

THE 19TH CENTURY CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE AND DENOMINATIONAL RIVALRY IN IGBOLAND: A CALL FOR CHRISTIAN INTEGRATION

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Abstract

In the nineteenth century, there were various Christian missionary bodies who made their way to Igboland, Nigeria from Europe and American continents. Their aim was to ensure that the seed of Christianity is planted and grown. In as much as the missionaries made their way towards spreading the Christian faith in Igbo territory, each of them struggled for superiority over their counterparts. This act brought about unhealthy competition and denominational rivalry. It could be said that denominational rivalry helped to fast track the growth and development of Christianity and civilization of Igbo territory. On the other hand, it presented a poor image of Christ and his gospel to the indigenous people. However, many literature have been documented on the history of Christian missionary enterprise in Igboland and their contribution to the development of Igbo society. However, there are many literature on the impact of denominational rivalry in contemporary Igbo society but the main focus of this research is to reunite various denominations which is the gap this research tends to fill. The study makes use of secondary sources of data collection like journals, book of readings, unpublished project works, text books and mainline books. The study finds out that, the foreign Christian missionary bodies introduced denominational rivalry in Igboland while spreading the gospel as its impact is still felt in contemporary Igbo society.

Keywords: Christian, Missionary, Denominational, Rivalry, Igbo, Society

Introduction

In nineteenth century, there was intensive Christian missionary enterprise in Igbo territory. Various Christian missionary bodies trooped into Igbo land beginning with Church Missionary Society and later others came. In the words of Okpalike and Nwadiakor (2015), the British Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) claimed to have chosen Africa as one of the spheres of its apostolic work, and the Negro race in particular, out of commiseration for wrongs which the slave trade had wrought upon them. Hence, they came with the Bible and the Plough missionary policy proposed by Thomas Buxton which aimed at civilization and Christianization of the indigenous people. With the coming of other Christian missionary bodies from Europe and America, this missionary policy was well executed and it produced positive results. However, during the course of evangelism among the missionary bodies, there existed sore relationship among them. Ezeugwu (2021) reports that, competition, nepotism, theological differences, political positions, competition for followers, interpretation of the scriptures, amongst others resulted in rivalry among the mission groups. According to Ekechi (1971), as the Christian missions found the Igbo remarkably receptive to missionary propaganda, each was more than anxious to exert its denominational influence on the people. Thus denominational rivalry, especially between the Roman Catholics and the Protestants, was the order of the day during this period. Anaukwu (2012) reports about the interaction and relationship among the various Christian missionary bodies when he says that:

The Roman Catholics and the Anglicans never liked to see each other because from time immemorial because their denominational relations were not cordial and this has led to many incidents. One of them took place in 1948 when the Roman Catholic catechist instructed his catechism class that the CMS people are teaching heresy and their teaching will not be seen anywhere in the Bible. James Nnama, and others came and intimated the CMS catechist of the development and some people fought over the accusation. At every instance, each mission is always discrediting the work of the other. The Anglican members by the way of cajoling the Roman Catholics would say *Fada onye nkwa* (Roman Catholic priest is a rapist) while the Roman Catholic members would call "*Ciemensi bu Oku muo*" (Anglican is hell fire) (p.75).

Nwaka (2012) further explains that, the struggle for self-assertion among the two groups took various forms which include: casting aspersions on each other, belittling each other with derogatory names, songs, sermons, teachings, and so on. From the above viewpoints, it could be deduced that unhealthy competition and rivalry was the order of the day during the 19th century Christian missionary enterprise in Igbo territory. It could be observed that despite that Christian missionary enterprise is still ongoing, the impacts of denominationalism is still felt in modern Igbo society. According to Okoro (2018):

One exact feature is the sharp line drawn between Catholics and Anglicans of even today. Among the Pentecostal movements of today, we find another grave element of the missionary mistakes: The competition among churches to grow their numbers through contemporary tactics without recourse to the in-depth attention required for each convert. The Christianity received from these divided Christians turn out to represent a divided house, where blind competition and bitter rivalry persist and governs (pp. 38-39).

