



**THE DYNAMICS OF CHRITIANITY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC
CHANGES IN THE FIVE L.G OF OGBOMOSO, OYO STATE –
NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Many people are of the opinion that Christian Missions came to Nigeria primarily to preach the gospel and their impacts are not felt in other areas of life. Similarly, it is has become general opinion that most of the social amenities in the area of study are the effect of efforts put in place by the government. Apparently, this paper examined the dynamics of Christianity and its impact on socio-economic development of Ogbomoso. In this paper, we made use of secondary sources, that is, books, journals, unpublished theses and archival materials. Correlative research method cannot be avoided because views, facts, opinions were correlated particularly on the activities of Christian Missions. However, it was observed that there was and there is mutual relationship among the missions that are competing in developmental programmes. Missions were mutual in elite-building of the Ogbomoso Youths. Finally, the paper recommended that evangelism should not be restricted to spirituality only but social needs must be a counterpart of church growth.

Keywords: *Dynamics, Christianity, Socio-Economic and Changes.*

Introduction

The emergence of Christianity in Nigeria was in the fifteenth century through the Roman Catholic Portuguese, who came to Africa primarily for economic reasons but used Christianity to advance their interests. It was their belief that the conversion of Africans to Christianity would produce economic benefit as

the Portuguese planted Christianity in the Kingdoms of Benin and Warri. Similarly, it was their aim to show concern for the welfare of those who received the Christian message. The Missionaries believed that one of the factors which helped the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ was the practical assistance he gave to the people through the healing of the sick free of charge, changing water into wine and raising of some people from the dead. When Christianity came to Benin and Warri, it did not spread beyond the coastal kingdoms. When the relations between the Portuguese and the rulers of Benin and Warri collapsed, Christianity suffered because there were no missionaries to continue the evangelization.

The more effective introduction of Christianity occurred, however, when the slaves who were settled in Sierra Leone began to spread to Nigeria as from 1838. Many of the former slaves claimed Yoruba decent and it was not surprising that they returned to Nigeria with their imported Western culture and Christianity. Peel (1968) has succinctly observed that:

The first missionary society to arise out of this movement was the Baptist Missionary Society, founded in 1792 by William Carey. Others followed, the London Missionary Society (1795), the Glasgow Missionary Society (1796), the Church Missionary Society (1799), the British and Foreign bible Society (1804), and the general Missionary Society of the Methodist (1818).

However, Christianity came to Ogbomoso precisely in 1885. Evidence has it that the town claimed more Christian converts than any other Yoruba town especially converts to Baptist denomination. Through data collected, it was revealed that Christians were more in each family compound with the adherents of other religions, above all, Ogbomoso is described as one of the towns in Yorubaland where a considerable number of Christians can be found.

Furthermore, this work reveals that there are more Baptist missionary impacts in town compared with other Yoruba towns as we shall see in the paper. The objective of this paper is to draw attention to the emergence of Christianity in Ogbomoso and its impacts on the socio-economic change in the town.

Religion in Ogbomoso before Christianity

Before the advent of Islam and Christianity, the inhabitants of Ogbomoso were adherents of Yoruba traditional religion. It has been remarked that before the

emergence of Christianity in the town, the people were very conservative clinging passionately to the custom and tradition of their ancestors. Tishken (2002) stressed that, “traditional religion as it was with the people, was an obsession”. The rulers, farmer, courtiers and artisans carried on with their work under the influence of religious rites. They believed in the existence of an almighty God who is acknowledged as the maker of heaven and earth and pure as to be unapproachable by sinful creatures as they were which made them to have mediators who served as the media of communication between the living and the unapproachable Deity. In Imasogie’s (2000) words, this should however be seen as a “reflection of the hierarchical structure of the traditional society which places the King at the apex of a complex hierarchy of varying grades of Chiefs and Messengers through whom the King administers his Kingdoms”.

