

**PROTESTANT MISSIONS AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS IN THE IGBO
HEARTLAND: A FOCUS ON ANGLICANISM AND ADVENTISM IN
OWERRI AND ENVIRONS**

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of Protestant missions on intergroup relations in the Igbo heartland, with a particular focus on Anglicanism and Adventism in Owerri and its environs. Drawing on a blend of ethnographic data on mission activities and historical sources, the paper seeks to understand how the two missions shaped the social and religious landscape of the Igbo heartland through their activities in Owerri and its surrounding areas. Furthermore, the paper aims to ascertain how the different Protestant missions interacted with one another, and how this interaction shaped the Igbo society. To do this, the paper draws on both primary sources, such as missionary correspondence, diaries, and field reports, as well as secondary source material such as historical records, books, and newspaper articles. The findings showed that Protestant missions had a significant impact on the Igbo, leading to changes in their social and cultural life, as well as the development of intergroup relations. Anglicanism and Adventism both made inroads into Igbo society, and their respective members interacted in various ways, including competition and cooperation. For example, while both mission societies sought to convert the Igbo to their particular interpretations of Christianity, they also collaborated in certain areas, such as providing medical care and education. Overall, this paper demonstrates that Protestant missions had a significant impact on the Igbo people, and that the missions of Anglicanism and Adventism in particular helped shape the intergroup relationships in the Igbo heartland.

Introduction

It is not a doubt that religion and religious rituals played roles in the promotion of intergroup relations in the Igbo heartland as a result of the activities of the two leading Protestant denominations in the area. This study surveys the activities of the Anglicans and members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church within the Owerri area of Igbo land,

especially as it relates to their efforts to foster intergroup relations among the hitherto warring communities in the area. These Christian denominations made deliberate efforts to create a common front for fostering intergroup relations amongst the indigenes and dwellers in the community. The coming and the continual existence of these two denominations have brought about obvious effects on intergroup relations. Discussion will be most limited within the framework of such factors that kept intergroup relations alive. The roles the two leading Protestant dominations have played in bringing peace in the host communities will also be discussed. To be investigated also are the socio-economic effects of such intergroup relations in the study area.

Conceptual Clarifications

In an attempt to examine the nature of intergroup relations in the Igbo heartland, particularly the missionary factor in the phenomenon, it is necessary to define the concept, especially in the context that will add texture to this study. Anukam (2000) says that an intergroup relation is characterized by the identity of a common consciousness in addition to other relevant ethnic groups within the larger political society. An analysis of this reveals the factor of common consciousnesses of being one in relation to the other relevant groups within a political society. The term intergroup relations in the context of this study therefore, refer to both individual interactions involving members from different groups and the collective behaviour of groups in interaction with other groups, at either the intra or inter organizational level. Intergroup relations imply therefore, the existence of mutually exclusive groups that are in constant interaction with one another. These mutually exclusive groups due to the mode of their social bond usually exhibit the 'we' attitude toward members of their mutual group while exhibiting the 'they' attitude to the other members of the out-group. Conversely therefore, while the relationship between the various ethnic groups in Nigeria constitutes interethnic relations; the existence of such relationship between the components of an ethnic group, for example the relationship between the communities in the Igbo heartland, is referred to as intergroup relations.

Thinkers of the concept began in the late nineteenth century with Gustave Le Bon. He proposed that a group of individuals is different from the sum of its parts. Presently, intergroup relations is characterized by researchers applying and refining these theories in the context of modern social issues such as addressing social inequality and reducing discrimination based on race or ethnicity or religion. Notable figures include: Kurt Lewin, Gordon Allport, Muzafer Sheriff and Carolyn Wood Sheriff; Jim Sidanius and Felicia Pratto developed a more radical theory which among other definitions included race/ethnicity, religion and nationality. It is important to state that the usage of ethnicity and intergroup relations was necessary for evaluating the Protestant missions' activities in

the Igbo heartland as it has affected the intergroup relations between the neighbouring communities.

The Igbo Heartland

Igbo heartland as a subculture area is a sub-group in Igbo land lying east of the Niger. The Igbo heartland is of a major historical importance in Igbo land. Its political, social and economic stature of today should be seen as a carry-over from the past when it had earlier begun to hold a dominant sway over its environs. The Igbo heartland in the context of this study comprises of Owerre nchi-ise, the Ala-Enyi group, and other immediate surrounding communities, towns and villages. The area principally covers the present day Owerri municipal government, Owerri north and south local government areas and Ngor Okpala local government area of Imo state. A Christian population census conducted in 1966 and was made available by Kalu (2003) states that the Igbo heartland, otherwise known as Owerri Province was greater in Christian population of the Protestant denominations.

