

CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES AND THEIR IMPACT IN AFIKPO, EBONYI STATE

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ABSTRACT

One of the major mandates of the European Christian missionaries in Nigeria was the propagation of Christianity. To achieve this, missionaries were dispatched to various regions and communities across the country with the aim of converting the people from their traditional religions to Christianity. In addition, the missionaries sought to eradicate certain practices they considered inhuman—such as the killing of twins—and to promote legitimate trade as a replacement for the slave trade. This study examines and evaluates the roles, activities, and impact of the European missionaries in Afikpo, Ebonyi State. The study relied primarily on secondary sources such as books, academic journals, newspaper articles, and other relevant literature. The findings reveal that European missionaries, particularly the Presbyterian and Catholic missions, made significant impacts in Afikpo. However, their activities also brought about social disruption and cultural change within the community. The study concludes by recommending sustained collaboration between the European mother Churches that sent the missionaries to Nigeria and their Nigerian branches, in order to promote mutual partnership and further development.

Keywords: Christianity, missionaries, Catholic mission, churches, Afikpo.

INTRODUCTION

Although Afikpo lies geographically at a cultural crossroads—sharing borders with both Igbo-speaking communities and non-Igbo-speaking areas of Cross River State—its location did little to make it receptive to change, especially to foreign or alien cultures. This may explain why the people resisted the peaceful entry of both Christian missionaries and British colonial agents. For instance, as early as 1883, the Church of Scotland Mission (now known as the Presbyterian Church) visited Unwana, a sister clan about 20 kilometers from Afikpo. The people of Unwana welcomed the missionaries warmly, and by 1888 a primary school and a Church had already been established there. Yet, despite this proximity, the people of Afikpo continued to resist both the missionaries and government agents from entering their land.

However, in December, 1902, British forces invaded Afikpo with the primary aim of extending British occupation, securing a suitable location for a district headquarters, and ensuring the safety of the Presbyterian mission station at Unwana. According to Aja (2005), Major Heneker, the leader of the British forces, was instructed to convene a meeting of the Afikpo people—possibly in Unwana—to persuade them to peacefully provide a site for the establishment of a government station. At the meeting, the people were to be informed that the government would protect them from hostile enemies once the headquarters was established, but that, if they refused, the government would proceed to occupy the area by force if necessary.

In reality, no such meeting ever took place. Efforts by the British to reach a peaceful settlement through Unwana chiefs failed, as none volunteered to travel to Afikpo. The people of Afikpo were so fierce and warlike that no chief or elder from neighbouring clans dared to take messages from the white man to them. As Afigbo (1973) notes:

The people of Afikpo would not allow a government post to be established in their territory and would not even receive messengers sent to negotiate with them. They went as far as to attack the village group of Enohia Itim, which was pro-British, and to ambush British fact-finding parties. So stubborn and determined was the Afikpo resistance to the British that none of their neighbours friendly with the government would take messages from the white man to them.

Subsequently, on December 28, 1902, a British military force was dispatched from Unwana to attack Afikpo. Although the Afikpo people were eventually defeated, they displayed remarkable courage. Aja (2005), quoting Heneker, recounts that the people “showed great bravery in crawling through to get close to quarters.”

Following their defeat, the British colonial government gained unhindered access to the area, and the missionaries soon followed. Against this background, this study seeks to assess and evaluate the activities and impact of Christian missionaries in Afikpo. To achieve this objective, the paper is organized into several sections. Following this introduction, the second section briefly examines the geographical and cultural setting of Afikpo. The third section discusses the activities of Christian missions in Afikpo, with particular reference to the Presbyterian and Catholic missions. The fourth section analyses the challenges and impacts of Christian missionary work, while the final section concludes with policy recommendations on how to build upon the legacies of the early Christian missionaries in Afikpo.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Modernization theory provides a useful lens for understanding Christian missions in Nigeria because missions actively promoted the transformation of African societies along Western lines—through education, healthcare, moral reforms, and cultural reorientation. Modernization theory is defined as a framework that views development as a uniform evolutionary process through which all societies’ progress from traditional agricultural structures to postindustrial, modern forms, emphasizing internal socioeconomic factors such as education and market economies while recognizing science and technology as critical catalysts for this transformation.

