

The Role of the Church in Iwhuruoha Development

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Abstract

Nigeria like other post-colonial states in Africa greatly suffered and suffocated from the pacification spree of colonialism. It was a most dreadful brutality which distorted and greatly disorganized the cultural bond of the people. All these were systematically orchestrated to achieve an economic objective. In fact, those who set out for colonialist imperialism in Africa and indeed Nigeria, were not engaged in an act of civilization nor the spread of enlightenment spirit. One of the lasting legacies of colonialism in Nigeria is the church. It was the handmaiden of colonialism that softened the mind of the people to embrace the values and ethos of capitalist imperialism. The spread of this consciousness was facilitated by western education. Education became a tool to enter and embrace the world of 'civilization'. This study seeks to examine the role of the church in Nigeria, particularly in Iwhuruohna. It is a qualitative study and data collection relied solely on secondary sources. These include a review of existing literature, journals, magazines and visit to some research institutes like the Centre for Black and African Arts and Culture in Lagos and Claude Ake School of Government in University of Port Harcourt, Choba. It was discovered that contrary to existing position, the church has played significant roles in Nigeria and Iwhuruohna, especially in the production of human capital that have immensely facilitated, the development agenda in Iwhuruohna Ethnicity Nationality (IEN). Rt. Rev. V.A. Ogbonna, Bishop of Ikwerre Diocese of the Christ Army Church is one of such products of the church. We, therefore recommend that men like Bishop Ogbonna whose virtues served as building blocks for the development of their area should be emulated and cherished at all times.

Keywords: Colonialism, Capitalism Imperialism, Dreadful Brutality, Western Education, Civilization

Introduction

Nigeria is a sovereign State within the global community. Like other African States, it experienced one of the 'most dreadful brutality' as a result of the pacification spree, and the British military operation which culminated in the greatest of colonial looting in Nigeria (Siollun, 2021, p.127). The country's industrial and cultural capacity was distorted and externalized with the imposition of an alien philosophical worldview and economic relation. This was so because in the colonial calculus, African enlightenment was not prominent. In order to justify their colonial imperialist mission, Africa, indeed Nigeria was negatively given an epitaphic description of 'a sub-specie of humanity' with inherent inferiority. These erroneous conceptions of Nigeria consistently influenced colonial policies until political independence on 1st October, 1960. It must be emphasized that it was not the spread of 'Enlightenment Spirit' nor

the 'Civilizing Mission' that brought Europe to Africa, but the burning desire to get an unhindered access to the continent teeming with inexhaustible fertility. This imperial capitalist interest was corroborated in 1923 by Albert Sarrant, French Colonial Secretary of state. According to him,

What is the use of painting the truth? At the start, colonialization was not an act of civilization, nor was it a desire to civilize. It was an act of force motivated by interests. An episode in the vital competition which from man to man, from group to group, has gone on ever increasing, the people who set out to seize colonies in distant lands were thinking primarily of themselves, and were working for their own profits, and conquering for their own power (Nkrumah, 1963,p.21).

Colonial incursion in Nigeria undoubtedly was motivated by capitalist interest, and this accounted for all the pro-imperialist policies of the colonial state, even up to the 21st century. Hence, Ijeomah (2005,p.44) noted that the economic system established by the colonial government kept the colonies willy-nilly at the mercy of world markets. As an important feature of capitalism, its distortion and destabilization of pre-colonial potentates and institutes cannot be overemphasized. It is therefore, not out of place to conclude that the present political economy crises in the country bordering on human insecurity, cyclical stagnancy, retrogression, suffocating macroeconomic environment and extremely poor Human Development Index (HDI) are traceable to the manipulations of the colonial state. It carefully prepared Nigeria as a country 'fit-for-foreign-purpose'. This scenario was deepened and consolidated by the inheritors of political power incubated by the departing colonial officers. It is in recognition of this fact that Ekekwe (2018,p.78) noted that, a meaningful restructuring of Nigeria has to be comprehensive and painstakingly undertaken because the roots of the problem lie in our collective experiences of about hundred years, in the burdens imposed by those experiences. In fact, the whole essence of European colonialism of Africa was completely an exercise in wickedness and man's inhumanity to man. Nwabueze (2010,p.47) pointed out that, the title of European colonizers to rule Africa had no such moral basis in traditions convention or myth, it was grounded purely on conquest by force of arms, sheer might, or cession obtained by undue influence.

