

Inculturation in Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches in Igboland, 1857 to 1960

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ABSTRACT: The Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches have stayed for more than a century, yet the gospel had not taken root in Igboland. These churches were selected for this study owing to the fact that they were the foremost churches that evangelized Igboland. The legacies laid by the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) and Church Missionary Society (CMS) on inculturation have created problem for the present churches and other denominations. This problem is the negative attitude of these churches to inculturation. The work examined the negative attitude of the RCM and CMS to inculturation and proffered solution to the problem for the gospel to be more relevant for the people. This work used primary source like observation and secondary sources which included books, Internet materials and newspapers. It used historical approach. The data collected were described and analyzed. It was discovered that the RCM and CMS' nonchalant attitude to inculturation had deprived the people the opportunity of receiving the gospel that was more relevant to their situations and context. It was discovered that the negative attitudes of the RCM and CMS on inculturation are still affecting the contemporary Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. The work recommended that the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches should expedite action in employing inculturation as a strategy for evangelization in Igboland which would make the gospel to adapt to their situations and cultural context.

Keywords: Culture, evangelization, gospel, inculturation, theology.

INTRODUCTION

Initially, inculturation was used in a missiological sense to explain the mission of the Church to non-Christian religions and cultures (Onwubiko 2001). It was designed to address numerous conflicts accruing from the encounter between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. It must be stated that one of the puzzling issues that challenges Christianity is how to interpret Christian message from African perspective in order to enable the African understands the gospel within his cultural context for a better and more tolerant Christian living. However, it has been discovered that the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches are lagging behind on inculturation due to the wrong foundation the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) and Church Missionary Society (CMS) laid on inculturation. This may be partially due to fear of syncretism. From every indication, there is no doubt that

the African Independent Churches (AIC's) have overcome fear of inculturation which has enabled them to present the gospel that is more relevant to African context and situations. This accounts for the African's habit of feeling at home in the African Independent Churches (AIC's).

There is no doubt that the strategies used by the RCM and CMS in the evangelization of Igboland created problems for the present Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches due to their negligence of inculturation that would have created harmonious relationship between Christianity and Igbo culture. Christianity has remained at the periphery of the people's religious beliefs and practices. Previous researchers devoted attention on decolonization of the Bible and indigenization of Christianity in Igboland without considering the negligence of inculturation by the RCM and CMS that were the first

to evangelize Igboland. There is no way decolonization of Christianity and interpretation of the Bible in African context will make impact in the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches and possibly, in other denominations if the wrong foundations laid by the RCM and CMS concerning Inculturation are not adequately addressed. The work examined the negative attitude of the RCM and CMS to Inculturation of the gospel and proffered solution to the problem for Christianity, particularly the gospel to be more relevant for the people.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF TERMS

Inculturation

Uzukwu (1996) avers that inculturation is the incarnation of Christian message in cultures. It is the interpretation of Christian message to reflect the cultural context of the audience or congregation. Gener (2008) opines that inculturation means the process of proclaiming and explaining the gospel in a language a given group of people can understand. In inculturation, the gospel is proclaimed and preached in such a way that it will take cognizance of the people's way of life. According to Onwubiko (2001), inculturation is "a form of evangelization of peoples and cultures, expresses an aspect of the process of the influence of the gospel preached to peoples" (p. 387). It aims at influencing culture by its reformative power. Mbon (1993) states that inculturation is the process of practicing Christian faith within the cultural context. It occurs when a Christian practices his or her Christian faith as an African Christian. Inculturation utilizes culture as a vehicle of proclaiming and explaining the gospel.

Gospel

Grayston (1983) asserts that Gospel is derived from the old English word *godspel* which is equivalent to Latin word "*bona annuntiatio*" and Greek word "*euangelion*" which means good news. Therefore, Gospel is good news. Ferguson and Wright (1988) assert that Gospel is synonymous to "Joyful tidings" and 'good news'. It consists of the totality of Christian message. Ekpunobi (1993) observes that Gospel is a message that conveys good news. The Gospel summarizes the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Uka (1999) sees the Gospel as good news that proclaims the tidings of deliverance. Gospel is the totality of Christian messages preached by the church to the world. It is a message of salvation from sin. Lasebikan (2002) argues that Gospel is good news that God loves the world. It is a message of God's love. Alexander (1980) insists that Gospel is Jesus who is the good news. The church emphasizes on the Gospel due to the mission of the church is Christ centric.

