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A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF CHRISTIANITY AND EKWULOBIA CULTURE, 1913-2013

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Abstract

Ekwulobia community is a cultural area with its unique characteristic features that set it apart from other cultures of the world. The people of Ekwulobia cherish their culture and tradition and through this they organize their life, style and worldview. The culture and traditions of the people of Ekwulobia determine to a very large extent the way in which they understood their faith. Their traditions and culture are expressed in their festivals and celebrations, like Achukwu Ukpo, Igba-eke, Igba-udo, Okponsi, Iso-ebe, Ezeasika, Ilo-uwa, Igba-afa and Igochi Umunwaanyi. Christianity came to Ekwulobia in the year 1913 by the European missionaries. The people of Ekwulobia saw Christianity as opposing their culture. The missionaries did not help matters at all because they made no efforts to understand Ekwulobia people and their culture or seek ways of incorporating Ekwulobia culture with Christianity. The people of Ekwulobia find it too difficult to abandon their culture in preference for a new way of life. Despite over hundred years existence of Christianity in Ekwulobia and the enormous changes brought by it, they find it very difficult to let go of some aspects of their culture which leads to their double allegiance of faith and the gospel message not taking full flesh in the lives of the recipients.

Introduction

Ekwulobia is one of the towns that benefited from the coming of the European missionaries and their religion, Christianity in 1913. Christianity is no longer a new phenomenon in Ekwulobia. The process of christianization in Ekwulobia which brought these two different religions and culture into contact and conflicts experienced reciprocal shocks. Agba (1996) stated that conflicts are abound to occur when the old and new meet because each will claim superiority over the other. The people of Ekwulobia gradually embraced Christianity. Christianity has demonstrated in its human character that it is the custodian and promoter of human value, though one may not rightly assert that Christianity has always played this role flawlessly. Before the advent of Christianity in Ekwulobia, the indigenes of Ekwulobia were very religious. Mbiti (1969) explained this clearly:

Wherever the African man is, there is his religion, he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop, and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school. Wherever he is going, he has his religion and culture with him. (p. 24).

Leonard (1986) supported this view saying, "Igbo people are truly and deeply religious people of who it can be said that.... they eat religiously, drink religiously, bath religiously and dress religiously" (p. 38).

When Christianity came to Ekwulobia, the indigenes gave a cold reception to it because most of the people they came to evangelize looked at the new religion as a threat to their religion as in the case of Anglican and the coming of Catholic Church in Ekwulobia. They saw Christianity as the importation of the white man's culture which cannot easily mix well with their own culture. Before the advent of Christianity, Ekwulobia was governed by

traditions and customs. Ekwulobia people did not know that there were other cultures and traditions which were different from their religious beliefs and worship. There were traditions that were given high positions in Ekwulobia like *Iso-ebe*, *Igba-eke*, *Igba-udo*, *Okponi*, *Igochi Umunwaanyi*, *Achukwu* masquerading, *Oriri Uto*, *Ezeasika*, *ilo-uwa*, *Ijuase*, *Ogwu*, *Mgborogwu na Mkpaakwukwo* and so on. Through this culture and tradition, they organize their life, style and worldview.

There was a cultural clash between the western culture vessel in which Christianity has been conveyed to Ekwulobia and the authentic values of Ekwulobia culture because the people of Ekwulobia find it extremely difficult to abandon their way of life for a new way of life that is yet to prove a superior alternative. Even some of the converts and practitioners of Christian faith seem not yet ready to let go of some aspects of their culture. This is so, because the Christianity that was brought was fully engulfed in western culture, western philosophy, theology and cultural values such as monogamy, rituals and ceremonies and also western names. All these posed a serious problem for the establishment of Christianity at the initial stage and also the reason why all the efforts to have deep touch of the Christian message in the lives of the people seemed to be shallow. The missionaries came with their own brand of religion called Christianity that was headed by Jesus Christ. This brand of religion was regarded by the missionaries as the best way of worshipping God and by this they implanted the message of Christ in the minds of Ekwulobia people especially those that accepted their religion. For them, Ekwulobia traditional religion ought to be discarded since it was no religion at all and religion entails the conception of the abstract which Ekwulobia people could not do. According to Ludwig (1980), how can the untutored Africans conceive God that is not seen? Ebelebe cited in Ekwunife (2016) added that the missionaries were praised for the development brought all over Igbo land; he also blamed them for not taking cognizance of the people's culture. Rather what left was Irish church structures and practices transplanted into Igbo land. Christianity came to Ekwulobia in the year 1913 through the Anglican missionaries, while the Roman Catholic faith was brought through Adazi in Anaocha in the year 1925 by Rev. Fr. C. Liddane, C.S.S.P who was then the parish priest of Adazi. When Christianity came to Ekwulobia, the missionaries forgot that the people of Ekwulobia, before they came, had their own mode of worship and belief in the Supreme Being. The white missionaries did not consider all these rather all the religious artifacts were branded idols, fetish and everything about them was referred to as heathenism.