One of the legacies of colonialism is the Christian church. Christianity was the hand maiden of colonialism in the planning and execution of its policies and programmes. Through its vigorous and competitive evangelism, the myriad Christian denominations penetrated the emotions and cultural bond of the people. The people were admonished to 'trust and obey' the colonial authority for there is no other way to be happy within a colonial environment. A seamless relationship between the church and the colonial state was maintained. While the Colonial State provided the needed security and minimal grants for the church to run their affairs, especially schools, the church provided the needed manpower and upright characters that would meet the demands of a colonial administration. Collins (2007,p.187) stated that;

The conquest and occupation of Africa at the later half of the nineteenth century introduced alien rulers to whom the traditional education within African societies was unproductive, unprogressive, and not always relevant to the needs of the imperial homeland.

Colonial education became an ideological tool to internalize the values of capitalist orthodoxy and production of elites grossly alienated from their cultural milieu. It is important to note here that despite the hallowed praise on colonial education, it did not exterminate the assumed

raciocultural superiority of western values. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the role of the church in Iwhuruhna development.

Clarification of Concepts

In this section, we shall be concerned with the clarification of the important concepts in this paper. This would enhance our comprehension, and most importantly, it is an indispensable part of social science tradition in eliminating what seem to be ambiguities and haziness in any work. But before we delve into the concepts, let us briefly answer the question, who are the Iwhuruohna?

Simply put, Iwhuruohna more often referred to as Ikwerre is one of the 389 ethnic groups in Nigeria (Orite, 2000). It is the largest ethnic group in Rivers State and spread within four local government areas. These are Port Harcourt City Council, Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre and Emohua Local Government Areas. Akani (2022, p.73) noted that the ethnic group lies roughly within the coordinates of 450N15⁰ 15N, 6⁰30E and 7⁰15E, with a population of 1,390,895 according to the 2006 census. It is estimated that with population explosion, the population would have tremendously doubled by 2023. The place is endowed with limitless bounties and inexhaustible fertility such that people from all over the country desire to permanently settle and have an untruncated retirement life. Its tradition which encapsulates its artistic, poetic, religious and social relation anchored on the concept of Ubuntu has made many people to christen it 'eli yebiala meruehia' (a place where you deprive yourself something for not visiting). Iwhuruohna is a product of many migrations starting from Wagidi of Isiokpo in 1100 from Benin Empire because of the Ogiso Dynastic crisis, Ochichi and Akalaka in the late fifteenth century. There are also some internal migrations such as Rundele and Uvawhu from Ekpeye, Isiordu Okani eli from Rukpokwu (Ikpokwu), Rumuoro in Ogbakiri (Wezina) from Rumudede in Ekinigbo, Rumuokani (Wezina) from Rumuoria in Rumuokwuta all from Aparia kingdom to mention just a few. Over a long period of time, these groups have come to see themselves as an indivisible bloc bonded by a common cultural feeling in all ramifications. During the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras, Iwhuruohna Ethnic Nationality (IEN) have not faltered in immensely contributing to the entrepreneurial prowess and political development of Rivers State and Nigeria. Perhaps it is because of its enviable advantage that it incurred the hostility of some groups especially during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-70.

Sometime in 1985, the Nigerian Institute of Languages recognized Ikwerre as one of the national language in the country. Unfortunately, the ethnic group has since colonial time witnessed the distortion and desecration of its history claiming that it is a sub-set of a mega ethnic group. All these were based on fallacious assumptions to achieve and consolidate a political economy that favoured their desire for unquestionable primitive accumulation of wealth within Iwhuruohna. According to Ogolo (2022, p.33), over time, the language affinity has failed to prove that Ikwerre originated from the Ibo-ethnic group. The work of Kay Williamson on the linguistic affinity between Ibo and Ikwerre notes that the later (Ikwerre) was not a dialect of Ibo, but at best could be regarded as a related language which she termed the lower Niger group of languages.

Having briefly located the position of Iwhuruohna, let us look at the Church and Development. Most often, the question has often been asked if Jesus Christ within the thirty-three years of His Ministry built a church? This enigmatic question can be answered in two ways – 'if a church is referred to as a building housing people of the Christian faith, it is likely to surmise that Jesus Christ never built a church. On the other hand, if He assembled people for the propagation of a

new order, then He built a church. The church which originated from the Greek word 'ekklesia' was instituted by Jesus Christ during His ministry. At the city of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus Christ wanted to test the knowledge of His disciples about his identity. It was Simon Peter who said that 'you are the Christ, the son of the living God'. Excited with this answer, Jesus made a historic proclamation which can be seen as the official anointment of Peter as the Head of the church. According to Matthew 16:18, Jesus unambiguously stated that:

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosen in heaven.