Culture

Iwe (nd) defines culture as "a complex and total configuration of institutions and mode of life embracing the knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, capabilities, habits and expectations commonly prevalent in society and shared by the members thereof" (p. 84). Culture is a totality of a way of life of a given people. Emovan (1990) notes that culture is the arts, customs, beliefs and all products of human ideas made by people at a particular time. Culture is transmitted from one generation to another generation orally. Arinze (2001) declares that culture is a body of knowledge, way of thinking, feelings, attitudes, goals and ideals. In fact, culture covers every aspect of human life. Imo (1997) makes it clear that culture connotes "pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitude toward life" (p. 9). Culture is a vehicle of communication.

Theology

Dickson (1984) points out that the word theology was etymologically derived from two Greek words "Theos" meaning God and "Logos" which means word or reason. Theology means the study of God's word. Umoren (2005) asserts that theology is an intellectual discipline that deals with an ordered study about God. It is a systematic discourse about God. Onuoha (2000) opines that theology is a reasoned discourse about gods or God. Uzoho (2001) maintains that theology is the body of truth about God in relation to man. It discusses the nature of God systematically.

Theoretical framework

The work used conflict theory. Conflict theory originated from sociologists that drew their theory from Karl Marx and Simmel in 1950s and 1960s respectively. Karl Marx propounded a dichotomous view of social conflict in which the whole society was divided into two classes of capital and labour. There was a social conflict when different interests of the two classes clashed (Abercrombie, Hill, Turner, 2000). Simmel did not share the idea that conflict could result in disintegration and destruction of society, rather social conflict would usher in social stability and preservation of the groups and collectivities. The conflict theory states that complex societies always have plurality of interests and conflicts provide balancing mechanism that prevents instability. It must be noted that social conflicts are inevitable in interpersonal and social interactions (Abercrombie *et al.*, 2000).

Iruonagbe (2009) asserts that conflict theory revolves around internal divisions that erupt in a community over

differences in dogma and worship that cause open conflict. Social conflict is caused by religious differences. It occurs where there is interdenominational conflict. Social conflict is visible when there is inter religious conflict like conflict between Christianity and African traditional religion. Inculturation is a means of resolving religious conflict between Christianity and Igbo traditional religion.

THE BACKGROUND OF IGBOLAND

Uchem (2001) opines that Igbo were the third largest ethnic group in Nigeria. She further states that according to the 1991 census, the population of Igbo people was 13 million which represented 21% of the total population of Nigeria. There is no agreement on the geographical location of Igboland. However, Ekwunife (1990) quips that:

the Igbo inhabit an area of Southern Nigeria between latitude 5 to 7 degrees north and longitude 6 to 8 degrees east. The area covers about 15,800 square miles, the bulk of which falls within the equatorial rain forest region. The Igbo have a common border with the Igala and the Idoma on the north, the Ijaw and the Ogoni on the south, the Yako and the Ibibio on the eastern boundary and the Bini and Warri on the west (p.2).

The people share a common language known as Igbo language. However, different dialects abound in Igboland. They are predominantly farmers which accounts for their dependence on agricultural production as a means of livelihood.

Igbo occupy the present southeast geo-political zone. Diara (2001) avers that the Igbo live in villages which comprise of homesteads and share the same kinship ties. Clan or community is the largest political unit in Igboland. The villages that make up of a clan share the same cultural identity, guardian deity, central meeting place and market.

He further states that each village has the right to manage its affairs. In Igboland, every clan has a traditional ruler. Every community is autonomous, hence the name autonomous community.

ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN IGBOLAND

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) was the first mission to arrive in Igboland in 1857. It was the British Government officials, MacGregor Laird and Williams Balfour Baikie that sponsored the expedition to Igboland. Samuel Ajayi Crowther led the CMS in company of John Christopher Taylor, Simon Jones, Augustus Radaillo (librated slaves of Igbo origin), with definite mandate from Henry Venn to open a mission at Onitsha (Anyabuike 1996). The leader of CMS, Samuel Ajayi Crowther and his

team arrived at Onitsha on 26th July, 1857. They visited Odiri, the king's son before they were invited to the palace of Akazua (Animalu, 2001). They were received by the king of Onitsha, Obi Akazua and his cabinet. Those that received them included the king's son Odiri, Obi's brother, Orikaebue and Obi's councilor, Anyakoha. Samuel Ajayi Crowther and his team informed the king of the purpose of their visit which was to establish a church in his kingdom. The king immediately gave them land to build a church. It was on July 27, 1857 that the first church was built by the CMS (Anyabuike, 1996). Ajayi Crowther led the Niger Mission to Igboland which he latter handed over to John Christopher Taylor who became in - charge of Niger Mission (Kalu 1998). This continued till Holy Ghost Fathers arrived in Onitsha.

The Holy Ghost Fathers came to lower Niger in 1885 (Onitsha). It was in the same year that the first Catholic Mission in Igboland was established. The Holy Ghost Fathers came on the invitation of French Trading Company. On their arrival, Samuel Ajayi Crowther gave them land and said "I acquired this land for God's cause, take it"(p.147). It is worthy of note that an Alsatian, Father Lutz, founded Holy Ghost Mission in Igboland. After his death, Leon Lejeune succeeded him in 1900. He was the first person to introduce Education as the primary means of evangelization in Igboland. Joseph Shanaham a Holy Ghost Father, succeeded him and contributed a lot in spreading Roman Catholic Church to the rest of Igboland (Isichei, 1973).

Mission churches and inculturation in Igboland

The Holy Ghost Fathers led by Father Lutz and later Joseph Shanaham paid much attention on social services at the expense of inculturation. Shorter (1973) has this to say:

among the Ibo of Nigeria the Catholic Mission seemed to offer many avenues of social advancement and this accounts for the very large number of conversions, in spite of the fact that no real encounter took place between Christian ideas and the Ibo spiritual world (p.78).

The RCM presented Christianity that was foreign to the people as well as severing the relationship between Igbo Christians and traditional Igbo spirituality.

The CMS that evangelized Igboland was frustrated by language barrier. It was not conversant with Igbo Language. Ayandele (1966) notes that it was language barrier that led Ajayi Crowther to make policy that English Language should be the only medium of teaching in CMS churches in Igboland. It was a serious problem for the early converts of CMS that were yet to understand English Language. Akuma (2002) states that even when the

Missionaries utilized interpreters, they misinterpreted the messages grossly to the detriment of the gospel and the Igbo converts. The interpreters conveyed wrong interpretations that negated the authenticity of Christian message. Consequently, Nwosu and Kalu (1978) assert that language barrier was an obstacle to inculturation.

The Christian Missionaries sent by the CMS and RCM to Igboland lacked theological training. Their sending Mission Bodies did not send the best. Akuma (2002) quips "missionaries like T.J. Dennis of the C.M.S who came to Onitsha, was originally a gardener; H. proctor-the head peddler; E.H. Hardman-the book seller; while others were clerks, etc" (p. 96). A lot of emphasis was laid on spirituality, knowledge of the bible and common sense, rather than on theological and educational qualifications. In corroboration with this view, Isichei (1973) recalls how agents of Igbo extraction that were serving Royal Niger Company as gardeners, carpenters and servants were converted as Evangelists for Missionary work in Igboland. It must be stated that poor theological and educational qualifications of the early Missionaries and Agents (catechists) had grave consequences on inculturation. It is based on this Nweke (2001) asserts that the immediate effect of poor educational qualifications of the early Missionaries was condemnation of anything they did not understand and giving it a wrong terminology.