The history of the interaction between the communities in the Igbo heartland is a revealing human story of inter-sub-ethnic contact in which harmonious symbiotic relations were occasionally interrupted, mostly by wars, before the coming of the two leading Protestant missions in the area. A survey is made of the pre-missionary (indigenous) socio-political organizations, the nature of economic (trade and commerce) activities within the area of study vis-à-vis their neighbours. This is necessary because as a background to the study, it offers the opportunity of appreciating the efforts of the Protestant missions in fostering and promoting intergroup relations in the area. This is important because the missionary factor in the history of intergroup relations in Igbo land has not attracted serious attention from many scholars except for few passing emphases explained in terms of economic induced migrations to urban centres created as a result of missionary enterprise. It has to be noted here that intergroup relations in Igbo land before the coming of the missionaries was largely characterized by wars and raids for slaves to the extent that its inhabitants were forced to break up into little communities which could take shelter in the forest. Moreover, the complex river systems in Igbo land were barriers to mutual intergroup co-operations and harmony. Such complex river systems isolated one community from another to the extent that every town and incidentally every clan was an independent entity. However, under the banner of Christian missionary enterprise the situation changed owing to the idea of “Christian Villages” with its accompanying schools, hospitals and so on, that attracted people who wanted to benefit from the services offered by the missionary agents.

Christianity and Intergroup Contact in Owerri and her Neighbourhood

Between 1906 and 1935, about eight different Christian missionary groups operated in various parts of Owerri area. The earliest was the CMS in 1905. The decision to extend their enterprise to the area was borne out of the economic prospect which the whole area seemed to offer. However, Anukam (2000) argues that the decision was borne out of the strategic location of Owerri as the gateway to the Igbo heartland. Thus, on September 27, 1905, Archdeacon T.J. Dennis, Rev Anyaegbunem and A.C. Onyeabo, arrived at Egbu from Onitsha. In June 1907, after a series of preliminary consultations with the chief of Egbu, a small church house was built through indigenous labour and small Christian colony was established thereafter. It is necessary to note here that the building of the church house involved the interaction and movement of people from within Egbu, Owerri, Emekuku, Awaka, and Umuawuka in Emii. This was the beginning of intergroup contact in the Igbo heartland through the activities of Christian missionaries in the area.

The missionary work of Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Igbo heartland began in January 1923 when the Eastern Nigerian Conference was established as a mission, with Jesse Clifford of England, who had served in Sierra Leone and Ghana (Gold Coast), as the pioneered missionary. Jesse Clifford and his wife established the Aba mission station, which since then has been the headquarters of the church in Eastern Nigeria. Alalade (2008) corroborates that the Eastern Nigeria Mission was formally organized in 1930. In the same year, a second station was opened at Elele with L. Edmonds of England in charge. He continues that:

In Igbo land, in South Eastern Nigeria as in no other place in our work in West Africa, there has been a mass movement toward the message. In two mission stations in this district there are more than a thousand baptized members and ninety-six Sabbath schools. (p. 60).

No doubt conversion to Christianity involved interactions; contacts and most probably signaled an incidence of peace, harmony and friendly environment.

It is pertinent to note that in the pre-missionary era, Owerri area had easy access road networks, though mainly track roads; however, they gave easy accesses to neighbouring villages and communities. These internal links mostly used for commercial purposes promoted cultural unity, comradeship and friendship between families and in-laws. Then and now, Okazi Emii, Uguzo, Emekuku, Oru, Owerri and some other communities in the Igbo heartland shared cultural celebrations which necessitated the gathering of friends, in-laws and the attraction it offered enabled intergroup relations between these communities. It eventually became a platform for the missionaries, colonial imperialist and European merchants to advance into the Igbo heartland communities. The border

towns/communities acted as intermediaries, such towns include: Obowo, Mbaise, and Emekuku. These trade routes which began as footpaths and slave highways eventually were developed into a good road network which were maintained and used for missionary enterprises and connectivity to the community of faith.