We can assert without equivocation that it was because of this Divine charge to Peter that he is placed as the first Pope in the Roman Catholic Papacy. He was not only canonized as St. Peter, but seen as the Vicar-General of Christ. Indeed, Jesus instituted a church by assembling twelve men named apostles/disciples. Even though the building was not completed, but all preparations had been made for its take-off. Therefore, a church can be referred to as any assembly; local body of believers or the universal body of believers (Brand, 2003, p.295). According to Johnson (2015,p.1), the church is the assemblage of God's people. In the universal term, it includes radical new generation of people who accept Jesus Christ as the Lord and son of God. The assemblage goes beyond the boundaries of Jews and gentiles, as it includes all those who believe in Jesus. According to Quarcoopome (1985,p.158), It is quite apparent that 'Jesus, in His life time intended to bring into being a new community of believers. In short, He intended to establish a church. It is therefore, reasonable to regard as genuine, the sayings of Jesus with specific reference to the church. He calls Peter the one which he would build his church. Peter was to be the head of the new community. All the authority is given to the leaders of the church. In matters of ethics and discipline of the church, Jesus counsels what the church should do when a member continues in his obduracy. He is to be excommunicated. 'If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a gentile and tax collector' (Matthew 18:17).

In other words, the church constitutes the people of God, the Body of Christ united as believers under Jesus suzerainty, and the church is a covenant community. They epitomize the foundation and strong pillar of the Christian faith and cannot renege from such commitment. Considering the sterling characteristics of the church, they are not only enjoined to obey secular authorities, but to subject themselves to the demands of the messianic kingdom. The church must be exemplary and must be seen to act accordingly because Christ is the 'Head of the church'.

They must also ensure that they become ambassadors of Christ through the preaching of the gospel of redemption. The hallmarks of the church should be service and humility and without racial or territorial distinction. Akani (2014,p.224) stated that the ecumenical character of the church as noted by St. Paul is that there is no Jew no Gentile. In his Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul declared that there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave no free, there is neither male no female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians, 3:28).

From our discourse thus far, we can see that the church constitute of a body united to reflect, continue, reinforce, and re-emphasis the message of redemption of mankind, service to humanity and conduct themselves in a manner that will expand the salient themes of Jesus Christ who is

the Head of the church. The work of the church is facilitated by a building where the body of believers can congregate from time to time to pray, mediate and seek the favours of God.

Development

The concept of development is key in the social sciences, particularly to African scholars. From the decade of the 1950s, it was approximated to be growth measured in quantitative terms such as high external reserve, Gross National Product (GNP) and per capita income. Economic growth places more emphasis on economism without bringing the people at the centre of the process and protecting the values, needs cherished by the society. This flaw necessitated a more embracing approach to the concept. From the 1970s to the 21st century, scholars like Todaro and Smith (2004), Adedeji (2000), Ake (2001), and Rodney (2009) have come to see development with a humane content. The 1991 World Development Report stated that ‘the challenge of development... is to improve the quality of life’. Sen (1999) also noted that ‘economic growth cannot be sensibly treated as an end in itself. Development has to be more concerned with changing the lives and the freedoms we enjoy’. In what can be seen as a new dimension to the multidimensional concept, Seers (1969) posited that before arriving at what development is, we must ask the following questions:

1. What has been happening to poverty?
2. What has been happening to unemployment?
3. What has been happening to inequality?

For Seers (1969) therefore, when all these human-centred questions are answered in the affirmative, then a development is on course. This is why Prebisch (1971,p.171) stated that ‘a new type of development is required, imbued with great vigor and strong sense of social equity. The strong sense of ‘social equity’ which Prebisch (1971) referred to takes cognizance of the people. Perhaps this was why Rodney (2004,p.1) defined it as a many-sided process which implies increased skill, a capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Development is people-centered. It is a life-long project geared towards the realization of the potentials of the human personality (Olaniyi, 2017,p.397). It is a multifarious and multidimensional process whose aim is to qualitatively transform people, their horizon and environmental processes. This is why it is a dialectical process in which the individual interacts with the environment, transforming it and at the same time being transformed by it (Ezeah, 2005, p.86). Development enhances the quality of life of the people, raises their HDI, respects the right to participation in the development process. Development cannot take place when the people are alienated from it, and only receives whatever the authority dishes out to them. Therefore, to deny the people the right to actively participate in the process of development is to jettison the ‘development agenda’. Such attitude as it is witnessed today demonstrates official paternalistic and sanctimonious posturing. Development in all ramifications must change the status-quo because it is a dialectical process. Adedeji (2000,p.209) pointed out this when he asserted that:

We need to set in motion a development process that puts the individual at the very centre of development effort, a development process that is both human and humane. Without necessarily softening the discipline that goes with development but which enhances man’s personality, a development process that does not alienate man from his society and culture but rather develops his self-confidence in himself and identifies his interest with those of his society thereby develops his ability and willingness for self-reliance.

