

# **NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT AND CULTURAL REVIVALS: A PRODUCT OF RELIGIOUS REVIVALS AND ENLIGHTENMENT**

<sup>1</sup>Kingsley Ekele Eze

<sup>2</sup>Oliver O.C. Uche

## **Abstract**

This paper appraised the salient issues involved in the “newness” in African Initiated Churches (AICs) in relation to new religious movements and cultural revivals, not limited to the issues included Africans’ quest for spiritual power, cultural identity, ethnic identity, health, and for economic emancipation system for their own personal and practical purposes of healing or security. The purpose of the study is to examine what is “new” in the new religious movements. The methods of approach include historical and phenomenological methods. The findings showed that the religion is a religion of the oppressed in cultural, social, religious and political spheres.

**Keywords:** Newness, Occultism, Syncretism, Culture.

## **Introduction**

The dominance of Islam and Christianity in the country, coupled with their aggressive evangelism and wide spread spatial practices create the impression that no alternative religions are practice in the country. However, there are thousands of Nigerians who confess varieties of unconventional religions which scholars called New Religious Movements (NRMs).

A proper definition and conceptualization of NRMs is a daunting challenge, scholars, media and other stakeholders failed to reach consensus on precise definition. The difficulties that usually arise in defining NRMs have been beautifully illustrated by Saliba (1997). He started with the word “New” he noted that many of the NRMs are not really new; many parts of their syncretistic teachings go back to Gnostics teachings of ancient Greeks or philosophy of ancient India, and some of them such as Eckankar and Grail Message have tried to trace their origin right to the beginning of creation. Secondly, the term “religious” also has some problems because many NRMs do not want to associate themselves with religion. They view religion as something that has to do with superstition and dogmatism. According to the teaching of Raelian religion and New Age Movements what they practice is not a religion but pure science, Grail Message members contend that they observe higher law of nature.

Surely the world has never seen a clear presence of minor religions as this time around. In the previous centuries unorthodox religions are usually silenced as a result of persecution and domination by established religions. But nowadays new NRMs are springing up continuously and are being diffused to different parts of the world through various outlets bringing cultural awareness and revivals. The presence of NRMs cannot be without alarm to the orthodox religions, various anti-cult movements sprang up in

North America, Europe and other part of the world. Even in Africa orthodox religions are watching NRMs with uneasy look.

### **NRMs in Nigeria**

From the 1970s, onward many foreign NRMs began to appear in Nigeria especially in southern part of the country. Many of them have engaged in vigorous mission activities and tried to compete with the established religions for membership among Nigerians. Some of the foreign NRMs that marked their presence in Nigeria are as follow: Aetherious Society, Hare Krishna Movement (ISKCON), Raelian Religion, Inner Light, Grail Message, Baha'ism, Christian Science, Sa'i Baba Mission, Brahma Kumaris, Eckankar, AMORC, Scientology, Guru Maharaji, Lucis Trust, Higher Consciousness Society, The Way of Truth, etc. However, some of these movements have short life span and some have very insignificant membership. Some of the above mention NRMs have become very influential and possess large number of followers in Nigeria. And some of them have been subscribing air time on television and radio for preaching their teachings, and sometimes they engage in outdoor preaching in public places or organize seminars and workshops. AMORC has about 76 centres with large and influential membership in Nigeria. Grail Message has more than 28 Grail Centres throughout the nation. Aetherius Society has two centres one in Abia State another one in Lagos with overall 12 Blessing Groups in several cities. Lucis Trust has four strong centres plus esoteric library in Abeokuta. Hare Krishna and Eckankar are some of the most important and renowned NRMs in Nigeria. Eckankar has about 114 centres in 26 states of the Federation, while Hare Krishna has 9 temples in the country. Various factors may account for this state of affairs.

### **Contributors to the Rise Of NRMs in Nigeria**

#### **❖ Globalization**

There is no doubt that globalization has created favourable conditions for the proliferation of NRMs throughout the world. Neither globalization nor NRMs are really new phenomena, but in the middle of the twentieth century both assumed strong power and far reaching influence. Globalization is a complex and controversial concept; scholars do not unanimously agree on its definition and its nature. However, the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines globalization as 'the development of an increasingly integrated global economy marked especially by free trade, free flow of capital, and the tapping of cheaper foreign labour markets'. Globalization here is seen as a process of gradual integration of world economy and collapse of trade barriers. The forces of globalization, such as efficient transportation, immigration, instant global communication, cultural linkages and ideological forces behind globalization (such as economic and cultural liberalism, human rights, democracy, secularization, individualism, freedom of religion, freedom of expression and emerging pluralistic societies), have created a fertile ground for growth of NRMs throughout the world and in Nigeria in particular.