In the pre-eighteenth and early 19th century ogbomoso had individual gods and worshipped most of the principal Yoruba gods like Ogun, Sango, Oya and Oro. Ifa was also worshipped and given regard extensively in the town. The Ifa worshippers had two big central shrines in the town with two Olu Awos in the town; one Awo for Ijeru while the other was for Masifa

In Ogbomoso, shrines of different gods and goddesses are still seen and most of the shrines are closely linked with the founders of the various compounds. Some people in the town still bear names that have connections with their objects of worship as evidence of their faith. Such names as Esudiyun, Ogunlowo, Ifabiyi, Sangotope etc. Most of the important deities have some of their shrines, symbols and charms in the palace. This gives the Soun, chief Priests and Priestesses the benefit to perform the religious duties promptly and at the Soun’s convenience. By way of strengthening the above view, there was a Tortoise in the palace of Soun of Ogbomoso. This Tortoise was three hundred years (300 years) old in the palace before its death. The tortoise was an object of worship; it was a source of protection for the King and the Ogbomoso people. The Tortoise was collecting salary from the Ogbomoso North Local Government; the salary was collected by the Soun of Ogbomoso to take care of this sacred animal. Through this Tortoise, the Palace has become a centre of Tourism. Scholars and the likes come from both near and far to watch the tortoise and they often take picture with this Tortoise for future reference.

Of all the large number of gods and goddesses worshipped in Ogbomoso, two have very significant local importance, they are Orisa Popo and Ooslalasa (Odoje).

Conversion and Experience of Missionaries in Ogbomoso

The people of Ogbomoso are industrious and well known with their occupations such as Peasants farmers, Traditional doctors, hunters and traders. Nevertheless, those people kept to their religion and they took with them this religion to their daily activities and businesses. This was the situation in the town when Christianity arrived the town. When Christianity entered Ogbomoso, people did not welcome the religion immediately. Three factors created fear in the people's mind which eventually scared them away from the missionaries. First, the missionaries were White men, (Oyinbo) this colour was so strange to the inhabitants. Secondly, there was a premonition that the white men were monkeys and could carry a child up and up into trees never to return. Finally, there was a belief that the white men would use human bones to make handles of knives. As a result of the aforementioned factors, nobody was ready to move closer to them, let alone embrace what they came to offer.

When nobody was ready to embrace Christianity, the missionary later took Gospel to the Baale, his wives and some of his chiefs. When that also failed, he became itinerant preacher i.e. on the street, market places and wherever opportunity presented itself. The first convert recorded by the missionaries in Ogbomoso was a native Doctor name Mr. Fasanya. His son Fagbemi by name got to know W.H. Clarke, through his constant visit to the surrounding area of the Mission House where he picked some plants for medicinal purposes. Thorough Clarke constant visit to Fasanya's house, Mr. Fasanya, his son and the entire members of his family accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. They were baptized and receive Christian names such as Abraham Fasanya, Job, John, Stephen Agboola etc. this family is known today in Ogbomoso as a Christian Compound.

In 1880, Fasanya alias "father of Christian" died. Right from its inception, there was no open clash between Christians and the traditionalists except in a few isolated instances when the traditional priests were quick to realize that the Christians challenged their authority, a great hostility against the Christians came when the convert, Pa Fasanya died. Preparations were made for a Christian burial with a service in the Baptist Church at Osupa for him. All preparations had almost been concluded when some non-christian relatives objected and insisted that he must be buried in the earthen floor of the house where he lived as was customary.

This disengagement led to misunderstanding between the two warring parties. The roofs of both Baptist and the CMS churches were torn off and the Mission House where Pastor Stone was resident was besieged. After that, the Christians both old and young were openly molested. They were not allowed to attend services on Sundays because they were attacked relentlessly by the traditionalists. Some of the Christians had to adopt methods by which they could outweigh their oppressors. They change the habit of holding the Bible and Hymn Book overtly in their hands into that of hiding them in the baskets and covering them with cutlasses, leaves and rags as if they were going to farms, on their way to their places of worship.

