his perceptions and reactions to the major theological, ideological, and missiological transitions, which occurred between 1930 and 1946. A number of these developments, most notably the neo-orthodox critique of liberalism, challenged tenets and convictions that had long informed his life and work. Nevertheless, analysis of Faduma's final writings reveals that amid the intense theological, missiological, and ideological controversies of the era, he continued to adhere to the central tenets of a chastised evangelical liberalism.<sup>25</sup> Although he may have been in agreement with Harry Emerson Fosdick's admonition that liberals "must go beyond modernism," he was not among those whose minds had been "changed" by either the

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<sup>24</sup> Orishatukeh Faduma, "Lessons and Needs of the Hour," Sierra Leone Weekly News (Sept. 21, 1918); Oct. 5, 1918. Faduma appears to have come closest to presenting a comprehensive and systematic summary of his mature theological convictions in a series of articles published in the Sierra Leone Weekly News in 1923 under the title "The Faith that is in Me." Orishatukeh Faduma, "The Faith that is in Me," Sierra Leone Weekly News, June 2, 1923; June 16, 1923; July 14, 1923; July 21, 1923; July 28, 1923; Aug. 18, 1923; Sept. 1, 1923; Sept. 15, 1923; Oct. 20, 1923; Nov. 3, 1923; Dec. 8, 1923.

fundamentalist or the neo-orthodox polemic on the failings of liberalism. The position of Yale theologian, Robert Lowery Calhoun, who declared himself "A Liberal Bandaged but Unbowed," perhaps best approximated the dogged liberalism of Faduma as he approached his final years.<sup>26</sup>

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the aged Faduma was fully abreast of these developments. After retiring as Assistant Principal of Lincoln Academy in 1934, he served for eight years as Professor and "Acting Dean" at Virginia Theological Seminary and College in Lynchburg, Virginia. At this traditional center of black Baptist theological, missiological, and ideological thought, he continued to serve as a mediator of evangelical liberalism to a later generation of African and African-American students.<sup>27</sup>

During the waning years of his life spent in High Point, North Carolina with Henrietta, his wife of almost fifty years, Faduma's dogged evangelical liberalism was further assaulted by the brutalities of World War II and the continued intransigence of Southern racism.<sup>28</sup> It was from High Point that Faduma issued the final summary of his life's work. Ironically, this was made in reply to a request for an alumni update from Yale Divinity School. Intrigued by the response of the elderly West African, Dean Luther

<sup>25</sup> See Faduma's autobiographical sketch titled, "An African Background," and Orishatukeh Faduma, "Africa the Unknown," Mission Herald 43 (Nov.-Dec., 1939), p. 20, 44 and (Jan -Feb. 1940), pp.16-17.

<sup>26</sup> Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Beyond Modernism," Christian Century 52 (Dec. 1935), pp. 1549-1552. See also series of thirty-four articles published under the title, "How my Mind has Changed in this Decade," in Christian Century 56 (Jan. 18-Sept. 20, 1939), and William Hutchison's assessment of this series in Hutchison, Modernist Impulse, pp.304-305. Robert L. Calhoun, "A Liberal Bandaged but Unbowed," Christian Century 56 (May 3, 1939), pp. 701-704.

<sup>27</sup> Faduma, "Some of My Experiences," p. 9 and Orishatukeh Faduma, "Africa the Unknown," Mission Herald 43 (Nov.-Dec. 1939), p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Orishatukeh Faduma, "Some of My Experiences," pp. 9-10.

Allan Weigle of the Divinity School asked for additional information.<sup>29</sup> Faduma replied with a letter that rehearsed his extensive missionary and pedagogical labors. It also recounted his years as a student at the Divinity School. He explicitly recalled former YDS instructors: "Dean Day, Professors Fisher, Harris, Brastow, Stevens, Curtis, [and] Porter," all of whom, Faduma confessed, "left behind them and in my life memories which are indelible." On May 22, 1945, Dean Weigle responded with a letter that expressed the Divinity School's pride in Faduma's long and distinguished career. He wrote, "I congratulate you heartily upon the long and effective service that you have rendered in the field of Christian missions and Christian education, and I assure you that we of the faculty of your old school take pride in what you have accomplished."<sup>30</sup>

Less than a year later, on January 25, 1946, Faduma died. He was buried at High Point in the adopted soil he had come to call home on this side of the Atlantic.<sup>31</sup> No eulogies have been found of Faduma through whom so many of the theological, missiological, and ideological currents of the era had converged and been creatively reshaped. Nevertheless, the final statement made by Faduma in his autobiographical

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<sup>29</sup> When the Divinity School mailed Faduma an alumni information form in 1944, he replied in an aged script that he was a "Retired Missionary" who had spent a total of "57" years at various mission posts and institutions in the United States and Sierra Leone. Orishatukeh Faduma, Yale Divinity School Alumni Files. He also included a listing of 50 of his "literary contributions," the typescript of his autobiographical sketch titled "My Nigerian African Background," and a copy of his 1943 article, "Some of My Experiences in the Southland." On Dean Weigle who had also been decisively influenced by evangelical liberalism, see Who's Who In America: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Men and Women vol. 24, 1946-1947 (Chicago, 1946), p. 2404.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Faduma to Dean Luther Allan Weigle, May 10, 1945, Orishatukeh Faduma, Yale Divinity School, Alumni Files. See also Bainton, Yale and the Ministry, pp. 169-170, 178-183, 189-190, 202, 219, and 225. Letter from Dean Luther A. Weigle to Faduma, May 22, 1945, Orishatukeh Faduma, Yale Divinity School Alumni Files.

<sup>31</sup> Orishatukeh Faduma, Yale Divinity School Alumni Files. "Certificate of Death," North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics," #2708. Filed 2-11-46.

sketch serves as a most appropriate epitaph. Faduma, the aged evangelical liberal, simply confessed:

Like a hound, I am in pursuit of truth, retired but not tired, nor yet ready to depart, but still on the war path of duty. For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. Again I say, retired, but not tired.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Faduma, "My Nigerian African Background."