Social liberalism, which minimized conservatism, has given people more freedom to join the religion of their choice. Liberalism renders legitimacy to cultural pluralism, which gives rise to a multitude of worldviews in human society (Cooper, 2007).

Moreover, liberalism allows the fermentation of a new religious ideology or group to develop and proliferate in the new global world, without unbearable pressure to conform to conventional social norms. Immigration and easy and faster transportation in the age of globalization also make it possible for new religions to spread throughout the world. Immigrants from Asia and Africa introduced many NRMs to the West, and from there they spread to other part of the world. Strong concern for human rights in this globalized world gives shelter and recognition for different types of NRMs.

Based on the concept of rational choice, religious consumers also select among a plethora of religious commodities what suits their need, and buy into it by becoming members (Lang, 2005). In the present world of complex religious pluralism, this theory fits the situation of NRMs that are rising and growing day by day. In this respect, Upal (n.d) states: The entrepreneurship theory (Stark and Bainbridge 1987) considers NRM founders to be entrepreneurs who produce, market, and sell compensators in exchange for other rewards. A compensator is an unverifiable promise of a future reward that is in low supply or unavailable at present. According to the Stark-Bainbridge theory, in a situation where some rewards are in low supply or not available at all, people are willing to accept compensators in lieu of the actual rewards

NRMs all over the world utilize media as effective strategy for advertizing their religious products. One of the important components of globalization, which NRMs are employing as their marketing strategy, is information and communication technologies (ICTs), which are becoming the dominant medium of advertisement. ICTs have virtually connected most of the world into a single global village. Now people from different parts of the world can communicate and access information in the blink of an eye. So, the great barrier of time and space has collapsed almost completely.

By the beginning of the 21st century, approximately 360 million people, or roughly 6 percent of the world's population, were estimated to have access to the Internet. It is widely assumed that at least half of the world's population will have some form of Internet access in the next few years, and that wireless access will play a growing role (Kahn, 2009, p. 1). NRMs all over the world try to take advantage of advertising their religious wares through the internet, and many of them have achieved significant success in this endeavour. Chryssides (1996) contends that: Many of the new religions have availed themselves of the opportunity to 'go on the Net', for a variety of reasons. The prestige value of a web page is no doubt a contributory reason; however, more importantly, numerous religious organizations have realized that some net surfers are using the Net to find varieties of religion that may fulfill their spiritual needs. The plethora of religions that feature on the Net can enable the seeker to choose from the widest possible range (p. 1).

Nigeria is an integral part of the globalized world; in fact, the British colonialists had incorporated the Nigerian economy into the world-wide capitalist economy since the middle of 19th century. Therefore, Nigerian society is not immune to the myriad of

influences from other parts of the world, including religious ones. The efforts of NRM missionaries have reached Nigeria since 1970. The ease of traveling in this time of globalization has led many individual NRM missionaries to come to Nigeria and spread their religious messages, and some Nigerians have encountered NRMs while traveling abroad.

Nowadays large numbers of Nigerians have access to the information technologies, and this has enabled them to search for NRMs of their choice in the comfort of their homes or internet cafes. Nigerian members on many occasions have watched international lectures of Harold Klemp live through video telecast, and sometimes through the internet. They usually communicate, interact, and share experiences with other members through the internet. They also read articles and books, or download materials such as spiritual music and literatures from the websites NRMs of their choice. All these are possible as a result of globalization.

### ❖ **Secularism in Nigeria**

Many believe that secularism is an anti-religious movement, and that secularists are out to undermine religion, but the facts on the ground show that secularization is one of the modern factors that has indirectly influenced the rise and proliferation of NRMs in Nigeria. Government intervention or regulation of religion has stifled competition in the religious market, and discouraged new ideas in solving religious problems. In countries where theocratic system have been adopted, or where atheistic ideology assumed the role of state religion, new religions are hardly tolerated and religious innovation is usually undermined. It is very hard for NRMs to rise and thrive under these circumstances. Minority religions always feel more secure under a secular canopy, because it is only in this situation that their rights can be guaranteed.

From independence to the present, Nigerian policy makers have ensured that the federal government remains secular—not assuming state religion. Despite government involvement in some religious activities, such as funding religious projects, spending money on pilgrimages (to Mecca and Jerusalem), and clergy training in the police and the military, the constitution has guaranteed religious freedom. For instance, the 1999 constitution stated:

(1) Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

(2) No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction on ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or religion not approved by his parent or guardian.

(3) No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination.

