

Church as an Agent of Transformation: The Impact of Christianity in Nigeria

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Abstract

The coming of Christianity to the continent of Africa has brought a lot of changes and development to the continent specifically Nigeria. The continent was considered by most of the westerners and missionaries to heathen, demonic and backward continent in need of civilization. This led to the coming of missionaries to the continent including the colonial masters through the world powers of some European countries without Africans knowing. However, the church served not only as an agent of transformation but also as secularization in various ways especially the manner the missionaries presented her message that transformed some practices within traditional religion and cultures in Nigeria. The assimilation of traditional Nigerian cultures by western culture in the name of Christianity can be viewed as both transformation and secularization. This paper employs the concept of assimilation within postcolonial theory on the history of the church/Christianity in Nigeria that serves as an agent of transformation of the local cultures and practices. Such an approach helps in understanding how the church plays a vital role in stopping the evil practices within the Nigerian traditional religion and cultures. Church being an agent of transformation also helps in contextualizing and indigenizing the Christian message to respond to Nigeria's reality so that it will not be a stranger in the land.

Keywords: *Church, Transformation, Contextualization, Culture*

Introduction

The church is a living organism and its mission is to reach people with the message of transformation of individuals and society. The book of Acts tells the story of the beginning of the church whose mission was to reach the ends of the world (Acts 1:8). In fulfilling this mission, the early Christians experienced conflict and persecution from within and outside (Roman Empire) as threats to the life of the church. But these threats were possibly, in God's providence, the very instruments that motivated its mission and saved it and the Christ movement transforms the life of many. Hendrik Kraemer (1977:26) asserts that the church "has always needed apparent failure and suffering in order to become fully alive to its real nature and mission which is to transform people's life and society."

The church is harmless even when began during the Roman Empire. For one thing, it confronts, opposes, and overcomes forms of popular religion to the point Rome regarded Christianity as illegal religion within the empire. The members within the church also extend mercy to the sick and those that are dying through their ministries of healing and providing food for all (Carl Holladay, 2016:57). The word church in Acts usually means the local congregation; the young congregations are also spoken of as the 'churches' (William, 1970:100). Similarly, the church began to spread through efforts such as helping and transforming the lives of people. Christianity as a religion played a great role in people's lives and the society from the time of Christ till the beginning of its fulfilment so as to reach other parts of the world.

The history of Christianity in Nigeria is one that can be considered as the assimilation of traditional Nigerian cultures by the Westerners which took place through the colonial masters and some of the Western missionaries that came to the country. This paper defines the term "Church," which is different from the normal definition of the word. The church is defined as the coming of Christianity to the traditional society of Nigeria; it is therefore the

coming of Christianity through Western culture to Nigerian soil that transformed the undesirable practices of the cultures.

John Mbiti (1969:231) observed, “the image that Africans received, and to a great extent still hold, of Christianity, is much coloured by colonial rule and all that was involved in it. We are still too close to that period to dissociate one from the other.” This paper aims at examining from the postcolonial lens through assimilation, how Christianity transformed the traditional Nigerian religion, beliefs, practices, history, and culture in the process of pacification by the European empire. This paper is divided into three sections; first deals with the meaning of assimilation as a transformational tool, secondly, history of Christian mission in Nigeria, and lastly, Christianity as a transformational tool for indigenous cultures in Nigeria.

Cultural Assimilation as a Transformational Tool

The word “assimilation” is often used with reference to not only indigenous groups but also immigrants settled in a new land. A new culture and attitudes toward the original culture are obtained through contact and communication. Assimilation assumes that a relatively-tenuous culture gets to be united into one unified culture. That process happens by contact and accommodation between each culture (Rajashree Dasgupta, ND:2). Cultural assimilation in this work aims at discussing how the coming of Christianity serves both as a tool for “transforming” and also “secularizing” the Nigerian cultures that are undesirable but still maintaining the good aspect of the norms. The intermixing of cultures and also producing a unique culture that transform both cultures are considered in this paper as a transformational tool.