In all the definitions of development, we can deduce some of its characteristics. These include;

- a) It is pro-people to enhance human personality and quality of life.
- b) It is participatory
- c) Recognizes the importance of human freedom
- d) It must be systematic, dialectical and anchored on its agenda.
- e) It involves some discipline

Indeed, we can summarize this section by defining development as a human process purposely geared towards the elevation of the living standard of the people through their active participation. It is in this process that their capacity to change their immediate environment is realized.

Emergence of Christianity in Iwhuruohna

We noted earlier that Christian religion was not averse to colonial penetration in Nigeria. They may be seen as Siemens twins with mutually agreed agenda. Afolayan (2009,p.39) pointed out that:

For the Christian missionary society, the British conquest of Northern Nigeria was a welcome development. Many of the missionaries advocated for that conquest. Some had provided intelligent information to the colonial army to facilitate the process of subjugation, while a few had worked assiduously to aid the process. European missionaries viewed colonial conquest as a divinely ordered event that would open up African countries to peaceful and effective Christianization.

It must be noted that British occupation of Nigeria started in December 25, 1851, when Lagos was conquered and declared a colony in 1861. This violent expedition was not precipitated by a humane intention to save the people from the prevailing iniquitous trade. Rather it was mainly to secure markets for goods produced as a result of European industrial revolution and jobs for the teeming population. The other reason was to dislodge other imperialist competitors, especially France from having a competitive advantage in the scramble for African resources. Asiegbu (1989,p.6) explained that the interests of British commercial and increasing European, particularly Anglo-French, jealousies and rivalries on the coast especially over the control of the important and growing commercial centre of Lagos, were decisive factors in the British conquest of Lagos.

It was the 1851 and 1861 events that emboldened Britain to claim a good chunk of what became Nigeria during the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. The thought of bringing this territory under a sovereign control led to the establishment of the Selborne Committee in 1898. It also led to many expeditions to explore for interior markets and evangelization. Some of the people that pioneered this venture include Macgregor Laid, Richard Oldfield and Thomas Fowell Buxton. The latter was inspired by the adventurous exploits of the former, especially with their book *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa*, published in 1837. Under the theme Christianity 'commerce and civilization', Buxton through his book: *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy* called on British government to venture into African hinterland because of the enormous commercial profit. He was convinced more than ever that 'Christianity and the Bible would transform the mentality of the peoples' (Onu, 2018, p.106).

Buxton's unrelenting campaign convinced the British government to sponsor three missions in 1851, 1854 and 1857. While the 1851 mission ended in disaster, the other two registered appreciable success. Crowder (1976,p.48) stated that the 1854 expedition, led by Dr. William Barkie, on which quinine as a prophylactic and cure for the 'fever' of Africa was discovered,

led to the establishment of a trading settlement in Lokoja. The 1857 expedition was led by Dr. Barkie and Lt. Glover, while Rev. S.A. Ajayi later Bishop represented the Church Missionary Society (CMS). The avowed objective of the 1857 mission was to sign treaties with local chiefs, Chart the Niger River, explore trade prospects and open mission stations along the banks of the Niger (Onu, 2018,p.109). On July 26, 1857, Bishop Crowther arrived Onitsha. It was from the mission of Onitsha that the CMS foraged the Niger Delta from Bonny in 1865 to other areas. According to Ogun (2017,p.51);

The work of taking the Bible to West Africa was the responsibility of the church missionary society (CMS) which had been established on 12th April 1799 in anticipation of abolition, with William Wilberforce as the founding vice president. Its original name was the 'society for missions to Africa and the East'. The mission was to 'preach the gospel to every creature'. Its first task was the education and training of the 'receptive' as native missionaries.

The evangelical activities of the CMS led to the forage of other denominations like the Methodist Church through the Wesleyan mission of London and the United Free Church of Scotland, later Presbyterian Church of Nigeria. As the missionaries penetrated into the Niger Delta, they did not cast off their color bar disposition against Africans. In their estimation, Africa has inferior faculty of self-development. The period also coincided with the burning zeal of the Pan African Movement which preached the dignity and oneness of Africa. The Movement called the African to be truly himself to realize his African personality'. Edward W. Blyden who was adjudged to be the 'oracle on both sides of the Atlantic and the highest intellectual representative and greatest defender of the Africa race' (Esebede, 1994, p.24) urged African Christians not to engage in unreasonable imitation, but to form what he called the 'African Nativity'. According to J.E. Casey-Hayford;