Furthermore, it could be observed that the various Christian denominations which were present in Igbo territory compete for legitimacy, acceptance and spiritual superiority amongst one another. Iheanacho (2009) notes that, the pursuit of religious legitimacy and superiority promotes fundamentalism, and fanaticism amongst the Christian fold. He further explains that it leads to divisions and splits. All the above points raised presents a poor image of Christ and his gospel also it dents the image of the church. However, there is need for Christians to pursue harmony and achieve unity in diversity as Christ prayed “that they may all be one” (John 17: 21-22).

Concept of Denominationalism

The term denominationalism does not have a generally accepted definition. However, different scholars conceive the concept from different perspectives. Tolorunju (2018) elucidates that denominationalism is the coexistence of different factions of the church and even different religions within the same country without government interference. Denominationalism is the belief that some Christian groups are legitimate churches of the same religion regardless of their distinguishing labels, beliefs, and practices. A denomination within Christianity can be defined as a recognized autonomous branch of Christian church. A Christian denomination is a distinct religious body within Christianity, identified by traits such as a name, organization, leadership and doctrine. Individual bodies however may use alternative terms to describe themselves, such as church or sometimes fellowship, ministry, movement among others. Groups of denominations often sharing broadly similar beliefs, practices, and historical ties are sometimes known as branches of Christianity. Tolorunju (2018) defines denominationalism as an act of denomination; name designation especially a general name for a class of things or a religious body comprising of a number of congregations. It is argued that, the differences among Christians were inevitable, but that separation based on the differences was not necessarily schism. Adamolekun (2012) opines that Christians are obligated to practice their beliefs rather than remain within a church with which they disagree, but they must also recognize their imperfect knowledge and not condemn other Christians as apostate over unimportant matters.

Denominationalism, on the other hand is a response to the problems created by the division of the adherents of a single religious tradition into separate and competing ecclesiastical bodies. They shared a common faith but were divided by issues of the church, government and worship. Ekpunobi (2001) opines that denominationalism took toleration and religious freedom for granted and later accepted arguments put forward in their defense, and then moved beyond the goal of peace among competing groups to a quest for unity in the midst of the acknowledged differences of those who shared a common faith.

Origin, Growth and Development of Denominationalism in Christendom

The origin or take off point of denominationalism could be traceable to the 16th century Reformation. This movement which took place in Western Europe is considered as the source of denominationalism in Christendom. According to Untung and Khoirunisa (2019), reformation could be considered as a movement which focused on thorough examination of institutions and practices of Western Christianity which was dominated by the Catholic Church. Furthermore, reformation as a movement opposed the moral decadence and unethical doctrines and practices which were practiced in the Church (Alister,

2016). Although some scholars are of the view that Erasmus laid the egg which was later hatched by Martin Luther. Erasmus did this through his writings which Martin Luther read and took pragmatic approach to openly confront and counter some practices of the Catholic Church. Luther was a monk from the Society of Augustine, who was dissatisfied with elements of decay ongoing at the Catholic Church. In his quest to counter such practices, he wrote and hung 95 Thesis at the door of Wittenberg Church in Germany and sent to the Archbishop of Mainz in October 1517.

However, the Papal authority demanded that he be silenced. Untung and Khoirunisa (2019) states that Luther criticized the Catholic Church for selling indulgences in order to increase the funds that would be used to rebuild St. Peters Basilica in Rome. Furthermore, Luther criticized and rejected some of the religious doctrines and practices of the Church which did not have biblical basis. He criticized various corruptions in the church, most notably the buying and selling of indulgences. In their original form, indulgences were gifts offered to the church by repentant sinners to show their gratitude to God for the forgiveness of their sins. By the early 1500s, the practice had become rampant and it appeared that the Christian church was selling forgiveness rather than merely accepting gifts from the faithful. Luther criticized this practice, he says that this act instills in Christians that repentance and forgiveness could be bought freely. Instead, Luther preached that salvation is a free gift from God that comes through faith alone upon repentance for sin. Luther also objected to the hierarchical structure of the Christian church, arguing that any Christian who could interpret the Bible and serve as a minister as well as any other; this idea is now known as the priesthood of all believers. Hallihan (2017) asserts that in 1520 Luther's standing with the Roman Catholic Church was in disarray, and the next year he was excommunicated.