These are what accompanied the invasion of the Westerners and some of their missionaries in Nigeria. Mudimbe (1988:1) agrees with the idea of invasion that “let us enter upon a new and nobler career of conquest. Let us subdue savage Africa by justice, by

kindness, by the talisman of Christian truth. Let us thus go forth, in the name and under the blessing of God, gradually to extend the moral influence the territorial boundary also of our colony, until it shall become an empire.” This paper thus uses the idea of cultural assimilation as a transformational tool on how the coming of Christianity into Nigeria changed many undesirable traditional practices making the church to serve as an agent of transformation both on people and traditional practices that are undesirable.

History of Christian missions in Nigeria

John Mbiti (1991) observes that “Africans are notoriously religious”, - a statement of fact with the people of the continent. Before the coming of Christianity to Africa and particularly Nigeria, the people were worshipping their tribal, personal, and community gods (deities). This shows that they had an idea about the Supreme Being. That is why Bolaji Idowu and John Mbiti (1991) postulate that Africans knew God before the coming of Christianity to its continent. African traditional religion happens to be the foundation in which Christianity was built. But today, traditional religion in Nigeria is declining daily due to the cultural assimilation, social, and political advantages that came with Christianity. In the words of Galgalo Joseph (2012), Christianity is still a stranger within the African people because they have ideas about God and they worship God based on their understanding of the Supreme Being. John Mbiti (1991) rightly agrees that African religion can be seen in five parts: beliefs, practices ceremonies and festivals, religious objects and places, values and morals, and lastly religious officials or leaders. Africans are not clueless when it comes to God (Supreme Being). But with the coming of Christianity (the Church), most of the colonial masters and missionaries that came with the gospel brought along with them their Western belief attached to the gospel.

Adegbite Deborah Doyinsola & Adegbite Olusola Deborah (2015:3) rightly states that

“In the colonizer mindset, the people of Nigeria are seen as the colt that has been bound by its slavery to mundane, talisman, primitive ideas of worshipping stones, clay, iron, trees, and rivers. Hence the colonizer came to civilize and liberate the Africans from its

bondage of such things. But besides the need to be enlightened, the colonizer has also spotted other potential in the African”.

Juhani Koponen (1993:1-7) wrote on the scramble for African countries that had begun in deep about 1880. The French began to increase their territory from the West African coast heading to Western Sudan. The findings of diamonds in 1867 and gold in 1886 in some parts of Africa increased European interest in colonizing the continent. The struggle was so severe that European countries were terrified that war could break out between themselves. To avoid such war, 14 European nations met at the Berlin Conference in 1884–85 to lay down rules for the partition of the great African continent that most of the European countries were fighting for. Furthermore, John Baur (2009:377) agrees with Koponen that any European country could claim land in Africa by notifying other European nations of its claims and showing it could control the area. The European nations partitioned the continent with little thought about how African ethnic or linguistic groups were different from one country to another even within same country. No African ruler was invited to attend these meetings, yet the conference sealed Africa’s fate into the hands of the colonial masters (European countries). By 1914, only Liberia and Ethiopia remained free from European control. The European countries that were involved in the colonization of the countries in Africa includes: Germany, Portugal, France, British, Belgium, Spain, and Italy.

In 15th-century, Henry, the Navigator of Portugal, desired to sail further in the Atlantic Ocean. Henry loved buying the gold from West Africa and wanted to get the West African gold directly, without going to the Muslim Kingdoms in North Africa and Arabia in the Middle East, as affirmed by Ade Ajayi (1977). Henry sent out his ships accompanied by some Roman Catholic Missionaries to West Africa particularly Nigeria. They visited Benin and Warri, around the riverine areas in Nigeria, where slave trade was the business of the day at the time. Most of the kings that the missionaries preached to were interested more in the Portuguese guns than in Christianity.

However, this paper is aware that most of the missionaries that were colonialism instruments were government-sponsored missions of orthodox churches like Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist etc. They served as instruments of secularization with their primary goal not being evangelisms but to using Christianity as their entry tool to gain access to the continent's resources. Nevertheless, most of the protestant missionaries were faith mission-based that raised individual support for their missions and therefore, had less influence of colonialism. Some of these faith missions fought against colonialism and kick-started the independent revolutions. In Nigeria, for instance, the first political parties were formed by missionaries to help the natives fight for their independence and transform the lives of people.