This constitutional provision has protected NRMs' members from government persecution or any legal action that would deny them the right to propagate their religion, or hinder other people from joining them in any part of Nigeria. As a result, members of NRMs have been enjoying this freedom for decades, conducting their activities freely without legal impediment. Even when the military suspended the constitution, they never persecuted minor religions, but remained faithful in supporting religious freedom as stipulated by the constitution. Northern states which adopted state *Shar'ia* which is an Islamic legal system have not encroached on the rights of minority religions.

#### ❖ **Urbanization**

There is no doubt that urban centres create a favourable atmosphere for the growth of NRMs in Nigeria. Factors such as employment, education, and social amenities attract diverse groups of people into urban centres. Mingling of different groups, with different worldviews, often reduces conservatism as found in the rural areas, so people are freer to subscribe to a set of values different from that of their parents or communities. Access to new information and new ideas is prevalent in the cities, more than in the villages; these factors also make it easier for NRMs to spread in the cities than in rural environment. Nigeria has been steadily experiencing rapid urbanization since colonial times. Mezt (1991) writes:

Spurred by the oil boom prosperity of the 1970s and the massive improvements in roads and the availability of vehicles, Nigeria since independence has become an increasingly urbanized and urban-oriented society. During the 1970s Nigeria had possibly the fastest urbanization growth rate in the world. Because of the great influx of people into urban areas, the growth rate of urban population in Nigeria in 1986 was estimated to be close to 6 percent per year, more than twice that of the rural population. Between 1970 and 1980, the proportion of Nigerians living in urban areas was estimated to have grown from 16 to more than 20 percent, and by 2010, urban population was expected to be more than 40 percent of the nation's total (p. 3).

#### ❖ **Modern Education**

Mass literacy in Nigeria is among the factors that facilitate the growth of NRMs. The majority of NRMs converts are individual spiritual seekers who actively investigate various spiritual paths until they find the ones that satisfy their spiritual needs. This search into myriads of religious literatures is not possible without literacy. Over the years, Nigeria has reduced its illiteracy rates. According to Huebla (2008) 55% of the Nigerian population from ages 15 and above is literate, with more men (67%) than women (44%). He continues that the rate is higher in urban areas (71%) than rural areas (47%) (p. 1).

This mass literacy in Nigerian urban centres has played a vital role in facilitating the growth of NRMs in the country. Most of the NRMs members are literate and highly educated persons. Due to the level of their education they are more open minded and more receptive, and daring to experiment with new ideas. Almost all the scriptures of NRMs are written in English. And all worship services and other ritual sacraments are conducted in English.

#### ❖ **Similarities of NRMs with African Traditional Religion**

African Traditional Religion (ATR) is the religion of African people before the arrival of Islam and Christianity. Many scholars agree that there is no universally accepted definition of ATR. This is due to reasons that range from the fact that ATR is a holistic religion; it covers virtually every aspect of life, without clear separation between material and spiritual worlds. Moreover, ATR has no clear dogma, doctrines, sacred scriptures, hierarchy of priests; and its propagation is by living it, not by preaching, as in other religions (Mbiti, 1999, p. 3). These factors, together with the multiplicity of kinds of ATR, make it very difficult to define. But with all these problems, according to Mbiti (1999) we can find and understand ATR through its rituals, ceremonies and festivals, sacred objects, shrines, arts and symbols, music and dance, proverbs, beliefs and costumes, myths and legends, etc.

Even though ATR is now retreating to the background of the religious scene in Nigeria, it still has influence on Nigerian society and culture. Most Nigerians are carrying the vestiges of ATR beliefs in their psyche without even being conscious of it. There are still large numbers of people in Nigeria who practice ATR; we can still find its remnant in respect for ancestors, belief in spirits and the spirit world, magic and witchcraft, and so on. Similarities between ATR and NRMs include the concept of the Supreme Being, pantheon of gods, reincarnation, the spiritual world and immediate divine retribution.

#### ❖ **Existential Crises**

An existential crisis is a stage of development at which an individual questions the very foundations of his life: whether his life has any meaning, purpose or value; whether death is the end of everything or consciousness will survive death, whether the values he has been taught have any merit; and whether his religious upbringing may or may not be founded in reality. It is a known fact in the study of religion that an existential crisis is one of the sources of religion. Most of the important religious founders such as Gautama Buddha, Guru Nanak, or Joseph Smith, were bedeviled by an existential crisis before the religious experiences or encounters that led to the founding of their religions. Some scholars agree that the most intensely religious persons are people who are concerned with existential questions. Batson et al (2001) quote Tolstoy lamenting as he is plunged into existential crisis: What will be the outcome of what I do today? Of what I shall do tomorrow? What will be the outcome of all my life? Why should I live? Why should I do anything? Is there in life any purpose, which the inevitable death, which awaits me, does not undo and destroy (p. 116).