In order to prove his points on some practices carried out by the Church which have no biblical basis, he translated the bible to German language. He did this because the majority of the laity could not read Latin which was the official language of learning. According to Franklin (2018), Luther resolved to put the Bible into a German form that was so natural and so forceful that it would speak to the hearts of all Germans. He wanted the Scriptures to be translated accurately into the language they used in their everyday lives. The laypersons access to the Bible was coping with the institutional church's political power over their lives as it was about developing personal spirituality (McGrath 2001). Despite the ban on Martin Luther, his reformation movement was successful as it led to the formulation of new ideas to the Christian faith and birthed denominationalism to Christendom.

In summary, reformation has its root from the struggle of Martin Luther which was the most traumatic era in the entire history of Roman Catholicism. This era was the period that the Roman Catholic Church stood, alone as a single entity which was distinct from other branches of Christendom. After the era of the Reformation, a large number of various Christian denominations sprout out and are still in existence till date.

Christian Missionary Enterprise and Denominational Rivalry in Igboland

This section explores the role denominationalism played in shaping Christian missionary activities in Igbo territory. The pros and cons of denominationalism will be pointed out as well. Christianity was brought to Igboland by Church Missionary Society in 1857. After some decades, some other missionary bodies like the Roman Catholic Mission, Wesleyan Methodist Mission, Scottish Methodist Mission, The Qua Iboe mission, Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) among others came along as well to assist the Anglicans in evangelism. Some of the various missionary agencies relied on the assistance, support and protection from the colonial government to spread the gospel all over Igboland. As each of the missionary bodies stood firm, there arose denominationalism and rivalry among them. The missionaries were however not only concerned with the introduction of Christianity into Igboland, but were so engrossed in gaining many indigenous people as converts to surpass other counterparts in the missionary endeavour.

Anaukwu (2012) observed that each mission struggled to show their mastery and superiority over others. Ezeugwu (2021) reports that competition for control and areas of influence in the field resulted in rivalry among the mission groups. Ekechi (1971) states that, as the Christian missions found the Igbo

receptive to missionary propaganda, each were more than anxious to exert its denominational influence on the people. For each of the various Christian missionaries in Igboland to attract more members to their denomination, they considered putting in place certain social amenities and rendering of charitable services that could attract the indigenous people to their own denomination. According to Nmah (2012), in such inter-denominational rivalry, all tactics were used such as schools, hospitals, skill acquisition and other material gifts which became veritable tools for making Igbo converts. Hence, each missionary body applied various strategies in attracting the indigenous people to their own denomination.

For instance, the Anglican missionaries introduced Western education in Igboland, thereby using indigenous language to teach her students. Also the Roman Catholic Mission on the other hand taught her students in English language. This made the Catholic mission to attract more students to than the Anglican mission schools. This was vividly captured by Okafor (2014) who said that, it is important to note that the schools earlier established by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) before the arrival of the Roman Catholic Mission missionary education received very little patronage by the indigenous people. While it was patronized by a few girls, the men kept away from the classrooms which they considered as idle venture that could only pass for a lazy man's occupation. Serious and hardworking males preferred to accompany their parents to the farms, or engage in various handcraft.

According to Ekechi (1971), another reason was that the CMS schools had earlier insisted on instructing their pupils in the vernacular. Recognizing the fact that the Roman Catholic mission schools attracted more pupils, because the CMS local Secretary believed that the Roman Catholic Church had good schools, the chief attraction being that nothing is done in vernacular and English is taught by an Irishman. Ekechi (1971) noted that from all appearances, it seemed that the acquisition of the language skill was more possible through the attendance in Catholic schools. The CMS, on the other hand, frowned upon the teaching of the English language in schools. This could be because Catholic mission schools had already adopted English language as official language in teaching students because they saw that the indigenous people were so inquisitive to learn it and other Western related ideas.

In collaboration with the above viewpoint, Igwe (1977) opines that at this time, the ability to speak and write the English language was a passport to comparatively well-paid jobs in government offices and commercial houses. English was also regarded as the storehouse of the superior European culture which the indigenous people were eager to acquire. Ekechi (1971) echoes Crowther's observation in the following way; "from all I could gather by observation, the Igbo are very emulative as in other things, so it will be in book learning. Other towns will not rest satisfied until they have also learned the mystery of reading and writing, by which their neighbours may surpass or put them in the shade" (p. 7).