The planting of Christianity by the Roman Catholic missionaries failed in the 15th and 16th centuries in Nigeria. Nonetheless in the 18th and 19th centuries came other missionaries to Nigeria, most of whom were being faith-based with the sole aim of evangelization, and this was when the church got a foothold in Nigeria. The pioneering Christian missions in Nigeria included: Wesleyan Methodist (1842), Scottish Presbyterian (1842), Church Missionary Society (1844), Southern Baptist Foreign Mission (1850), Roman Catholic Mission (1961), Sudan Interior Mission (1893), Sudan United Mission (1904), United Missionary Society (1905), Seventh Day Adventist (1914), Qua Iboe Mission (1932), Assembly of God (1939), and African Church Movements (1888-1925) (Foxall, 1973:257). The history of the church in Nigeria cannot be complete without mentioning the role of freed slaves in bringing the gospel, such person included Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. However, Etim Okon (2014:192) argues that:

Colonialism has become a stigma for Christianity in contemporary Africa. It is a historical fact that Africa was evangelized through colonial machinery. It is not an overstatement to say that colonialism aided missions in nineteenth-century Africa. It is also correct to say that missionaries, traders, and colonial administrators had a common interest in Africa. Missions and colonialism are topical in African ecclesiastical historiography. Africans throughout the continent are living under the pains and consequences of colonialism. Mission Christianity, which was imposed through colonial

military power, has become the dominant religion with various strands and variegated manifestations.

Dube (2006) argues that colonizing structures include the procedures and policies that promote “the domination of space, the reformation of natives’ minds, and the integration of local economic histories into Western perspective.” In the early missionary literature, Nigeria and indeed Africa were characterized as universal dens of desolation, misery, crime and certainly. Of all the divisions of the globe, it has always had an unfortunate pre-eminence in degradation, wretchedness, and woe (Kwame Bediako, 1999:225-29). Most of the missionaries that came to Africa for evangelization had a general wrong idea of the people and the continent (Dube, 2006:102). References are made of the continent being dark and uncivilized (in need of civilization, which to them civilization is a Western culture and Christianity).

Adegbite & Olusola (2015:3-4) postulates that instead of understanding the ways of life of the Nigerian people, most of the missionaries viewed it as demonic, barbaric and the den of desolation, among other unfavourable terms. The colonizers and missionaries assumed that because the Nigerians were dark in skin, they must be dark in their minds. The climate was largely conducive for living, and they hence had no climatic challenges that could have improved their intellect. The colonizer therefore assumed the role of one bringing light to the dark people of Nigeria, because they considered themselves more superior and civilized than the Nigerian people. Unfortunately, for both the colonizer and the colonized, Africa was a dark continent only in the minds of the colonizer who did not know about Africans and yet could not be bothered to humbly learn about them. In the words of Brain (2015:2)

This ideology, wet in ethnocentrism, was superficial in the Western treatment of the people in Africa, as colonial efforts were partially seen as an exercise in curing Africans of their primitiveness, and Christianity played a key role in their attempts to assimilate Africans to their presumably advanced ways of life while the African continent was being exploited for its resources.

Brain (2015:2) further maintains that Christianity was undoubtedly an essential factor in the colonial takeover of Africa, and it later proved to be an equally important instrument of resistance and the transformation of the country and people. Nigerians were given a means to spiritual salvation that was pregnant with ideas of European superiority that aimed at transforming virtually every sector of the society including the people bad ways of life.

Musa Dube (2002:101) argues that the colonizer believed in the superiority of his/her religion, race, economy, and culture. This superiority called upon the colonizer to beat the vacation of converting and ordering the world toward his/her identity. Such an ideology was grounded in the beliefs of several missionaries that came to Nigeria. This process then led to assimilation of the colonized in virtually every aspect of life. Colonialism, which to Galgalo (2012) is the context in which Christianity came to African land, was instead more of a curse than a blessing. Most missionaries, of course, regarded it as divine providence that the colonial government provided security and helped them to access places where they could not. Hilde Arntsen further (2019) maintains that,

The role of the missionaries in the colonization of the region was also considered in terms of the political and cultural supremacy of the people. While the assignment of some of the missionaries' was to make people accept the Bible and its teachings, Christianity was twisted into an ideology that could be used to convince people not to resist white domination. Religion was used to legitimate, sustain and even promote political tyranny and oppression, as well as in other instances for reasons of political liberation of the people.