Christian missionary activities in Nigeria particularly between the 19th and 20th centuries—aligned structurally and ideologically with modernization processes. Missions served as agents of social change, pushing societies toward what they considered “modern” values and institutions. Modernization theory is suitable in explaining the missionary activities in Nigeria because missionaries presented themselves as modernizers who:

- brought Western education
- influenced political and economic transformations
- introduced new institutions and values
- Missions built the earliest formal schools in many African regions.
- Education promoted literacy, new occupational roles, and bureaucratic skills associated with modern society.
- Mission schools created an African educated elite, essential for modern states
- Missionaries introduced Western medical systems—clinics, hospitals, sanitation campaigns.
- This helped reduce mortality and improve public health, enabling demographic transition.
- Health interventions supported modernization’s idea of improving “human capital.”

This matches modernization theory’s emphasis on education and health as a driver of societal changes.

AFIKPO: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Afikpo, located in present-day Ebonyi State, is inhabited by a people who traditionally identify themselves as Nde Ehugbo (“the people of Ehugbo”). During the colonial period, European administrators found the name *Ehugbo* difficult to pronounce and consequently adopted the name *Afikpo*, which was later formalized in colonial records.

Geographically, Afikpo occupies a unique cultural crossroads, sharing boundaries with both Igbo-speaking communities and non-Igbo-speaking groups in present-day Cross River State. This strategic location positioned Afikpo as one of the few Igbo-speaking regions with direct historical and cultural interactions with non-Igbo populations along the western bank of the Cross River.

Culturally, the people of Afikpo display distinctive features that set them apart from many other Igbo groups. These include a double descent system of kinship, a composite nucleated village pattern, and a well-structured age-grade system of governance. They, however, share these characteristics with other Eastern (Cross River) Igbo communities such as Edda, Ohafia, Abiriba, Arochukwu, Abam, Bende, Nkporo, Item, Alayi, and Igbere. Additionally, they share similarities in marriage and burial rites, as well as in traditional norms regulating marital ceremonies and social conduct.

The next section will provide a detailed examination of the arrival of European missionaries in Afikpo, highlighting the challenges they encountered and the transformative impact of their activities on the lives of the inhabitants. However, before discussing the coming of Christianity in Afikpo, it is pertinent to first examine the traditional religious practices that existed among the people prior to the advent of Christianity.

INDIGENOUS RELIGION BEFORE THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFIKPO

Jonathan Boucher (1998) defines religion as a fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity which may be variously designated. In traditional African societies, most of the laws governing the people were religiously based. Similarly, Martey (1994) argues that religion permeates every aspect of African life, and therefore, there is no dichotomy between the religious and the socio-political spheres. According to Martey, “even the drum that accompanies the traditional ruler to the durbar speaks a religious language”. For him, the African worldview is characterized by a unitary perception of life.

This unitary worldview explains why, in most traditional African societies, religion not only provided an explanation of human existence and destiny but also served as the moral and social force by which laws and customs were made, obeyed, and enforced. Within this context, the indigenous religion of Afikpo played a central role in shaping communal life. It guided moral conduct, sustained social harmony, and provided spiritual assurance. This strong religious foundation may partly explain why the Afikpo people initially resisted both the European religion and colonial administration until they were subdued. The indigenous religion was thus the bedrock upon which the people built their moral values, governance systems, and collective identity.

Like other African peoples, the ancestors of Afikpo were fully human—with emotions such as hunger, thirst, anger, fear, and curiosity. They feared the unknown and the unseen powers believed to govern their environment. Religion therefore offered them comfort, protection, and a framework for understanding life’s mysteries. It provided a basis for moral behavior and social order, which the entire community subscribed to and enforced.

The people of Afikpo believed in the existence of a Supreme Being who is called by various names such as *Chineke* (the Creator), *Chukwu* (the Great God), and *Obasi n’elu* (the God whose abode is in the heavens). However, they also held that the Supreme God was too exalted and distant to be approached directly. Communication with Him was therefore made possible through intermediaries—lesser deities and ancestral spirits—who acted as messengers in the theocratic order of the universe.

This understanding accounts for the proliferation of deities in Afikpo such as *Ali* (Earth Deity), *Esim Okike*, *Mkpurukem*, *Ibini Ukpabi*, *Itara*, *Evegari*, *Enyum Ukwu*, *Ngele Ukwuelu*, *Akarakara Nde Ijokwu*, and *Nfijioku*, among others. These deities were believed to perform specific functions within the cosmic and social order, ensuring justice, fertility, protection, and the moral balance of the community (Oko, Unya & Igariwey, 2022).

THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFIKPO

Afikpo belongs to the category of early Igbo communities that came into contact with both European traders and Christian missionaries. Its geographical location along the Cross River significantly facilitated this early interaction. Afigbo (1980), describing the vital role of the Cross River during the colonial era—before the construction of roads and railways—observed that the river served as a major highway through which “light and civilization” penetrated the former Eastern Region.

The establishment of British rule further deepened intergroup relations through the creation of administrative units such as provinces, divisions, and districts, which enabled missionaries to penetrate the hinterlands without fear. The significance of the Cross River also stemmed from the arrival of the Church of Scotland Mission (now known as the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria) in Calabar in 1846, under the leadership of Rev. Hope Masterton Waddell.

By 1883, British agents—including missionaries, explorers, and administrators—had reached Unwana, a neighbouring clan to Afikpo. The elders of Unwana warmly received the Europeans, resulting in the establishment of a Presbyterian Church outstation and a primary school in 1888. Following the subjugation of Arochukwu and Afikpo in 1902, the Scottish missionaries, according to Nwanchor (2024), expanded their mission work by founding stations in several Igbo communities: Isu (1908), Ututu (1909), Ohafia (1910), Abiriba (1911), Igbere (1916/1919), Abam (1918/1919), Okposi (1913), Edda (1920), and Afikpo (1923).

Another missionary group that entered Afikpo shortly after its subjugation was the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM), which arrived in 1903 and established a primary school at Ndibe village in 1914. Agwo (2024) explained the initial failures of missionary educational efforts in Afikpo thus:

Between 1910 and 1916, different missionary groups tried opening schools in Afikpo. Prominent among them were the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM), (later known as the Presbyterian Mission) and the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM). These two missionary groups opened schools in Ozizza, Ndibe, and Enohia to aid their Christian evangelization. Regrettably, they all closed down because Afikpo people refused to send their children to the schools.

To encourage school attendance, the British colonial administration introduced the Warrant Chief System around 1920 to help bridge the gap between the colonial government and the indigenous population. In 1924, a government primary school was established in Afikpo. The then District Officer, Mr. L. H. Shelton, devised a strategy that required each Warrant Chief to recruit a specific number of pupils from his community. Through this system, the first government-established school in Afikpo began operation—preceding the success of missionary schools.

The next section will examine the activities of the two most prominent missionary bodies in Afikpo—the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Missions.

THE ADVENT OF THE PRESBYTERIAN MISSION IN AFIKPO

In 1888, the Church of Scotland Mission (Presbyterian) resolved to establish a permanent mission station at Unwana. Consequently, on 25th October 1888, Reverend J. F. Gartshore, a young missionary from Europe, began work at Unwana as the resident minister. With Unwana as its base, the Presbyterian Church gradually extended its influence to neighboring Afikpo.

In Afikpo, the church was pioneered by Chima Okpani of Amaechara village, who had embraced Christianity while working in Calabar. Upon returning home, he was filled with zeal to establish a Christian fellowship in his community. Assisted by other early enthusiasts such as Okoronkwo Oji, Ugwu Otu, John E. Iduma, Nwata Mbuto, and Nnachi Ewa, the first organized prayer group was formed in 1923. Initially, worship services were held in the Native Court building, which served as a temporary place of worship. Among the early non-native members were Mr. Dorfi (a prison clerk), Mr. Okunzua (the postmaster), and Mr. Philips (the dispenser). The first church building was erected in 1927 at the Public Works Department (P.W.D.) site (Aja, 2005).

With the assistance of Mr. John Egwu Otu, the members later secured land from Chief Egbudu of Amaechara village, located between Amaechara and Ukpa, where a new church building was completed in 1931. Elder Oko Alu became the first church elder in Afikpo, followed by Elder Akpu Ewa, who, after returning from the Itu leper colony, emerged as one of the most influential Christians in Afikpo town.

Reverend Mcloclor, the officiating minister of the Unwana Church, regularly visited Afikpo to oversee the congregation. In 1916, he extended Presbyterian missionary activities to the Ozizza community in Afikpo. It is also noteworthy that Dr. Akanu Ibiam, who later became President of the World Council of Churches and one of Nigeria's most prominent Christian leaders, was among the early converts at Unwana (Aja, 2005).