Northrop (cited in Anukam, 2000) aptly observes that “roads in pre-colonial Igbo were advantageous commercially and hence aided missionary connectivity as to be incorporated into the early colonial road system” (p. 99). Reference was made to the statement of Major A.G. Leonard who referred to routes in Ngwa land as “more like an avenue in English shaded by splendid trees” (p. 99). Suffice it to observe that the presence of good roads aided the missionary enterprise into many Igbo communities in the hinterland. The Aro Expedition of 1901 opened the Igbo hinterland for Christianization as security drastically improved with constant patrol of British military; the expansion into the hinterland provided a new base for recruitment into the Christian fold. According to Ekechi (1971), the drive into the interior had its fascination... the greater proportion of the people lived in the hinterland rather than in the coastal towns, it was felt that such an advance would bring the Christian message to as many people as possible.

It must be noted here that at the inception, the missionaries exhibited certain attitudes that were counterproductive to intergroup integration that was supposed to be part of the core of their message. The attitudes of some missionaries who discredited the work of their rivals in the presence of their own African congregations created a level of disunity among the local converts. This disunity bred mistrust and intolerance between African members of rival denominations (Udo, 1980). This is to say that intergroup relations between local converts of the early missionaries in the Igbo heartland were not healthy at the earliest stage. Anukam (2000) adds that an important factor in the introduction of Christianity which had effects on intergroup relations was the division amongst the various Christian religious bodies. The difference in their religious teaching was often shown in their attitude to non-converts and members of other denominations. However, it suffices to observe, according to Afigbo (1980) that “the missionaries eventually won the people over to their side by their policy of kindness, patience, sympathy and friendliness, there soon grew up a strong bond of mutual trust between them and the people” (p. 188). Notwithstanding the fact that some villages and towns were divided along denominational lines with different systems of teaching and administration, the missionaries still made efforts to bring them together into an enduring relationship. In the same vein, Udo (cited in Afigbo, 1980) aptly puts that in spite of the police and the armies which the colonial administration had to enforce their wishes, the missionaries were more influential than the government in uniting the people.

Protestant Missions and Inter Group Solidarity in the Igbo Heartland

The Protestant missions fostered intergroup solidarity, harmonious intercourse and the sense of purpose among members of their host communities. This was remarkably evident whenever there was a church building project. Christians from neighbouring communities always rallied round in solidarity to ensure that such projects were carried out. This is evident in the construction of the first mud building of the CMS at Emohe Emii which started in 1912 when Mr Nathaniel Akutu from Onitsha was the church agent. The early converts began the church building construction; prominent among the builders were Mr Silas Azuh and Mr Christopher Nnawuotu. The building project became a means of reconciliation between Emohe and Ubah Christian converts who were torn apart by inter-community war over land issues. The CMS missionaries from Egbu set up a peace committee under the leadership of Rev. A.C. Onyeabo to restore the misunderstanding. Mr Nathaniel Akutu served as the CMS agent in that church till 1923. In 1924 Nathaniel Iyielimo served as the agent. In 1925, Mr. Jacob Opara from Egbu served as the CMS agent in Emii. During his period, a perpetual peace between the two communities was finally restored. Hence even till the present day, the two communities have continued to enjoy mutual confidence and peace. Mr Job Eme of Awaka worked at Emii as church agent in 1930 to 1933, he took over from Jacob Opara, and Mr James Atuanya served in Emmanuel church between 1934 and 1935, while Mr Josiah Onyedinma of Obizi Mbaise worked at Emii in 1936 and 1938. In 1939 to 1941 Mr. Josiah Chukwunta worked at Anglican Church Emii.

Other notable examples were the church building projects at Egbu, Owerri, Emekuku, Awaka, and Naze. Anukam (2000) says that:

The building of the church house involved the interaction and movement of people from within Egbu, Owerri, Emekuku, Awaka and Umuawuka in Emii. This was the beginning of that intergroup contact between Owerri town and the surrounding communities through the activities of Christian missionaries in the area. Between 1913 and 1914 Owerri assumed the status of a mission Headquarters for the entire mission stations in the Owerri Province. (p. 198).