The coming of Christianity to Ekwulobia is more or less an encounter of culture with another culture. In this encounter, the system of religious beliefs is being evaluated. Christianity had an encounter with the cultural environment in Ekwulobia and the good news is that the two religions have distinct ethical imperatives and most often Christianity claims superiority over the cultural, social and political environment in Ekwulobia, and this creates more problems. The culture and traditions of the people of Ekwulobia determine to a very large extent the way in which they have understood their faith. The missionaries did not help matters at all because they made no efforts to understand Ekwulobia or seek ways of incorporating Ekwulobia culture with Christianity. According to Iwe (1985), "They never appreciated effectively the positive elements of our culture and religion, the white missionaries erroneously believed the African continent as being in darkness, lacking the rightful religion" (p. 16). Kenyatta (1938) also opined the same:

In the early days of European colonization, many white men, especially the missionaries landed in Africa with pre-conceived ideas of what they would find



there, and how they would deal with the situations. As far as religion was concerned, Africa was regarded as a clean slate on which anything could be written. It was supposed to take whole heartedly all religious dogmas of the white man and keep them sacred and unchallenged no matter how alien to its mode of life. (p. 269).

If the early missionaries had given enough time to the study of Ekwulobia culture and custom especially as it affects the area, they would have noticed that they had been worshipping God, though in their own way and as they understood. Total condemnation of what the people of Ekwulobia were doing by the missionaries provoked those they had come to evangelize. The indigenes were very reluctant to have anything to do with those that brought Christianity to them since they knew nothing. However, as time went on, there were gradual changes on both sides, each trying as much as possible to soft-pedal in order to accommodate the other. As they continued to understand and accommodate themselves, good rapport for evangelism was created. Ekwulobia generally is well known for their generosity and that is why the town was named “Ekwulu-obia” because they are open to anyone who wished to co-operate with strangers. From 1914, the indigenes of Ekwulobia always maintained the friendliest relations with the missionaries, never molesting them in any way, but on the contrary showing the greatest eagerness to be on the most cordial relations with them. It was this singular and profound kindness of the natives of Ekwulobia towards the Christian missionaries that prompted them to make liberal grants of traits of land and other donations and gifts in cash and kind to them for the success of their mission. Despite the initial negative approach towards evangelism, the missionaries later developed keen interest towards the winning of souls. The fact is that the indigenes of Ekwulobia were probably not unaware of the elementary fact that the acceptance of “new forms” may only increase the range of alternatives available to them. This unfortunate uneasiness of being a Christian and at the same time having unrestrained attraction to traditional practices has to be properly addressed. This led Chikwe (1992) to remind us thus: “Every serious evangelizer is therefore called upon to make the message of Christ at home with the culture of the evangelized and at the same time bring the culture of the people in line with the gospel message” (p. 25). In fact, this is a clarion call to have a serious, sincere and deep look at the traditional culture, to situate it in the context of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to objectively allow it to be transformed by the radiance of Christianity.

From the year 1914-1920, the indigenes of Ekwulobia have been responding both positively and negatively since their contact with the white man’s religion. The interaction between the traditional culture of the people and Christianity brought about drastic changes in the lives of the people. There was confrontation between traditional moral values and Christian ethics, between western norms associated with Christianity and Igbo concepts of norms and values, which gave rise to the rapid socio-religious change. Churches in Ekwulobia were not dormant towards this issue especially the Catholic Church. From the year 1978-1990, churches in Ekwulobia have done a lot towards inculturation especially the tremendous efforts made by Late Fr. Martin Maduka; nevertheless a lot needs also to be done in order to alleviate double allegiance of faith among Christians and establish deep rooted Christianity in Ekwulobia cultural environment. Despite the fact that Ekwulobia accepted Christianity, one needs to know the impact Christianity has created in the lives of the indigenes. There is the need to ascertain the extent their traditions have been bastardized, sustained or restructured by Christ and his teachings. Since the missionaries that brought Christianity to Ekwulobia did not consider their culture before imposing theirs, there is the

need to find out the culturally poignant issues that hampered the church from its goals in the proclamation of the gospel of Christ. This makes it imperative for a thorough investigation of the advent of Christianity in Ekwulobia, and the relationship that exists between Christianity and the cultural environment in Ekwulobia.

The Advent of Christianity in Ekwulobia

Christianity has a historical arrival in Ekwulobia area. Christianity is with unimaginable followership, including so many denominations under the umbrella of Christianity. We cannot discuss all the denominations within the scope of study but two selected ones are to be examined, namely, Roman Catholic Church and the Church Missionary Society.

The Historical Origin of Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Ekwulobia

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) was a child of the 18th century Evangelical Revival. According to Anozie (2009), Church Missionary Society was formed in 1799. This revival attracted followers from various bodies as well as members of the Church of England. The Church Missionary Society was from the onset a purely Anglican Association whose aim was to take the gospel to the remotest part of the world. Omoyajawo (1994) opined that “the injunction to spread the gospel was to all Christians as individuals and not merely to the church as an organization” (p. 124). The CMS was solely interested in the conversion of the traditional worshippers in Africa and Asia. Adiele (1996) says that on Monday July 27, 1857, the first CMS church in Igbo land was planted and on Sunday August 2, 1857, the first church worship was held by Rev. John Christopher Taylor. By this event, Onitsha became the gate way and bridge-head for the Church Missionary Society in the Eastern part of Nigeria.