As the persecution was raging, some were also being converted. Buxton (2002) recorded that around this time, there was a scuffle between the Christians and some natives, Stone was captured and maltreated before he was released, but soon afterwards, some new converts brought different images of gods to be destroyed. By this time, the Missionaries realized that there was the need to have resident missionary in the town.

It was on the basis of having a resident missionary that Captain Bowen of the American Baptist penetrated Ogbomoso. In the heart of the crisis notwithstanding, Captain Bowen was warmly received by the people.

The coming of Captain Bowen was captured by Buxton's (2002) statement. According to him;

The splendid reception given to Bowen in Ogbomoso on September 23, 1855 marked the beginning of positive disposition to the gospel. Bowen began the Sunday school class on the following Sunday, September 30, 1855. Many people came but they were more inclined to look at Oyinbo than to learn.

When Bowen came, he observed the needs of the people particularly in the area of health care delivery; as a result of this he liaised with Southern Baptist America and established Baptist Hospital Ogbomoso which is now named after Bowen as Bowen University Teaching Hospital. Similarly, he spare headed the establishment of First Baptist Church in Ogbomoso at Okelerin to promote spiritual growth of the natives.

Smith came to Ogbomoso in 1888; his arrival saw a remarkable progress in the mission enterprise. He established training Institution for preacher in

1897 out of his own expense, later, the Board undertook the support of the school. The immediate effect of this was that the mission's initial problem of lack of preachers and teachers was drastically reduced.

Christianity and Socio-Economy in Ogbomoso

In terms of economic impact, Christianity was conceived as a “civilizing” mission, which used education and skill transmission as tools to achieve its objectives. The religion has realistically appreciated the economic problems which have inhibiting the realization of personal fulfillment and the good life of the people. Buxton (2002) articulates the mission in the following manner:

Le Missionaries and School Masters, the Plough and the Spade, go together, agriculture will flourish; the avenue to legitimate commerce will be opened; confidence between man and man will be inspired; whilst civilization will advance as the natural effect and Christianity operate as the appropriate cause of this change.

Resulting from Buxton's comment, European Merchants were admitted into many parts of the country. Most of these merchants engaged in industrial pursuits, agriculture was encouraged and western civilization was equally introduced. It was in realization of the economic and political advantages of Christianity that some individual rulers and Chief invited the missionaries to come and open up stations in their domain, which some individual did.

In furtherance on the economic impact, Christianity realistically appreciated the economic problems which have been preventing the realization of personal fulfillments and the good life of Nigerians. Tishken (2002) is more explicit when he says:

Nigeria as a developing country, her economic resources are in disarray and dormant, especially in rural area. Increasing unemployment figures are one of the striking features of our economy. To solve economic problem, Christian leader have been offering some solace and relief.

This economic view as cited here also finds expression in our study area where people have been summoned on cooperative endeavors aimed at putting their welfare. The impacts of Christian Missionary towards socio-economic development in Ogbomoso can be well understood with reference to the Baptist

Mission. The impacts of other denominations like Anglican, Methodist, C.A.C., the Apostolic church can best be felt in the establishment of Primary and Secondary Schools in the town while that of Baptist cut across all area of life. Certain set of activities of the Baptist Mission in Ogbomoso have promoted changes in the use of natural resource and the acquisition of new skills which were necessary for changes in the people among whom the Mission was established. The sets of activities included:

Employment in Baptist Institutions

The Mission has produced educated and skilled men who were catalysts and instrumental for the development of economy of the town which has helped in the process of labour specialization; and therefore considerable monetization of the material means of life, and hence significant structural changes in the economy. Many of the early educated elites were Teachers, Clerks, Pastors, Catechists and Nurses. Those not skilled enough were also employed as Cooks, Gardeners, Maids, Hospital Wards, Night and Day and Watchmen to look after Church premises, Staff quarters and Mission.

