

INDIGENOUS RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY IN AN AFRICAN SOCIETY: A FOCUS ON NIMO, SOUTHEAST NIGERIA (1911-2011)

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Abstract

From the 1950s, Afrocentric scholars were greatly spurred on by the need to reconstruct and give a good view of their history after being distorted by Eurocentric scholars. To this, prominent Igbo scholars and concerned academics took it upon themselves to rewrite the wrongs of the past and give their different communities a truly African perspective of their history. However, in Nimo, eminent scholars have only focused their attention on other subjects of discourse like the history of Nimo, Nimo and her neighbours, Nimo Brotherhood Society, Nimo Social Clubs, Nimo Festivals, etc. No concrete work has been done on the traditional religious practices of the people before the coming of Christianity viz a viz the present fate of Christianity in the community. What we have is the existence of abridged information on the discourse that has not been properly collated and arranged for better understanding. Salient questions like what was the nature of the religious tradition of Nimo before the advent of the Christian missionaries? Who were these missionaries? How did the local inhabitants receive the good news? What were the consequences of their activities? What is the state of cultural and religious beliefs in Nimo in this present time? How strong is the Christian faith in this time? Were the concerns that engaged the focus of this research.

Keywords: African Traditional Religion, Christianity, 'Neo-Paganism', Syncretism

Introduction

It's an indubitable fact that Africa as a whole and indeed Nigeria in particular, has been a product of a coterie of external influences ranging from Slave Trade, Legitimate Trade, Christianity, Imperialism, Colonialism, and Neo-Colonialism. All these have had variegated consequences on the current Nigerian structure. These pervasive external influences have instigated most Euro-centric scholars to analyze and discuss African and particularly Nigerian history on the erroneous and parochial view that Western exertions form the basic part of Nigerian history. However, with particular reference to the Igbo history, reputable Nigerian scholars have refuted this skewed Western stance. Chief among these were Igbo scholars like AdieleAfigbo, who argues that:

The Igbo are a branch of the Negro race. This is important to the question of their origin. Available archaeological evidence suggests that this race may have

originated in along the latitude of Asselar and Khartoum that is more or less on the northernfringe of the savanna. One possible meaning of this is that the homeland of the Igbos cannot possibly lienorth of this latitude - that is as far north as Egypt, the Holy Land or Yemen."¹

The Christianity that was introduced in Nigeria had similar problems. The Westerners that brought Christianity to Nigeria despised the various traditional religious practices labelling them as fetish and inferior to their "superior" religion. The missionaries alleged that they were spurred by the need and desire to redeem Africa's backward and poverty-stricken people from the ruins of eternal darkness and damnation. They promoted everything Western and 'destroyed' anything Nigerian. They had core Western values, cultures, modes of dressing, ideas and languages as springboards to their works of evangelization. The rejection of the cultures and religious traditions of the Nigerian people by the whites led to the establishment and proliferation of "African Churches" in Nigeria. It is worthy to note here that the Christian missionaries that plied the coast and hinterland of Nigeria came in the late 19th century and early 20th century. They were motivated due to their successes in Sierra Leone and Liberia in the 19th century, after their unsuccessful adventures in Africa in the 15th and 16th centuries.

In Eastern Nigeria, the major Christian missionaries that held sway were the Holy Ghost Fathers and the Church Missionary Society. They established schools, churches, missions and hospitals for the people. Their activities have remained permeating and visibly felt till the present time. The ancient town of Nimo in the now Njikoka Local Government, Anambra State Nigeria, was privileged to be one of the first places the missionaries established their base in the defunct Awka region. The first missionaries were the Holy Ghost Fathers led by a French priest Fr. Jean-Joseph Bubendorf, who arrived at Nimo on 14th July 1911. His arrival was facilitated by a young boy Micheal, son of Chief Giniwefolu Onyuike, who met Fr. Bubendorf at Onitsha and succeeded in persuading him to make the trip to Nimo². From then, missionary activities took off at a great speed, and the rest they say is history.

This research paper attempts to unravel the state of traditional religious practices of the people of Nimo before the coming of Christianity. It also discusses the activities and nature of the imprint of Christianity on the Nimo society. It goes further to analyze the present state of Christian faith in the community as it concerns the current practices of syncretism and neo-paganism in the socio-religious lives of the people. Generally, the work aims at reconstructing a section of the history of Nimo which will remain relevant in years to come.