One cannot overlook the role that colonialism played through some of the missionaries in transforming the country of Nigeria, even though it had its negative aspects (secularization). Most of the missionaries that came to Nigeria had a positive attitude to transform the country through their Western cultures. For instance, Schapera I. (1960: 239-43) describes what most missionaries like David Livingstone and Fabri of the German Missionary Society in Namibia believed, that once Africans were colonized by European countries, they were more likely to seek after Western Education and Christianity which the

missionaries controlled. Similarly, the church had become an agent of secularization when it came to the diminishing influence on society. It referred to the fact that more and more areas of social life were taken away from direct or indirect Christian influence. The role of Colonialism in most cases, introduced secularization in Nigeria were Western cultures which came with Christianity replace traditional values of the Nigerian communities (Benno van den Toren, 2003:9-10). Christianity has often been charged with being an instrument employed by the European colonial powers to enslave and oppress the Africans (Pobee, 1979:15). Thomas Oduro (2008:37) argues that,

When missionaries came to Africa they did not simply bring the Gospel message, they also brought Western culture which in a way to assimilate the traditional cultures of Africans. The issue was not pure Christianity against impure indigenous belief, but Christianity plus Western culture on the one hand, and indigenous African beliefs and culture on the other.

Most of the missionaries generally saw Nigerian cultures as rudimentary and lacking in philosophical sophistication. This made most of them to wrongly think that Nigerian culture was inferior compared to their Western culture. The missionaries did not only confuse Christianity and Western culture but also generally believed that their culture was the superior culture in comparison with Nigerian culture (Joseph Galgalo. 2012:15; Thomas, 2008:37). The church also served as an agent of secularization, and Cauthen (1969:14) affirms that “Christianity is a parent to both science and secularization.” For Cauthen, the Christian message that was presented to be more superior to any other faith should be seen as the secularization of the people.

The coming of colonialism and Christianity into Nigeria is in tandem with what Michael calls “urban industrial society,” where he stresses that with the arrival of Christianity with Western civilization, such as the technological sophisticated urban societies, comes secularization in the name of civilization. As Christianity brought civilization (industrialization), it also came along with secularization which reduced most of Nigerians’ sense of dependence on the creator as human beings and became the masters of their

environment, time and mental space for the awareness of the divine, fostered in prayer, silence or meditation, shrinks rapidly, while increasing activities in business, leisure, entertainment and the culture of consumerism tend in their turn to increase irreligiosity. The advent of automobile possession, television, modern lifestyle, and inventions captured the mind of many then (David Martin, 1978).

Joseph Galgalo (2012) and Mbiti (1991:15) rightly observes that in Africa, Christianity was, for the most part, a religion of convenience, social identity, a way to be, and not necessarily a spiritual home and certainly not the only spiritual home for most professing Christians. Traditional religion functioned more on a communal level than on an individual basis. It was a way of life for the people in the community which covered their life span, from the moment of birth to death. But this virtue of communal living had declined due to the coming of colonialism tied with Christianity in the name of civilization by some missionaries, which also came with Western ideologies of individualism and not communal life that the Nigerians had known. Patrick Sookhdeo (2017:23) correctly noted that “individualism is a dominant and unique feature of Western society. Individualism promotes the freedoms, rights, and choices of an individual over those of the family or community.” Western civilization that came with secularization had dismantled communal and ritual identities in Nigeria and Africa at large. It could be said that civilization was a direct product of industrialization and Westernization (modernization) in Nigeria.

The migration of people to the urban cities in search of jobs and daily bread undermined Traditional Religion and cultures because it removed the people from their base. As the people moved to the cities, they could not move their shrines, priests, or ancestors. Instead, they met Christianity as a viable option in city life. Furthermore, Assimeng M. (1989) maintains that city life compelled the people to conform to the guiding rules of secularization in the name of modernization, one of which was that anything that had to do

with traditional religion was demonic and should be discarded totally. Indeed, until very recently, it was nothing of pride for anybody to publicly profess that he/she was an adherent of traditional religion in Nigeria. The migration of men and women to the cities in search of daily bread had also been cited as the reason why women became custodians of the traditions of Nigeria (Iatvoet, 1996). Urbanization altered the ethical sensitivity of several Nigerians and this could be easily discerned through the many vices that resulted from how people related with one another as communal and not individuals. These, in the words of Assimeng (1989) included other vices like armed robbery, pen robbery, prostitution, and other fraudulent activities, which were not very common in the traditional Nigerian societies before the coming of colonialism and Christianity. Traditional virtues became seriously undermined and eventually ignored, with examples including humility, goodness, truthfulness, obedience, diligence at work, loyalty, respect for elders and brotherly or sisterly love.