The particular effect of this was that many new converts and the former CMS members crowded Catholic schools to avail themselves the opportunity of learning English. All the circumstances taken together led to mass exodus of people from the CMS to the RCM. Within a short period of its existence at Onitsha, Catholicism became so popular that delegations came from other towns and villages to request the Reverend Fathers to come and open schools and Churches for them. In each case, the Roman Catholic Mission responded immediately to the call.

Also, the Roman Catholic missionaries saw Western education as a means of evangelisation and conversation. Thus, at the early stage, Roman Catholic mission schools offered free education to the indigenous people. This gesture encouraged many indigenous people to go to school and thousands took advantage of it to become members of Roman Catholic Church. Igwe (1977) emphasis that the Catholics at first, adopted the strategy of reaching the people through the charitable approach of erecting hospitals where the sick and the less privileged were taken care of for free without fees or charges. Roman Catholic priests approached CMS teachers and Catechists and offered them better salaries and further education opportunities. The result of this was that many of them left the CMS which had no such prospects for them and joined the RCM. Onwuegbuchulam (2017) affirms that:

In 1886, Reverend A. C. Strong, who was the Anglican School Master from Sierra Leonean of Igbo heritage wrote about the intrusion and the influence of the Roman Catholic mission at Onitsha saying that RCM took from our school about a dozen children over whose parents they

had exercised some influence. The parents did not take their children to them for baptism but for medical aid and the priest seized the opportunity of administering holy baptism first and the medicines afterwards. They have in all about (20) twenty boarders. The 20 boarders were redeemed slaves, and together with 20 other boys (p. 62).

Although other missionary bodies adopted similar strategies however, it seems that each of the missionary bodies made attempts to discredit these gestures offered by their counterparts. Anaukwu (2012) documents that, it was not uncommon to hear that all schools, hospitals and institutions except those run by their mission were of low quality. They even come up with the propaganda that if you go to a hospital owned by another mission, they will give you injection and you will die. It is not surprising that they stationed members around opponent's hospital to know their members that attended the other hospital. The missionaries encouraged parents not to send their children to schools owned by other missionary bodies. Anaukwu (2012) further enunciates that children attended only hospitals and schools of their own mission no matter the distance from their homes. That explained why some students trekked miles to attend schools owned by their denomination despite that there were other mission schools closer to them. On the positive, it made students to learn to wake up early, prepare in order to be in school on time.

Furthermore, Nmah (2012) states that the Roman Catholics generously distributed medicines thereby upsetting the CMS by this use of alluring temporal advantages to win converts. The Anglicans applied same in Enugu State. Roman Catholic Mission established Christian villages where run-away slaves or those redeemed by the missions would be protected and educated in the Christian way of life. Jordan (1949) said that social outcasts were also welcomed in the villages. The Catholics also provided its members with food and clothing. These charitable deeds of RCM attracted many indigenous people to them. Inyang (1967) recalled that in 1898, the entire people of Osamari left the CMS and invited the RCM which responded immediately with a school and a Church. The first Catholic teacher posted to them was a reconverted member of the Anglican Church.

From the above points of view, it could be deduced that there was much who scrambled for converts among the various missionary bodies. This resulted to denominationalism and rivalry among them. Nmah (2012) observes that the Igbo converts with their inter and-intra-village competition exploited this rivalry to the fullest. For many people especially the outcasts, slaves, twin mothers and their babies, captives, was at the mercy of the church who really provided succor to them. It could be deduced that the Christian rivalry in Igboland, Nigeria, stems from various historical, cultural, and socio-political factors. When Christianity was introduced in the 19th century by European missionaries, it was marked by the competition between different denominations, particularly the Roman Catholics and various Protestant groups like the Anglicans and Methodists. One primary reason for this rivalry was the competition for converts. Each denomination sought to expand its influence and membership, often leading to aggressive proselytizing efforts. This competition was intensified by the missionaries' desire to establish dominance and secure funding from their home churches, which valued reports of successful conversions. Cultural factors also played a significant role. The missionaries often imposed their own interpretations of Christianity, which sometimes clashed with the traditional beliefs and practices of the Igbo people. This led to divisions within communities, as different groups aligned with the denominations that best resonated with their cultural values or offered the most tangible benefits, such as education and healthcare. Political ambitions and the quest for control over social structures further fueled the rivalry. As missionaries established schools and hospitals, they gained significant influence over local governance and social norms. Different denominations vied for this power, leading to conflicts and competition for loyalty among the Igbo populace.