There is a general agreement that Church Missionary Society was the first Christian missionary body to arrive Ekwulobia. According to N. Nwankwo (personal communication, July 8, 2018), Christianity was first brought to Ndikelionwu in the early missionary days through the efforts of one Mazi John Ogbonnika Kanu of Ndikelionwu in the year 1908. In other words, Mazi John Ogbonnika Kanu could be described as the life wire of early Christianity in Ndikelionwu town and beyond. It was through his evangelistic thrust, drive and leadership that the gospel was spread to Ekwulobia and other towns and communities in Aguata. J. Onyekachukwu, (personal communication, October 15, 2018), narrated that Evangelist John Kanu in spreading the gospel from town to town in the olden days met Nwankwo Oriji of Eziagulu village in Ekwulobia in the year 1910. Nwankwo Oriji was converted and baptized in the Christian faith by Mazi John of Ndikelionwu town. His name was changed to Samuel Oriji Nwankwo. According to Ekwulobia Home and Abroad Handbook (2013) “it was said that evangelist John Kanu helped to conduct services at Ekwulobia and the name St John was named after him. In those days, changing to Christian or foreign name was an indication of accepting Christ.

It was through the fruitful efforts of Samuel Nwankwo that the good news of Christianity reached Ekwulobia in the year 1913. This continued to cement the cordial relationship between Ndikelionwu and Ekwulobia people to date. M. Ezeafunamba (personal communication, October 15, 2018) says that Samuel Nwankwo started displaying his new faith and life style to the admiration of his friends and new converts. They decided to join him in the spread of the good news of Jesus Christ as opposed to idol worship, lifeless images, eating of human beings as well as indulgence in other anti-social behaviours which

were prevalent in those days. In the year 1914, the first church compound was established at Eziagulu. They made up to twelve converts led by John Anyaoku of Obosi. These new converts include: Nwankwo Samuel, Ezeonwu Nnoli, Anaekzie Udude, Ezeobi Okonkwo, Ibe Udude, Onuora Afunanya, Ezeofe Onwumelu, Okonkwo Ayika, Uligwe Uzoezie, Okeke Ilo, Achufusi Okafor and Okafor Ezekegbo. John Anyaoku lived in Agba and came to Eziagulu to teach. All attempts made to plant CMS at Agba failed. Nevertheless, Chief Ezekannagha Ezenwabachili was never a Christian but he allowed his wives and children to become Christians. He used his authority as the warrant chief to allocate some portion of land, such as the palm plantation now Bishops court. He also encouraged his friends to allocate their lands to the church and school authority. It was then that a vernacular school was cited at the place presently occupied by the Local Government stadium. All these took place when Mr. L.M. Uzodike, the late Bishop Uzodike, was the headmaster of CMS Central School, Ekwulobia.

The new converts devoted all their time and efforts in the spread of the good news. They travelled far and near spreading Christianity. Attendance on Sunday church services started to grow with pomp and pageantry and at an alarming crescendo; it grew steadily at the average of 97 per Sunday to the admiration of the members. L. Oyejiaka (personal communication, August 20, 2018) posits that Sundays that fell on Eke days (*uka eke*) were particularly set apart for open air evangelism. The church leader led the congregation in open air evangelism involving preaching, singing and testimonies among others. The role of music in evangelism must be appreciated. The church has its laid down procedures which every member must attain to before becoming a full member of the church. The stages include: catechumen, baptism and confirmation among others. A widow would swear to the bible that she would not make new babies before admission as a full member of the church. A Christian was not allowed to participate in traditional dancing and related social gathering that were considered unchristian. But these days, because of competition and proliferation of churches the rules have been liberalized.

The people of Ekwulobia had their well-established way of life. They cherished their age-long traditional values, culture and norms, and it was likely that they would reject any form of religion that was opposed to their well-established beliefs. The church on its own side has its policies that were opposed to the peoples established values. Accepting the new religion shows that the people would renounce their established way of life. These opposing points posed a serious challenge in the conversion of new converts. This led to the slow growth and spread of the gospel message.