Methodology of the Study and Sources

This work has a combination of both thematic and chronological approaches. It also applies the analytical method in reviewing and analyzing the available historical tools and facts available to the researcher to present a credible and comprehensive academic work. Also, it uses the narrative approach to lay bare the various narrative topics in this work, like the Origin of Nimo. It further adopts some basic social science methods in accounting for how Nimo people set up socio-political structures to regulate their day-to-day activities. The descriptive method is used to describe the traditional practices, the missionaries' activities, and the people's responses to the new religion. It applies the comparative approach in analyzing and comparing the differing existing beliefs affecting the Christian faith in Nimo. Finally, all these methods are combined with history in attempting a historical analysis of indigenous religious practices and Christianity in Nimo. The sources of this work were drawn from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were mainly oral interviews conducted by the researcher using a tape recorder and note-taking. The interviews were conducted with respected Chiefs and titled-men of the community, religious leaders, retired civil servants, and the aged people with high knowledge of the topic of our discourse and so on. Another primary source of information was archival materials obtained from the National Archive Enugu, Nigeria. The secondary sources were mostly obtained from published and unpublished sources such as books and relevant magazines and some relevant undergraduate and postgraduate theses located at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria. In addition, the researcher also made use of some important internet sources.

Conceptual Clarification

For the sake of easy comprehension by an average reader, the researcher deems it wise to give a common and clearer explanation of some of the concepts used in his work.

African Traditional Religion

African traditional religion refers to the indigenous religion of the African people. It deals with their cosmology, ritual practices, symbols, arts, society and so on. Because religion is a way of life, it relates to culture and society as they affect the worldview of the African people.³ It is also the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans. It is the religion that resulted from sustaining the faith held by the forebears of the Africans and which is being practised today in various forms and various shades and intensities by a very large number of Africans.⁴

Christianity

Christianity is the religion based on the person and teachings of Jesus Christ or its beliefs and practices.⁵ As Paul, the spokesman for the early church, would put it, Christianity is the good news concerning a historical person, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. On the human side, the latter was born of the royal seed of David and demonstrated to be the son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead. Jesus Christ himself that good news: his person, his life—what he did, taught and claimed; his death---what is accomplished; and his resurrection that demonstrated that his claims were true. These historical facts are the heart of the Christian gospel, and the New Testament is the record of them and their implications.⁶

Neo-Paganism

Sonia Weidner Maluf defines neo-paganism as a concept used to designate a variety of religious and spiritual movements from the second half of the twentieth century, which claim a pagan influence and ancestry based on different lines of paganism⁷. According to crystalinks.com, neo-paganism is a modern religious movement that seeks to incorporate beliefs or ritual practices from traditions outside the main world religions⁸. The researcher finds this definition of ‘neo-paganism’ as derogatory to the people who practice it, and inappropriate to the basic knowledge of religion. Paganism is a religion on its own and the revival and resurgence of original traditional religious practices (before the advent of Christianity) should be classified as ‘neo-liberal traditional religion’. But for the sake of this work, he adopts the ‘neo-paganism’ term to describe the prevalence of the conscious return to traditional religious practices by the people of Nimofor a general understanding of the situation in the community.

Syncretism

It can be defined as the taking of the structures, beliefs and practices of Christianity and accommodating them to fit the host culture or blending the tenets of Christianity with the dominant culture so that Christianity loses its distinctiveness.⁹ Syncretism, therefore, from a theological perspective, constitutes religious adultery. It means an inauthentic principle of combining bits of various creeds, ideologies and views, including those contradicting, to formulate a completely new doctrine.¹⁰ At the end, the basic Christian teachings are diluted or destroyed.¹¹

Literature Review

Some books were consulted in the course of this work. Some vital information contained in this work was gotten from these texts. It should be noted that none of the authors of these books wrote extensively or particularly on the subject of this discourse.

Ropes of Sand by our own renowned Adiele Afigbo¹² was able to trace the origin of the Igbos from the Negro race rather than the hitherto Jewish assumptions. He has also argued following linguistic lines that the Igbo form part of the Kwa sub-group of the Niger-Congo family.

