

LIGHT AND SHADES OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN IGBOLAND (1841-2010): A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Onyeka John Egwuonwu

Department of Religion and Human Relations

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

jo.egwuonwu@unizik.edu.ng

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Abstract

This paper examines the advent and development of the Anglican Church in Igboland. The paper aims at finding out the achievements the advent of Anglican Church made in Igbo land. Primary and secondary sources of data collection were used in this paper. The primary data was collected through oral interview and the secondary data was collected through the review of textbooks, journals, articles and internet materials. In this paper, content analysis was employed to analyze the contents that form sub literatures of the study. The findings indicated that development of Anglican Church in Igboland contributed greatly to the development of Igbo land. The study concluded that the advent of Anglican church in Onitsha gave rise to creation of Anglican diocese on the Niger and the expansion of the gospel from Onitsha to other parts of Igbo communities which resulted to civilization, establishment of school, abolition of harmful cultural practices, making the people to be law abiding citizens amongst other factors that cannot be forgotten in Igbo territory as a result of the advent and development of the Anglican church in Igbo land. This paper, recommends that the present day church should emulate from the great escapades and contributions made by Anglican church during the 19th century in Igbo land and work in that line.

Keywords: Light, Shades, Anglican Church, Church, Historical Analysis

Introduction

Jesus Christ while on earth was an itinerant preacher who taught about the kingdom of God, performed miracles and did good. He chose twelve disciples whom he commissioned to preach the gospel before his ascension into heaven. Ituma (2003) states that that Jesus is the foundation of the New Testament (NT) and the NT itself is the foundation of Christianity. Jesus Christ before his ascension gave a command to his disciples to preach the gospel till the end of the earth which formed the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). The Great Commission formed the basis for evangelism and also made the Apostles and other members of the early church to make evangelism their core objective despite all odds (Acts 6:4).

However, in the 19th century, precisely in 1857, the evangelistic movement of some Anglican evangelists in London called Church Missionary Society settled in Onitsha. In 1864, the Anglican Diocesan system from Freetown in Sierra Leone inaugurated in Igbo land with the creation of the Diocese on the Niger with its headquarters at Onitsha. From Onitsha, the Anglican Diocesan system established the church in other parts of Igbo territory. The Anglican Church through their evangelistic spirit brought a lot of social and economic development to Igbo land such as education, enhanced human health via scientific medical care, legitimate trade, agricultural and infrastructural facilities. Hence, this study aims at investigating the advent and development of the Anglican Church in Igboland.

The Great Commission

The Great Commission is a mandate which the church has no option but to fulfill. The final instruction Jesus gave to His disciples was to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28: 19; cf. Acts. 1: 8). As Christ was sent into the world by the Father, so did he send his disciples also (John 20: 21). Their primary task, as well as that of the church, has always been the sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the world. Ekpendu (2016) opines that the members of the church have been called out of the world to be sent back into the world with a mission and a message. The call to evangelism springs from an unequivocal command of the Lord of the church, to share messages that transforms and directs lives to live in harmony with the character of Christ.

Ogunewu (2013) states that, Acts of the Apostles reveals the zeal of the apostles in this direction and the early church is also not left out in the venture as through it the gospel spread to the nook and crannies of the Roman Empire. In the same vein, the church of the nineteenth and the twentieth century witnessed a tremendous quest for and emphasis on the world in evangelization. This is as a result of the independent missionary bodies which came into being during that time. Similarly the 21st century Church is not relenting in its effort in this direction. Many conferences on world evangelization have been held in the recent past and many declarations made. These have been backed with concrete actions which have seen the gospel message promoted into many countries of the world. Many Church denominations have over the years developed their own Mission Boards and Evangelistic groups which have performed tremendously in this regard. The Bible Societies around the world are continually making the Bible available in the indigenous language of the people so as to expose them to the word of God.

Millions unreached by resident missionaries have access to the gospel through the radio and virtually every province and village is being penetrated with the gospel in one way or the other. It was the quest to obey the Great Commission that made the Apostles to embark on evangelism amidst opposition from Roman government. It was also the zeal to obey the Great Commission that made the European missionaries to bring the Gospel back to the African soil of which Igboland was not exempted.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts theory of reasoned action as its framework. The theory of reasoned action was propounded by Fishbein, Martin and Icek Ajzen in 1975. The theory of reasoned action (TRA) explained the relationship between attitudes and behaviours within human action. It is mainly used to predict how individuals behave based on their pre-existing attitudes and behavioural intentions. An individual's decision to engage in a particular behaviour is based on the outcomes the individual expects will come as a result of performing the behaviour. The primary purpose of the Theory of Reasoned Action is to understand an individual's voluntary behaviour by examining the underlying basic motivation to perform an action (Doswell, Willa, Braxter, Betty, Cha, EunSeok, Kim and Kevin, 2011). Thus, Fishbein, Martin and Icek Ajzen (1975) based their assumption in the following principles:

Behaviour: Theory of Reasoned Action attempts to predict and explain one's intention of performing certain behaviour. The theory requires that behaviour be clearly defined in terms of the four following concepts: Action (e.g. to go, get), Target (e.g. a mammogram), Context (e.g. at the breast screening center), and Time (e.g. in the 12 months). According to Theory of Reasoned Action, behavioural intention is the main motivator of *behaviour*, while the two key determinants on behavioural intention are people's attitudes and norms (Fishbein, Martin and Icek Ajzen, 1975). By examining attitudes and subjective norms, researchers can gain an understanding as to whether or not one will perform the intended action.

Attitudes: Attitudes are one of the key determinants of behavioural intention and refer to the way people feel towards a particular behaviour (Ajzen and Albarracín, 2007). These attitudes are influenced by two factors. The strength of behavioural beliefs regarding the outcomes of the performed behaviour (i.e. whether or not the outcome is probable) and the evaluation of the potential outcomes (i.e. whether or not the outcome is positive). Attitudes regarding certain behaviour can either be

positive, negative or neutral (Fishbein, 1967). The theory stipulates that there exists a direct correlation between attitudes and outcomes, such that if one believes that certain behaviour will lead to a desirable or favorable outcome, then one is more likely to have a positive attitude towards the behaviour. Alternatively, if one believes that certain behaviour will lead to an undesirable or unfavorable outcome, then one is more likely to have a negative attitude towards the behaviour and influence the decision of innovation adoption (Ajzen and Albarracín, 2007).