Galgalo (2012:12) further describes the pitfalls of some missionaries imposed upon African converts in their Western denominational brands of Christianity. For some missionaries, their mission was about institutional expansion and the propagation of the sectarian, denominational Christianity. The upsurge of various denominations and Pentecostalism in Nigeria has led to this paper believing that Nigerians exported Christianity. Christianity came with a denominational difference, which had split the spirit of togetherness of the Nigerian traditional community. The Nigerian communities, which normally had the same gods or deities that were worshipped by all the people of the community regardless of gender, social class, among others, had now led to different denominations (O'Donovan, 2000:14). This led to division in the family where some went to a different church from the rest of the other family members which was unheard off in traditional Nigerian society.

Many “so-called men of God” in Nigerian today have turned the Christian faith to be a means of earning their living. The act of using technological equipment in terms of healing

and performing miracles such as asking members to eat grass in South Africa, drinking of fuel, or swallowing snakes to show the power of God. Biwul, Joel Kamsen Tihitshak (2018) argues that the level in which some “so-called men of God” advertised “miracles” was nothing short of deceitful attempts by money-hungry preachers to defraud people of their money and material things. The percentage of such preachers was higher with Christianity, and women constituted a substantial proportion of their victims and men inclusive. Churches were being founded daily all in the name of the prosperity gospel. Ultimately, the preachers enriched themselves while most of the members wallowed in poverty. The media had made it possible for some preachers within the Christian faith to become “small gods” in their empires (ministries). This was because through television programs these preachers became known and were worshipped as gods, especially by the youths. If by chance, such a preacher visited a city, the youths would be seen running after their cars believing that touching the man or woman would alleviate their problems - all these pointed towards hero-worshipping (Assimeng, 1989).

Western education in Nigeria is considered to be brought by the Christian missionaries who came with the gospel. As Dube (2002) postulates, “it thus became socially more advantageous to be Christian than not, to be educated in the European fashion than in indigenous African schools, to work in the church and colonial administration offices than to manage one’s farm.” This led to the formation and teaching of Science and the scientific worldview as spreading through modern education has, of course, been another significant factor in the development of secularisation (Cauthen, 1969:35; Toren, 2003). This however gave rise to the sect known as “Boko Haram” meaning (‘Western education is prohibited’) in Nigeria by the Islamic group that is terrorizing the North-East region. The secularising influence of Western education in Nigeria was, of course, the strongest when education was not only promoting a scientific understanding of reality but also promoting a secular value

system, freedom of speech, human rights both in the government and private schools, as observed by Toren (2003).

Omosade Awolalu (1979:191) observed that the slaves who were converted to Christianity after being taken into slavery in other parts of West were among those who thought it wise for their fellow brothers and sisters in Nigeria to benefit from the light they had received. This could be linked with what most of the missionaries said: “the continent of Africa is a dark continent that needs liberation. Awolalu (1979:188) went further to argue that the coming of Christianity divided the community that was once leaving together into two camps: the converts that looked down upon the old traditional religion, and the devotees of the old traditional religion. The intention of some Western missionaries to convert the so-called ‘heathen’ to their views in all things such as: religious, moral, and social. This might be regarded as reasonable from the missionary’s perspectives, but they assumed that the traditional religions were necessarily inferior to their own, naming it juju, fetishism, idolatry, and heathenism. To the Western missionaries accepting the Christian faith is more of accepting civilization. But Rodney (1972:278) accused the missionaries

Of preaching humility and submission in the face of gross injustice, inhumanity, and dehumanization. While British traders were exploiting their African customers, the missionaries preached peace, forgiveness, and good neighbourliness, which prevented genuine rebellion, self-preservation, and determination. Missionaries worked towards the preservation of the status quo and upholding of the master-servant relationship between Africans and Europeans.