In the book, *Groundwork of Nigerian history*¹³, Adiele Afigbo argues that the Igbo have been in their present home for a very long time. Hinging on the available archaeological evidence that D.D Hartle carried out a test excavation at the University of Nigeria Nsukka Agricultural farm; the result was that human occupation in the area dates back to 2,555 B.C. + 130. This finding lends credence to the researcher's position that Nimo as a community has been in existence for a very long time, and the documentation of their history was a recent development.

*The Definition of Christianity*¹⁴ by David Gooding and John Lennox recounts how the seed of Christianity was sown by Jesus Christ, which germinated after his death. His resurrection was the turning point of Christianity. Without the resurrection, Christians would have lacked the courage to confront the world, and on their confession, they would have had no gospel to confront the world.

The author of the work titled, *An Introduction to Christian Theology*¹⁵, traces the origin of Christianity from Judaism. He goes further to recount the activities of Christ on earth, how he started preaching in the temples, assembled his disciple, was persecuted and later died. He also narrates how his disciples continued and expanded the scope of his ministry on earth after his resurrection.

J.O Awolalu, in his work, *What is African Traditional Religion?*¹⁶, views the African traditional religion as the indigenous beliefs and practices of the Africans. He also posits that it is a religion that resulted from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present Africans and which is being practised today in various forms and various shades and intensities by a very large number of Africans.

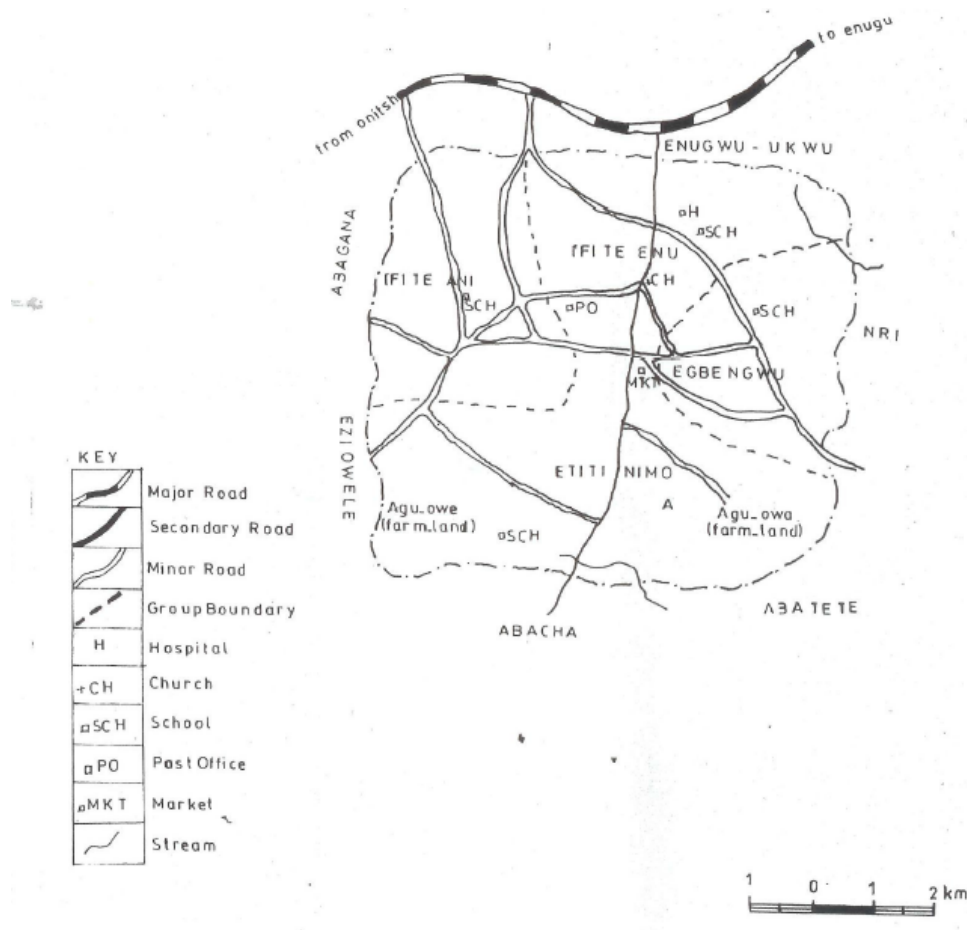
In *Modes of Syncretism*¹⁷, the authors (John Law, Geir Afdal, Kristin Asdal, Wen-yuan Lin, Inguun Moser, Vicky Singleton) explain syncretism as the process of combining practices taken from other different religious traditions.