Behavioural Belief: Behavioural belief allows us to understand people's motivations for their behaviour in terms of the behaviour's consequences (Ajzen and Icek, 2012). This concept stipulates that people tend to associate the performance of certain behaviour with a certain set of outcome or feature. For example, a person believes that if he or she studies for a month for his or her driver's license test, that one will pass the test after failing it the first time without studying at all. Here, the behavioural belief is that studying for a month is equated with success, whereas not studying at all is associated with failure.

Evaluation: The evaluation of the outcome refers to the way people perceive and evaluate the potential outcomes of a performed behaviour (Fishbein, Martin and Icek Ajzen, 1975). Such evaluations are conceived in a binary fashion-like manner. For example, a person may evaluate the outcome of quitting smoking cigarettes as positive if the behavioural belief is improved breathing and clean lungs. Conversely, a person may evaluate the outcome of quitting smoking cigarettes as negative if the behavioural belief is weight gain after smoking cessation.

Subjective norms: This is one of the key determinants of behavioural intention and refers to the way [perceptions](#) of relevant groups or individuals such as family members, friends, and peers may affect one's performance of the behaviour (Fishbein, 1967). [Ajzen](#) defines subjective norms as the "perceived [social pressure](#) to perform or not perform the behaviour (Ajzen and Albarracín, 2007). According to Theory of Reasoned Action, people develop certain beliefs or normative beliefs as to whether or not certain behaviours are acceptable. These beliefs shape one's [perception](#) of the behaviour and determine one's intention to perform or not perform the behaviour. For example, if one believes that [recreational drug use](#) is acceptable within one's social group, one will more likely be willing to engage in the activity. Alternatively, if one's friends groups perceive that the behaviour is bad, one will be less likely to engage in recreational drug use. However, subjective norms also take into account people's motivation to comply with their social

circle's views and [perceptions](#), which vary depending on the situation and the individual's motivations.

Normative beliefs: Normative beliefs touches on whether or not referent groups approve of the action. There exists a direct correlation between normative beliefs and performance of the behaviour. Usually, the more likely the referent groups will approve of the action, the more likely the individual will perform the act. Conversely, the less likely the referent groups will approve of the action, the less likely the individual will perform the act.

Motivation to comply: Motivation to comply addresses the fact that individuals may or may not comply with social norms of the referent groups surrounding the act. Depending on the individual's motivations in terms of adhering to [social pressures](#), the individual will either succumb to the [social pressures](#) of performing the act if it is deemed acceptable, or alternatively will resist to the [social pressures](#) of performing the act if it is deemed unacceptable.

Behavioural intention: Behavioural intention is a function of both attitudes and subjective norms toward that behaviour (also known as the normative component). Attitudes being how strongly one holds the attitude toward the act and subjective norms being the social norms associated with the act. The stronger the attitude and the more positive the subjective norm, the higher the A-B relationship should be. However, the attitudes and subjective norms are unlikely to be weighted equally in predicting behaviour. Depending on the individual and situation, these factors might have different impacts on behavioural intention, thus a weight is associated with each of these factors. A few studies have shown that direct prior experience with a certain activity results in an increased weight on the attitude component of the behavioural intention function (Manstead, Proffitt, Christine and Smart, 1983).

However, Glanz, Karen, Rimer, Barbara and Viswanath (2015), maintained Theory of Reasoned Action beliefs that a person's intention to perform an activities is the main predictor of whether or not they actually perform that activity. Additionally, the [normative](#) component ([social norms](#) surrounding the act) also contributes to whether or not the person will actually perform the behaviour. According to Azjen, Icek, Madden and Thomas (1986), the intention to perform a certain activity precedes the actual activity. This intention is known as behavioural intention and

comes as a result of a belief that performing the activity will lead to a specific outcome.

Although the theory of TRA is criticized by scholars on the basis that the distinction between a goal intention and a behavioural intention concerns the capability to achieve one's intention, which involves multiple variables thus creating great uncertainty. [Ajzen](#) and Icek (1985) acknowledged that some behaviours are more likely to present problems of controls than others, but we can never be absolutely certain that we will be in a position to carry out our intentions. Viewed in this light it becomes clear that every intention is a goal whose attainment is subject to some degree of uncertainty ([Ajzen](#) and Icek, 1985). According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993) criticized that Theory of Reasoned Action does not take into account that certain conditions that enable the performance of a behaviour are not available to individuals. Since the Theory of Reasoned Action focuses on behaviours that people decisively enact, the theory is limited in terms of being able to predict behaviours that require access to certain opportunities, skills, conditions, and/or resources.

Hence the theory of reasoned action is important to this study. The theory of reasoned action explained the motives for engaging in activity. That people involve in an activity when they are sure that the outcome of that activity will yield something positive. In that note, the Anglican missionaries decide to come to Igbo land for the purpose of fulfilling the great commission and also, develop Igboland. So, because of these motives in mind, the Anglican missionaries from Sierra Leon headquarters sent some of their evangelists to bring the gospel to Igbo people. Their settlement, get of new converts and expansion of membership led to the establishment of Anglican diocese in Onitsha and by extension to other parts of Igbo land which still exist till today. Also, the development of Anglican church in Onitsha and other parts of Igbo land yielded to civilization, western education, abolition of slave, human right protection, establishment, commerce, trade, schools, hospital and industries in Igbo territory. So the Anglican missionaries before coming to Igbo land for mission work knew that their movement would not only bring salvation to Igbo people but also development which finally realized.

The Igbo Belief System before Christianity

The heterogeneous Igbo people is among the ethnic groups in Africa that occupy a very considerable extensive area of the south in eastern part of Nigeria. Their

industrious nature and readiness to travel around carried many of them far beyond their local confines. The main social control mechanisms of Igbo traditional society is their religious institutions. This is germane in understanding the Igbo world-view. According to Anaukwu (2012), the structure of Igbo world-view consists of a Supreme Being (*Chukwu*) occupying the apex of power, which is self-existent, and viewed as having created everything seen and unseen with man at the centre. Ifesieh (1989) affirms that the Igbo as a people owe their existence to *Chukwu*, the creator, whose central significance and comprehensive importance with individuals and the universe as a whole are known. Through their myths, native folk tales, proverbs and idioms, they demonstrated that *Chukwu* created all things and that he is really the greatest who controls all created things. Ilogu (1974) is of the view that the principal God of the Igbo is called *Chineke* or *Chukwu*, with a pantheon of gods which are sometimes personifications of the facts and features of nature and of daily life.