The assumption of Owerri as a mission Headquarters of the Anglican Church heightened the intergroup relations as many who worked for the mission relocated to Owerri on transfer. Interaction among people of different religious affiliations and ethnic background increased and hence furthering intergroup relations. This new status of Owerri caused the creation of new out-stations such as Amakohia, Awaka, Emii, Naze, Uratta, Irete and each of these out-stations had one reason or the other to interact with the mother station in terms of intergroup relations. A good number of church workers lived within the communities especially Christian colonies; worked, intermarried with them,

while their children attended schools in those areas. Though the advent of RCM and the eventual establishment of a seminary at Uburu (in Mbaise, a neighbouring town to Owerri) gave a new religious dimension to group relations, the introduction of about eight or more Christian denominations with Protestant missions outnumbering the RCM made Owerri not only a colonial attraction but mostly Christian stronghold with its consequent promotion of intergroup relations. Owerri area subsequently witnessed influx of people from Onitsha, Bonny, Nkpo, Arochukwu, Enugu, Okigwe and environs who came for the purpose of trade, school and even in search for white collar jobs in the mission and colonial establishments; such people lived and interacted with the natives. Thus, missionary presence positioned Owerri area as a melting pot that fostered and promoted intergroup relations that was almost a mirage in the pre-missionary era.

It is also necessary to recall that these different Christian missions were founded mainly by outsiders, that is, non-indigenes, who settled within Owerri town and some within the neighbouring communities, attracting others of their kind into those areas. In their attempts to identify with the indigenes and, perhaps, to better their prospect of success amidst the various competing Christian denominations, some of them intermarried with the people, thereby winning more converts to themselves, attracting others, while maintaining a closer contact generally with the people. This form of contact invariably promoted intergroup relations between them and the indigenes on the one hand and their converts from within the various groups.

Mission Agencies as a Platform for Common Identity for Indigenes and Migrants

The coming of Christianity to Igbo heartland brought people of different communities under common denominations; these new converts came with their varied socio-cultural or group affiliation, but that notwithstanding, they immediately started interacting with other groups. These denominations became a new source of identity for such people, thereby deemphasizing their personal identities and ethnic affiliations to promote their denominational or Christian identity. It did more: it created a new form of integration because many of the settlers came from ethnic groups that were warring against each other. In this new community, self-definition is religious in character. Socio-religious identity assumed a heightened meaning and a depth that economic, political and ethnic identity has never been able to achieve. For them, religious identity became significant to understanding the network of economic revitalization, political engagement and national integration. Christianity became the anchor that held their life/world together, generating stability, meaning and other resources necessary for the larger world.

One sure way by which the mission agencies fostered a common identity for the Christian converts was through contacts between members of the same denomination in different

communities. As each group of missionaries thought in terms of and competed for spheres of influence, any community or group that was under the religious influence of a particular religious denomination was seen as part of that religious denomination and as members of the same Christian body. Thus, converts within a particular community saw themselves bound to converts of the same Christian denomination in another community as brothers and sisters, more than to members of their own group or community who were non converts. This possibly accounts for the close relationship that existed between members of CMS Egbu branch and the CMS members in Emohe Emii, who up to the present time are bound to each other by denominational virtues.

By binding people of different communities under one denomination, intergroup contacts between such members from different communities enhanced. Similarly, this accounts for the closer relationship between members of the RCM, especially worshippers at the Assumpta cathedral in Owerri town and members of the RCM in all the ten communities at Emekuku, as well as members of the same religious denomination in Umuawuka Emii. By infusing a common sense of brotherhood among members of the same Christian denomination irrespective of their groups or community affiliations, the Christian religious groups acted as agents of social integration. In this way Christianity in the Igbo heartland offered an inescapable oneness through what it preached which served as a factor that bound the members together despite their nativity.

It must be noted here, however, that much of the cordial relationship that were occasioned by the missionaries tilted towards bringing people of the same Christian denominations together. In most cases, the relationships between people of different denominations as well as that of non-converts were hostile. This could be noticed in the attitude of converts toward indigenous norms and values of the people. Missionary Enterprise in the Igbo heartland brought its consequential effect of recruiting membership to seemingly new ideas of God, new forms of worship, contrasting worldviews, new religious ethos and practices, new religious calendars and ritual practices. Nwadiolor and Umeanolue (2015) write that the advancing frontiers of missionary enterprise created situations of new opportunities, both for individuals and for the Igbo nation.... the missionaries changed indigenous Igbo society much more radically than either the government or the teachers did.... They offered western education, bringing attractive bait which indigenous religion could not offer. Afigbo (Cited in Nwadiolor and Umuanolue (2015) referring to the changing roles played by mission schools to the emergence of a modern Igbo nation observes that it was the instrument for mobilizing support for Christianity and by the same token for withdrawing support from the old social order. To this, individuals and groups that submitted to communal sanctions imposed by indigenous religion, custom, traditions and public opinion before the advent of Christianity revolted against some

traditional norms immediately they were converted. They were admitted into the mission houses as a community of believers where they were protected by the missionary authorities. Hence, it is apt to opine that the presence of these denominations in the Igbo heartland offered to its adherents and converts the courage to stand up against the obligations of the indigenous society and sanctions that were offensive to their new found moral ethos. The mission house became a safe haven for its adherents. They succeeded in producing outbreaks of popular religious fervor which represents hope for the despairing and voiceless who were lost in the anonymity of the traditional societal settings. New forms of solidarity and brotherhood arose, ensuring acceptance and security, mutual assistance and support.