The growth of the church then attracted the growth of the school because both of them go together. As a result of this, according to E.A. Ezeobi (personal communication, August 15, 2018), the Church Missionary Central School was established in the year 1920 by Rev. G.T. Basden, the manager of the C.M.S schools at Awka. F. Ezekeke (personal communication, August 20, 2018) confirmed that the pupils that attended the school then came from various towns including Umuchu, Achina, Uga, Nkpologwu, Ezinihite, Igboekwu. Nanka, Oko, Ndiokionwu, Ndiowu, Aguluezechukwu, Ichida and Ndiokpalaeze among others. The school at Enugwuabo Ufuma was transferred to the Central School Ekwulobia and one Mr. Joseph Onwudiwe was in charge of it. It was discovered that the school population was increasing every day because of influx of pupils from other towns, and in 1921, a new site was established at Ula village headed by Mr. Abel Okoye. In the year 1922, Rev. Dr. Basden moved the school from Ula to its present location. This famous

school has graduated some notable figures like: Late Dr. Alex Ekwueme, Former Vice President of Nigeria; Late Most Reverend Jonathan Onyemelukwe, Former Bishop of Asaba; Late Prof. Clifford Ezeilo, Professor of Mechanical Engineering, Leeds University, England; Late Gabriel Mbionwu of the Ministry of Agriculture; Engineer Clement Onyemelukwe, Former Chairman Electricity Corporation of Nigeria, and so on.

The Historical Origin of Catholic Church in Ekwulobia

It was in 1885 that Rev. Fr. Lutz, the leader of the Holy Ghost Fathers chose Onitsha in preference to Gbebe as the location of the Roman Catholic Church to the lower Niger. The Anglican Church had stayed for twenty-eight (28) years before the arrival of the Catholic Church. The church had penetrated into the interior areas of Igbo land, though some of the towns they entered never received them warmly. The advent of Catholic Church in Ekwulobia started in 1925. According to K.E. Okafor (personal communication, July 5, 2018), Catholic Church came to Ekwulobia some years after the Anglican Church has taken ground in the town. The Catholic Church migrated from Adazi in Anaocha Local Government Area in 1925 through Rev. Fr. Bubenduff who was then the parish priest of St Andrews Catholic Church, under Archbishop Herrey who was then the Diocesan bishop of Onitsha. According to Golden Jubilee Anniversary Magazine (2017), the people of Ekwulobia who accepted the new faith used to trek far and near places in search of faith from the white clergy. They attend Sunday mass at St. Andrews Catholic Church, Adazi. They did this several months before they assembled themselves together and pleaded with the white clergymen to manifest the Catholic faith in Ekwulobia. In 1925, as said above, the white clergy men accepted to establish Catholic Church in Ekwulobia. The church was initially situated at Agudo Umuchi which was now a police station. The officiating priests there were Rev. Fr. Bubenduff and Rev. Fr. Liddane. The overall head was Rev. Fr. Bubenduff, issuing instructions from there and also reports were being brought to him from other stations within his jurisdiction. The two priests usually came from St Andrew's Parish and St Charles Parish, Achina.

The land of Agudo Umuchi was donated by Late Ezekafor Nwadayi and Ezekafor Okeke, both from Umuchi. The Pioneer Christians were Albert Okolocha, Reuben Ogwatta, Hezekiah Ezeuchu, Alfred Ezechukwu and Moses Nwosu. Others were: James Ike, Ezekiel Nwankwo, George Nwankwo and Peter Anojuo. These were the first converts baptized in the year 1926. The progress of Catholic Church in Ekwulobia was considerably high despite the fact that it arrived late in comparison with church Missionary Society. As the number of converts was increasing rapidly, the need for a bigger site arose. A mighty bush at Agba village was given to the church with the assistance of Rev. Bubenduff. The land that was given to them, according to J.N. Ike (personal communication, July 8, 2018), was an evil forest land and dead bodies were discarded there. The members were afraid to enter the land for clearing until Rev. Fr. Liddane who was an assistant Parish priest started clearing the bush, trying to prove to members that there is nothing to be feared. During the clearing, a lot of things were found there like dead bodies, pots of concoction and other things. After the clearing, they erected the first mud church which took the position where Grotto of our Mother Mary situates now. They also built the headmasters house at Agu-Eke and the church catechist then was Patrick Okolo.

In the year 1932, they found a land for school at Agu Nwaagba. The school was called "Nta-akara" (Kindergarten). J. Onyenkuzi (personal communication, August 17,

2018) stated her earlier teachers were: Emmanuel Ezeagu from Adazi, Richard Isidienpu of Nteje and Henry Akwaanya from Nteje. This group of persons also acted as catechists to the church. They nurtured the school and fanned the flame of light of the pupils into a blazing fire. Despite the challenges witnessed, the Catholic Church in Ekwulobia has produced so many indigenous priests such as Rt Rev Msgr. M.O. Maduka in the year 1953, Rev Fr. Dr Augustine Onyeneke CSSP, 1965, Rev Fr. Anthony Okafor, 1967, Anthony Onyeji, 1974, Rev Fr. Paul Okoli CMF, 1983, Rev Fr. Peter Okonkwo CMF, 1990 and so on. She has progressed tremendously, grew with might and power and its school was very superb.