In the brochure, *Centenary Celebrations of the Advent of Catholic Church in Nimo*¹⁸, the editor narrated how Catholicism came to Nimo through the help one Michael Onyiuke. He further reported how the first Catholic mission was built at Uruegbe.

In her unpublished dissertation, *A Historical Analysis of Nimo Brotherhood Society in the Development of Nimo Community in Anambra State 1932-2007*¹⁹, MrsEzedinachi Edith Ifeoma highlights the origin of Nimo, the land and people of Nimo.

Geographical Location of Nimo

The geographical location of Nimo is important in the understanding of the present discourse. Indeed as J.C. Anene has pointed out, the historical experiences of a community are generally "written in its geographical features".²⁰ Nimo is an Igbo town located in the western part of Njikoka Local Government Area of Anambra State, sharing common boundaries with Enugwu-Ukwu on the North, Abacha and Abatete on the South. It shares boundaries with Neni, Adazi and AguUkwuNri on the Eastern side, and it is bordered on the western side by Eziowelle and Abagana.²¹



MAP OF NIMO SHOWING MAIN SECTIONS

Brief Tradition of Origin

There are some limitations in the aspect of the documentation of the origin of Nimo as it was a pre-literate society heavily reliant on oral sources, which were prone to manipulations and distortions from generation to generation. A.E Afigbo saw the reason for this problem "as the absence of a literate culture among the Igbo until the imposition of European rule."²² In a bid to close this gap, in 1936, the District Officer (D.O.) Awka Division, Mr P.V. Main worked on and filed an intelligence report on Nimo village and their pre-colonial administration. This intelligence report reported that Nimo and her neighbours Abagana, Abba and Ezi-Owelle had a common ancestor called Owelle. He further opines that 'Nimo elders have little history to relate beyond legend'.²³ However, the story of the foundation of their village is that a certain Owelle who came from some unknown part further north settled with his wife Oma at a site halfway between Nimo and Eziowelle, Abba and Abagana. Owelle was said to have four sons, namely Nimo, Eziowelle, Abba and Abagana. Each founded the present villages of that name. The villages of Nimo, according to Main, have one genealogical group. It traces its descent paternally from a legendary eponymous ancestor, Nimo. It has four main quarters descended from the four sons of Nimo, namely: Ifite-Enu, Ifite-Ani (Uruokofia and Oteni sub-quarter), Egbengwu and Etiti-Nimo. These four quarters are composed of varying members of the extended families or exogamous groups.²⁴

Like most pre-literate societies of Africa, their traditions of origin tend to have diverse accounts. Another version of tradition maintains that the original ancestor is Owelle who married Omaigbo and they had four children: Abagana, Nimo, Abba and Eziowelle. Nimo is said to have four sons viz: Ezenebo, Ezeabani, Okpaladinwe and Ojideleke²⁵. DandaAnakpeAnalikwu strongly supports this claim averring that "Okpaladinwe fathered EtitiNimo and Ojideleke begot Egbengwu. Ezenebo had Ifite-Ani while Okpalabani bore Ifite-Enu"²⁶. These formed the four quarters of Nimo. By and large, there is a general consensus as to the fatherhood of Owelle over Nimo, with EtitiNimo, Ifite-Ani, Ifite-Enu and Egbengwu as his grandsons and the various exogamous groups representing the present-day council ward areas as his great grandsons. In other words, the general notion is that the extended family names are those of the great grandsons of Nimo. However, this is not likely to be true of all the extended family units, because several generations have certainly passed, some families have died out and some immigrants have been included.²⁷