THE ARRIVAL OF THE CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES IN AFIKPO

The earliest attempt by Catholic missionaries to establish a presence in Afikpo occurred in 1914, when Reverend Father Francis Howell made a stopover at Ndibe Beach during one of his evangelical tours. Following negotiations with local leaders, a school was established, with Mr. J. J. Duke from Calabar appointed as its headmaster. However, this initial effort to implant a lasting Catholic mission in Afikpo was described as a "gross failure."

According to Aja (2005), the Catholic Missionaries of the Holy Ghost Congregation from Uturu, near Okigwe, made several visits to Afikpo during the early 1930s. In 1932, for instance, Reverend Father Trech, stationed at Uturu, visited Afikpo and succeeded in making contact with a few early converts. The mission work was later re-established and gained firmer ground in the mid-1930s, as the Catholic Church—particularly the St. Patrick's Missionary Society (Spiritans or Holy Ghost Missionaries from France)—expanded their evangelistic activities from Ogoja and Abakaliki into the surrounding regions (Catholic Mission Archive, 1975).

From 1933 onward, the founders of the Society of St. Patrick's Congregation continued to visit Afikpo from their headquarters in Abakaliki. In February 1933, a Reverend Father met with the local chiefs and elders, who requested the establishment of a vernacular school. This request materialized in 1935 with the founding of a school at Ngodo village, enrolling thirty boys at its

inception. By the autumn of 1938, Father MacManus of the St. Patrick's Missionary Society was appointed resident minister at Abakaliki, with Afikpo placed under his pastoral care. In 1939, he became the first resident Catholic priest in Afikpo, stationed at Ngodo village, where both a church and a school had been erected (Aja, 2005).

DEVICES EMPLOYED BY THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN GETTING NEW CONVERTS

The Christian missionaries employed various strategies in their effort to propagate Christianity and transform the cultural outlook of the people. Among these, the most popular method adopted by the Presbyterian Church was open-air preaching, which was sometimes followed by house-to-house evangelism. Missionaries and local converts often went out in groups for evangelical crusades aimed at winning souls.

In contrast, the Catholic Mission rarely engaged in open-air or door-to-door preaching. Instead, it relied on other means such as mass infant baptism, the use of local catechists, and the distribution of gifts to attract the people. A particularly effective device was the provision of free education, especially to the sons and daughters of influential chiefs, with the hope that their families—and eventually the wider community—would embrace the new faith through them.

According to Aja (2005), the most important instrument employed by the Christian missionaries was **the teacher**. The teacher served not only as an instructor but also as a catechist and moral guide. In most cases, children who attended mission schools automatically became converts of the mission that owned the school. Even pupils enrolled in the only government primary school in Afikpo were often affiliated with one Christian denomination or another, as the missionaries extended their influence into such institutions.

Another effective means of conversion was the doctrine of heaven and hell, which was prominently emphasized by both the Presbyterian and Catholic missions. The Catholic missionaries, however, tended to be more subtle and diplomatic in their approach. They sought to graft the new faith onto existing traditional beliefs rather than confronting them directly. This adaptive approach enabled them to win a larger number of converts within a relatively short time compared to their Presbyterian counterparts.

Much of the success of the Catholic Mission in Afikpo has been attributed to the personality and character of Reverend Father MacManus, who played a leading role in the early phase of Catholic missionary activity in the area. He was a man of great adaptability who frequently visited and interacted with the villagers, conversing with them in familiar settings. Through this close engagement, he became an integral part of the society and significantly influenced the development and acceptance of Catholicism in Afikpo (Aja, 2005).

THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN AFIKPO

The Christian missionaries made significant impact in Afikpo from the late 1880s, beginning with their arrival in Unwana, up to and including the colonial period. Their influence can broadly be grouped into positive and negative impacts.

Positive Impacts

One of the major contributions of the missionaries was the introduction of a new religion—Christianity—which transformed the religious and moral landscape of Afikpo. By preaching the universal brotherhood of man, Christianity weakened the tribal bonds that had long structured traditional society. Many converts were won over to the new faith and baptized. As a result, several traditional practices considered inhuman—such as human sacrifice, twin murder, and the abandonment of abnormal children—were abolished. Aja (2005) notes that the people of Afikpo remain grateful to the missionaries for initiating a process of social change that ended these practices and improved community health through the establishment of medical services that saved countless lives.