The work of Edward Wilmot Blyden is universal, covering the entire race. (He) has sought... to reveal everywhere the African unto himself to fix his attention... as to his place in the economy of the world, to point out to him his world as a race among the races of men, lastly and most important of all, to lead him back unto self-respect (Crowther, 1976). While the church preached the universal brotherhood of man, their paternalistic attitudes towards Africans was in contradiction to the values and goal of Pan Africanism whose consciousness had gradually gripped the soul of many Africans. Akani (2022, p.179) stated that an opportunity to practicalise this came when;

1. The London Committee of the Anglican Church refused to appoint Rev. James Johnson as a successor to Bishop S.A. Crowther who died on December 31, 1891.
2. The alleged insult on Bishop Crowther by the British missionaries of the Sudan Team during a finance meeting in Onitsha in August, 1890.

These events led to the formation of Niger Delta Pastorate in April 29, 1892 and what became the African Independent Churches. They maintained an active programme of evangelization by adding the African content to Christianity. According to Isichei (1983,p.461). The African churches were founded in Lagos in the 1890s, for the most part, as breakaway movement from the older missionary churches. They were founded in a spirit of ecclesiastical nationalism by educated Nigerians resentful of continuing white domination. In 1888, the Ebenezer Baptist Church was founded. In 1891, the year when Bishop Crowther died and was replaced by a European, the Delta churches formed a self-governing and self-supporting Pastorate with the Anglican Church, and a group of CMS members and Methodists in Lagos formed the United

Native African Church. Davidson (1984,p.209) also pointed out that; Christian influences had already taken is new turn. Having found that European missionaries were part and parcel of the colonial system, African communities rejected their European mentors and formed Christian and communities in their town. The movement for separatist churches had begun long before in South Africa – now evolved in many colonies.

It must be emphasized that the explosion of Black Consciousness in the Orthodox Churches was not a unique feature of the continent. It also did not escape Africans in the Diaspora, especially those in North America. Alkalimat (1991,p.376) pointed out that:

Black people have remained mainly within the Black church, as much because of the force of cultural tradition and survival instinct as because of white racism that kept blacks out of the white church. The main African-American religious Christian denominations are the National Baptist convention, the African Methodist Episcopal and Christian Methodist.

From 1892 when NDP was formed, many African Independent Churches (AICs) emerged (see table II).

Table II
Some African Independent Churches (AICs)

S/N	Name	Year	Founder
1	NDP	1892	Archdeacon Dandeson Crowther
2	Western Equatorial Mission		J.S. Hill
3	Salvation Army Church	1920	William Booth
4	United Native African Church (UNAC) later first African Church	1891	William Cole
5	United African Methodist Church	1917	
6	Internal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim	1925	Moses Orimolade Tunolase
7	African Bethel Church	1901	Elder Jacob Kahin Coker
8	Christ Apostolic Church	1941	Joseph Babalola
9	Celestial Church of Christ	1947	Samuel Oshoffa
10	United Africa Apostolic Church	1912	Bishop Matseq Mareri
11	Church of the Lord (Aladura)	1925	Josiah Ollunowo Ositelu
12	Brotherhood of the Cross and Star	1956	Olumba Olumba Obu (O.O.O.)
13	Christ Army Church	1918	Garrick Sokari Daketima Braide
14	Native Baptist Church, later Ebenezer Baptist Church	1888	Rev. Moses Ladejo Stone
15.	The Apostolic Church Nigeria	1918	Emmanuel Segun Muoka

Source: Author's Fieldwork, 2023.

The activities of the AICs hastened the Christainization of the people, and facilitated a

tremendously qualitative social change in Nigeria.

Church and Development in Iwhuruohna

We noted earlier that a church does not consist of only a gigantic building, but an assemblage of men and women ardently committed to the teachings of Jesus Christ for salvation and forgiveness of sins. The question here is, did the church contribute to the development of Iwhuruohna?. The answer will be in the affirmative. The various denominations of the Christian Church showed disdain and contempt on the traditional values of Africa (Nigeria). They described some aspects as inhuman and not in consonance with Christian values. Such practices like killing of twins, polygamy, worship of ancestors and traditional dance were considered fetish and a demonstration of primitive sexuality. Indeed, the objective of the church was to 'wash away' every vestige of Africaness in the Christianized African so that (s) he can be admitted in the civilized world of Christianity. After all, the African was possessed of savage instincts and was the victim of 'degrading fetishism and demonology'. The prohibitions and taboos of Christianity were expected to replace paganism (Awonor, 1975,p.22). The African was also adjudged to be a devil worshiper whose mind had been employed by Satan, leaving him without any single ray to guide him away from the dark and dread of futurity (Awonor, 1975,p.23).