Socio-Political Administration of Nimo

Although Nimo, like other Igbo towns, was generally an acephalous society, she had various structures that helped her govern the people and maintain a stable society in those days. Some of them were: The lowest administration unit (Extended family): This was

made up of several family units, each consisting of a husband, wives and children and was varied in villages and quarters. Adult male members met in the "Obu" of this earlier common ancestor in matters affecting this group. The Obu was a small meeting house originally built by this ancestor in his compound to house his "Ofo", a fetish object and a symbol of manhood. He and his descendants would make sacrifices to this 'Ofo' for family protection.²⁸ The Quarter Council was the next effective unit of administration in the village. It met at the Obu house of the Senior Obu holder. All adult males attended the meeting. Again, the senior titled man present presided and announced decisions; again, he had no individual authority.²⁹ The Titled men occupied similar positions in the Quarter Councils as they did in family councils.³⁰ Administratively, the title holders in Nimo had an influence amounting to authority in religious and social matters, but in the administration and judiciary unless also in a majority, they did not have authority but influence.³¹ In judicial matters, if both parties were of the same extended family, the family council met at the senior *Obu* meeting house; if the dispute was between two families, both family councils met at the quarter *Obu* house. If the case were between two quarters, the village meeting places would be at the Oye market Nimo.³²

Administratively, Nimo was rated highly. P.V. Main had this to say Nimo has at no time been troublesome to Government. It was always shown marked adhesion unanimity with its village council. Since the introduction of taxation, payments have been made in time, and there has been a little need to send reminders or prosecute for non-payment as there has been in some neighbouring villages".³³

Traditional Practices in Nimo before the Advent of Christianity

Before the coming of Christianity in Nimo, the people were deeply rooted in traditional religion like other Igbo people, which centred on the belief in one and only supreme God called Chi-Ukwu, Chi-Ukwu-Onyeokike, (The Supreme Being and the God the Creator); who can be approached or worshipped through the intermediary of deities.³⁴

Some of these practices were:

Ima Chi (Initiation Rites)

This is a process of initiation to the gods of the land of a young boy in the community. My informant believes that this is the first acceptance process into the society a young boy has to undergo.³⁵ It entails a series of rites to be performed by the village Chief Priest to dedicate the boy to the gods of the land and entrust him to his own *chi* (God), which will serve as a symbol of protection, guidance, direction which will eventually lead the young boy to his destiny in life.

Ime Oye (Festival of the gods)

Chief Orafu strongly posits that this is the highest ceremony the people of Nimo celebrate after the feast of other regional and smaller ceremonies of lesser deities like AkpuNgene, Eke Mkpukpa, Eke Akpaka, Udo di Aba and so on³⁶. DandaAnakpe posits that this festival is for men only. It is done on Eke and Oye markets days. Families of five or six can combine and buy a cow for the festival. That it is the last feast done in Nimo.³⁷

Ikwa Ozu (Funeral Rites)

Ekperah agreed that in the olden days, men and women did not observe the dust-to-dust rites that it is a recent development that Christianity brought.³⁸ Tony Eke asserts that there was nothing like dust-to-dust right during burials in the olden days that Christianity brought it. When a man or woman dies, none of them goes near to the grave of the other. He said that the olden people saw it as dreadful for the man or woman to do that for his/her partner, believing that marriage ends with death ³⁹.

Alo Mmuo/IwaJi (New Yam Festival)

It comes up in August of every year. It begins on Afor day and ends onNkwo, thus lasting two days⁴⁰. Reuben Orafu said that relatives from paternal and maternal sides visit each other during the ceremony to celebrate. He tagged it "OririNgamiga" (Feast of Passover). That all spirits, land and water, will come to celebrate this feast. Each person makes merry according to the deepness of his pocket, but it is imperative for titled men to slaughter goat or cow. He said that this feast is in existence in the whole Negro race and the world at large.⁴¹

Alu (Taboo)

Chief Orafu listed taboos in Nimo to include: killing/shedding of one's blood, sexual intercourse with a fellow brother or sister, stealing, performing dust-to-dust rites, to engage in abortion. He observes that taboos are up to 100 to the best of his knowledge.⁴²

Ikpu Alu (Spiritual Cleansing)