Traditional sanctions were gradually replaced as Christianity offered to its adherents and converts the opportunity to stand up against the dehumanizing obligations of the indigenous society; hence another form of communities began to emerge around the mission houses. The communities knew no ethnic or tribal differences, it rather accommodated anyone who sought the protection of the missionaries against the dehumanizing traditional demands, and those who wanted to benefit from the proceeds of the missions agencies (Western education and health care services). Such intergroup relations were extended to people who were accommodated by missionaries of the same mission in other communities. There were also instances where twins were adopted by missions to prevent their killing.

Mission schools also provided opportunities for more contacts. The quest to acquire Western education made many young men and women to travel long distances from different cultural background to interact with other people in schools. This is also found among the teachers, catechists and pastors drawn from different groups or communities. Oral tradition has it that Onwu Dike from Nkwere and Ukwuoma from Amala, settled in Emeohe Emii to gain access to elementary education at the Seventh-Day Adventist Primary school. It is worthy to not that Ellen G. White, one of the pioneer members of Seventh-day Adventist Church maintains that wherever the church is planted, there should be schools there also. Pastor Clifford started an Adventist Primary School in Aba. The hunger for Christian education led the Church to establish in 1948 the Nigerian Training College at Ihie, about 15 miles from Aba. The Church followed up in September 1953 with the establishment of Adventist High School, Ihie, on the same premises with Canadian-born Lawrence Downing as its first Principal. This high school started with 28 students, 19 of whom were Seventh-day Adventists. Out of the 28, only three were girls. It did not take long before the schools became household names and highly sought after in Eastern Nigeria.

The quest for Western education, health services and religious instructions encouraged intergroup migrations. Despite that schools were agents for recruiting junior members of the Church; they also became opportunities for contact not only among the pupils but also for the teachers, catechists and pastors. It brings different groups and communities into a common ground, becoming agents of new forms of contact.

At the initial stage of their activities, missionaries had to persuade parents to send their children to these schools, even though education was then free. But as time went on most parents and students settled in those areas where the schools were established. For the women it was an opportunity for them to choose from among their male counterparts future husbands. Even after marriage, some resolved to settle close to the mission schools and churches, and perhaps, where such places offered better prospects of job opportunities, and perhaps, where as in the case of ex-slaves and outcasts, their freedom from their former masters was enhanced.

Apart from contacts through the schools, missionary activities gave rise to urbanization. In the Igbo heartland, some few relatively fairly developed communities like Owerri town, Egbu, Irette, Naze and Emekuku, occasioned the development in these areas of a higher situation of security and protection of life and property. This in turn attracted young men and women, job seekers and labourers in general, particularly from such areas like Upe, Umunnam and other communities in the present Ngor Okpalla local government area, where such facilities and opportunities were not available compared with the fairly developed communities mentioned above. This helped to intensify intergroup relations. Anukam (2000) notes, however, that the socio-psychological problems created by this phenomenon of working and living away from one's home or village affected the changing nature of the indigenous extended family system of the various communities. Since people moved to relatively more urban areas, the cohesiveness and control mechanism of the indigenous extended family system with all its mystique and religious ethos suffered a progressive decline in essence and observance. This problem was the prevalent situation within the surrounding towns like Avu, Umuguma, Afara, Ikeduru and other towns where a significant measure of residual social interaction and cooperation between them and the emerging urban centres occasioned this phenomenon of migration and settlement in the urban centres. This eventually occasioned sub-ethnic group in the Igbo heartland such as Emii Development Union, Imerienwe Progressive Union, just to mention but a few. The aim was to promote group cultural interest and security of their members while ensuring a harmonious relationship between its group members and their host communities.