Modern psychology and science lack any panacea for such an existential crisis; as a result people usually turn to a spiritual quest. They explore different types of spiritual tradition in order to get solace for their deep subjective problems and uncertainties. In the course of this research, I have come to realize that a number of NRMs members are people who were highly disturbed by an existential crisis in the past. In most cases their previous religion did not satisfy their persistent questions about some of the most fundamental problems of life. They sought for answers through many religious groups, but could not get satisfaction until they came across their present religion. Hare Krishna and Eckankar and other NRMs were spiritual seekers and most of them explored different spiritual groups before they encountered their present religion.

### ❖ **Religious Experiences**

There is no generally accepted definition of religious experience. This is because of its individual nature and the difficulty of putting it into ordinary language. Nevertheless, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2011) defines it as follows: Religious experiences can be characterized generally as experiences that seem to the person having them to be of some objective reality and to have some religious import. That reality can be an individual, a state of affairs, a fact, or even an absence, depending on the religious tradition the experience is a part of (p. 1). Religious experience is one of the most important aspects of religion. Many important founders of religions, both orthodox and NRMs, were inspired through dramatic religious experiences. Some people become religious or converted because they had one form of religious experience or another. Some had a radical transformation of life, behavior, or worldview, and adopted a new commitment as a result of their religious experience. Some people have done amazing things because they believe God told them to do so, while others claim to have been miraculously healed through divine intervention. Holy Books (such as the Bible or Qur'an) have many examples of religious experiences recorded in them. Classical scholars of religion, such as Edwin Starbuck, George Coe, James Bissett Pratt, and G. Stanley Hall, William James, and Carl Jung, have devoted some time in their works to religious experience. Religious experience plays an important role in conversion to most of NRMs in Nigeria. Some members report that they had experienced dramatic religious experiences before their formal conversion, while some maintain that they had no intention of converting, but they tried the spiritual exercises out of curiosity, and it resulted in an enigmatic experience.

### ❖ **Quest for Riches**

Some members of NRMs have come to their present religion as a result of a quest for riches. Nigeria now is among the poorest nations in the world. During the oil boom era in the 70s Nigerians had unprecedented prosperity and one of the highest per capital income in Africa. When the oil boom collapsed in the early 80s the economy deteriorated and the limited manufacturing industries and agriculture experienced serious setback. This economic collapse, together with endemic corruption, political instability, ethno-religious crises, poor macroeconomic management, and structural adjustment programmes, plunged Nigerians into a vicious cycle of poverty,

unemployment, under-employment and suffering. As a result some Nigerians have tried to cope with their economic hardship through esoteric religious means.

### ❖ **Social Influence**

Man as a social being is not completely independent from his social environment. Social psychologists study how people around a person influence his beliefs and attitudes. Batson et al. (2001) in their book *Religion and the Individual* discuss how social influence affects religious beliefs. They employ the explanation on how individuals learn from their environment, given by psychologists and sociologists using a dramaturgical analogy of social roles—the part or role assign to each individual by his social group to play. Social norms—the scripts of the play, which contain the rules and regulations of each role-play by the individual, represent the ideal behavior, and it may be written or unwritten. Reference groups—represents the audience of that particular part, and they may be parents, friends, or teachers. They maintain that, “our religion or lack of them is simply one aspect of the part in the social drama we have been assigned to play” (2001, p. 30). Batson et al. (2001) argue that since religion goes above objective reality it is highly susceptible to social influence. They use the Leon Festinger theory of social comparison to illustrate the power of social influence on religion. According to this theory, there exists a drive to evaluate one’s opinions and abilities. When evaluating ability people use an objective standard, but in evaluating opinions, beliefs, and attitudes it is not possible to use objective standards, and therefore people resort to social comparison. Batson et al. (2001) maintain that even though Festinger did not apply his theory to religion, it is very relevant to religion since it involves non-objective beliefs and subjective experiences. The findings of this research conform to the conclusions of Batson et al. Many young members of NRMs were converted through the influence of their friends or family members, From the above we have noticed that various factors are responsible for the presence of NRMs in Nigeria. Global and national forces combined with individual subjective tendencies and motivations to pave the way for unorthodox spiritual seekers to experiment with new religions.

### **Challenges of NRMs in Nigeria**

Nigerians have diverse reactions toward NRMs like Scientology, AMORC, Hare Krishna and Eckankar, but from what I observed, most of the reactions are somehow negative. Few Nigerians have a positive attitude and understanding or knowledge about NRMs. Below is some opinions expressed by Nigerians concerning the presence of NRMs in the country.