Another profound impact was the introduction and promotion of Western education. Schools were initially established as “nurseries” of the Christian missions, designed to produce future Christian leaders and enable converts to read the Bible. Over time, the educational system expanded beyond basic literacy to full formal education. Primary, secondary, and teachers’ training colleges were established to meet the growing demand for educated personnel. Education soon became one of the most enduring legacies of the missions in Afikpo.

In accordance with Fowell Buxton’s theory of the “Bible and the Plough”, the missionaries also promoted vocational and agricultural education. They sought to redirect attention from slave trading to legitimate economic activities. The Catholic Mission established experimental farms where people were trained in plantation agriculture, animal husbandry, and home management. The Presbyterian Mission imported skilled artisans—carpenters and sawyers—from Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Gold Coast (modern Ghana) to construct mission buildings and train local apprentices. Through such programs, the missionaries fostered a culture of self-reliance and practical skill acquisition.

The missionaries also introduced European languages such as English, French, Portuguese, and German, along with many aspects of European culture—monogamous marriage, Western art, music, and medicine. Their influence marked a significant cultural shift in Afikpo’s social life.

In the field of healthcare, the missions were pioneers. They established hospitals, health centres, maternity homes, and clinics for infectious diseases. These facilities helped combat tropical diseases, reduce malnutrition, and generally improve public health. Many of these services were offered free of charge, enabling the people of Afikpo to live healthier and more productive lives.

The missionaries also demonstrated compassion for orphans, the handicapped, and oppressed groups, particularly mothers of twins, who had been marginalized by traditional practices. They built orphanages, rehabilitation centres, and leprosaria, where those afflicted by leprosy received care and support. By doing so, they humanized the treatment of the vulnerable in society.

In terms of architecture, the missionaries introduced new building techniques and materials. The adoption of triangular structures, bricklaying, and corrugated iron roofing replaced traditional mud structures, signaling a visible transformation in Afikpo’s physical landscape.

Economically, the missionaries encouraged legitimate trade and commerce as a means of suppressing the slave trade. They promoted agriculture, introducing new crops such as rubber, cocoa, and cotton, and teaching improved methods of cultivation. Through these initiatives, the

people of Afikpo were able to earn income from cash crops, particularly palm oil, which became a major export commodity.

Negative Impacts

The missionaries exhibited a low opinion of Afikpo traditional religion, whose adherents they erroneously labeled as *heathens* or *pagans*. They saw nothing good in the indigenous faith and indoctrinated their converts to reject it completely. In their effort to discourage belief in traditional religion, shrines and other sacred monuments associated with ancestral worship were destroyed, leading to the erosion of vital aspects of Afikpo culture.

Furthermore, Afikpo names were described as meaningless and unfit for baptism, compelling converts to adopt foreign Christian names whose meanings they could not explain. Describing the disruption caused by the new religion, Aja (2005) observes that:

The converts, in the guise of the new religion, ignored their civic responsibilities and often flouted and undermined the authority of their elders and fathers who were traditional legislators and custodians of the laws and customs of the land—an action which was tantamount to an attempt to overthrow the established social order, and which was never heard of in those old ‘good’ pre-Christian days.

The educational curriculum introduced by the missions was also limited in scope and tailored primarily to serve the interests of the missionaries, the large trading firms, and the colonial administration. Afikpo pupils were taught basic literacy—reading, writing, and elementary arithmetic—sufficient only to enable them to read the Bible or work as catechists, interpreters, clerks, and messengers within the colonial system.

Moreover, the missions undermined the traditional way of life of the Afikpo people by promoting the idea that everything Western was good while everything indigenous was primitive and inferior. To be considered *civilized*, Afikpo converts were encouraged to imitate Western habits—speaking with foreign accents and wearing European clothing unsuited to the African climate.

Traditional forms of artistic expression such as music, songs, dance, and drama were condemned as heathen and immoral. Consequently, many Christian poets, musicians, and drummers refused to participate in the famous *Okumkpo* masquerade performances, which traditionally conveyed Afikpo moral values through satire, music, and dramatic expression. Through *Okumkpo*, individuals’ deeds and misdeeds were publicly exposed under the symbolic immunity of the masquerade spirit (*nde maa*) (Aja, 2005).