National Evangelical Mission, Ekwulobia

Indeed this church has spread in almost all the villages in Ekwulobia and beyond. They have their general headquarters in Onitsha while their South-East regional headquarters is in Ekwulobia. Their regions have their co-coordinators. The general over-seer of the church is Rev Bishop Ositadimma Dominic. They have so many pastors and assistant pastors helping out at Ihuokpala, Ula, Umuchiani, Eziagulu and Agba. There is no Pentecostal church in Ekwulobia in terms of population, finance and magnificent building like National Evangelical Mission. There members give them financial support in a tremendous manner unlike other churches. They share food in the church after church service, they also share bags of rice, garri and envelope to their members. Indeed this church has challenged Anglicanism and Catholic Church in Ekwulobia because it touches the lives of people and has made so many impacts.

Effects of Christianity on Ekwulobia Cultural Environment

It is a noticeable worldwide phenomenon that the appearance of Christianity in any culture has always been accompanied by encounters, conflicts, tensions, compromises, recognitions, victories and surrenders. As has also been observed, Christianity in one cultural dress encounters another culture and then tries to incarnate itself in the new culture. In doing this, however, it challenges and transforms the culture. It also incorporates some authentic aspects of that culture heritage to the enrichment of the Christian culture. However, there are always reactions whenever an attempt is made to bring about a positive change in any aspect of culture. Since it is impossible to shed off all aspects of one's cultural heritage as a result of encounter with a new culture, compromises are made.

This section tries to look at the part played by foreign religion (Christianity) towards the changes that have occurred in the Ekwulobia society. Christianity is a foreign religion imported into Ekwulobia while traditional religion is the indigenous faith of the Ekwulobia people. According to Onyeidu (1999), Christianity has in time past and at present impacted so much on African culture in general both positively and negatively and it is still doing so now. Against this backdrop, Ugwu (2002) said, although the imported world religions have brought in some positive influences or effects on the Nigerian communities, they have also dealt a staggering blow on our social, economic, religious and political systems. However, change is the only thing that is constant in human life and as such it is inevitable in human interaction. Hornby (1999) defined change as act of passing or making somebody or something pass from one state or form into another. Therefore, Ekwulobia society like any other one is dynamic one; hence it is susceptible to change.

There are some impacts of Christianity on Ekwulobia culture and Ekwulobia Christians as well. Therefore, in any part of Ekwulobia, it had always had its own attendant impacts on the people and the church. It is in this light that we shall examine the following:

Positive Impacts of Christianity on Ekwulobia Culture

There is no doubt that Christianity has greatly shaped the character of the Ekwulobia Christians towards the toleration of some of the culture of his people. In other words, Christianity is trying to create unity between the church and the positive and authentic traditional values of the people of Ekwulobia. Today, the Ekwulobia Christians have shed off almost all gruesome and cruel aspects of their culture, which prompted the missionaries to adopt a general negative attitude towards them. Such gruesome and cruel cultures include the following: killing of twins, maltreatments that were meted on the widows, evil practices during burial, killing and sacrifice of virgins during rituals and so on. Therefore, Christians than ever before can now participate freely in their traditional dances without any feeling of guilt. They can freely accept titles, from their traditional rulers and in the following Sunday organize a thanksgiving service whereby they thank God for giving them the rare privilege of serving their people and being recognized in the multitude of other deserving and illustrious sons of Ekwulobia community. One hundred and ten years ago in Ekwulobia, this would have sounded quite incredible.

Talking about how Christianity influenced Ekwulobia culture and the natives positively, one must surely not forget to talk about the tremendous efforts made by Late Monsignor Martin Okeke Maduka (Nnadiesube). Late Monsignor Martin Maduka was a native of Agba village in Ekwulobia. He was a devoted Catholic priest. Nnadiesube understood inculturation as the Christians contextualization of the faith and worship within the local culture, and correspondingly, it is the Christian's evangelical immersion or insertion of his local culture inferiority; it is persons, Christ and the believers, who are primarily essentially inculturated, immersed and united. This attitude was decades before inculturation became the evangelical refrain of it. The Irish missionary clergy of those early days seemed not to have understood this traditionalist and prophet very well. He was also misunderstood by his very own, by his indigenous superiors. Efforts were made to derail him from his inculturational crusade; but he did not relent. His inculturation tenacity and fidelity unto death vindicated him. He knew where he was coming from, whom and what was prompting him and where he was going to. The Late Monsignor Martin Maduka began a ground work on giving the church in Ekwulobia a real foundation based on what is original to the Ekwulobia people that is their cultural beliefs and practices. For him, the missionaries that brought the message of Christ did their best but they stifled the good cultural heritage of Ekwulobia people thereby making Christianity a foreign religion instead of a foundational one. E. Maduka (personal communication, June 16, 2018), confirmed that one thing very unique about Fr. Martin is that he is a man of action. Once he reflects on something and finds it convincing and worth doing, he effectuates it. He is a man of praxis.