### ❖ **Secret Society or Secret Cult**

Some scholars see secret societies as clubs or organizations whose activities or teachings are hidden from nonmembers, and in most cases they are fraternal groups that engaged in self-help activities. What distinguishes them from other organizations is the use of symbolic actions and secret ceremonies. In this view, secret societies are not necessarily evil, even though some people also regard an organized crime group, such as the mafia, and security agencies, among secret societies, although such groups do not fit to the scholarly definitions of secret society. Barrett (1997) describes secret societies as: .....any group that possesses the following characteristics: It has carefully graded and



progress teachings; teachings are “available only to selected individuals; teachings lead to “hidden (and ‘unique’) truths”; truths bring “personal benefits beyond the reach and even the understanding of the uninitiated” (p. 3).

In Nigeria, the terms 'secret society' and 'secret cult' trigger a mixture of fear and mystery in the popular psyche. Conspiracy theorists tend to blame social ills on secret societies, and believe that secret societies are always conspiring to destroy or corrupt the social fabric of the nation. Nigerian popular thinking about secret societies usually raises the specter of ritual killings, demonic activities or witch craft practices. The occultic blood rituals constantly shown on Nigerian movies has shaped and defined the perception of many Nigerians about a secret society. The crimes committed by many students identified with secret cults in the Nigerian universities further substantiate the negative outlook of many Nigerians about secret societies. The Okija Shrine incident that happened on August 5th 2004, when police discovered 20 human skulls and 50 dead bodies in a shrine at Okija in Umuhu village in Anambra State, has increased fear among Nigerians about anything that involves a secret society or cult.

#### ❖ **Medicine men (*babalawos* or *bokaye* or *dibias*)**

One of the vestiges of ATR is fervent belief in medicine men in Nigeria. Many Nigerians visit medicine men to seek for help for their persistent problems, and this practice is not restricted to people at the lower class of society; even the educated and political elites visit *dibias*, *babalawos*, or *bokaye* in the Hausa language. These practices persist despite opposition from dominant religions like Islam and Christianity toward such beliefs. Some Nigerians confuse NRMs with medicine men. They assume that NRMs centres are mystical centres found on big cities in Nigeria.

#### ❖ **Social Discrimination**

Many members of the two movements claim that they have experienced different types of subtle discrimination or rejection because of their belief. Many expressed concern over the emotional reaction expressed toward them whenever people discovered that they are members of NRMs. Some members hide their religious identity to escape discrimination. Many singles members of NRMs find it very difficult to marry outside their religion, because neither a Christian nor a Muslim will marry a member of these movements. While Muslim or Christian singles have numerous choices among the opposite sex, the singles of minority religions have more limited choice due to small membership.

#### **Cultural Revivals in Nigeria**

Uche (2009) noted that “Culture remains everything acquired by a human being that is not physically inherited, but remains a social property passed on through learning and teaching from generation to generation” (p. 156).

#### **Cultural Decay in Nigeria: Causes and Effects**

The cultural heritage of the Nigerian peoples had in the past been severely dealt with that it became doubtful whether much of the good values in Nigerian cultural heritage

could be rehabilitated. The reasons for this cultural decay range from slavery and slave trade, colonialism and imperialism, illiteracy, interiority complex, and so on.

### ❖ **Slavery and Slave Trade**

Nothing can be more humiliating to a people than slavery. According to Ryder (1999): The first cargoes of slaves carried from Nigerian shores in European ships were destined not for the

Americans but for the Gold Coast were Portuguese traders seeking gold found necessary to offer slaves as well as cloth and metal wares that brought gold to the Coast. It was soon discovered that slaves could be obtained quite close at hand in the rivers west of the Niger Delta, and by 1440 it had become a regular practice for one or two Portuguese caravans to enter these rivers each year in search of slaves. (p. 237).

### ❖ **Colonialism and Imperialism**

Just as the time the slave trade was dying and the Nigerian man once more had an opportunity of reconstructing his bearing, Western imperialism came to further shatter the fledging value systems, and so further distort the cultural profile of the peoples of Nigeria. The combine forces of these two exogenous factors shook the self confidence of the Nigerian peoples to its very foundation, and as Ejiofor (1984) put it: In this way, Igbo culture in its virgin form was in a sense raped by the slave traders and abducted by Western civilization. It is difficult to say for sure which of these made the greater impact on Igbo culture. But whichever it was, the net effect of the operation of these forces was a decay of the traditional moral code, and the creation of a cultural vacuum within which individual Igbo operated in their relationship with one another, the community and the society. (p. 70).