The various missions, particularly the CMS also had in their attempts to maintain good and healthy medical services for their converts and themselves, established hospitals and

other medical and para-medical institutions. Chima (2021) asserts that the C.M.S mission in the Igbo heartland did not only open churches or schools but also hospitals in some places. The CMS three missionary objectives were Christianity, health and education. Damsteegt (1995) believes that “the integration of health reform into the vital part of the Seventh-Day Adventist theology of mission accounts for the emphasis in SDA’s thought on the intimate relationship of the human body and mind to the religious experience of the individual. Nyekwere (2004) further notes that “while the church was contemplating this idea, the Eastern Nigeria government who wanted to provide a hospital at Ahoada division invited the Seventh-Day Adventist to operate the hospital.

The number of such health institutions, and even the personnel was very small. What is more is that most of the medical institutions were located in the emerging urban centres. The locations of these health institutions were not within walking distance to their neighbouring communities. And given the increased daily need for such services, people often travelled long distances to receive medical attention. Patients from neighbouring towns and their relatives who could not easily obtain medical attention or meet up with medical appointments on the same day due to distance, chose to settle around the health institutions, especially where their medical cases require constant medication and for a period of time. Consequently, there developed in these towns where medical facilities are available a cluster of stranger elements or relatives of patients and their family members attracted to these towns as a result of these opportunities. By this way, a new intergroup relation between the larger elements and their host communities developed.

Perhaps, the most important aspect of the Protestant missionary enterprise in the promotion of intergroup relations in the Igbo heartland was the Bible translation into the Union Igbo, particularly Owerri dialect, which became as it were, a lingua franca of all other dialects within the surrounding communities in particular and Igbo land in general (Anuka, 2000). Ward (cited by Nwadike, 2012) informs that the Union Igbo (the Igbo Bible) was devised in order to provide the Bible in a form, which it was hoped would be easily understood by speakers of differing Igbo dialects. It was constructed from materials belonging to five areas (Bonny, Owerri, Arochukwu, Ngwana and Onitsha). It might be thought, indeed it has been considered, that it would fill the role of a literary medium for the Igbo people. As Owerri area was steadily becoming Bible district in Igbo land, scholars as well as priests were attracted for the translation business from surrounding communities. Anyannde (1970) observes that “amidst a polyglot of dialects in Igbo land, the Owerri Igbo was made an Esperanto of Igbo that caught on with the masses, thereby giving to the Igbo, a common vehicle of expression and a language of literature” (p. 283). This obvious position created an attraction among the people thereby promoting intergroup relations. Ilogu (1985) opines that the Union Igbo played a unifying role

among the various Christian groups who speak the Igbo language. Owerri area, apart from her central location, became a centre for missionary enterprise with churches, education and health institutions as points of contact and agents of intergroup relations.

Conclusion

This study has been able to establish that Protestant missions in the Igbo heartland provided the normative regional network and created avenues for effective intergroup relations in the area. This is in line with the argument of Ottenberg (cited in Dike and Ekejiuba, 1990) that “religion provides a normative basis for mediating expansion of community and inter-regional network” (p.13). It is no doubt, therefore, that missionary activities in the Igbo heartland fostered a new dawn of intergroup relations between communities in the area like Owerri, Amakohia, Awaka, Emii, Naze, Uratta, Irete, and so on, whose coming in contact more often resulted to inter-marriages, school environment relations, community of believers and workers. The centrality of Owerri area as the heartland of Igbo nation promoted intergroup relations. Intergroup migrations and mingling were encouraged as many young ones moved from one locality to another for education thereby enhancing subgroup affiliations and the population of these host communities increased owing to the presence of strangers searching for Western education, mission work, vocational training and health facilities. Population increased as a result of institutions established in the communities owing to the presence of strangers who had settled among them. Of recent, many people who work at Owerri reside in the neighboring communities and this further encourages intergroup relations in work places, religious or worship places, and even special gatherings. Hence, the study concludes that missionary presence in the Igbo heartland acted as a single factor of unity that fostered a measure of intergroup relations by bringing people together under one common religion, their varied culture or group affiliations notwithstanding. Anukam (2000) in this vein had argued that apart from the differences in the denominations (Anglicanism and Adventism) among its adherents, Protestant missions offered an inescapable oneness through a factor that bound members together. In Emohe Emii for instance, burial ceremonies, marriages, village meetings and other gatherings are mostly not fixed on Saturdays and Sundays in response to the beliefs and teachings of the two leading Protestant denominations in the community (Anglicanism and Adventism). This is so because mostly adherents are kins and kin who need the solidarity of each other during such gatherings. No other Igbo community has such a cooperation been recorded of these two denominations with opposing days of worship.

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