He rekindled the light of Christianity which was not properly lighted by the missionaries who mistakenly saw our custom as child's play, crude and primitive. It was at this apostolic era that he organized and formed his own cultural dance which he identified with till his death. This "Akwu n'echi enyi" dancing troupe performed at Awada-Onitsha during the epic visit of Pope John Paul II to Nigeria in the year 1982. Late Monsignor Martin Maduka plunged himself into other aspects of Ekwulobia life including their social

and economic life. He infused sanity and order into their mode of funeral celebrations and upgraded their catechetical instructions, thereby, making it richer and more interesting. He assiduously tried to make them disciples of Christ. B. Onwuegbuchula (personal communication, January 3, 2019), posited that Monsignor Martin Maduka successfully crusaded for an authentic African Christianity, in a language and mode in which people will understand and appreciate more. In a social and simple way in which people can easily emulate and become good Christians. He is simple and content with himself and Ekwulobia cultural heritage. With that, he worshipped God. This is his life and message designated often thus: Fidelity to Christ and Africa (R. Ezekafor, personal communication, January 3, 2019). On this pastoral aphorism and acumen hinged all his priestly ministerial message to all his places of apostolic duty, Ekwulobia case, his maternal and fraternal home, will not be exceptional to this.

With the dawn of Christianity in Ekwulobia, Nkwa-nkwa dance was remoulded, and every pagan attachment to it was shed off. Eze (personal communication, November 15, 2018), explained that Nkwa-nkwa dance is a cultural dance in Ekwulobia community. It is usually performed by *Inyom-ona* and *Umuada*. *Uko* or *otosi* is usually used as the musical instrument for the dance. The village that is well known for the dance is Agba village. It is used in entertaining people during festivals like new yam festivals, *Igochi Umunwaanyi*, during traditional marriage and so on. Sacrifices and some rituals are attended to before the dance will be displayed. Nkwa-nkwa dance was changed from its pagan connotations and a pure revolution was effected. This was actualized by Late Rev Fr. Monsignor Martin Okeke Maduka (Nnadiabube); he fought in ensuring that Ekwulobia community has people who are fully Ekwulobia and fully Christian. According to Okafor and Onebunne (1996), in repeating the words of Late Maduka, “our culture must contribute to the establishment of God’s kingdom amongst men, God must reign in our culture” (p. xi). Nnadiabube introduced Nkwa-nkwa dance into the church and wiped everything pagan from the dance. During some celebrations in the church, Nkwa-nkwa dance is employed for entertainment and in the village setting also; it is also used for making people happy.

In spite of all the odds, the glorious influences and practical utilities of Christianity cannot be overemphasized. Prior to the advent of Christianity, Ekwulobia people practised polygamy. The word polygamy is the antonym of monogamy. It is a more complex system of marriage than monogamy commonly found or practised in Africa. Polygamy has been defined as the rule, custom or condition of marriage to more than one person at a time. Mbiti (1969) agrees with the above statement when he described polygamy as, “a state of marriage in which there is one husband and two or more wives” (p. 142). According to Agha (2003):

Polygamy is a system of marriage in which a man has more than one wife who were married at different times and dates. These wives may not live together, in which case the man has to visit each of them from time to time. (p. 102).

This is also the opinion shared by Henshaw (1984) when he defined polygamy as, “the custom, practice or condition of having a plurality of wives, or the habit of mating with more than one female” (p. 28). It is also defined as a custom of having several wives at the same time. The proper terminology for the type of marriage described by the scholars above should be ‘polygyny’. Polygyny is a type of marriage custom that is common among Africans and Ekwulobia people as well prior to the coming of Christianity in the area. Mbiti (1969) stated this categorically when he wrote that: “getting married to two or more wives is a common custom found all over Africa” (p. 6). According to E. Ezegwu (personal



communication, December 28, 2019), when Christianity came to Ekwulobia, the heathen chiefs were highly promiscuous, keeping many wives as their sexual desire permits. Therefore, standing as obstacle to the spread of the gospel and making it impossible for many to see the light.

With the advent of Christianity in Ekwulobia, the missionaries brought along with them a new marriage system which was diametrically opposed to that of the people of Ekwulobia. To the missionaries, monogamy was judged the ideal system. They therefore, condemned polygyny in all its ramifications. The new church preached monogamy and refused to compromise with the polygynous marriage custom of the Ekwulobia people. To be converted into the new religion did not only involve turnaround from ones sins, but it also involves the total denunciation of ones cultural heritage. The Ekwulobia Christians found it difficult to phase out polygamy from their life pattern. For the polygamist, Christianity is good, but the only impossible barrier was its stance against polygamy. The traditional worshippers affirm that the life of polygamy as practised by their fore fathers was more suitable to them than that introduced by the new religion. However, there are more monogamous marriages today in Ekwulobia than there are polygamous marriages.