From 1898, the British government sought to establish and maintain a colonial state in Nigeria. This process of colonialism involved a number of measures including the subjugation of certain visible cultural heritage and the removal of all opposition from the territory later known as Nigeria. Tamuno (1999) posited that Instances of relentlessness under increasing colonial rule were forcibly suppressed with the assistance of the military and police resources at the disposal of the government. British rule in Nigeria was in the final analysis buttressed by force or by the threat of using it. (p. 393).

Ancient rulers, as well as other individuals and organizations, made vein attempts to stem the tide of Western imperialism. Viewed broadly from this standpoint, Western culture is a unit vis-à-vis the culture or cultures of the indigenous people of Nigeria (Nduka, 1975).

### ❖ **Illiteracy**

Few experiences can be more destructive to, and disruptive of sacred institutions and value systems like illiteracy. Illiteracy made the Nigerian man to begin to see everything good with the white man's culture at the expense of his own culture and value systems.

The effect was an untold decay of our cultural heritage in the face of the onslaught of western structures.

### ❖ **Inferiority complex**

Few handicaps can make the memory so short, and act as a drag on the inventive spirit like interiority complex. It is ironical that while leading in the fight against the white colonialism, the Nigerian man still identifies himself most intimately with the culture of the white man – he is fighting.

### **Factors that Inform Cultural Revival in the Church**

Christianity needed to be firmly rooted in the culture of the Nigerian peoples. It is for this reason that Hastings (1967) had noted that “the failure of the Christian churches to get rooted in indigenous culture was mainly responsible for the withering of these churches in the Congo and Benin Kingdom between the 16th and the 18th centuries”. (p. 53). In the same vein, Iwe (1985) opined that a religion which does not take cognizance of, and derive some inspiration from the socio-cultural and historical matrices of a people is bound to create more problems than it sets out to solve, having regards to the stresses attendant upon the forces of cultural heritage. To buttress this fact Arch-bishop Desmond Tutu gave expression of this dilemma, as cited in Parrat (1997) that “Africans suffer from a form of religious schizophrenia because of the struggle between their Christianity and their Africanness” (p. 4). Consequently, African Christians began to address themselves to the question as to how they can be Christians and Africans. Meanwhile the rediscovery of the values of our traditional cultural heritage led some Nigerian early Christian converts and indeed African theologians into a movement that was called inculturation movement. For many Nigerian Christians all these led to a conclusion that our rich cultural heritage and present situation could no longer simply be dismissed as “Pagan”, but needed to be taken seriously and somehow related to the truths of the Christian faith.

### **The Church and Cultural Revival in Nigeria**

One might be tempted to think or imagine that the church is irrelevant to our cultural regeneration. However, Religion and culture are so intimately related and connected that in reality it is impossible for a society to have a culture without religion or religion without culture (Iwe, 1985). Of all the agents of imperialism it was the missionary who has the most revolutionary impact of the Nigerian peoples. It was an enterprise which was to result in a certain degree of mental revolution and which, eventually gave rise to a seeming social revolution with the rejection of certain elements of Western cultures that has no relevance to the value systems of the Nigerian peoples. The exponents of Nigerian cultural revival were mainly individuals who had refused to give up their territories without struggle and who revolted against the very Western culture that had nourished them, because they were denied a respectable place within that same culture because of their race.

These group of Nigerians were led by men such as Edward Blyden, Bishop James Johnson, Mojola Agbebi, John Payne Jackson, William Bright Davies to mention a few.

They were strongly opposed to the attempts of Christian missions to denationalize Africans and were never weary of advocating a conscious rejection of those aspects of Western culture which seemed to them to be of no value to Africans and calling on them to drink deep from the fountain of their culture. There were also exponents and founders of the indigenous African churches which Ayandele (1970) described as the first concrete manifestations of cultural nationalism in Nigeria. Some of them demonstrated their rejection of Western culture in practical terms by dropping their English names and dresses. For examples, David Vincent became Majola Agbebi, George William Johnson became Osholake Tejumade, and Francis Ibiam became Akanu Ibiam. The Rev. James Johnson who did not change his own name demonstrated his rejection of Western culture by refusing to baptize any child with an English name.