HEALTH AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS OF EUROPEAN MISSIONARIES IN AFIKPO

Undoubtedly, European missionaries introduced a new religion—Christianity—which, by emphasizing the universal brotherhood of humanity, sought to transcend tribal and racial boundaries in many societies. Beyond their religious mission, however, the missionaries made

significant contributions to the social welfare of the communities in which they operated. In Afikpo, their most enduring legacies are evident in the areas of health care and education.

In the health sector, missionaries established health centres, maternity homes, hospitals, and infectious disease clinics. In Afikpo, the Presbyterian missionaries played a pioneering role in medical services. Although their main medical facility was eventually established in a nearby community about 28 kilometres from Afikpo, the Presbyterian authorities established the Presbyterian Joint Hospital, Uburu, in 1913. Built and managed by Scottish Presbyterian missionaries, the hospital became one of the earliest mission hospitals in Igboland. It was constructed under the supervision of Dr. William John Hitchcock, whose medical team treated various illnesses and diseases without discrimination, irrespective of a patient's ability to pay.

In the field of education, the Presbyterian missionaries initially established primary schools in several villages and communities in Afikpo. To strengthen and sustain the supply of trained educational manpower, they later founded a teacher training institution in 1959 known as the MacGregor Teachers Training College, Afikpo. The college contributed significantly to the training of primary school teachers, not only for Afikpo but also for other parts of Igboland and beyond.

Similarly, the Roman Catholic mission made notable contributions to health care in Afikpo. In 1942, the Catholic missionaries established the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, Afikpo. A decade later, in 1952, the hospital expanded its services by opening a School of Nursing, thereby becoming one of the early mission-based health training institutions in Igboland.

Overall, the activities of European missionaries greatly improved access to education and health care in Afikpo. These interventions contributed to healthier living conditions and enhanced the capacity of the people to participate more effectively in social and economic life, not only in Afikpo but also in Nigeria more broadly.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN AFIKPO

The European Christian missionaries in Afikpo encountered a series of challenges in their effort to evangelize the area. These difficulties hindered the pace of their missionary activities and, in some cases, threatened their survival.

First, there was the problem of language barrier. The missionaries came from different European countries such as England, Scotland, Germany, and France, and their languages were completely foreign to the people of Afikpo. Communication between the missionaries and the natives was therefore extremely difficult and was often carried out through signs and gesticulations. With time, however, some improvement was made as the missionaries employed interpreters who had a slight knowledge of the local dialect.

Second, there was the problem of transportation. Adequate means of transport for both the missionaries and their luggage were lacking. They had to depend on narrow footpaths through thick forests and, at times, uncharted rivers. In many cases, the missionaries had to trek long distances, which drained their energy and resources.

Third, the missionaries suffered from shortage of funds and provisions. This was partly due to underestimation of their needs and the occurrence of unforeseen circumstances. Sickness,

prolonged rainfall, and other unexpected events often delayed their journeys, forcing them to remain longer in the interior than they had planned. As a result, they faced financial difficulties, food shortages, and sometimes hunger and starvation.

Fourthly, the limited number of missionaries available at a time slowed down missionary activities. As a result of the high death rate among the few available missionaries. It was not surprising seeing only one or two missionaries operating in a vast territory. Thus, they were naturally overworked and this reduced their life span.

Finally, the missionaries had to contend with hostility from some natives who regarded their presence as a serious threat to their traditional way of life. Securing land for the establishment of churches or mission houses was therefore very difficult. In some instances, they were given portions of land considered to be “evil forests” to clear and build upon, as a test of their faith and power.

CONCLUSION

This study has established that although the people of Afikpo initially resisted the incursion of both the British colonial administrators and the Christian missionaries, their opposition eventually gave way to cooperation following the pacification of the area in 1902.

Furthermore, the study examined the advent of Christianity in Afikpo and analyzed both the positive and negative impacts of missionary activities on the people. It also highlighted and discussed in detail the various difficulties encountered by the European missionaries during their evangelization efforts in the region.

In conclusion, to build upon the historical collaboration that characterized the colonial and immediate post-colonial eras, the study recommends sustained partnership between the European mother Churches that sent the missionaries to Nigeria and their Nigerian counterparts. Such continued cooperation would promote mutual understanding, cultural exchange, and further socio-religious development.

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