It is self-evident that the church like colonialism distorted, denigrated, humiliated and destroyed our traditional bond including the religious world view of Nigerians. Consequently, it set a trail of behavioural confusion and docility. Many scholars have argued that if colonialism and the church had not intervened in the political economy of Africa, the continent would have out of its dialectical process of production of goods and services engendered its unique growth and development processes. The two alien forces could just be seen as 'spoilors'. This school of thought may be correct, but it is now mere conjectural. Nevertheless, this would not make us loose sight of the salient contributions of the church which set the people on a development pedestal.

One of the indelible contributions of the church is in education. The church more than the Colonial State produced educated elites that became the advance-guard of nationalist struggle. Infact, one could only guess the nature of the situation without colonial education. Right from 1842 when the Methodist missionary through the Wesleyan Missionary Society established the nursery of the infant to train children to 'read and write, learn, the ways of God by mastering the Bible (Akani, 2011,p.20) to 1960, the different Christian denominations have been involved in a healthy competition to establish schools to produce clerks, teachers interpreters and scholars within their environment. It was only in the early twentieth century that the Colonial State in Nigeria showed interest in education. As education became synonymous with missionary activities, the church also became indispensable in social and personal advancement. As Coleman (1986,p.113) pointed out:

To all intents and purposes the school is the church. Right away in the bush or in the forest the two are one, and the village teacher is also the village evangelist. An appreciation of this fact is cardinal in all considerations of African education.

It cannot be an exaggeration to say that the impact of colonial education on Africans was electric. It revolutionized the thought process of some of the educated elites, opened their vision to the mysteries and shenanigans of colonial imperialist philosophy. It also became a veritable tool for the rejection of Western Orthodoxy. According to Chanaiwa (2007,p.219);

In spite of the limitations of (colonial education), the educated elite made an essential contribution to the overall continuum of African nationalism and the liberation struggle in Southern Africa. They were the forerunners of modern African cross-ethnic unity leadership and pan Africanism.

The social change engendered by Christian Missions cannot be overemphasized. Apart from introducing Africa to Western medical practice, the people's horizon was opened to certain undeveloped professions which enhanced the quality of life and greatest happiness of the people. Most important was the printing industry which facilitated the publication of the peoples' history and the Bible in the languages of Africans. This tremendously hastened the knowledge of the past, present and hastened the appreciation of the scriptures. This also served as a veritable medium to express popular opinion on the social and political activities. For instance, in 1921 Johnson Samuel, the Pastor of Oyo published *A History of the Yorubas*. This was followed by an avalanche of historical publications on Africans (Nigerians). The need for the publication of the languages spoken in the Niger and the scriptures translated into Nigerian languages was first echoed by Rev. James F. Schoen, one of the survivors of the 1841 expedition. Akani (2022,p.176) pointed out that the writing of Bible Nso in 1913 by Ven. T.J. Dennis and other Bible translations such as the Iwhuruohna New Testament Bible called Testament 'Ikhe' received its inspiration from Rev. Schoen suggestions.

Apart from the scriptural publications, it was the mission-trained educated elites that constituted the nucleus of nationalist struggles in all the regions of the continent. Their training exposed them to the fallacies and contradictions of western civilization and the 'Civilizing Mission' of the colonialists. According to Crowder (1976,p.369);

Missionaries contributed in other ways to the growth of national consciousness. They produced the first newspaper in Nigeria: Iwe Irohin, founded in 1859 by Henry Townsend of the CMS, gave 'news of the church and state from near and far... educating the growing reading public through didactic essays on history and politics.

In fact, the indispensability of the educated elites could be seen in the colonial administration and functions of the corpus of training and commercial houses. Education gradually became a passport to enter into the world of Eldorado. One of the people who benefitted from the social change stoked by colonial education was Rt. Rev. Vincent Amaruaharu Ogbonna JP, later Bishop of Ikwerre Diocese of the Christ Army Church. He was born in 1942 in Mgbuodohia in Rumorlumeni. Before we focus on Bishop Ogbonna, let us briefly examine the Christ Army Church (CAC). Christ Army Church is one of the AIC formed in 1918 (see table II). It was started by Garrick Sokari Daketinza Braide from Obonoma in Bakana. He was born in 1882 and later Baptised on January 25, 1910.