Ilogu (1974) further opines that a description of the deities and spirits of Igbo religion leaves them lifeless until one knows something of the world-view which Igbo life and thought have built around these gods and spirits. Man is believed to be created by *Chukwu* who also is the Great Spirit or Lord over soul. Anukwu (2012) observes that at birth the great spirit- *Chukwu* that gives each man a part or his divine nature called *Chi*, which becomes the spiritual double of the man throughout his life. Whatever abilities, good, or bad fortunes, success, failure or weakness possessed by the man are often attributed to his *Chi*. Children of same parents are therefore endowed differently by various kinds of *Chi*. Through this *Chi*, *Chukwu* connects himself with all created human beings.

The Igbo Cosmological Order

Madu (2004) asserts that the cosmological sketch of the Igbo of Nigeria consists of three-tier intimately related but distinct worlds, each of which is well inhabited. The Heaven, the Earth and the Underworld. The heaven is the abode of the Supreme Being *Chukwu/Chineke*, and such major divinities like *Amadioha* (Thunder god) and *Anyanwu* (Sun god). Minor deities like *Edo*, *Idemili*, *Omaliko*, and man of course who is appointed as the agent to the Supreme Being, but who is also answerable to the Supreme Being, and has some responsibilities to fellow man's lives on earth.

Ancestors and Myriad of Spirits

The ancestors and myriads of spirit forces inhabit the underworld. Igbo people do not neglect *Ekwensu* in their ontology. It is like the devil in Christian perspective which is seen as a spirit that makes man to do things contrary to God' s will. The devil moves through and fro seeking whom to tempt and manipulate all to make sure that the God' s good thought towards man will not come to pass. Hence, Igbo people call on *Chukwu* to protect and defend them against the will and caprices of *Ekwensu* so as to live a fruitful and prosperous life void of misfortune. According to Anaukwu (2012), divinations and libations cannot also be glossed over for it is through these that the gods are communed with. Thus, any religious system that fails to recognize these may not flourish in Africa.

Igbo Traditional Society

Igbo traditional society is conterminous with life in most primal or simple society. Kalu (1978) posited that “the Igbo traditional society is so tightly constructed that a puncture from any angle posed a threat to the whole” (p. 317). According to Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019), in the traditional Igbo communities there was emphasis on social stratifications and it is possible to speak of a ruling class possessing special status and political, military, economic and religious functions that were often used for the oppression and suppression of those who did not belong to any of those classes.

The *Osu* and *Ohu* caste System

The *osu* system and *ohu* domestic slaves were cases in point. According to Onwukwe (2015), in Igbo traditional religion and culture, *osu* is viewed as a person or group of persons who are dedicated to a god or gods and as such becomes the property of that gods, unlike the *ohu* does not enjoy the freedom of the society and never have hope of being free. It was to this regard that Basden (1961) asserts that an *osu* is a slave, but one distinct from an ordinary slave (*Ohu/Oru*) who in fact is the property of the god and when devoted to a god, he has no prospect of regaining freedom and he restricts his movements to the precincts of the shrine to which he was attached. Therefore, the above suggests that an *osu* is solely a property of a particular god or gods. In the ancient times of the Igbo society, a particular community in order to atone for their sin would go to a very far community and get a small boy or girl either by transaction (slave trade) or by abduction, this slave is dedicated to a particular deity, gods to whom they must have wronged. The slave will automatically take responsibility of taking care of the shrine, performing other functions like running errand for the deity and the chief priest of that deity. Uchendu (1965) posited that an *Osu* is a cult slave, a slave

who has been dedicated to the service of the dedicators deity whose descendants are *osu*, by the dedicator an individual, extended family or lineage. They are also viewed as sacred, set apart and untouchable.

Ohu is acquired as a property. Those who usually constitute the *ohu* in the olden days include inter-ethnic war captives, lazy children, some of whom were sold by their parents, victims of political machinations, unprotected/unguarded strangers, and so forth. Some of the services rendered by *ohu* to their masters, included running errands for their owners, and taking punishments meted out for their owners who were found guilty of misdeeds. They were equally used to bury their masters or an important member of the society. They are not allowed to aspire for any leadership position in their various communities. Just like *osu*, the *ohu* are deprived some privileges enjoyed by *nwadiala* (freeborn) in the community. The *ohu* are not allowed to break kola at gatherings. They are not allowed to pour libation. They are forbidden from saying prayers on behalf of the freeborn at community meetings and are deprived of some prestigious social, religious and political rights in villages.

The Igbo Political Structure

The Igbo as a republican society has a distinctive feature that distinguishes the Igbo from other ethnic groups in Nigeria and traditional politics. It is well known that the Hausa and the Yoruba have powerful traditional monarchs known as *Sarki* and *Oba* respectively who yield supreme authority and control the people. But such is not witnessed in Igbo traditional political structure as the Igbo people are democrats at heart. The Igbo communities were known as extremely democratic and egalitarian, yet they have no centralized governments. However, in some communities kings exist. An example is the *Obi* of Onitsha. They subscribe to the principle of direct participation in governments. In explaining the traditional political structures Ohadike (1996) elucidates that:

The traditional political structures are made up of the council of elders. Therefore, matters affecting lineage members were discussed at the meetings of its elders, *Ndichie* with the assistance of the adult members of the lineage. The council is headed by the oldest in the kindred who holds the *ofo* (symbol of authority) and commands respect from others in the kindred. Age Grade: This association is known as *Ogboor otu*, which composes of men who were of about the same age. This group was responsible to carry out special duties in their various communities like clearing bushes that grow along stream paths, apprehend fugitives and try

to maintain peace and order among the grade. Secret Societies: These associations were exclusively for some men and women and others for both sexes. Very little is known about them because people who join these societies take an oath of secrecy seriously. Many members of secret cults were mouthpiece of oracles, they help to adjudicate and settle matters among community members or inter-community conflicts (pp. 22-25).