Introduction of fruits: Fruits like Cashew, Pine-apple and Mango were introduced to Ogbomoso through the Baptist Mission. These fruits were initially meant for the Missionaries' consumption, but man's agent of seeds dispersal scattered the fruits to the nook and cranny of Ogbomoso. The Mango introduced has special taste compared to other brands in other parts of Yorubaland. To this extent, it has become an export fruits from the month of April to June every year. This mango has become a source of income to the native during this time. Efforts have been made by the neighboring towns like Oyo, Ilorin, Osogbo e.t.c to plant the seed but to no avail. To this extent popular name has been given to the fruit which is "Ogbomoso Mango" which has brought the fame of the town to other parts of the country.

Assistance in Agricultural experiments and advice on economic development.

The Baptist Missionaries circulated a Memorandum in response to a Resolution which Oyerinde (1979) had placed before the working committee of Ogbomoso Educational programme which had as its preamble; these words

*Any movement of importance to the people of Ogbomoso
virtually concerns those of us who have come to work among*

you. We greatly sympathize with the people of Ogbomoso in their economic plight. The effort now being made to salvage something of the opportunity Ogbomoso might be able to realize out of the resources at their command are to be commended and encouraged.

Among the proposal for economic reform put forward by the Missionaries in the Memorandum were:

- I. That the Ogbomoso Missionaries will share with the people of Ogbomoso on a 50% basic support of two students to go abroad to study Agriculture in some recognized Agricultural Schools such as Tuskerge Institute in Alabama, U.S.A. and Trinidad.
- II. That the people of Ogbomoso should investigate the possibility of a groundnut processing and refinery which could be a profitable enterprise.
- III. That investigation be made with regard to the establishment of a soap factory since this could be with the planting and cultivation of oil palm trees along the valleys, creeks around Ogbomoso, thus providing another increased operation of farms.
- IV. That the people of Ogbomoso should follow up with much weaving as possible, Especially the more advanced type of weaving, since this will afford people the chance of increasing the cotton yield both in quantity and quality.

Healthy

Several cross-cultural students in Medical Sociology have stressed the relationship between health and the community. It is strongly held for instance, among some social epidemiologists that the way illness is perceived is determined by the worldview of a people, and that the way illness is perceived or evacuated tends to influence the recreation of the people at the onset of illness. In appreciation of this fact, the Baptist Mission pioneered a very successful health work in the town and the beneficiaries of the service of the hospital have been mostly the people of Ogbomoso. The Baptist Medical Centre now Bowen University Teaching Hospital Ogbomoso, has contributed in no small measure towards patient care and health development in the area of its establishment. From its inception to date, thousands of patients have been

treated. The Centre has built for itself a remarkable reputation over the years for efficient uninterrupted twenty-four hours service to the sick. Medical experts are on duty any time of the day or night. The following are other areas where the impact of Christian Missionaries especially Baptist could be felt in the area of health care delivery.

The Leper colony was another important department of the Bowen University Teaching Hospital. In 1930, Locket conceived the idea of having a permanent settlement for those who had this dreadful disease, and he devoted much of his talents and energy to its realization.

Another piece of welfare work connected with Bowen University Teaching Hospital requiring mention here is the Kersey Children's Home, other known as the Motherless Babies Home as it is popularly called. Miss Ruth Kersey arrived Nigeria in 1920. Her coming coincided with the rampant cases of motherless babies in the hospital. She was particularly moved when a woman who had a difficult labour died in childbirth and it was said that the family threatened to bury the healthy baby girl who was born with the dead mother, believing that she was responsible for her mother's death. Kersey pleaded to have the child and she was given to her. She later formed Motherless Babies Home in 1953 with the permanent building constructed along Ikoyi road named Kersey Children's Home Ogbomoso.