Chief Orafu opines that this rite is done to cleanse the curses from a taboo committed. Fowl, goat, ram, a cow can be used in this rite. It is also used to exonerate the innocent ones from the actual culprits of the offence.⁴³

Iku Arusi (Worship of gods)

Micheal Ebuanyi observes that this is the exclusive reserve of the eldest man in the community or kindred. He feeds the gods of land and offers prayers to the gods on behalf of the people.⁴⁴Ekperah agrees that it is meant for the eldest man in the kindred. He can hand it over to a younger person to perform the rites.⁴⁵ Reuben Orafu opines that it is done accordingly by age. It is not by appointment. Anybody that declines when it is his turn to look after the gods of the land will not reap the benefits that should accrue to him.⁴⁶

Izu Ahia Mmadu (Slave trade)

My informant opines that it was not only in Nimo that slave trade was practiced that it was done in the whole of West Africa and Africa. He agreed to the fact that Nimo traded in slaves.⁴⁷ Ekperah recounts that the warrant chiefs were the ones that perpetrated this act. That it was mostly done where there was existence of stone houses like that of Owelle Micheal Onyiuke. One slave was sold for 1 pound equivalent of 24 shillings during that time and people made a lot of money from it which they used to build the stone houses. He posits that there were bandits working for the warrant chiefs in getting the slaves for the white men.⁴⁸ Chief Reuben Orafu posits that a notorious person during those of slave trade was sold off to the whites. He also admitted that people engaged in kidnapping of their enemies and sold them off.⁴⁹

The Advent of Christianity in Nimo

For this work, our main focus will be on the Roman Catholic Church to mark the Centenary Celebration of Catholicism in Nimo in 2011. The Catholic mission that operated in Eastern Nigeria was founded by a party of four missionaries of Holy Ghost Congregation after their arrival at Onitsha in December 1885.⁵⁰ The party was led by Rev. Fr. Joseph Lutz, a French missionary. Others included Rev. Horne, Brothers John and Hermas, who later professed. They arrived in Onitsha to open a mission on a piece of land where the Holy Trinity Cathedral Onitsha is situated today, provided for them by Anazonwu, the then Obi of Onitsha.⁵¹ In 1891, the Aguleri mission was opened with branches at Igbariam and Nteje and Nsugbe inclusive in 1892. The presence of the Nteje mission turned out to be a blessing to the Nimo people together with their neighbouring towns like Adazi, Obeledu etc.⁵² A little over a century ago, precisely on 14th July 1911, a French Priest, Fr. Jean-Joseph Bubendorf, brought the gospel to Nimo. The visit was facilitated by a young boy Michael, son of Chief Giniwefolu Onyiuke of Nimo, who met Fr. Bubendorf at Onitsha and persuaded him to make the trip to Nimo. He was accompanied on the trip by Fr. Delaney, Fr. Trieck and Mr Daniel Ikpechukwu, who was a catechist, carpenter and interpreter.⁵³

On their arrival and with the advice of Michael Onyiuke, Fr. Bubendorff and his team made their first port of call at Chief Nwaelom residence, the most popular among the chiefs in Nimo as of then. After explaining their objectives which were based on converting the indigenes of Nimo to Catholicism and introduction of Western education, they requested and was given an evil forest land at Uruegbe to set up their mission/school.⁵⁴ The people set to work immediately cutting down trees and preparing rude posts. A sizeable church building/ school were erected by the joint efforts of the people of Nimo at the end of the day.⁵⁵



URUEGBE MISSION ERECTED IN THE 1930s

The church and school already started at Uruegbe were left under Mr Daniel Ikpechukwu, a native of Umudioka, then under Idemili North Local Government Area. Daniel proved equal to the task of combining the work of a catechist and a teacher. The church and school were progressively growing under MrIkpechukwu, adding new converts who were mainly men attended the church services conducted by the catechist and occasionally they attended church service at Nteje this is because Nimo was outstation of Nteje as of then; the missionaries only visit from Nteje to Nimo to see the success of the church and school established at Uruegbe village Nimo. The education as of then mainly consisted of religion, arithmetic, reading and writing.⁵⁶ After a year of evangelization, there were enough converts to merit the celebration of mass for them in the town. Consequently, on 14th July 1912, Holy Mass was said for the first time in the thatched house at Uruegbe. This Eucharistic celebration fell on the feast day of St. Bonaventure, and for this reason, the new church and school were named after this great Doctor of the Church. By 1913,

thirty-seven catechumens who were ready for baptism were baptized at Nteje. They were later on 2nd August 1914, administered the sacrament of confirmation also at Nteje.⁵⁷