Ohadike (1996) affirms that these political structures lost their appeal in the twentieth century when colonial officers stripped traditional Igbo chiefs of their power and then subordinated them to British appointed warrant chiefs and Western educated Igbo people. This was motivated by the missionaries whose activities were initially opposed by traditional chiefs in Igboland hence they sought for help from the colonial masters who responded with military expeditions in areas that were hostile to Christianity. Resistant traditional chiefs were deposed while British appointed warrant chiefs and the Western educated Igbo people who have been converted to Christian religion were enthroned. Nigeria is a pluralistic society in terms of religion, by this, it is meant that Nigeria is a country where different religious adherents coexist and mix freely to carry out their day-to-day activity. The Nigerian people opened up their country to accommodate foreigners of different backgrounds and walks of life who continue to introduce new social values and religions. According to Isichie (1995) both Islam and Christianity came to Nigeria as foreign religion and were gladly embraced by the people. Also, Nwadiolor (2016) records that, Nigerians first encountered Islam between 666-1067 AD and Christianity between 14th-15th century. With this in mind, Nigeria has three major religions namely; African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam and Christianity. These three major religions are practiced majorly amongst the three core ethnic groups in Nigeria namely; Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. The wave of Christianity was visible among these ethnic groups especially in Yoruba and Igbo land. Igbo land became a fertile ground for Christianity because Igbo people accepted it despite initial resistance.

Christian Missionary Enterprise in Igbo land

Christian missionary enterprise in Igbo land took a glaring stance as it brought an unwavering development in Igboland. Okpalike and Nwadiolor (2015) records that:

Missionary enterprise in Igbo land began in the middle of the 19th century when the pioneer missionaries came to Igbo land and the British Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.)- claimed to have chosen Africa as one of the

spheres of its apostolic work, and the Negro race in particular, out of commiseration for wrongs which the slave trade had wrought upon them, and thus they accompanied a British expedition in 1841 for the exploration of the banks of the Niger with the aim to establishing Christianity and legitimate trade along the Niger as a sure way of dealing a death-blow to the protracted and obnoxious trade in human beings. The first Igbo town that the expedition landed was Aboh, J.F. Schon, a German linguist and the leader of the C.M.S. team that accompanied the expedition, Samuel AjayiCrowther, a Yoruba ex-slave and Simon Jonas, a liberated slave from Sierra Leone of Igbo parentage, were able to forge a personal link with the King of Aboh, Obi Ossai with Simon Jonas acting as an interpreter. Here the missionaries succeeded in preaching the gospel message to the king and his people (p. 5).

In 1857, the C.M.S. finally came to establish a permanent station in Igbo land with their headquarters in Onitsha after making a brief stop-over at Aboh. Towards the end of the century, there came an interface in the Christian wave. On 5th December 1885, Roman Catholic missionaries arrived the shores of the River Niger and found safe havens in Onitsha. Christianity in Igbo land influenced Igbo traditional religion and culture. This came in form of changes to the indigenous society. According to Iheancho (2009) social change and human transformation are constant variables in the annals of Igbo history and existence in line with Iheancho's opinion, Ugwu (2002) voices that Igbo society is dynamic just like any other society and consequently susceptible to changes. Undoubtedly, Christianity has both positive and disruptive implications for the social structure in Igbo land.

Negative Impact of Christianity in Igboland

On the negative impact of Christianity Igboland, it could be said that the desecration of Igbo traditional religion and culture by the European missionaries seriously and adversely affected the traditional cultures of Igbo people to the extent that many traditional beliefs, social values, customs, and rituals were either totally destroyed or ignored in this frame Afolabi (2015) states that a modern Igbo has been brain-washed into disowning his own culture and embracing alien religion, culture and values, some of which he does not claim to understand. Uche (2014) states that Christianity made some damaging blows on the culture of the people of Igboland and these impacts can be felt in our method of worship, political system, eating habits, marriage, social system, the economic lifestyle and so on. Discussing the change on social life, marriage and family of Igbo people, the

missionaries abolished polygamy thereby giving way to monogamy and extended family giving way to nuclear family. In Igbo traditional society, there were reasons for polygamy. One of them is agricultural purpose. In the primordial days, agriculture was the main economy of the people. Then many farmers needed more children to work in their farmlands thus, to ensure this marrying many wives to bear many children was the key. Also, barrenness was another factor that led to polygamy. Traditionally, a man with a title such as *Ozo*, *Nze*, and so on who do not meet his wife during her menstrual cycle nor eat any food prepaid by his wife who is in her period neither will he go to the kitchen to prepare food as such is a taboo for titled men to do so. Thus, this leads to polygamy. Other reasons are for prestige and honour as well for political purpose. Polygamy is not peculiar to Igbo culture alone as it was practiced by the patriarchs of Israel in Ancient Near East. Examples include Jacob, Moses (Exo. 2: 21-22; Number. 12:1), David, Solomon and so on. Despite the above reasons, polygamy was rejected and monogamy was approved. It should be noted that rejection of polygamy by European missionaries was among issues that led to the formation of African Independent Churches.

Traditional family values are breaking down very rapidly. Arowolo (2010) observes that extended family that was wonderful instrument like a social verve, social security in our community has given way to nuclear family. Ezenweke (2016) states that, marriage institution which used to be held with utmost care and moral decorum due to the various rites and rituals attached to it has been reduced to mere social union. Okpalike (2012) avers that, Africans themselves looked down on the traditional marriage type and prefer the Christian or court marriage as both of which are full of pretenses and mistrust. Some marriage rights like *Iru Mgbede* (seclusion rite) which creates room for bridal premarital training which is needful in marriage have been neglected by many. Also the practice of *Iju Ese* (enquiry before approving marriage) is highly declining as many youths opt for court or contract marriage without seeking for the consent of their parents which is of Western origin. *Iju ese* means a proper inquiry which will be carried out by both families whose children want enter into marriage. This is to find out certain things about each family. The family of the groom will enquire from people living close to the bride to know if she is properly trained, responsible and of reputable character as well, same should be done by the bride's family. Nwaozuru (2020) affirms that this will help to ensure that none of them is marrying the wrong partner; when bridal pre-marriage inquiry is properly conducted it will help in choosing the right spouse, thus, helping to sustain long lasting marriage. Ezenweke (2016) informed thus, since some of these core marriage rites are

neglected, it has led to incessant marriage crises and broken homes due to the abuse and neglect of the importance of puberty rites in preparing and educating the young adult for the properties and games of marriage. Also, there are other factors that negatively impacted on the Christian mission in Igboland.