If it is correct that missionary sermons suppressed a genuine rebellion that could have ushered in freedom for the oppressed, then the linkage of the missionaries with all the visible evils of colonialism may be justifiable. Rodney (1972) further argues that colonial Africa churches could be relied upon to preach turning the other cheek in the face of exploitation, and they drove home the message that everything would be right in the next world. Ingleby (2010:168) was in agreement with Rodney that “white Westerners forget easily. We would like to sweep the issues of colonialism, racial prejudice, and slavery, with its accompanying

tale of destruction, exploitation, greed, and cruelty under the table. But that it is because we were the perpetrators and have become the inheritors and beneficiaries. We must remember to ask the victims what they think.” Consequently, Christianizing, colonizing, civilizing, as well as enslaving become part of the mission to save Africans (Dube, 2000:10). Nigerian people and their ways of life were being suppressed on multiple fronts, while the language and mentality of the time enabled the Europeans to see their efforts as “civilizing missions.”

Christianity as a Tool for Transformation in Nigeria

The coming of Christianity into Nigeria serves as a transformational tool in various ways which this part aims to discuss. The mission of the church (history of Christianity) in Nigeria transformed the spiritual, economical, educational and physical growth and also freed people from the bondage of evil practices of cultures and traditions. The first transformation that the impact of Christianity can be seen in Nigeria is the areas of *Education, good road network, and Medical services*. It is almost impossible to divorce Christianity with western education especially in Nigeria. Christian missions founded many vernacular Bible training schools with the primary purpose of developing indigenous Bible teachers, evangelists, and pastors who would later form a crop of indigenous church leadership (Galadima and Turaki, 2001:180). Western education in Nigeria started with the missionaries and the church, several mission churches started schools (primary and secondary), colleges and universities to train skilled workers (Babalola, E. O. 1976). The church started a literacy class for the natives to be able to teach them how to read and write. Education now serves as the light to the country of Nigeria and the entire world. As Galadima and Turaki (2001:96) noted that

The work of Christian missions has become an integral part of Africa’s social history. The theory and practice of Christian missions which effected social formations and transformations can be summed up in its humanitarian ministries and services, such as, educational programmes and institutions; medical work, services and institutions; literature work, programmes and institutions; planting of mission stations and churches; other forms of spiritual, moral and social development of peoples and societies. Christian missions held a dominant position as leading pioneers in education, the fight against illiteracy and ignorance; medical work, the fight against various physical human physical human ailment, disease and epidemics.

In the 1900s the western form of education was cherished and patronized since Nigerians looked upon mission education as the only agency that could bring about the transformation needed both within the church and the nation at large. This made the government then to welcome the idea of mission schools in most parts of the country. To this Ayandele, (1966) opines that the concentration of intellect in the Church provided a moderating influence to the transformation of the country (Nigerian) towards building a better nation. Furthermore, Ajayi (1965:139) postulated that:

When the first mission schools were established at most of the centres, the majority of the missionaries had still to learn the local languages; the emigrant schoolmasters had themselves been brought up in English, which they saw as the language of commerce and civilization, the road of success and advancement.

The aid of missionary schools, English language became the common medium of communication in Nigeria. In this way the Church became an integrative bond uniting and transforming individuals of different and formerly hostile communities. Furthermore, missionaries in various parts of Nigeria did encourage the government and some of them in their mission stations constructed good road to link from one place to another villages or towns. The construction of good roads also encourages many citizens to go into various trades that profited the individual, community, and country. Galadima and Turaki (2001:97) went on to states that Christian mission's pioneered education where the colonial government and indigenes authorities could not provide such for their subjects. The major contributions of the church is in the area of education through literacy, social, moral, and spiritual up-bringing and general development of the people and societies. Education was the most potent tool for the transformation of African societies. Similarly, the area of medical services also started by building health clinics, dispensaries, maternity homes and hospitals both in urban and rural areas where there is no access roads.

The second is *cultural assimilation*. In Nigeria, cultural assimilation took place in the area of dressing to the point that most of the Nigerians do not value their traditional dressings but that of the West. Most people priorities white wedding than traditional, most prefer individualism than communal living; some prefer everyone for himself/herself and God for all. That is why Christianity is not home to the local people because of the fight within cultural assimilation to be local versus Western. Ingleby (2010:168) correctly says “there is the need for the local people to create missiology of their own. Much of the Western thinking about mission history and therefore about the mission is still too triumphalistic, too Eurocentric, too androcentric - in a word, too colonial.” However, contextualization becomes the key to transforming the ideas of the Bible into local cultures of the people to be able to make the message of salvation home to them. Contextualization approach of missionaries led to Bible translations within the country (Nigeria) and as of now there are several Bible translations which are done into various languages in Nigeria and its transforming the lives of people.