Christianity has brought a lot of changes to the way of life of the people of Ekwulobia through education. Prior to the coming of Christianity in Ekwulobia, there was nothing like formal education. Education then was informal. Children were encouraged to emulate good models and virtue in the society. Learning was never pre-planned. However, Christianity brought a tremendous change in the educational arena. As soon as they arrived, they started building schools, for example, Ekwulobia Central School, Community Primary School, Umuezennefor Primary School and Eziagulu Primary School to mention but a few. The schools established by the missionaries were not only educational centres but also used as catechism centres. In other words, people were not just taught how to read and write but also to read the bible. The missions did not encourage education beyond the point needed to make one a good reader and teacher of the bible, a situation that led Ayandele (1996) to regard the educational curricula of the missions as “religion oriented and less creative, emphasizing only the three Rs - reading, writing and arithmetic” (p. 228). This they believed will enable the people of Ekwulobia to read the bible and possibly help others in future about the love of Christ. There is no doubt that this type of education affected the development of Ekwulobia, if not Ekwulobia will still be lagging behind in the education sector. Many of the great men and women owe their quality education they received to this church.

The introduction of Christianity has actually changed and improved the economic life of the Ekwulobia, ugly practices like killing of twins or triplets, discrimination against widows were checkmated. Also, Christianity helped in character modification of Ekwulobia children and made the young ones imbibe such virtues like love for one another, truth, obedience and respect for elders, parents and people in authority.

Negative Effects of Christianity on Ekwulobia Culture

Before the advent of missionaries in Ekwulobia, the people of Ekwulobia had well-established religious beliefs, practices, norms, values and worship of God. They know the Supreme Being-God but did not know Christ. There was an equally already established social system. The missionaries failed to understand this and never bothered to take a close look on the Ekwulobia cosmology. The missionaries right from the onset unconditionally condemned the Ekwulobia belief system and practices. The whole society was seen as



citadel for gods and spirits. Sacrifices of any kind to these gods were totally castigated and forbidden by Christians. They failed to understand the true nature and validity of the Ekwulobia traditional religion. The condemnation of Ekwulobia traditional religion in totality implied renunciation and destabilization of the moral codes, principles and ethics of life of the people that have been long engraved on their mode of existence.

Christianity on encounter with the already established institutions of marriage and family life, title-taking, masquerades, and the caste system and so on, the missionaries engaged in possible strategies to ensure that the existing cultural beliefs and practices do not infiltrate into Christianity. The missionaries used so many strategies to get the people to discard their much cherished tradition which has been source of conflict and disorderliness in Ekwulobia land. The natives of Ekwulobia who accepted to convert to Christianity were to relinquish their cultural affiliations and take up European lifestyle including means of identification -name. Boahen (1985) asserted that “to be admitted into the church, an African man had not only to be baptized but had to change his name” (p. 42). The converts took western names which bears no root or meaning to the people, hence the names; Mariagoretti, Ambrose, Philip, Mary Angela, Mary Clair and so on. Baptism replaced the traditional naming ceremony. Whatever dealing the missionaries had with the people of Ekwulobia, had no bearing with the Ekwulobia culture which they do not understand and never bothered to. Family system of polygyny was rejected and monogamy type of marriage was lifted up. Christians were to marry only one wife, a conflicting issue. Those who have more than one wife were to wed with only one. What happens to the others? This created a lot of confusion and irreconcilable situation.

The missionaries imposed both the Christian religion and western culture on the Ekwulobia people and the entire Igbo land surrounding Ekwulobia like Achina, Nanka, Isuofia and Umuchu using various strategies that suit them at the expense of the peace, unity, social and economic welfare of the people of Ekwulobia. The Ekwulobia people assimilated and adopted the western culture embodied in the Christianity they received. Achunike (2002) stated that the “new Christian converts seemed to work against the traditional belief and against the very communities that raised them up” (p. 47). In the course of eradicating the killing of twins, human sacrifice, social outcast, slavery and burying dead kings with human beings, the missionaries concluded that the Ekwulobia culture in its totality was evil. The Christian faith influences the daily activities in the traditional office. Some have done away with traditional symbols kept by their fore-fathers in the Obi and replaced them with crucifixes and statues of saints. Some have built chapels on the compound where masses can be celebrated by the priest. Visitors to the Igwe’s palace can equally visit the chapel and pray there.

This is an indication that the place of traditional worshippers is phasing away in Ekwulobia traditional setting. Ekwulobia traditional religion has a very rich cultural heritage and this rich values and virtues have sustained Ekwulobia people for so many years before the advent of Christianity. Jordan (1948) wrote that a whole system of taboos and ritual of ordination has controlled the entire life of Africans particularly the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria. These whole systems of taboos and ritual ordination that controlled the entire life of the Igbo were expanded by Onyeidu (1999) to include: swearing of oath, making of blood pact, trial by ordeal, oracles, vows, secret societies and the meticulous observation of customs and traditions. Unfortunately, these whole systems of taboos and rituals are no longer strictly

observed because of the influences of Christianity doctrines and this perhaps explains why there are so many crimes in the traditional communities today.

Another area that has been eroded and discarded was that of oath-taking. People now take oath according to their religious inclination and no longer on the basis of their original rich cultural heritage. This undoubtedly, has provided room for moral decadence and other vices in our society.

In terms of politics, Ekwulobia traditional political leaders no longer follow religiously the laid down rules and ritual practices that guide their offices because of their contact with the west and this is causing serious problems among the so called His Royal Majesties (HRM), the Igwes and their subjects. According to Ugwu (2002), the king is brainwashed and indoctrinated into accepting that rulership has no meaning here on earth and that nobody rules except God.