Influence on Traditional Political Structure

The missionary played a vital role in dismantling Igbo traditional political structure. They encouraged the colonial government to carry out military expedition in places they considered hostile to missionary activity. It was through Aro expedition that Aro town and other powerful towns got conquered. In turn, the British Warrant Chiefs were appointed especially Christians to advance the missionary objectives. The imposition of kings as sole authority and controller of the native people in their various towns is against Igbo egalitarian society which was in place before the colonial government and missionaries came. The missionary further threatened to ex-communicate any convert who join traditional secret societies or vie for traditional political positions. Thus, there was a total change in the political system of Igbo society.

Influence on the Usage of Igbo Language

The introduction of Western education made communication in English compulsory. The Igbo due to their inquisitive nature made efforts to learn English language. It could be observed that as Church Missionary Society (CMS) used Igbo language in teaching students and their converts, Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) applied English language in liturgy and in schools. This made many parents to send their children to Roman Catholic Mission schools. Today it could be observed that Igbo speaking in in some schools are prohibited and defaulters are punished or ask to pay fine. Many Igbo children especially those who live in urban areas find it difficult to freely express their opinion in Igbo language rather a combination of Igbo and English or Pidgin English will be used. Although the missionaries claimed superiority of English over Igbo language, the truth is that God listens to any Igbo man praying with his mother's tongue because God gave each and every his own distinct language.

Positive Impact of Christianity in Igboland

The coming of Christianity to Igbo land played a vital role in the development of modern Igbo society. Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) observe that the missionaries effected serious changes on indigenous Igbo societies. This section

therefore examines the influence of Christianity in Igbo land, taking into consideration these areas of exploits.

Development of Western Education

Afigbo (1999) noted that the missionaries changed indigenous Igbo society much more radically than either the government or the traders did. This they did by insisting that the Igbo people and their neighbours could not actually become good Christians or attain salvation unless they modify their societies drastically along prescribed western lines. They offered western education, highly attractive bait which indigenous religion could not offer. Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) observe that:

The Igbo people were anxious to acquire the white man's irresistible magic and knew this could only be done through going to school, they in time sent flocks of their children to the schools, soon, political, economic, religious and social life came to be dominated by the natives who had acquired the Whiteman's magic. In retrospect, all these could be seen as the birth pangs of the new society in Igbo land (p. 3).

The above thought is supported by Alagoa (1999) as he noted that "Western education had been identified as probably the most important motive for the acceptance of Christian missions" (p. 250). Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) also observe that, right from the 1840s, various missionary bodies have done a lot not only to evangelize different parts of Igbo land, but also to bring about educational development. By doing so, Christianity has therefore played an important role in the making of an Igbo nation even without intentionally doing so as a matter of policy. It is a fact that meaningful missionary enterprise which resulted in the making of an Igbo nation began in 1857, spearheaded by the C.M.S. and the Roman Catholic Churches in 1885. According to Uruakpa (1996), "it is quite clear that these missionary bodies had common aims, and especially shared in the philosophy of education as a sharpest instrument for effective and result oriented evangelism" (p. 123). For the first time, education was seen as the gateway to economic opportunity by the Igbo people themselves. They realized, as they never did before that knowledge is power, and that it commands economic security and social prominence.

Western education offered an escape from the petty tyranny of court clerks and warrant chiefs during the colonial era as the products of the local mission schools began to compete with them, the commercial advantages of education became

universally evident. The emphasis on competitive achievement applied not only to individuals, but to towns. Onitsha appeared the paradigm of a town which had prospered through education and association with the missionaries. Hence many Warrant Chiefs with the support of their people willingly invited the missionaries to come to their land not only to evangelize but to open schools.

There was collaboration between the Warrant Chiefs and the Christian missionary bodies in development of education and establishing of schools in Igbo land. Okoro (2018) observes that one reason for the desire of the Igbo, especially their Chief to have the presence of the mission at their communities was probably because of the advantages such presence brought with it high moral principles, churches, schools, and hospitals. Also education was a means of employment as graduates are employed by the colonial government as clerks and so on. It is worthy to note that learning how to speak and write English language taught in mission schools breached the language barrier which the Europeans experienced at the initial stage. Onwubiko (1985) comments that because of these reasons and others related to them, Chiefs of such Igbo towns as Aguleri, Nsugbe, Oguta, Emekuku, and several other peoples and towns of Igbo land, Ibibioland and Efik began to invite the missionaries to their communities.

Okoro (2018) recall the role played by Chief Idigo of Aguleri in the 1890s. Following the invitation he extended to the Catholic Mission, Father Joseph Bubendorf opened a mission in Aguleri in 1890. The exertions of the mission not only saw the conversion of Chief Idigo himself, but by the time he died in 1900, the Catholic faith and education flourished in Aguleri and the surrounding villages. Igwe (1977) states that in 1890, the Chief of Oguta, a town of about 30,000 inhabitants situated some sixty miles south-east of Onitsha, led a delegation to Father Lutz for a school and Church to be opened for his people on a piece of land already ear- marked for that purpose.

From the above statements, it could be said that the Warrant Chiefs played vital role in bringing various Christian missionary bodies and the complementary formal education to their communities. Some of the schools established by the missionaries in Igbo land are Uzuakoli Boys founded by Methodists in 1923, C.M.S. established D.M.G.S. Onitsha and Government College Umuahia in 1925. The Catholic opened C.K.C. Onitsha in 1932, Queen of the Rosary Enugu in 1942 and so forth. Many of those first sent to school, and therefore to church, were either *Ohu* (slaves) or *Osu* (outcasts). Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) explain that

these were people who, because of their social disabilities, had a grievance against traditional Igbo culture and society that had subdued them. They therefore saw the new Christian order which was forming as an alternative to the Igbo society whose constraints they were happy to escape. And what was more, it did not take time before the value of the missions as means of getting ahead in the new world ushered in by the colonial rule, was proved beyond all reasonable doubt. They were soon employed as clerks, messengers and the likes in the government and commercial firms and as teachers and agents in the schools and missions. In these jobs they acquired a new economic power and social status far beyond the wildest imagination of the elders, and thus became objects of admiration and envy. Hence, the quest to be educated became the order of the day.