Moreover, another notable impact of Christian missionaries in Ogbomoso in the area of health care delivery is the establishment of Centre for the Blinds; the first in Oyo State, which owes its origin to the interest taken in a few neglected blind people by the Baptist Missionaries Societies on September 19, 1958.

Establishment of Schools

It is pertinent to know that the establishment of Schools was a major policy of the various missions in Yorubaland. It was a strategy adopted by the early missionaries to win converts to their various missions.

In the Yoruba speaking area of Ogbomoso, some pre-independent Christian Mission Primary Schools include; Osupa Baptist Day School founded in 1945, Ijeru Baptist Bay School founded in 1948, Methodist Primary School Arowomole in 1952, The Apostolic Church Primary School founded in 1948. Today, there are more than one hundred primary Schools in the town because all Churches have their various Nursery and Primary Schools.

Moreover, impact of Christian Mission in the establishment of Secondary Schools cannot be underestimated in the town. These are: Anglican Grammar School founded 1947, Baptist High School founded in 1973, Methodist Grammar School founded in 1980. We have C.A.C. Grammar School founded in 1972 and The Apostolic Church Grammar School in 1979 founded by African Independent Churches.

Furthermore, in the area of Tertiary Education, Christian Mission has left an indelible mark in Ogbomoso. The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary was established in 1939. Many indigene of the Town are working as Lecturers and non-academic staff in the Institution. Similarly, Baptist School of Nursing is another effort put in place by the Baptist Missions towards the development of the area.

Social Impacts

Peel (1968) was of the opinion that Christianity in Yorubaland has been a catalyst of social change in the area. In line with peel's observation, Akanmidu (2001) says that "Christianity demonstrates non-conformist but the transformist postures". In the area of study, Christianity did not accept the old ways of life because it associated with enlightenment, civilization and a new social order.

In the traditional Ogbomoso society, there was a sectional feeling, which was a strong hindrance to the evolution of a corporate attitude. This sort of social development. Noticeable in this area was the land dispute which used to lead to communal clash among people in the area of study. When Missionary came, it was made clear that God owns the land and nothing was brought to this world when coming and nothing will be taken out of it.

Similarly, human sacrifice was the issue of the day before the advent of Christian Missionaries; when Christianity came, the act was condemned as barbaric and ungodly. Using charm like magun to punish offenders like fornicators and adulterers was common before Christianity came. With the advent of Christianity, people were made to believe that they should not avenge by themselves but vengeance belongs to God. It must be unequivocally spelt out that Christian Missions have played a major role in bringing peace to town. Dispute among members are settled and the members of the congregation are entreated to live in peace with their neighbours. This agrees squarely with Akano's (2011) observation that:

When people worship together, or at least see themselves as belonging to the same religion camp, they therefore live together and face their problems together, with regular meetings and social interactions they really found themselves in difficulties and in joy and to promote peace and unity in the society in which they live.

People emulated Missionaries in term of dressing, building of houses and speaking language.

Areas of Conflict between Christians and Ogbomoso Society

As a coin will certainly have two sides so also have the Christian missions in the town been viewed from two perspectives. Some agree that despite their positive contributions to the development of the town, the Missions as well have some glaring defects.

Apathy to the development of Ogbomoso Main Cash Crop

Tobacco was the main cash crop of the town on which the livelihood of many people in Ogbomoso depended. Also, the land has remained good for its cultivation. Yirenkyi-Boating (1999) specifically mentioned the towns as very suitable for the cultivation of Tobacco. In his words:

In 1932, the company (Nigeria Tobacco Company) identified Ogbomoso and Zaria as suitable for the cultivation of Tobacco, and in 1934 tobacco cultivation started at Ogbomoso with imported leaf to supplement the local supplies.

The factory was short lived because Christians were discouraged from the cultivation of this cash crop. Some young men have been very critical of the apparent callous insensitivity of the Christian Missions to the development of his cash crop.

