

## **CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY (C.M.S) MISSION IN IGBOLAND: STRATEGIES, AND METHOD OF EVANGELIZATION – AN APPRAISAL**

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### **Abstract**

Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) is an evangelical society found in London in 1792 charged with the obligation of preaching the gospel message. This study looks at the missionary enterprises of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Igboland and the strategies adopted in carrying out their assignments among the Igbo people. The work investigates the different strategies adopted which include but not limited to the use of education which resulted in the establishment of schools, development of Igbo Literature and language, use of medical facilities and commerce to engage the people. This study observes that their approach in the use of education, medicare, and commerce among others was very useful to their success in the missionary work, however; the CMS could not utilize the numerous opportunities before them as the first missionaries to engage the Igbo people due to their different missionary orientations of the leaders of the mission. During the course of this study, primary and secondary sources were utilized. The study therefore noted that despite their failures in certain areas as a result of approach, the CMS was still able to make great impact in Igboland in the areas of education, medicare, human capital development, development of Igbo alphabet and language among other numerous achievements. In the context of this work, method will be seen as orderliness and way of doing something. It implies the mechanism applied by the C.M.S in carrying out their evangelistic activities in Igboland. This study will be restricted on the methods and strategies adopted by missionaries of the CMS in evangelization of Igboland.

### **Introduction**

*The religious revival or awakening of the seventeen century in Europe gave birth to the establishment of different missionary societies for the propagation of the gospel message. This age of revival also gave rise to the founding of various humanitarian groups that spearheaded the campaign against human slavery, which led to its abolition. Their common concern is to improve the conditions of man in the world. Describing the age, warren (1971) observed:*

It was one of the great ages of exploration, particularly in Africa. It was an age in which the initiative in regard to the industrial revolution that was held by Britain led to an immense commercial expansion, and with the expansion, the extension of British political influence,, the extension of the British Empire was part of the providential ordering of history, (p.20).

It was in the midst of these happening that C.M.S was born to help evangelize the Africans. The expedition was trusted in the hand of the Church Missionary Society,

which the liberated slaves were used to achieve. Okeke (2006) narrates that in Button's view, "the Africans from Freetown and (the Americans, would be used at the forefront of the expedition" (p.5). Okeke went further to explain that the liberated slave would act for the European merchants, while supported and protected by the British government. Following the outcome of those expeditions, the Missionaries of the CMS arrived Onitsha (Igboland) on 27<sup>th</sup> July 1857. For Nnatuanya (2021)

This coming of the missionaries of the CMS in Igboland, and specifically Onitsha, in the middle of the nineteenth century opened a new phase in the historical life and activities of the Igbo people. It opened a phase for the proclamation of the Gospel with the power of the Holy Spirit. The presence of Christ abides, thereby challenging the whole affairs and experiences of the whole life of the Igbo man. This event undoubtedly turned everything around for the people and created an immense opportunity for her socio-political and economic development (p.81).

This study will investigate the strategies and methods of evangelization adopted by the Missionaries of the C.M.S.

### **Background of the C.M.S mission in Igboland**

For Gray (1969) there are different factors that triggered the missionary activities in Africa. According to him,

Exploration, steam power, medical advances and the maximum gun, all contributed to the astonishing extension of Christian missionary activity in the nineteenth century Africa. These products of the industrial revolution powerfully assisted the penetration, survival and the reinforcement of the pioneer missionaries and in part the Christian gospel floated in on the rising tide of European influence (p. 90).

In the same vein, the abolition of slave trade and the subsequent formation of the Anti-Slavery Movement spearheaded by British officials helped to lay the foundation towards the evangelization of Africa. By 1841, the abolitionists were advocating taking the campaign inside Africa itself and seeking to regenerate the Continent by the Bible and the plough with the purpose of eliminating the nuisance constituted by the freed slaves in Europe. In view of this, many humanitarians had aimed for a Christian colony with a Christian charter and a Christian citizenry to be established on Africa soil. To materialize their dream and desire to free Europe from freed slaves, Freetown was chosen for the experiment and it should be of great interest to state that according to God's master plan, Christianity was planted in West Africa by these resettled Africans who were already Christians before their deportation. These Africa ex-slaves played the most vital role in the evangelization of the Africa Continent.

The first expedition carried out by the British government on the possibilities of evangelizing Africa was done on April 14, 1841. This was referred as the 1841 expedition by church historians. Okeke (2006) noted that:

As far as the C.M.S was concerned, the 1841 expedition was exploratory in nature. It was to explore the possibilities for evangelistic work that they asked J.F. Schon, a German Linguist working for the society in Freetown and Samuel Crowther, a liberated African slave teaching in the C.M.S to accompany the expedition (p. 5).