It should be recalled that the early Christian Missionaries sent to Igboland were full of prejudice, sentiments and bias against the Igbo culture. Isichei (1973) opines that the early Christian Missionaries had erroneous view that the souls of the unconverted would be lost. For them, Igbo Traditional Religion (ITR) was *preparatio Evangelica*. Ilogu (1974) captures this when he quoted Ajayi Crowther as saying "the Ibo gods - their Idols Ikenga, Tshi and Ofo, their country gods, are now tottering and I hope will be ere long for ever paralysed... The Tshuku (god) of...the Ibos in general, shall fall down before the Gospel, as the Dragon fell before the Ark's" (p. 64). This attitude to Igbo religion made it impossible for the Mission Churches to embark on inculturation of the Gospel.

It is worthy of note that for the early Christian Missionaries there was no distinction between Christianity and Civilization, they were interwoven. The early Christian Missionaries exhibited superiority of Christianity above Igbo culture. More often than not, superiority and pride of the early Christian Missionaries against Igbo culture were attributed to their alliance with the Colonialists (Ekunwufe, 1990, Anyanwu, 1993). Sequel to this, the early Christian Missionaries resorted to reducing Igbo culture to nothing. Cultural hybrids manifested when they insisted that those that came for baptism must reject their Igbo names for a European or a Hebrew name. New converts were forced to jettison Igbo dress and put on English clothes always (Onwurah 1999). Children that went to school and were believed to have acquired civilization were debarred from participating in traditional ceremonies like initiation into the

masquerade societies, participation in social and cultic dances, acolyte duties, sacrifices and worship of clan and family gods on the grounds that they were uncivilized (Ilogu, 1974).

There is disagreement between Igbo world view and Christian world view. They are two parallel lines that cannot meet. World view is a rational explanation of man and the nature of the world where he lives (Kalu, 1993, Achebe 1986). The way an Igbo man sees the world is different from the way a Christian understands the universe. Christians are yet to reconcile with Igbo Traditionalists over reincarnation, heaven and hell, abode of ancestors, rewards and punishment on the grounds of syncretism. This has led to fear of syncretism that is a clog in the wheel of inculturation in Igboland. Syncretism means practicing two religions at a time. There is fear among the people, particularly Christians that an attempt to interpret the gospel from Igbo perspective may result in syncretism. Gwamna (2008) expressed fear that inculturation may lead to the colonization of the Bible in which Igbo culture imposes itself on the biblical studies. The danger of inculturation is that it may lead to 'Igbo centric' Christianity as well as a Bible and gospel that lack universal merit and acceptance.

Obstacles to inculturation in Igboland

The incessant conflicts between Igbo Traditional Religion, Mission Churches, particularly the Church Missionary Society (CMS) now called Anglican Church and Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) now addressed as Roman Catholic Church is an evidence to prove that the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church pay lip services to inculturation in Igboland. Ejizu (1985) maintains that conflict between the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church and Igbo Traditional Religion is still on. There are open confrontations, strives, crisis that mark the encounter of the two religions. There is no doubt that inculturation would have enabled Christians to realize that as Christian objects like cross, church buildings, Eucharistic elements (bread and wine) and other dedicated objects are sacred so also traditional objects like dedicated animals, shrines and trees are sacred and should not be destroyed. It is not so with Christian fanatics that destroy Igbo sacred objects with recklessness. For instance, according to Ekechi (1972), the school boys from Oba (near Onitsha) out of over zealotry caught a sheep offered to *A/la*, the Earth goddess, killed it and ate all with the approval of their teachers. They were apprehended and asked why they did it, they said that the sheep was offered to idols that did not exist. There was a letter written by Henry Venn, the Secretary General of Church Missionary Society (CMS) then who stated that customs that came into conflict with the bible should be rejected. This directive attracted the Church Missionary Society's indignation against taking

Ozo title by the members of the church (Adiele 1996). It should be stated that one of the measures taken by the CMS was to stop the Ozo title holders from receiving Holy Communion. The CMS also threatened Ozo title holders with ex-communication if they failed to renounce their membership (Adiele 1996). This created a lot of controversies in the church.