Making of new Elites in Igbo Society

Uruakpa (1996) submitted that the establishment of missionary education, created room for making of new elites in Igbo society. The new elites were Christian Igbos who have acquired Western education and were providing assistance to both the missionaries and colonial government in making Igbo society a Christian nation. The Igbo educated elites became whatever they were traders or teachers, clerks or catechists, politicians or true nationalists. With the introduction of Christianity and its accompanying benefits in education, urbanization and technical training came as a result of the emergence of new Igbo elite. According to Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019), at first the new elite comprised a disproportionately large number of natives of Onitsha. Her early access to mission schools, her later concentration of secondary schools and a training college, gave her unique advantages which no other Igbo community could equal. It is no accident that the first Igbo C.M.S. bishop, the first Igbo Catholic bishop, and the great nationalist leader Azikiwe were all Onitsha men (Egwuonwu and Mgbemena, 2019). Hence, Isichei (1977) observed that “the people of Onitsha considered themselves the aristocracy of Igbo land” (p. 190). They were followed by those from the areas around Onitsha; towns such as Nnewi, which had shared many advantages, and from Asaba, across the Niger, from Awka and from the Owerri area. These were areas notable for their playing host to the 19th to 20th century missionaries in Igbo land. The first generation elite were nearly always Christians.

These new elites had two uncomplicated ambitions which were to educate their families to the highest possible standard; and to erect the largest possible houses in their home villages. Many of the first generation elite were primary school teachers. They were often more than school masters; they were leaders and models

for the communities in which they lived, the first bringers of civilization to the town. Most of these early teachers lived by what they taught. Teachers therefore became objects of hero-worship. Parents who sent their children to school had no other job in mind for them than teaching. Achunike (2002) observed that the key to social change in Igbo land lay in an appreciation of the fact that the pre-colonial Igbo polity was a community in which the worldly and the other worldly, the political and the religious were closely bound together. As a result political, social and economic lives were underpinned by a religion centered on the worship of a pantheon of deities and the veneration of the ancestors.

In the process of changing the fundamental basis of society, and the emergence of a modern Igbo nation, the mission schools played an important role as Afigbo (1981) observed. “It was the instrument for mobilizing support for Christianity and by the same token for withdrawing support from the old social order” (p. 340). This role was all the more crucial because those recruited for Christianity through the school were by and large children, that is the younger generation who had not yet been fully inducted into the culture and lure of the nation.

Furthermore, Christianity effected serious changes on indigenous Igbo societies which according to Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019), was the instrument through which a lot of the younger generation of Igbo men were indoctrinated against the obnoxious practices inherent in the traditional Igbo societies and tended to withdraw them physically from participating in those celebrations and social process by which the values of the group were transmitted from generation to generation. So while time and death thinned down the ranks of the defenders of the old order, the ranks of the Christians were progressively being augmented. Therefore, slowly but steadily the new trend became observable and gained dominance over the old. Hence, obnoxious traditional practices such as killing of twins, human sacrifice and many more were eradicated in Igbo society.

Production of Igbo Nationalists

Through Western education and missionary work, Igbo nationalists were being unconsciously trained. Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) are of the opinion that the near proverbial Igbo nationalist consciousness is one of the areas in which the Igbo agents of the C.M.S, many years ago sowed the seed. The missionary teaching of equality and brotherhood of all men before God had the effect of generating self-consciousness in the recipient and this in turn made them nurse the ambition for self-expression and self-government as a corollary to the philosophy of

equality. Through Western education history was being taught to them. Igbo people studied many revolutionary movements like English Revolution, French Revolution, Cuban Revolution and so forth. This made them to critically think why not African revolution hence, they got the courage and impetus to demand political freedom from the colonial government. Such personalities like: Nnamdi Azikiwe, Jaja Nwachukwu, J.O.J Okezie, Mbonu Ojike, R.I. Uzoma and Sam Mbakwe just to mention a few, were all products of missionary education, and they all acquired virtues of leadership that enabled them to be reckoned with as builders of a modern Igbo nation in variety of ways (Egwuonwu and Mgbemena, 2019).

Western Economic System

The abolition of slave trade which was achieved through the efforts of the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) of the Church of England was particularly beneficial to Igbo land and her economic system. According to Diara and Nche (2013) sequel to the success of the abolition of slave trade, the missionaries assisted in re-establishing legitimate trade especially mechanized agriculture and introduced Western commerce. The latter attracted many young men and it required little capital and no elaborate organization like the oracle systems associated with the earlier trade. This new economic system which entails free participation by all and sundry was the foundation for the free enterprising nature of the people of the new Igbo nation. The impact of this development on Igbo society was quite far reaching. Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) observed that Western commerce vested a new value on raw cash as such and the Igbo came to say *ego bekee na ekwu okwu* meaning the white man's money talks. The fact is that hitherto people made money and accumulated wealth in order to marry wives, raise a large yam barns, and buy admission to the revered title and secret societies since it was from these that prestige and status derived. This truly transformed Igbo socio-economic life to a better standard of living.