Reasons for Denominational Rivalry in Igboland in the 19th Century

The denominational rivalry in 19th century Igboland, was fueled by some historical, cultural, social, and political factors. In as much as the arrival of European missionaries brought significant changes to Igboland, it also leads to intense competition among various Christian denominations. The factors would be discussed as follows:

Competition for Converts and Evangelical Zeal/Missionary Strategies

The primary driver of denominational rivalry was the competition for converts. Different Christian denominations, particularly the Roman Catholics and Protestant groups like the Anglicans and Methodists aimed to expand their influence by gaining as many converts as possible. Each denomination sought to secure a foothold in Igboland by establishing churches, schools, and hospitals. The success of these efforts was often measured by the number of converts, which in turn influenced the missionaries' funding and support from their home churches. Missionary zeal played a crucial role in intensifying the rivalry. Missionaries were often motivated by a deep sense of religious duty to save souls and spread their version of Christianity. This evangelical fervor led to aggressive proselytizing efforts, where different denominations sought to outdo each other in attracting converts. Various strategies were employed, including the provision of education, healthcare, and social services, which were attractive to the local population and served as incentives for conversion.

Cultural Clashes and Adaptations

The introduction of Christianity brought about significant cultural changes. Missionaries often imposed their own interpretations of Christian doctrine, which sometimes clashed with traditional Igbo beliefs and practices. This led to divisions within communities, as different groups aligned with the denominations that best resonated with their cultural values or offered the most tangible benefits. Some denominations were more accommodating of local customs, while others took a more rigid stance against indigenous practices, leading to further fragmentation and rivalry.

Socio-Political Ambitions

The competition among denominations was not solely religious but also socio-political. The missionaries wielded considerable influence over local governance and social structures through their control of education and healthcare institutions. Different denominations vied for this power, leading to conflicts over who would control these vital resources. The establishment of mission schools, for example, was a significant tool for gaining influence, as education became a means of social mobility and a way to cultivate loyalty among the younger generation.

Economic Factors

Economic considerations also played a role in the rivalry. Mission stations often became centers of economic activity, attracting local traders and artisans. The provision of European goods and the creation of new markets were additional incentives for conversion. Different denominations competed to control these economic hubs, as they provided financial support and opportunities for local converts. The economic benefits associated with alignment with a particular denomination could thus sway individuals and communities.

Implications of Denominational Rivalry in Modern Igbo Society

The effects of denominational rivalry in Igboland ranged from unhealthy competition, antagonism among churches, poor attendance to social functions, conflict in family relationships, amongst others.

Unhealthy Competition, Rivalry and Antagonism Among Churches

Although Christian missionary enterprise helped to develop Igbo territory, it could be observed that, the impact of denominationalism is still felt in modern Igbo society. According to Okoro (2018):

One exact feature is the sharp line drawn between Catholic Church and Anglican Church of even today. Among the Pentecostal movements of today, we also find other mistake which is the competition among churches to grow their numbers through contemporary tactics without recourse to the in-depth attention required for each convert. Christianity received from its counterparts a divided house where blind competition and bitter rivalry persist and governs (pp. 38-39).

The various Christian denominations compete for legitimacy, acceptance and spiritual superiority amongst themselves. Each group claim possession of the real Christian truth and bask in the euphoria of denominationalism. That is, each group holds the unshaken conviction that it is their church that can lead people to salvation. They do this to attract more people especially the youth to their denomination. In fact, many of the neo-Pentecostal Churches express sympathy for non-members (mainline churches),

for them such people are few steps to damnation and eternal punishment. This is the background of the appellative stereotype of living and non-living churches in Igboland. Iheanacho (2009) notes that the pursuit of religious superiority has promoted fundamentalism, and fanaticism amongst the Christian fold. This is because members are confused as denominations profess differing and contradicting messages and doctrines. The question becomes: Which path leads to salvation? As each claim revelation from the Holy Spirit and members who are expected to believe and not query their veracity. Since it is a matter of faith, which one do we believe? Do we believe all or none? Do we profess the Christian faith in delusion and confusion? There are accusations of sheep stealing which have given rise to conflict among different churches.