Similarly, Afigbo (2008) discloses that crisis broke out at Abia State University, Uturu, due to some Christian students that protested over the inclusion of *Ikenga* icon as one of the components of the University's coat of arms. The *Ikenga* icon in the coat of arms was significant to the extent that Undergraduates of Abia State University were addressed as *Ikengas* (Males) and *Ikengaresses* (Females). According to him, the angry Christian students insisted that the University is God's own University, there was no way the *Ikenga* icon which they described as fetish and satanic should be one of the elements of coat of arms. They protested for its removal and the students henceforth should not be addressed as *Ikengas* (Males) and *Ikengaresses* (Females). It caused an uproar which resulted in the intervention of the Governing Council of the University that settled the matter.

A similar controversy broke out in Owerri over the demolition of *Ikenga*. Ezughah (1999) observes that war raged in Owerri, the state capital of Imo State, over the demolition of *Ikenga* that was commissioned on October 1, 1986 by the military administration of Allison Madueke. The *Ikenga* statue was constructed by a sculptor, Vincent Onwuanaka of the Fine and Applied Arts Department of the Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri. It was situated at the intersection of Wetheral and Okigwe Roads. The *Ikenga* statue was elevated 18 feet above the ground. Traditionalists that opposed the demolition of the *Ikenga* argued that the *Ikenga* statue is a symbol of the cult of right hand which represents an Igbo man's struggle amidst vicissitudes of life. It also symbolizes Igbo man's value for hard work. However, the Bishop of Anglican Diocese of Owerri then and other Christians insisted that the statue must be demolished based on their claim that *Ikenga* statue was a symbol of idol worship. He further asserts that it was during the military administration of Tanko Zubairu that the *Ikenga* statue was demolished and substituted with a cross on 25th April, 1999. According to Afigbo (2008), crisis erupted during the military administration of Tanko Zubairu for suspending *Ahijoku* lecture in Imo State for four years. The academia did not take it kindly with the administration of Tanko Zubairu who was alleged to have colluded with some Christians and suspended the lecture that hitherto was a forum for Igbo scholars to showcase their researches on Igbo culture on the grounds that it was fetish. Crisis also broke out at Achina, Anambara state, as a result of the destruction of *Ezeokolo*, which was the main shrine of Achina people. Prior to the destruction of the shrine, there was an allegation that unknown people came and made away with carved gods

and assorted masks at the shrine. A traditionalist from Achina, Ezenwa took it upon himself to prosecute the three Catholic Priests and their congregations for allegedly masterminding the destruction of the shrine, *Ezeokolo*, after a three day revival in Achina. The church's massive destruction of Igbo traditional religion and culture has resulted in razing 500 traditional worship sites in the past decade. The destruction of artifacts by Christians has aroused the anger of the Traditionalists against Christians in Igboland (247 unreports.com/cultural conflicts).

Necessity of inculturation of the gospel in Igboland

Inculturation has become a necessity in harnessing the experience of Igbo people in making the Christian message real and more authentic (Obiechina, 1978). The Igbo cannot afford to practice Christianity that is foreign, European and British. They are not comfortable practicing Christianity that has no room for reflection on the real life of the people. Such a peripheral gospel avails nothing. It is tantamount to negligence of socio-political, economic and religious experiences of the people. He further argues that Christian liturgy is worthless if it does not provide channel for dissipation of emotions for the people. The Igbo are crying, laughing, shouting and praising people which should be reflected in their liturgical practices. There are yearnings by the Igbo to express Christian faith that is adapted to their culture and religious sentiments, especially in a world of change (Ugwu, 1999). The Igbo Christians still believe that spontaneous prayer is more efficacious than written prayers. Kalu (1998) asserts that the Igbo Christian who comes before God for health, long life, children and prosperity prefers spontaneous prayer to fixed prayer. They prefer prayer that addresses their socio-psychological, spiritual and physical needs. In the Mission Churches, there is no emphasis on removal of guilt, demon possession, deliverance, bad dreams and spiritual attacks. These are daily occurrences and experiences of the people that require attention of the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. For about one hundred and sixty years Christianity came to Igboland, it is still regarded as foreign or imported religion. It is yet to be accepted as an indigenous religion. It was partly the fault of early Missionaries that separated Christianity from Igbo culture which was instilled in the minds of their indigenous successors that have insisted on doing it the same way. However, some priests of the Mission Churches have made an inroad into inculturation, but their efforts have not obliterated the injustices done to Igbo culture as well as the seed of antagonism sowed between Christian faith and Igbo cultural practices.