It was observed that the mission was conceived distantly as a response by the C.M.S to possibilities both in terms of communication and the willingness of the Igbo people at Freetown to take the gospel to their kinsmen. The Igbo Freetown ex-slaves conceived, planned and carried out the occupation of their homeland as an evangelistic field while the influential Henry Venn brought the whole of his personality on the venture. The outcome was the arrival of the C.M.S mission on 27<sup>th</sup> July, 1857 at Onitsha under the leadership of Dr. William Bankie and Crowther. On arrival, the party was given a rosy welcome by the king of Onitsha, Obi Akazua and his elders-in-council.

### **C.M.S Methods of Evangelization**

Despite the fact that the C.M.S missionaries were the first to arrive in Igboland in the nineteenth century, their methods and strategies of evangelization kept them from utilizing the great opportunity in expanding and dominating the whole Igboland. Though, the missionary of the CMS did their best; however, the clash of interest they had with the traders, the natives and the West African company Ltd serves as a barrier. This is because the missionaries depended on the traders for their daily provision. In view of this, it becomes a problem because no man can serve two masters at the same time. Notwithstanding, the clash of interest, the C.M.S missionaries employed the following strategies to achieve their purpose in Igboland:

### **Education and establishment of schools**

The provision of education and establishment of schools was one of the methods adopted by the missionary of the CMS. This was seen clearly in Okeke (2006) citing Taylor's report on August 6, 1857: "Twelve children were brought to me to be educated by their respective parents and guardians. I looked upon them as the commencement of our direct missionary work. We lost no time, but began to teach them ABC" (p. 36). More so, the C.M.S missionaries discovered that the achievement of their goal will be through education. What followed was the establishment of schools like – Central School, Onitsha in 1860, St. Paul's Training College, Awka in 1904 (This was established for the purpose of training teachers) and Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha, Anambra (1925) among many other numerous schools. There is no doubt that since nineteenth century, mission schools, which were founded by foreign missionaries promoted Western education that was offered free or highly subsidized in most cases and many of today's Nigerian leaders benefitted from the free education offered by the missionaries, which became the bedrock for Nigerian nationalism and independence.

For Ogbu (1996) "education had the basic goal of evangelization... (p. 18). While Nmah (2008) emphasized thus:

In such inter-denominational scramble, all tactics were used. Schools, hospitals and skill acquisition training centers became veritable tools for making Igbo converts and evangelism. The Igbo converts with their intra-village competitiveness exploited their rivalry to the fullest. In the schools, the Roman Catholics offered instruction in English and other languages and science leaving the C.M.S to its idealistic programme of useful education, a legacy of self-governing, self-supporting and self-extending church coupled with the bible and plough days (p. 74).

Although Ekechi's argument in Okeke (2006) is that C.M.S education policy in Igbo land was based on trade oriented education which the Anglicans authorities sought to copy from black schools in America. But the importance of education and role of Taylor in the evangelization of the Igbo land cannot be over looked and in that regard Mbanefo (1960) echoed.

The origins of education in Nigeria are the classes of religious instruction in which ordinary people were taught to read the scriptures. Gradually schools, become available in which, at least, some of the children, could learn reading and develop their education generally. (p. 18)

On this note, this study observes that education played a vital instrument in the hand of the CMS missionaries in actualizing their goal.

### **Development of Igbo literature and Linguistics**

The need for Igbo literature and language led Christopher Taylor to the study and attempt to develop the Igbo vocabulary. The study led to the translation of the Lord's Prayer that was used on 13th September, 1857. In reaction to Taylor's contribution towards the role of education, Okeke (2006) emphasized that Taylor's labor in translation introduced the Igbo to the art of reading and this in turn enabled them to master English language and opened up for them the immense wealth in literally works. In other words, it is on record that the missionary endeavor of the CMS was instrumental in the development of Igbo language. No wonder that Ekechi (1972) commenting on the role the missionaries of the CMS played in the development of Igbo language observe that "there is no question that as a result of the C.M.S insistence on the use of the vernacular, graduates from Anglican schools were far better grounded in the Igbo language than their counterparts from the Catholic schools" (p. 192).

On this note Nwadiakor and Umeanolue (2012) acknowledged that "Taylor certainly was the most remarkable single contributor, in the 19 century, to the literature and study of the Igbo language, a position which he held without rival until the work of T.J. Dennis appeared in the first decade of the 20 century" (p.122). The climax was the work of T.J Dennis, an Archdeacon, a theologian and a Linguist who started the translation of the Igbo bible in 1905 and completed same in 1912. Commenting on the important of Dennis work, Green (1936) explains that "the making of union Ibo was a difficult and delicate task involving questions of inter-group jealousy and prestige as

well as purely linguistic considerations, and as such it certainly commands respect” (p. 510). And Westernman (1929) added that “what Dennis did is not essentially different from what happened in the European languages, where out of a number of dialects, one written language evolved, which bore and bears features of more than one dialect” (p. 340). In view of the above Nwadiakor and Umeanolue (2012) concludes that “it must be conceded that the missionaries especially the C.M.S. rendered remarkable services to the development of Igbo language through reducing it to writing, through their numerous evangelical tracks in the vernacular and, through the manufacturing of the Union Igbo.