Proliferation of Church buildings

Many people have questioned the rationale behind the proliferation of churches, which possible are the resultant effects of the congregationalism, particular in the Baptist Mission, which promotes unhealthy rivalry and individuality of churches. Therefore, the Christian Mission should not only think about church

buildings at the expense of church members, they should as a matter of necessity mobilize efforts at establishing an industry in the town.

Polygamy Controversy

Another important accusation which has been leveled against the Christian Mission is that it has not been sympathetic to some of the people's traditional institutions. One of the traditional practices which were vehemently condemned was polygamy. An item in the declaration of Baptist principles reads.

Recognizing monogamy as the ideal state of family life according to New Testament, the conversion places on record its adherence there too. No known polygamist shall be allowed membership in our churches to act as a lay preacher, or to participate in the ordinance of baptism and the Lord Supper.

However, whenever any of the wives brings money to church, the church accepts it wholeheartedly. This custom as Mbiti (2000) noted fits well into the social many purposes. It served social, economic and moral functions. Socially, it raised the status of a man in the minds of traditional people a big family earned its head great respect in the eyes of the community, since the practice was a measure of wealth. Morally, it helped to prevent or at least reduce unfaithfulness, especially on the part of the man, because if the man had more than wife there will always be other wives around when one is nursing a baby. With all the above laudable roles of polygamy, Christians viewed a victim as a sinner.

Unhealthy Rivalry among various denominations

The emergence Christianity in the town paved way for the existence of diverse denominations both in Pentecostal and Orthodox. Each of the denominations often claims superiority over each other as the only denomination that is sure of eternity. For example, member of Deeper Life Bible Church are strictly adhering to their doctrines and teachings, to the extent that whenever any other denomination invites them to a programme, they often object for their faith not to be polluted. This singular fact often creates religious violence even within Christendom, they have forgotten that, it is only God who has prerogative to determine who is to be saved or not.

Recommendations

1. Oyo State Government and Local Government in the area of study (Ogbomoso South, North, Ogo Oluwa, Oriire and Surulere) and the community at large should try to maintain and improve upon the legacy left behind by the Christian Missionaries.
2. The Christian tradition of hard work, dignity of labour and the like should be imbibed by all and sundry and practicalize it in any establishment where they find themselves.
3. The Oyo State Ministry of Health should provide advisory service and financial support for the Bowen University Hospital Ogbomoso, to help in the improvement of public health services, and in the training of public health workers.
4. Christian denominations in the study area should harmonize their propagation strategies and worship procedures so that they would not cause division and misunderstanding among converts.
5. Christian converts in the study areas should form an Association with a view to maintaining and protecting the edifice left behind by the Christian Missionaries.
6. The Oyo State Government should help to provide storage facilities to store some of the fruits introduced by the Christian Missionaries in time of plenty. Such fruits are: Cashew, Mangoes, Guava and a host of others.
7. Evangelism should not be restricted to spirituality only but social needs must be a counterpart of church growth.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is obvious that Christian Missionaries had left an indelible mark on the soil of Ogbomoso metropolis. Their impacts can be seen or felt in almost all area of human endeavor, such as economic growth, health service, social development and education programmes. However, in the process of data collection in Ogbomoso, it was revealed that there are some aspects of their life that are yet to be touched; where people lamented bitterly. Such areas include unemployment, provision of social amenities like food road, pipe-borne water, electricity and a host of others. These people are like Oliver Twist who always asks for more. It is their belief that Government has failed in taking good and adequate care of their needs in the aforementioned area.

Therefore, they are calling on Christian Missionaries and other religious bodies to improve on the existing conditions of the people.

Finally, the history of the town is not complete without adequate reference to the efforts put in place by the Christian Missions. Though, there are areas of their shortcomings as discussed above, hence, if their impacts are removed a vacuum is created and cannot be filled by any other substitute.

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