Antagonism is witnessed among churches in Igboland, as some of the Pentecostal pastors speak against doctrines practiced in mainline churches. Some Pentecostals call the new generation churches as they publicize the mistakes of other pastors and sometimes accuse their fellow Pentecostal pastors of using diabolic powers to perform miracles which are one of the strategies to attract youths to their denomination. There also exist conflicts among different denominations because their member left them and joined the other denomination. For Adeyemo (2006), unhealthy competition exists among Pentecostal churches which further leads to divisions and splits. He points out that, some of the Pentecostal preachers claim to have more power to perform miracles than their fellows in faith. This makes the believers to move from one church to another looking for a place that may satisfy their quest for spiritual deliverance at all cost. This movement from one church to the other has left many believers confused and frustrated. Related to competition are the names given to some of these Pentecostal churches. Most of these preachers brand their churches with attractive names, such as House of Harvest Church, John 3:16 ministry, Prayer Palace, Miracle Centre Ministry, God of Talknado Ministry, E-dey work ministry, Solution Centre, Run for your life ministry, Helicopter of Christ among others. These names create curiosity among the miracle seekers especially the youth and increase movement across these churches due to their pronounced publicity.

The unhealthy competition has led many of them to show their deliverance and healing services on different media platforms while the wealthy ones establish their own radio and television stations. As part of the unhealthy competition, Nwaozuru (2020) reports that some crusade/revival themes used by some Pentecostal churches are aimed to intelligently gain people to their Church through crusade themes such as: Who is Holding my Wedding Gown, Operation Take Your Child amongst others are nothing but to attract more members to their churches. It has been noticed that the messages preached are not even capable to save souls rather it gives momentary joy.

Poor Attendance to Social Functions of Other Denominations

Refusal to attend social functions organized by other denominations is witnessed today in Igboland. Some Parents refuse to give out their children to marriage to prospective suitors simply because they are not of the same denomination. All these seem to have started during Christian missionary enterprise in Igboland. According to Anaukwu (2012):

At a stage, Christians of one denomination would neither marry nor attend wedding by members of the other denomination. It was clear that if you marry or give out a hand in marriage from another denomination that was not yours, the person would receive penance or punishment. For instance, Hyiacent Ilochi refused to give out her daughters' hand in marriage to an Anglican member because he was a knight of the Roman Catholic Church (p. 76).

Anaukwu (2012) concludes by saying that brothers fight one another and would not even attend one another's funeral or marriage just because they go to different churches. As a result of these, a lot of people in Igboland were denied their choice partners. A lot married out of fear. Anaukwu (2012) reports that Reverend Fr. Cyprain Michael Tansi flogged Mrs. Azuka Ebo for accepting an Anglican marriage. In some parts of Igboland, people are told not to associate with Christians of other denominations nor accept marriage proposals from them. Anaukwu (2012) writes that they must not marry us so that they may not lose their souls. Nmah (2012) states that, it is often difficult for an Anglican and other churches to marry a Catholic and vice visa. When such occurs the parties (couple) alongside their parents are either excommunicated, suspended or they relocate to a more neutral church. According to Chiegboka

(2009), in a situation a Catholic parent give out their daughter to non-Catholic for marriage, they incur the penalty of suspension from the sacraments unless they show non-cooperation by not taking dowry and accepting wine. In practice, this denial of sacraments extends to denial of funeral mass. Again, parents and those taking the place of parents, who hand over their children to be baptized or brought up in a non-Catholic religion are to be punished with a *centure* or other just penalty.

Nmah (2012) observes that in marriage, some church members do not attend the marriage ceremony of their member who marries outside of their denomination are sometimes been suspended for a while. In support of Nmah's viewpoint, Nwaozuru (2020) records that Miss Iheajuru Angela's wedding ceremony was not attended by her church (Assemblies of God Church Umuahia District) because her husband is a member of Saint John Anglican Church in Aba. Some female members of Jehovah Witness reject marriage proposals of believers from other denominations. Some courtship or proposed marriage ceremonies have been cancelled because they would either be the bride or groom to be from one denomination to another. It could further lead to late marriage among many spinsters in Igboland.