Origin of the Anglican Church in Igbo Land

William Wilberforce was a young evangelist who hails from England. Following his acceptance to join the evangelism move in England in 1786, William Wilberforce vowed to devote his energies to the abolition of slave trade which had its greatest source in Africa and Nigeria in particular. He thus joined a small group of evangelical clergymen and influential laymen committed to the cause of missionary movement. The members of the fellowship group included Charles Grant of the East India Company, Thomas Clarkson and Zachary Macauley of the

Sierra Leone Company, Lord Teigumouth, a former Governor General of India, and others. It was a combination of their interests in India and Africa, and the anti-slavery campaign that moved them to favour a rekindling of the fire of evangelization, and the establishment in 1799 of a society for missions to Africa and the East (Ajayi, 1994). This missionary society was later named the Church Missionary Society (CMS). Thus, the Church Missionary Society was founded by a group of sixteen clergymen and nine laymen in 1799. This was at a time when the Evangelicals were few in number and their influence in the church very limited. They believed that the injunction to spread the Gospel was to all Christians as individuals, and not to the church as an organization, but that evangelization required to be done within the context of the church because the converts would eventually need to be constituted into a church, which is a branch of the existing church. The evangelicals also saw foreign evangelization as an essential part of their vision to revive the spiritual life of the church. The greatest labour of the Church Missionary Society centered on the campaign against slavery and slave trade. When all the evils connected with slave trade became clearly known, many good Christians and Christian Organizations began to speak openly against its continuation. With the passing of time, the movement for abolition of slave trade became influential even in the British Parliament. Victory crowned the labours of the evangelicals towards abolition of slave trade on 23rd February, 1807 when the back of the opposition against abolition of slave trade was broken. The battle, however, continued for complete emancipation until age and poor health forced the leader of the Evangelicals, William Wilberforce, out of the parliament. The skills of a young evangelical named Thomas Fowel Buxton were immediately enlisted and he assumed the leadership of the “Holy enterprise” . On 25th July, 1833, four days before Wilberforce died, the reality of the passage of the Emancipation Act by the British Government came, freeing slaves throughout the British Empire (Shelly, 1970).

The liberated African a slave among whom was a Nigerian of the Yoruba extraction namely, Samuel Ajayi Crowder, was settled in Sierra Leone in a place that was named “Freetown” . This was a settlement established by the Society for Black Poor with the approval of the British Government, and the Nova Scotians and the Maroons, many of whom were already Christians were settled. In the settlement, there was the problem of ethnic loyalties among the liberated slaves, hence while attempts were being made to hold them together, there was continuity of old values, such as holding fastidiously to ethnic biases. These gave rise to the scientific study of native languages and adaptations of traditional instincts to the

new development. The nostalgia for home became real with the heightening of inter-ethnic rivalries. One of the outcomes of this development was the successful planting of Christianity (Anglicanism) among the Yoruba in 1842 (Okeke, 1994). The success of the Yoruba mission in turn stimulated the Igbo in Freetown into seeking a way of bringing the gospel to their countrymen. Already there was a powerful Igbo Association in Freetown. It was this Association that petitioned the Local Committee of the CMS in Freetown through Bishop Vidal, that Christianity be extended to Igbo land. Before then, British Government had launched an expedition in 1854 to the Niger; and the report had reached the CMS in London about the prospect of the Niger for missionary work (Onyeidu, 2001). The CMS then organized a missionary outreach to Niger under the Rev. J.C Taylor of Igbo decent. Taylor and his team left for Onitsha in 1857. On their way to Onitsha Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther was directed by the CMS authority to join them from the Yoruba mission. The team with Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther arrived at Onitsha on July 26, 1857, and on July 27 they were formally welcome by the traditional rulers of Onitsha, Obi Akazua and his elders-in-council. The church was then planted and the mission successfully inaugurated in Igbo land. Before this time Igbo land was in complete spiritual darkness as the light of the gospel was yet to be extended to the people. The Anglican Church thus became the mother of the Christian mission in Igbo land in 1857. The Church being an Evangelical church came along with the seed of Pentecostalism which is essentially an intrinsic aspect of the Evangelical tradition which the Anglican Church represents (Jones, 1952). Although, the Pentecostal seed planted by the Anglican Church did not germinate immediately, its potentiality remained viable until the 1960s - 70s when it sprouted with remarkable signs and marks.

After the successful inauguration of the mission, Crowther left Lokoja and Taylor resumed the leadership of the Igbo mission to which he was totally committed. Initially, due to lack of missionary personnel and the opposing evangelistic strategy between Samuel Ajayi Crowther and Taylor, the mission could not spread fast to other parts of Igbo land outside Onitsha. While Taylor saw the urgent need of reaching out with the gospel to other towns and villages, Samuel Ajayi Crowther argued for strengthening of Onitsha base before any outreach.

Perhaps lack of personnel also militated against the work initially. The mission was only extended to Bonny at the request of the king of Bonny in 1864. Taylor visited Obosi, Oko, Nsugbe and Nkwelle but they could not be occupied for the reasons expressed above. In 1872 and 1874 the two main outstations of Onitsha,

namely; Osomari and Asaba were established respectively. Later on the Onitsha station again extended the mission to Obosi (Okeke, 1994). Gradually, each of the Igbo mission centers began to initiate evangelistic outreaches and the mission gradually began to grow. By 2002, there were 20 Dioceses of the mission with countless number of church stations. The word of God which the Anglican Church first preached and taught in Onitsha from 1857 thus became the sine qua non for an effective Evangelistic and Pentecostal tradition among the entire Igbo people. The CMS team, saw the Igbo land as a whole as Satan's stronghold and themselves as the agents of God who had come to wage a determined spiritual battle against Satan.

Subsequently, they had cultural and theological encounters with the people who were by then ardent worshippers of the spiritual forces that pervaded the Igbo land. There were challenges and confusion. But in all, the power of the Holy Spirit prevailed. Thus, the Anglican mission introduced Charismatics/Pentecostalism in Igbo land before ever churches with exclusively Pentecostal traditions came about a century later.

Establishment of Anglican Dioceses in Igbo Territory

The creation of Anglican Church in Igbo territory came to be as a result of directives from the leadership of the CMS from London Diocese in 1857 (Nwankiti, 1996). This according to Adiele (2001) is without prejudice to the recruitment of Negro settlers in Sierra Leone who worked in the Niger Mission. Following the successful establishment of the Igbo mission commonly called the Niger Mission and the fast growth of the mission, the Anglican churches in Igbo territory was created out of the Diocese of Sierra Leone and constituted into a new Diocese in 1964 with headquarters in Onitsha. From Onitsha (1857) the Anglican Church spread the gospel to the other areas of Igbo territory. The Rivers/ Abia area (1865) through Bonny, Anambra area outside Onitsha (1903) direct from Onitsha and Imo area (1905) direct from Onitsha; Enugu area (1916) through Awka and Ebonyi area (1959) through Enugu (Diara, 2004). In 2002, the mission which started as a single station at Onitsha in 1857 has developed to a chain of self-supporting and self-governing Dioceses. Thus, to state that the Anglican Church in Igbo nation is a fast growing church is simply stating a clear fact. In less than a century and half (1864-2009), the first Igbo Diocese grew and spread the Anglican mission to every part of Igbo land, thereby giving birth to about 50 Dioceses (Church of Nigeria, 2014). This remarkable growth was due to the sacrifice, hard work and burning zeal of

the indigenous converts of the CMS some of whom were employed as the pioneer lay agents of the Mission in different parts of Igbo communities.