#### ❖ **The Church and the Development of Indigenous Languages**

The missionaries believed, and rightly so that it would be impossible to convey the gospel message effectively to any people unless the evangelist himself was able, not only to master the local language of the people but to understand and appreciate their thought and value systems. For this, the missionaries devoted considerable attention to the study of the indigenous languages, and this was one of the areas in which they made their greatest contributions to the cultural revival of the Nigerian peoples. According to Tasié (1996) “The study of Igbo language, as far as evidence shows, was begun by John F. Schon, the German linguist and missionary, who for his linguistic achievements was in 1884 to receive the D.D. Oxford. He had reduced Igbo to writing in 1841 for the use of the famous Niger expedition of that year. When Schon retired from West Africa, Samuel Ajayi Crowther continued the investigation from 1854 – 1857 in Sierra Leone; and with the help of his African assistants, Crowther discovered what came to be regarded as the standard Igbo, or the Igbo dialect. The point we are making here is that the language of a people cannot be taken in isolation, but as part of the vehicle for expressing the culture and thought system of the people. Thus, the claim by

#### ❖ **The Church and the Purification of Some elements of our Culture**

It is to be noted that not every aspect of a culture is good or acceptable. There could be some elements of its institutions and practices which if allowed persisting for a long time would stultify and degrade that culture. In our culture there are a few of such elements. To this, Ejiofor (1984) observed that the culture of our fathers is not perfect. Some should therefore be abandoned. It is for this reason that the church did not advocate a totalistic approach to cultural revival, which is a wholesome exhumation and re-animation of the cultures of our fathers. It is in this regard that the church had played a purifying role in our cultural regeneration. The church has done much to integrate into modern life only what seems valuable from our cultural past.

Certain bad customs that were frowned at and fought against by the church included such things as human sacrifice, Osu caste system, killing of twins, denial of rights to women, secret societies and so on. These were most mischievous and pernicious heritage devised and bequeathed to us by our fore bearers through fear and innocent ignorance. It is therefore these culturally purifying truths that the church has fearlessly and ceaselessly striven to impress on the minds and will of our people. It is by putting up a stiff fight against these aspects of our social heritage which are neither good nor

honest nor authentic that the church had contributed in our cultural evolution and freeing it from its humiliating internal shackles and elevated it to acceptable standard and dignity.

#### ❖ **The Church in Defense of Indigenous Culture**

It is now a matter of common knowledge that our culture is battling desperately against foreign-inspired cultural cancer, such as bribery and graft, bureaucracy and nepotism and the injustice of confidential report, denial of merited promotions, authoritarianism and arrogance in power, mammonism or the worship of money, religious discrimination and fanaticism, leadership crisis, and lack of compassion for the common man (Iwe, 1985). All the above mentioned symptoms of cultural malaise and disorder are foreign to the fundamental values of our culture. It is true that it is difficult for the modern man to capture the true cultural value of the Nigerian peoples in its pristine form. For about three hundred years her territory was raided by European agents for slavery and imperialism and the debasing effects of these raids on the culture of the Nigerian peoples can best be imagined. Howbeit, there is substance in the saying that Christianity brought more blessings than curses. This is particularly true in relation to our cultural regeneration because Christianity does not in any way accommodate human debasement.

It is to the credit of the church that she was in the fore front of the struggle that saw the abolition of the obnoxious trade in human beings which the early European contact with Nigeria, and indeed Africa, had introduced. To defend our culture against all these symptoms of social morbidity is the task which the church had diligently and courageously addressed.

Closely allied with the defense was the Church's effort to patronize our culture. The salient points of our cultural values are not in doubt and they are distilled and preserved in our proverbs, idioms and institutions. The sense of truth and liberty is very dear to our culture. The church has therefore fed our people with the truth, while it has also expounded the implications of the liberty of the people of God. In this regard the church has exposed our people to the fact that liberty denotes not merely freedom from bodily restraints but also the right of the individual to engage in any of the common occupation of life, to acquire useful knowledge, to worship God according to the dictates of his conscience. Furthermore, the church has produced such spiritual churches as the Aladura, the Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim, the Healing churches and prayer houses whose liturgies have found a strong parallel with the traditional African cosmologies. Ejiofor (1984) added that "The Nigerian Methodist church adapted by creating the patriarchate, traditional artifacts like gongs, drums, Ikoro etc, which were branded as paganism by early missionaries have now been re-introduced into orthodox Christian churches including the Catholic Church". (p. 54). The Ozo title has fought its own battle for survival and has emerged un-vanquished

#### **Conclusion**

In conclusion this research has found out that Christianity and Islam are not the only religions in Nigeria, there are different minor religions with legitimate claims to salvation. These minor religions managed to sustain their presence in the country despite many challenges. Contrary to what many Nigerians think, these religions are not secret cult that involved in demonic activities for making money. They do not engage in blood rituals or psychological manipulation of their members. Many members are normal people with genuine desire for God.

They often arrived at their present religions after many years of searching for spiritual enlightenment. Therefore, these religions continue to maintain their presence because their members found spiritual solace through practice and conviction. However culturally speaking Christianity has, in the course of human history demonstrated itself as the custodian and promoter of human values as well as a preserver of a people's cultural heritage. Iwe (1985) rightly noted that there is sufficient historical evidence to justify this claim when he said that: It is to be remembered that Christianity had a purifying and humanizing impact on the pagan and imperialistic vices and violence of the ancient Roman Empire. In the dark ages of the 8th and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, Christianity stood singularly firm in the West as the sole symbol of light and guidance and as the pledge of brighter future. (p. 29).