He was the Pastor's Warden and a licensed layreader at St. Andrew's NDP church Bakana, under the Pastorate of Rev. Moses Adolphus Kemmer. He internalized the Pan African consciousness of the later nineteenth century, and was regarded as an 'enthusiastic evangelist because of fervent commitment to prayers and crusades'. His exemplary dedication and unreserved seriousness attracted many members of the NDP church to his fold. They believed and paid unquestionable obeisance to his Ministry. In 1912, the members convinced of his

religious revival and recorded successes christened him Prophet Elijah II.

In 1916, he declared in Abonnema that ‘the white man’s days’ were over and that it was up to native peoples to determine their fate (Onu, 2018,p.145). This was merely a reinstatement of the Pan African slogan of self-identity and self-awakening of the Africans. According to Isichei (1983,p.463);

It was his custom to slip in secretly into St. Andrews church on week days and there prostrate himself in prayer to Almighty God ... sometimes it was his custom to ask the Pastor’s permission to spend the whole night praying in the church. His message spread to almost all the Niger Delta communities, especially on abstinence from alcohol. His activities became a threat to the church under Bishop James Johnson .Bishop Johnson was amazed that Braide’s followers addressed their ‘Master’ as a Prophet even before the Lord Bishop. This left him ‘in an abrupt, disrespectful and disgraceful manner’ (Ayandele, 1970, p.361). Since the Bishop could not constrain the excesses of the Garrick Braide Movement, he was reported to the colonial authority. This was how he was arrested by Percy Talbot, the Colonial District Officer of Degema in 1916. In 1916 he was charged for ‘seditious feeling against the government’ and in 1917 he was sentenced to six months imprisonment. Despite his travails, his Ministry expanded rapidly without hindrance. In 1912, his crusade arrived Akpor Kingdom and Omugwa in 1914 in Iwhuruohna, Okrika mainland in 1915 and Ogoloma in 1918. The spread of what became GBM was accompanied by miraculous healing services at designated places called Canaan Land. Sadly, he died on November 11, 1918 on his return from Ogoloma (Okrika) to Bakana. Obuoforibo (2005,p.634) pointed out that on his way home;

He urged them to land at Canaan, a religious settlement of the much persecuted sect of Ogoloma, which was a few kilometers from Ogoloma town. Here, he requested for a fruit of coconut to be plucked for him. This was done and he drank, and he drank of the water. Leaving the shores of Canaan after a few hours he died on his way to Bakana by sea.

The death of ‘Prophet’ Braide whose teaching was declared heretical to the Anglican Church and roundly condemned led to the formation of the Christ Army Church in 1918 by his followers. It was this church that incubated Vincent Ogbonna until he rose to the eminent position of Bishop of Ikwerre Dioceses of the Christ Army Church. He went to Community Primary School in Mgbuodohia, and St. Patrick’s State School in Rumuorlumeni and later St. John’s State School Port Harcourt in 1960. In 1975, he travelled to National House. Manchester in Britain for his Diploma in Salesmanship. This educational qualification laid the fertile foundation for more professional training in Store Keeping, Purchasing and Supply in New Jersey, US and Britain. He later enlisted into the Military profession only to realize that he was not destined to fight war with weapons of mass destruction. He worked briefly with the Rivers State Ministry of Justice, before switching over to Michelin Company Nigeria Ltd. He rose from a Tyre Service Technician to Depot Manager, and retired in 2000 after a fulfilling service of twenty-nine years. His public responsibilities did not constitute a hiccup to his community commitment. He doubled as a Palace Secretary and Personal Assistant to the sixth Paramount ruler of Rumuorlumeni, Late HRH Eze Amadi George Orlumeni. He was also a onetime chairman of Ogbakor Ikwerre Cultural Organization Worldwide, Lagos branch. Most people in Rumuorlumeni knew him as a man of peace, an exemplar of Christian Life and an inestimable philanthropist. It was said that he and other peace-builders like Late Chief, Engr Sir Joseph Nyewewene Orluwosu were selflessly dedicated to a violent-free Rumuorlumeni through their consistently consistent peace advocacy at all times. Although, he was not a Chief, but his wise counsel to the Rumuorlumeni Council of Chiefs from his position as their Special Advisor made him an indispensable material both to the Council and to the Paramount Ruler.