For Kalu (1993), the gospel is yet to speak to Igbo people due to the inability of the Mission Churches like Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Church to understand the nature of Igbo culture which has resulted in turning

Christianity into a parallel religion in Igboland. The necessity of inculturation in Igboland cannot be over emphasized. There is no doubt that many Igbo Christians are living in between two worlds of Christianity and Igbo traditional religion. Such people are neither Christians nor Traditionalists. Onwurah (1999) observes thus:

when it comes to major crises of life, namely, sickness, suffering and death, Christ is pushed aside and real recourse made to traditional and well proven methods of countering the effects of evil and gaining assurance in world of uncertainty and danger (p.147).

It is discovered that some Christians practice both Christianity and Igbo traditional religion at the same time. There is no demarcation between Christianity and Igbo traditional religion. Ijediogor and Ezea (2009) opine that Chris Ngige was allegedly compelled by his god father, Chris Uba to swear an oath of allegiance to him at the Okija shrine before he became the Governor of Anambra state in 2003. Later, Chris Ngige acknowledged the fact that he went to Okija shrine with his Bible but he did not swear an oath for anybody.

CONCLUSION

The Christian message should enter into dialogue with Igbo tradition and culture to enable Christianity be more meaningful to the people. Unfortunately, the early Christian Missionaries that evangelized Igboland did not take cognizance of the necessity of inculturation. Even when it was obvious that the gospel should be preached through the people's culture, prejudice, bias, superiority complex, pride, language barrier became great obstacles to inculturation. The Mission Churches should strive to overcome the pitfalls of the early Christian Missionaries in order to present the gospel through the Igbo cultural lens that will not only make the gospel clearer and more meaningful but will also make Igbo people feel at home in the church and tolerant to the Igbo culture.

Lack of encounter between Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion is a responsible factor for the incessant religious conflicts between Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion. It has become a necessity for the Mission Churches, particularly the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church to pay attention to the training of their priests on inculturation, so that they will acquire the skills required for effective inculturation of Christianity in Igboland. There is no need to fear that inculturation will create opportunity for syncretism to flourish provided the religious leaders of the Roman Catholic Church and Anglican Church will focus on lofty cultural and religious practices and discard obnoxious ones that contradict the Christian faith. Again, if Christianity could borrow from non Christian religions, yet remains authentic, there is no

reason it will not put the good aspect of Igbo Traditional Religion into consideration in the interpretation of the gospel and presentation of Christianity to the people.

The leaders of Mission Churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church are not expected to treat the Igbo Traditional Faithfuls with disdain due to they are not members of their churches by subjecting them to humiliation and destruction of their sacred objects. Each of these religions has adherents that hold its teachings tenaciously which necessitates the adherents of these religions to respect each other in the spirit of freedom of worship that is expected to prevail in Igbo society that is pluralistic in nature. The informal education that was prevalent among the people before the advent of Christianity was an agent of socialization. Education becomes irrelevant if it cannot socialize the people to be members of society. Consequently, formal education is meant to educate members of society to appreciate and practice their culture, rather than relegating it to the background.

Recommendations

The church and adherents of Igbo Traditional Religion are expected to refrain from attacking each other. There should be freedom of worship between the religions in Igboland. Dialogue between Christians and adherents of Igbo Traditional Religion is a key for mutual understanding of each other. Inculturation should be carried out in such a way that it will not lead to syncretism. Studies on Christianity and African Traditional Religion should be intensified in Universities, Colleges of Education and seminaries in the Country to enable students understand the heritages of both religions in other to know areas of agreements and disagreements which will enable them to resolve areas of conflict. Religious leaders of both religions have to sensitize their members to be law abiding. Also, members of the religions should tolerate one another. Political leaders should not use religions as tools for destabilization.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares that they have no conflict of interests.

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