With the coming of Christianity in Ekwulobia, Ekwulobia beautiful languages have been polluted that there is no Ekwulobia man that can speak the vernacular without mixing it with English language or the “pigeon English stuff”.

Ekwulobia people are well known for being hospitable, loving and welcoming. But with the coming of Christianity in Ekwulobia, one will not be astonished to see that, that spirit of oneness, love and accommodating visitors is gradually going down because of denominational rivalry brought about by the emergence of Christianity in Ekwulobia.

The interaction and relationship among the churches in Ekwulobia reminds us that there are more than one missionary body that took part in evangelization of Ekwulobia. The presence of different missionary bodies implies different undertaking of Christianity and approaches. This bred rivalry as each mission struggled to show their mastery and superiority over others. To the Ekwulobia people, the gospel did not go deep in the people, and as a result, poor quality Christians were bred in Ekwulobia. On a global dimension, the relationship and interaction between these mission churches and the independent churches was not cordial. Oguike (1997) has this to say: “the relationship of the new religious movements with the mainline churches has been far from cordial they made most of their converts from the mainline churches” (p. 11). The interaction and relationship that exists between the denominations has not shown that they are all one in Ekwulobia, with effect that the sword of Christianity divides us and tears us apart.

Recommendations

Inculturation should serve as a viable instrument for ensuring skin-deep Christianity in Ekwulobia since it represents also in the minds of some that sense of willingness of Christianity to undertake dialogue with the culture and to enter into culture via a dynamic process in order to come to its full expression. Total break away of Ekwulobia people from their cultural roots and religious beliefs is almost an impossible mission. This is because the traditional culture and religious beliefs of Ekwulobia people form part of their identity. Therefore, a contact approach should be encouraged.

Critical evaluation of how Christianity can fully be expressed or practiced within the cultural context should be attended to. Even though it is apparent that Ekwulobia yearn to experience Christianity within their cultural setting, it still remains to be established how Christianity can best be communicated within Ekwulobia cultural context. Christianity in Ekwulobia should not only consider the positive or negative aspects of the Ekwulobia cultural and religious heritage, but should also take into account the nature of such a cultural

and religious heritage. This is because the cultural and religious heritage of Ekwulobia people in particular serves as their worldview - that is, the way they see the world, understand wellness and get to maintain balance in their lives.

The church in Ekwulobia is of age and she can now stand on her feet. Hence, she can chart her own agenda. In this case, the researcher recommends that Ekwulobia people should respond for the Christian message in accordance with her existential situations, be it political, economic, spiritual and cultural. There are some cultures that need to be modified and there are others that need to be maintained and treasured for posterity in order that their human dignity and identity as Ekwulobia people may be maintained. There is need to treasure those things that make them unique or distinguish them from other Igbo communities such as simplicity, honest life and trust, not desiring to acquire money or wealth by all means or at the expense of human life, ethics of hard work, cultural dances and games. It is important that they disengage their minds from the erroneous concept that money is better than good names. Honesty had been a part of Ekwulobia culture. We should allow the light of Jesus to enter into our culture. The light will make our culture to stand tall and above all, stand the test of time.

Conclusion

The culture of Ekwulobia as well as their religion is so valuable and indispensable to them that they will find it difficult separating themselves from it. Christianity did not only compete with Ekwulobia culture as a whole, but it threatened its very existence. Christianity and Ekwulobia culture have existed together since they came into contact and they have influenced each other both negatively and positively. Ekwulobia culture is fundamental to any meaningful Christian practice in the area. Unless these values, beliefs and ideas of Ekwulobia people are incorporated into Christianity, the Christian practice will continue to be shallow in Ekwulobia. If Christianity that came to Africa had Jewish, Roman and Hellenistic elements, then it must also incorporate some Igbo/Ekwulobia elements. For the researcher, the culture of Ekwulobia is the correct wheel on which the Christian message and practice will rotate. The churches must be prepared enough for greater degree of flexibility and adaptation and the abandonment of their dream of a homogeneous Christian culture devoid of all African elements.

Indeed, the missionaries that came to Ekwulobia were not interested in Ekwulobia culture. Ekwulobia culture was not important to them and they thought they could build the Christian faith and practice in vacuum. This was really a wrong approach and we do not hesitate to say that this false assumption underscores the shallow type of Christianity in Ekwulobia. The churches in Ekwulobia should be able to see the need in making the people feel at home with the gospel of Christ. This could be achieved by rooting the gospel in the culture, language, habits and thoughts of the people by employing inculturation as a viable tool in achieving this.

Since Ekwulobia traditional religion and culture permeates every aspect of the people's life, it stands the reason to say that it is the Ekwulobia culture and religion that must be Christianized so as to appreciate that Christ came for them also. The harmonization of their traditional cultural values and ideas with Christianity will surely enhance the principles which Jesus enunciated, namely, love of God and love of one's neighbour.

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