### **Establishment of Health Care delivery and Hospital**

It was around 1890 that one of the missionaries of the CMS, Rev. Henry Dobinson started a dispensary for a formal medical work among parishioners in and around Onitsha. The medical work was carried on by Miss Mary Elms, a Nursing Sister who had had her nursing training in Sheffield England in both general and Midwifery. This bold step was the origin of the Niger Mission Medical Services which later gave birth to Iyi-Enu Mission Hospital in 1907. This venture helped immensely the evangelization of the people because preaching the gospel and healing the sick cannot be separated. The need for healing of the body from different disease that the Igbo man could not understand causes them to embrace the gospel.

### **The use of trade and industry**

The Missionaries of the CMS in their bid to make sure that holistic evangelization was carried out employed the use of proper and effective education which involved training in skills to make sure that their converts is useful to the society. In additions to that, few were trained as artisans and builders in European fashion.

### **The ordination of George Nicholas Anyaegbunam into the Holy Order**

The ordination of George Nicholas Anyaegbunam on February 13, 1898 by Bishop H Tugwell at Immanuel Church Onitsha marked a significant turning point in the life of Onitsha people and the other surrounding Igbo communities. According to Nnatuanya (2021) this singular act raised the morale of the Igbo people and made them to have sense of belonging. It made the Igbo people to believe that what the white man can do their own can also do the same. This helped them to accept that the God that used the white man can also use the black man to accomplish his purpose. However, this ordination created a sense of rivalry between the Igbo and the other missionaries of African descents.

### **An Appraisal**

There is no doubt that the missionary endeavours of the CMS, played significant role in the development of education in Igbo land. No one can talk about education today and the development of Igbo language without making reference to the work of the CMS. For instance, the CMS through Archdeacon Dennis was instrumental in the translation of the Bible into the Igbo language under the auspices of the British and Foreign Bible Society (Fulford, 2002). This study observes that Dennis was a major key player in the development of Union Igbo, a written standard intended to serve all dialects. This Union Igbo New Testament was published in 1908 and the whole Bible in 1913. To show the impact of this translation, it was noted that by the

time of his death, five years later, about 25,215 Bibles had been sold. Though, this was very influential but it was criticized by Chinua Achebe, as stultifying the Igbo language. Notwithstanding the criticism, the role it played cannot be over emphasized. In the same vein, Archdeacon Dennis was instrumental in the publication of Igbo grammar in 1901, a literacy primer in 1903, which was later revised 1911 and an Igbo translation of Pilgrim's Progress. These works were the foundation upon which Igbo alphabets and language were built.

Notwithstanding these endeavors by the CMS, their inability to expand their missionary territories as a result of their differences in missionary strategy affected their exploits. For Nmah (2008) the C.M.S mission in Igbo land was influenced by the following factors: The Onitsha and Ogidi war gave them opportunity to employ her court alliance approach in evangelism, epidemic phenomenon which makes them to use medical facilities to assist the people and their acceptance of outcast, slaves and Osu among others.

However, there are factors that frustrated the C.M.S mission in Igboland. Such factors include the question of procedures for baptism. This was seen in the disagreement between Johnson and MacCarthy. Johnson was of the view that discreet and strict measures must be adopted when accepting converts for baptism while MacCarthy's idea was that the whole village ought to have been accepted as church members after which instructions concerning maturity were to be given. The missionaries of the C.M.S adopted the strict measure that before one would be baptized, he or she must pass through the catechumen class. This is very good in the sense that it ensures that the one baptized understood what it means but on the other hand, it scares people away from coming to be baptized.

On the other hand, Okeke (2006) laments that Crowther's disagreement with Taylor on the nature of missionary expansion limited the area covers by the missionaries of the C.M.S. He said:

Taylor's evangelistic strategy differed from Crowther. Taylor believed in immediate expansion before consolidation. He was aware of the Igbo social system of diversity in unity even to a point of fragmentation while on the other hand, Crowther came from a tribe wherein authority was fairly concentrated in a central place... (p.56)

Notwithstanding all these, Akinwumi (1988) admitted the impact of education towards the evangelizing process. According to him, "The primary objective of the missionaries was to convert the people to Christianity through education. The schools were Crowther's principal method of evangelization. All good missionaries made it their duty to convert the children willy-nilly through education. Thus the beginning of education in Nigeria is traceable to Christian missionaries. (p. 60).

### **Conclusion**

The strategies of the C.M.S towards admitting converts into the church: baptism and confirmation, polygamy and clash of interest between Crowther and Taylor contributed

immensely for their non-control of Igbo land. Regardless of that, their method of using education, medical facilities, training institute and giving of alms including using of indigenous church agents helped them in their endeavors. The impact of their missionary endeavor reverberates all around Igbo communities today. The CMS sowed a seed that has grown to be the iroko tree that has been serving as a shade to the Igbo nation. Their use of education as a tool is one of the major reasons why at present the Igbo nation is known as one of the most enlightened tribe in Nigeria.

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