Bishop Ogboma's service to mankind was not solely secular. He was entrapped by the whirlpool of GBM which had swept almost every part of Iwhuruohna. His membership of CAC and his virtue of selfless service to humanity made the leadership of the church to spot him out as a gold fish that could not hide. Gradually, he rose as a licensed Lay Preacher in 1984 to a licensed Catechist in 1996 and Deacon in 1999. By 2008, he was catapulted to the exalted position of Honorary Canon of St. Jude's Cathedral in Port Harcourt. By this time, it was clear to everybody that he was on a transcendental mission. In what may be seen as a manifestation that no one could delay, truncate or annul, in 2012 he was installed as the Archdeacon of Ikwerre Diocese, and in October 21, 2018, he was ordained as the Pioneer Bishop of Ikwerre Diocese of CAC of Nigeria. It is important to note that his meteoric rise to fame and glory was not by happen stance or 'pampering', but a result of hardwork, perseverance, untainted dedication and commitment to a progressive ideal. It is no gainsaying to state that his versatility and qualitative service to humanity is traceable to the training he received from the church.

Apart from Bishop Ogbonna, the galaxy of pioneer Iwhuruohna elites and scholars trained by the church through the numerous mission schools have contributed immensely to our history, historiography and knitted a bond of indivisibility that has become a glowing feature of Iwhuruohna ethnic nationality. Today, IEN has qualitatively and quantitatively advanced in almost all areas of progressive endeavours, the dialectical processes of production of goods and services have to a large extent transcended the pre-colonial mode of environmental interaction, social relationship, quality of living and state of health. While not undermining the impeccable contributions of elites trained by government schools, the fact remains that colonial education ensured a positive social change and development in 'Eli Iwhuruohna'. This conclusion may be disputed because some African scholars see colonial education either from government or the church as a setup to create an African population that was economically efficient and consumptive and politically acquiescent to 'White Supremacy'. Nevertheless, this cannot erase some of the noticeable achievements. Outright generalization would always remain subjective, and cannot easily erase the efficacy of the role of the church in Africa. The strong wind of Pentecostalism that blew across Nigeria in the early 1970s recorded some noticeable changes in 'Eli Iwhuruohna'. Many Iwhuruohna sons and daughters including the orthodox churches could not resist it. This phenomenon was characterized by the popularity of Scripture Union (SU), Born Again Sacrament, Prophetic Healing and Speaking in Tongues. The evangelical forays of Pastor Godfrey Numbere with his Greater Evangelism World Crusade, Deeper Life Bible Church by Pastor Kumuyi in 1973 and others stoked an unimaginable social reaction in 'Eli Iwhuruohna. It is therefore, not surprising that Iwhuruohna sons and daughters have become an integral part of the Pentecostal story. Names like His Eminence Apostle Dr. Michael Agbarakaibea Sam-Wobo, Evangelist Erinwo Wejiorwhor from Ibaa, Bishop (Dr.) Prince Samuel Richard of Soul Ablaze from Ogbogoro and others have through their evangelical activities and social services given succor to their people. These have turned around their wellbeing and social standing.

The planting of the orthodox churches, especially the Anglican Church in 'Eli Iwhuruohna' was mostly in the early twentieth century through the interaction of the people with the coastal areas of Niger Delta. Consequently, many churches were planted in Eli Iwhuruohna. The aftermath of this social interaction mainly through trade and friendship have snowballed into the production of a sizeable number of Iwhuruohna men and women occupying prominent positions in the church in the twenty-first century. For instance, Rt. Rev. Bishop Samuel O. Elenwo was the Bishop of Niger Delta Diocese and in August 31, 2018 Rt. Budu Wisdom Ihunwo, DSSRS

became the Bishop of the Niger Delta North Diocese of the Anglican Communion. Their episcopal responsibilities have bestowed on them the obligation to make a noticeable change in the religious and social life of their people. As Onu (2018,p.232) pointed out, in ‘Eli Iwhuruohna’;

The church and the community appreciated each other for their work of sacrifice in the maintenance of peace and good neighbourliness, socialization of all and sundry, merry-making, solidarity, and strengthening cordial relationship between the church and community.

Conclusion

The role of the church in ‘Eli Iwhuruohna’ cannot be over exaggerated. Right from the early twentieth century when Christianity penetrated the area, to the twenty-first century, a lot of positive changes and transformations have taken place in the areas of education, religion, administration, medicine, law and politics Iwhuruohna elites have risen to occupy exalted positions beyond expectation. This is traceable to the foundation of the church through the mission schools.

Bishop Vincent Ogbonna could not have risen to the pinnacle of his career if not for his dedication to serve humanity and the training he received from the church. It is within this prism that the church can be seen as a trigger of development. Despite its shortcomings, it exposed the people to a new horizon of life whose utilitarian content placed Nigerians on a pedestal of wellbeing and good life. But whether colonial education was sadly defective or not, we cannot lose sight of its impactful changes in ‘Eli Iwhuruohna’ which Bishop Ogbonna epitomized. It is his dedication, philanthropism and crusading for peace as an essential building block for human development that we should cherish, adore and emulate at all times.

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