It would therefore not be a wild claim to say that the cultural contribution of Christianity were the historical pre-requisites for the Nigerian renaissance and for the dawn of the modern Nigeria. Our special contention here is that there is still a strong need for Christianity to continue its traditional role of being the agent of human values and cultural revival and enrichment here in Nigeria. It is for this reason that Iwe (1985) had argued that our developing African scene exhibits multifarious forces – domestic, ethical, cultural, religious, social, political, national and international – which militate against the realization of unquestionable human values. Against these dehumanizing and degrading forces the resources of Christianity require immediate mobilization and effective deployment.

**<sup>1</sup>Kingsley Ekele Eze**

Department of Religion and Human Relations  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka  
Email: [ezekingsleyekele@gmail.com](mailto:ezekingsleyekele@gmail.com)

**<sup>2</sup>Oliver O.C Uche, PhD**

Department of Religion and Human Relations  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka

**References**

- Ayandale, E.A. (1970). *Holy Johnson: Pioneer of Nigerians nationalism 1836 – 1917*. London: Frank Cass.
- Ejiofor, P.N.O. (1984). *Cultural revival in Igboland*. Onitsha: University publishing.
- Hastings, A.C. (1967). *Church and mission in modern Africa*. London: Burns and Oaths.
- Iwe, N.S.S. (1985). *Christianity and culture in Africa*. Onitsha: University Publishing.
- Nduka, O.A. (1975). *Western education and the Nigerian cultural background*. Ibadan: Oxford University.
- Parrat, J. (1997). Early Christianity in Africa. *Reader in African Christian theology*. London: SPCK.
- Ryder, A.F.C. (1999). The trans-Atlantic slave trade. In O. Ikime (Ed.). *Groundwork of Nigerian history (pp.236-246)*. Ibadan: Heinemann.
- Stark, R. (1996). *Sociology*. Albany: Wordsworth.

Tamuno, T.M. (1999). British colonial administration in Nigeria in the twentieth century. In O. Ikime (Ed.). *Groundwork of Nigerian history* (pp.393-409). Ibadan: Heinemann.

Tasie, G.O.M. (1996). John Christopher Taylor, missionary strategist and pioneer Igbo nationalist: A biographical note. In S.N. Adiele (Ed.). *The Niger Mission: Origin, growth and impact 1857 – 1995* (pp.53 – 79). Aba: Isaeco.

Uche, O.O.C. (2009). Religion in the Nigerian culture. In N. Okediadi, O.O.C. Uche & S. Okeke (Eds.). *Themes in Nigerian peoples and culture* (pp. 150 – 167). Enugu: John Jacobs.

Barrett, V.D. (1997). *A Brief History of Secret Society: An Unbias History of our Desire for Secret Knowledge*. New York: Carrol & Graf Publishers.

Batson, C. D, Schoenrade, P, & Ventis, W.L. (1993). *Religion and the Individual: Social Psychological Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford. *Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999*. (online) Available:[http://www.nigerstate.gov.ng/epubl/Niger\\_constitution\\_1999.pdf](http://www.nigerstate.gov.ng/epubl/Niger_constitution_1999.pdf).

Cooper, T. Michael. (2007). Druids Globalization and Constructing a Postmodern Religious Identity. *Centre for the Study of New Religions*. The 2007 International Conference 7—9 2007. Bordeaux, France.

Chryssides, G. (1996). New Religions and Internet. *DISKUS*. Vol. 4, No.2. (online) Available: <<http://www.skepsis.nl/onlinetop.html>>

Huebla, F. (2008, April 5). Adult Literacy in Nigeria. *International Literacy Statistics*. Retrieved from <http://www.hueblablogspot.com>.

Kahn, R. (2009). Internet. *Encyclopedia Britannica 2009 Ultimate Reference Suite*. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica.

Lang, G. 2005. Temples and the Religious Economy. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion*. Volume1, Issue 1 Article 4.

Mbiti, J. (1999). *Africa Religion and Philosophy*. New Hamshire: Heinemann. Metz, H. C. (1991) ed. *Nigeria: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress.

Saliba, A. J. (1995). *Understanding New Religious Movements*. Grand Rapids: Eerdman's.

*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (2011). Religious Experience. (online) Available: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religious-experience/> Upal, M.A. *Towards a Cognitive Science of New Religious Movements*. (online) Available: <http://faculty.oxy.edu/aupal/res/05/jcc.pdf>