Role of Anglican Church in the Development of Igbo Territory

Between 1864 and 1919, the Diocese of the Niger Territories later known as the Diocese of Western Equatorial Africa with headquarters at Onitsha encompassed almost all the regions in Nigeria, particularly the Eastern Region which is synonymous to Igbo land. According to Onyeidu (2001) about the year 1883, Niger Diocese was comprised of the whole of the Country Nigeria with a little exception. This Diocese expanded and provided education and healthcare to Igbo converts. This was because the colonial government was so slow in becoming aware of her duty to provide health care for the citizens as well as in accepting her responsibility for the education of the citizens. In the initial stage, the government only gave assistance in form of grants to missionary hospitals hence Anglican Church missions took the direct responsibility of establishing orthodox healthcare in Nigeria and Igbo land in particular. For example the Anglican medical services in Iyienu hospital. Baur (1994) opined that medical care was the daily routine of the Anglican missionaries in Igbo land as they were moved not only to preach the gospel in words but also to heal the sick. For the pioneer missionaries their medicine chest was like a magical box working miracle of healing and winning the people's confidence where their preaching would have failed.

Also, the building of school in Igbo land especially first in Onitsha precisely by Anglican Diocese with the backing of the Diocese of London marked the formal introduction of western education in the Igbo land which could well be described as the barometer of the people's development hence schools are the most important missionary social institutions in Igbo territory as a whole (Baur, 1994). Greater number of children were sent to schools in order to have the white man's knowledge, the secret of his power, and mostly, to learn in order to get a job. Whatever the motives in the historical and sociological perspectives may be, the mission schools were the greatest service done to Igbo people by the missionaries. Initially, Sunday schools were established in which those who could read and write in Igbo language were assigned to teach. By this time before the 20th century, there were no formal schools recognized by government in rural areas. In fact, government was only based in Lagos (Adebiyi, 1994). The Anglican missionaries spearheaded the task of educating the children of Igbo converts in vernacular with the aim that they would be converted and taught how to read and write the language of their people and hence be used for the work of the mission in their

area. Also, the Anglican mission adopted native languages, namely vernacular, as language of instruction in their schools. This implies that the Anglican missionary education in Igbo land was introduced in stages. The first was literacy education followed by commercial/industrial education, then the Secondary and Grammar school education and finally, the Teacher' s Training Education (Onyeidu, 2001).

The efforts of the CMS and the Anglican Diocese of London and subsequently that of the then Anglican Diocese of the Onitsha Territories effected the commercial and agricultural aspects of the economic life of the Igbo people. The CMS missionaries from London Diocese assisted in re-establishing the legitimate trade on which European nations hitherto traded with Africans before the era of slave trade such as pepper, gum-arabic and Bini-cloth. In this way, the Anglican missionaries introduced European system of commerce in Igbo land in place of the illegal trade on slaves. Industrial institutions were established to teach carpentry, bricklaying, dyeing, etc. (Okeke, 1994). New crops hitherto not found in Igbo land were also introduced by the Anglican missionaries such as cassava, tomatoes, carrots, orange, mango, pineapple, sweet potato, cashew, amongst others (Agha, 2012). Also, the work of the Anglican Church in Igbo land according to Nweke, (2001) resulted in the decline of the local deities, which were believed to be custodians of morality in Igbo land. In order to encourage members to cultivate higher ideals and higher standards of morality, it then became necessary for Anglican Church, Igbo land to envelop and introduce a number of associations to enhance the spirituality of the men, women, youth and children in the community.

They brought a new pattern of life and worship to the converts and people of Igbo land. In the aspect of new cultures and civilization in the community, they added a new dimension to the cultural heritage of the people. Community activities such as the new yam festival have turned to annual church harvests. The use of charms, amulets, concoctions and rituals by 'dibias' to fortify the masquerade dancers and their families are now minimized in the community (Amadi, 1993). Again, the practice of libation and sacrifices to the divinities and ancestors in the open places has declined in the Igbo communities. Most social gatherings are usually commenced with prayers offered to the Christian God and not to deities.

Conclusion

This research work deals with advent and development of the Anglican Church in Igbo land. In this study, the researcher was able to review literatures on Great commission, the Igbo belief system before Christianity, Christian missionary

enterprise in Igboland and the social changes brought to Igboland by the church. The researcher also discussed the advent of Anglican Church in Igboland, methods used by the missionaries to convert Igbo people, their influence on Igbo traditional religion and culture. The study found that the development of Anglican Church in Igbo land contributed greatly to the development of Igbo land. This is true as the advent of Anglican Church in Onitsha gave rise to creation of Diocese for the expansion of the gospel from Onitsha to other parts of Igbo communities. Also, civilization, establishment of school, abolition of bad cultural practices, making the people to be law abiding citizens and among other cannot forgotten in the Igbo territory as the outcome of advent and development of Anglican church in Igboland.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

- i. The present day church should emulate from the great contributions and impacts made by Anglican church during the 19th century in Igbo land and work in that line.
- ii. There should be freedom of worship between the religions in Igbo land.
- iii. There should always be a mutual dialogue and understanding between Christians and adherents of Igbo traditional religion.
- iv. Also, members of the religions should tolerate one another. Political leaders should not use religions as tools for destabilization.
- v. Anglican Church Igbo land should set up mathematical classes and more vocational and industrial schools which should be used to increase the number of young converts into the Anglican faith.
- vi. The members of the church should avoid discriminations with other denominations in their doctrines and socio-cultural activities that deal with the welfare and well-being of the people in the Igbo community.
- vii. The building of church should be preceded by much caution and considerations as touching the infrastructural conditions attached to the status. This is to ensure that the present day church should be able to bear the burden and evangelistic responsibilities that is involve in the development of the present day society.

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