The establishment of the Assumption Catholic Church resulted from insufficient land at Uruegbe due to the ever-increasing congregation and the growth of the Catholic Church in Nimo. Thus, the need for expansion became imperative. This development necessitated building the gigantic and more befitting church at OfiaUdo, Ifite-EnuNimo, while the Uruegbe mission became Uruegbe Primary School Nimo. This effort was successful as a result of the influence of Chief Michael MoyekwuOnyiuke, who was able to secure the present massive hectares of land located at Ifite-Enu village Nimo without resistance from the traditional religionists.⁵⁸ By 1992, Assumption Parish became a one town parish and had the remaining three-quarters of Nimo as outstations. God has continued to bless the parish as the number of faithful continued to swell such that soon, the quarter outstations became fit to be independent parishes. Eventually, the Catholic Bishop of Awka Diocese made them parishes in this sequence: St. Mary's Parish EgbengwuNimo (1995), St. Vincent's Parish Ifite-AniNimo (1995), St. Kevin's Parish EtitiNimo (2000).⁵⁹

The contribution of Chief M. Onyiuke to the mission growth in Nimo is best summed up by this comment by Fr. Jordan CSSP:

The Nimo boy who was chosen from training at the mission and afterwards baptized Michael became Chief of the town some years later and did tremendous work for the church there. He remained first-rate Catholic from the day of his baptism despite the great lure of 'paganism', always for those who have wealth and influence enough to enjoy it.; wealth he certainly had which he gave lavishly to every good and charitable cause and when he died a great Catholic went to a great reward"⁶⁰

THE CURRENT FACE OF OUR LADY OF ASSUMPTION CATHOLIC CHURCH IFITE-ENU, NIMO BUILT SINCE 1958



The Activities of the Missionaries

The Catholic missionaries had the full support of the important chiefs of Nimo, which encouraged them to embark on a series of activities and programs that facilitated and internalized the seed of Christianity in the people of Nimo. Gifts like singlets, holy pictures, gramophones, sandals, and biscuits were given out to the people, infant baptism conducted for both the young and the old, celebration of feast days especially during traditional festivals, house-to-house evangelization, the establishment of the Uruegbe Trading centre for the economic stability of the mission and setting of schools formed the major part of their missionary work in Nimo.⁶¹

Responses by the Local Inhabitants

The responses were relative and differed in certain quarters and places. The village chiefs welcomed them, and a great number of the people followed the chiefs' direction, which led to massive conversion to Christianity. However, some hardcore traditionalists refused the adoption of Christianity vehemently. An allusion is made after the sudden death of Chief Michael Onyiuke in 1937. In the absence of this church pillar, the traditional religionists made inroads into the congregation, leading many astray. As a result, many became apostates, while syncretism became common among the remnants of the faithful.⁶² Some rejected Christianity because they were not ready to leave their evil practices like the killing of twins, slave trade, cannibalism etc. which the church was out to end. Others accepted Christianity because of one societal problem which they hoped would be solved by the white men.

The Consequences of Their Activities

Education remains the most pervasive influence. The missionaries set up institutions of learning which helped to sow the seeds of educational excellence and human capacity development in Nimo. As such, Nimo has produced eminent personalities in all walks of life. Lawyers of repute like Justice G.C.M Onyiuke, who later became the Chief Justice of Tanzania, Justice G.U Ononiba (Former Chief Judge of Anambra State who is the current Traditional Prime Minister of the community). Erudite scholars like Dr Paul Akubue became the first Nimo man to acquire a Doctorate Degree and later a Professor (Pharmacy). Successful business moguls who set up their major industries in Nimo like Sir. P.C Omabu, Sir John Odiike, Chief Oliobi (Olimax who is the current Traditional Ruler of the community) amongst others.⁶³

zzzAlso, the church did not only introduce Western education based on reading and writing. Still, it further incorporated basic skills like tailoring, carpentry, masonry, sewing, knitting, and embroidery, which raised the people's standard of living. By the close of the 1930s, Nimo building technicians and artisans were highly regarded for their craftsmanship and technical abilities. They were engaged in government establishment such as the Nigeria Railways, Public Work departments, public and private establishment all over Nigeria.⁶⁴

Spiritually, Nimo has been transformed from a largely pagan town to a Christian dominated town. The people had abandoned their traditional religion in submission to Christianity. Though presently, this stance has been seriously challenged and undermined by the upsurge of neo-paganism and syncretism.