Conflicts in Family Relationship and Discrimination in the Society

Denominational rivalry has adverse effects on families and relationships. It could lead to conflict in Christian families and crisis in relationships. Sometimes, the unhealthy competition and rivalry between various Christian denominations has affected many Christian homes in Igboland. People who are related by blood now see themselves as enemies simply because they attend different churches. It has been observed that most parents are not happy with their children when they quit family Church to another denomination hence, most parents quarrel with their children for migrating from family Church to other denomination. In a scenario where a young man wants to marry, and his family refuse to accept the wife to be on the ground that they are not of the same denomination, such could lead to quarrel and division in a family. At worst, the young man could elope with the young lady. At this point they are now cohabiting which is against Christian standard.

There is discrimination among members of the society. In the wider society, some Pentecostals consider others from mainline churches as not true born again Christians because they fail to cooperate and live in harmony with them. Anaukwu (2012) observes that members of the new generation churches would not want to associate with the mainline churches so as not to entangle themselves with sinners, and even if they do, it is lip service attitude as this has watered the gospel of Christ. The co-operation between these churches came only in mere extending and honouring of invitations with hidden undertones. The Assemblies of God Mission will invite Anglican members to their crusades for purpose of converting them. The CMS, the RCC and independent churches usually invite other members on special occasion like Harvest and Bazaar sale, fund raising, church dedication, and synod meetings. Hence, all our shouts and cries of shallow Christianity will continue until Igbo people dismantle the walls of denominational rivalry that has engulfed them.

Remedial Approach Towards Denominational Rivalry in Igbo Society

Religious Tolerance

Alao (2017) describes tolerance as the mutual understanding and cooperation between groups with different ethnic, religious, political and economic status. Saint Paul commented on the range of religious tolerance among Christians. He called for intra-faith harmony. Paul urged believers to be tolerant of others who may follow different to be tolerant of others who may follow different dietary rules, or hold religious services on a different day. He recommends that believers avoid doing anything that might make a fellow believer stumble in faith (Romans 14: 1-2). To this end, every member of the body of Christ should treat others equally no matter the denomination such a person belongs to. Nmah (2012) states that Nigerians should imbibe the culture of religious tolerance. Nmah (2020) is of the opinion that Christian's tolerance must be based on love. Christians, ought to be tolerant not because we could care less, but because we look at the other person with eyes of agape love.

Love in Action

Christ commanded believers to love one another (John 15:12) because God is love. This love should be shown in action and in deeds (I John 3:18). Nmah (2012) reveals that God's love for men gives to each

human personality an inestimable worth. Saint Paul encourages Christians to follow peace with all men. It is scripturally affirmed that Christ the owner of the church is the prince of peace. Hence, the Christian religion is an epitome of peace and love. This should be emulated by various Christian denominations in Igboland and Nigeria at large. Thus, church leaders should encourage peaceful co-existence and harmonious living among Christians despite the denomination they belong to. This should be based on agape love. Church should consider what the commandment to love our neighbour means as well as what the Golden Rule entails and teach these to their members. When Christians abide in love and live peacefully with one another, it will help to stem the tide of denominational rivalry not only in Igboland but the entire Nigeria.

Intra-Faith Dialogue

Intra-faith dialogue in this context is seen as a challenging process by which members of different Christian denominations encounter each other in order to break down the walls denominational rivalry that seems to divide them. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of the same religion but with different doctrines, liturgies, traditions and teachings at both the individual and institutional level. Each party remains true to their own doctrines, liturgies, traditions and teachings while respecting the right of other Christian denominations to practice theirs freely. The objective of intra-faith dialogue is to avail a common ground where people from different Christian denominations could cohabit in peace thereby avoiding any form of rivalry among them. Intra-faith dialogue involves when people of different Christian denominations come to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences.

Conclusion

Reformation gave room for various Christian denominations to spring up and today there are many Christian denominations in Igboland and the world at large. When Christians capitalize on denominationalism, it has dire consequences to Christianity in Nigeria. For instance, while Catholics and Anglicans are fighting one another, they are fast losing their members to Pentecostals. While Pentecostals are busy poaching against mainstream churches, Christians are fast returning to idolatry. While Christians are fighting with traditionalists, Muslim fundamentalists are advancing their agenda. Hence, Christians need to unite their forces to produce a harmony and a symphony. To this end, our differences should not tear us apart rather avail us the opportunity to achieve unity in diversity. As well strive to spread the gospel and render humanitarian services to the world at large.

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