Nyambura Njoroge (2001:211) argues that this kind of patriarchal-colonial Christianity left African adherent disempowered and disoriented; cultural imperialism was central in the process of Christianising and civilizing the African people. Nevertheless, this transformed the negative parts of the cultures or practices and still upholds the good norms of the Nigerian people. For instance, the abolition and the killing of twins by Mary Slessor a missionary that went to Calabar in Cross River state within 18th and 19th century (W. P. Livingstone, N.D). Slessor missionary work in Calabar brought great transformation to the people of the land by the stoppage of the killing of twins that the community tag to have brought bad omen to the society. Today the community still remember her great work and courage to stand for the children that are twins not to be thrown into the evil forest. The

abolition of slave trade by Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce also brought transformation to the continent of Africa and even Nigeria.

Lastly, in transforming the culture of traditional Nigerians, Ingleby (2010:60) proposed *decolonizing Christianity* from Western cultures that appears to devalue the good aspect of Nigerian cultures:

First of all, the church should be autonomous in the sense that it should not be controlled by any “foreign” power... much more common are hierarchical and authoritarian structures within individual local churches and, of course, they are equally unwelcome and need to be resisted. Also, within the church, the rights, and roles of the marginalized, the poor (in every sense), and the disadvantaged need to be consistently championed, and this will mean a wholehearted tolerance of diversity... equally, no one group should be allowed to use their identity, particularly if it is grounded in tradition, to get their way. Finally, the church will encourage free and constructive dialogue, which will encourage every church member to be involved in the running of the church and also in determining its directions.

In the words of Kwame Bediako (1999:240) writes on what gave rise to the Independent movements or churches in Africa to accept the fact that they have to do with their world and world-view, and this is in contradiction to many missionaries whose motto was, “you must become like us.” Furthermore, Mandla Makhanya (2017) writes that

Christian conversion was closely associated with this colonial and imperial project without a clear distinction between the two. Reaction to Western control of leadership positions in churches with African congregants. The Western control of the church had a hierarchy with little opportunities for Africans within the system. Church dogmas and worship that seek to eradicate the African way of life and world view without any flexible hermeneutics of the Bible to accommodate cultural heritage and diversities found in most cultures in Africa. Needs for Africans to establish churches that embrace their traditional, cultural, and customary practices.

It is in line with the decolonization of Western history of missions and Christianity that Bolaji Idowu (1973:xi) of Nigeria has long been recognized as a leading advocate of a “theology which bears the stamp of original thinking and meditation of Africans.” There is also a need to decolonize the Western form of theology to the African theology that can answer the questions Nigerians are asking or the challenges the citizens are facing daily. African theology should resonate with African realities instead of philosophical arguments and abstract theologies. Such theology should be in line with the African women theologies,

they are doing their theologies from the experiences of women which are clouded with oppression, marginalization, subordination, discrimination etc. Their theology aims at giving life and transforming the oppressive and patriarchal system that devalue most women and silenced their voices.

Conclusion

This paper has observed that the coming of the missionaries into Nigeria brought some transformation in various aspect of life of the people. Through cultural assimilation, this paper has shown the role that missionaries played in transforming and impacting the Nigerian traditional cultures which have kept people in bondage from many evil practices. This approach to Christian mission by the Western missionaries brought civilization to the people of Nigeria and also led to the coming of western education, medical services, and several social amenities and propound a theology of African Christianity, African theology, indigenization of Christianity and inculturation/contextual theology. Christianity in Nigeria has transformed individuals and communities, such as indigenizing African Christianity and giving room for people to express themselves. It also set people free from satanic bondages such as illnesses, oppression and hatred. The coming of Christianity also improved trade relations through providing good access roads from one community to another. Christianity also encouraged many Nigerians to be educated and also gained employment in various field of endeavours this is done through the coming of Christianity to Nigeria.

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