Christianity in Nimo in the Present Time

African Traditional Religion in Incongruity with Culture

Most recently, these two concepts have been used interchangeably and most unfortunately erroneously in Nimo. People no longer differentiate between the practice of religion and observance of core cultural norms and values. In our usual Igbo parlance, culture is "omenala" while African Traditional Religion is "igo/imearusi". Some Christians have always referred to pagan worshippers as "ndiomenala", an aberration when translated into English (people who practice culture). Culture is the people's way of life and should be practised by all members, not by a stereotyped few. Adherents to African Traditional Religion should be tagged as "ndiarusi" (worshippers of idols). The coming of Christianity has created a cavity in differentiation between traditional religious rites and cultural beliefs and norms. This situation has given birth to syncretism.

Syncretism in Nimo

Wilfred Eke observes that this exist in Nimo, and the major reason for this is the lack of a basic understanding of the Christian faith and doctrines.⁶⁵ Tony Eke believes that those who practice syncretism in Nimo do so because of fear of death and to avoid the wrath of any of the gods.⁶⁶ G. U Ononiba posits that syncretism occurs because of the indiscipline of the people and defects of Christianity.⁶⁷ My informant admits that the cause of this is greed and insatiability of the people of God to be content with what they have.⁶⁸ Syncretism has created a new phenomenon in Nimo called "ojeuka....ago mmuo" (Biblically, being hot and cold at the same time). The researcher sees the inability of understanding, clarifying and differentiate traditional religious beliefs from the basic cultural practices of the people of Nimo as the major cause of this.

'Neo-Paganism' in Nimo

There has been a conscious return to 'paganism' by core Christian converts. It has been a big concern to the priests, the custodians of the faith and the whole people of God. My informant conceives that this situation is brought about out the dire economic situation in the country, which has caused poverty, hunger and avarice among the people. The lure of consuming great lumps of meat and chicken at shrines has led people, especially the youths, into this.⁶⁹ Also, Otie agrees that youth unemployment, failed destinies, poverty, and hunger are the major causes.⁷⁰

Conclusion

In all, the challenges of these recent religious developments in Nimo are enormous, which have affected key decisions in the community. The contestation created by the inability of some groups to differentiate between traditional religion and culture properly has made

people to conflate and observe the two practices as one, while others see them as totally different concepts that should be addressed and observed differently. Also, the current practices of 'neo-paganism' and syncretism have sharply divided the Nimo society into factions, sects, groups and diverse schools of thought. As a result, issues affecting the well-being and future of Nimo are treated and argued from one's or groups' points of view. These militate against coherence and cooperation among the people of Nimo, thus affecting key decision-making in the community.

From a Christian point of view, one can argue that the worship of God adversely suffers due to the existence and practice of these realities. Only a few persons still practice their Christian beliefs and norms in the most acceptable way. Many have become nominal Christians rather than living out the true Christian life. Little wonder, Augustine Isinwa retorts that the state of Christianity is poor and at an all-time low.⁷¹ J.U Ononiba avers that he is not impressed with the state of things in the practice of Christianity in Nimo, blaming the priests, religious and the lay faithful for this malaise.⁷²

The researcher concludes this work by positing that Christianity brought civilization and contributed immensely to the human capital development of Nimo. Ultimately, it changed the religious landscape of a largely 'pagan' community into a strong Christian society. This transformation has encouraged Christians within the community to call for the discontinuation of the current practices of 'neo-paganism' and syncretism. However, he is of the opinion that all members of the community are at liberty to practice whatever they believe in provided it doesn't in anyway affect the lives, properties and overall development of the community.

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