

The Christian Village Experiment in South-East, Nigeria and the Challenges of Socio-Cultural Traditions, 1885-1970

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Abstract

This study investigated and assessed the Christian village experiment by the early Catholic missionaries in Igboland, south-east Nigeria, with a view to capture the factors that led to its failure, and especially, to find out the role socio-cultural traditions played in bringing an end to the practice. The investigations were done in five towns in Anambra and Imo States, using a descriptive survey design that combined semi-structured interview and a structured and validated questionnaire titled “Factors that affected the successes and failure of the Christian village practice in Igboland”, and randomly administered to selected elders. The presentation of the entire work employed traditional historical narrative method, laid out thematically. The findings of the study which exposed unacceptable social, cultural and traditional conflicts were generalized to the entire south-east, Nigeria.

Keywords: Society, Culture, Socio-cultural, Tradition. Christian village.

Introduction

It is not uncommon in the world over, for various religions to seek for converts, and in addition, to seek to maintain a hold on their members. The need to achieve these usually leads to the development of evangelizing strategies. Christianity has, over the centuries, explored varied evangelization strategies. Many of such strategies have long been abandoned, even if they may have yielded some positive results at one time or the other. Equally, as time rolls by, development of new strategies becomes a necessity. Following the turn of events in the world, the then Catholic Pontiff, Pope Paul VI, in his Encyclical letter, *Evangelii Nunciandi* (1975) advised thus; “The conditions of the society in which we live oblige all of us therefore to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern man.” In the bid for new evangelizing experiments, the Catholic Church, for instance, has explored different methods in recent decades, including “Acculturation and Inculturation”; the Basic Christian Community (BCCs); the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs); and the pursuit of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, among others (Okafor, 2020, pp. 58-67). The search for new methods is not ended since the world continues to evolve.

In the search for new methods, the objective, in the main, is the achievement of positive results including increase in membership and especially consolidation of the presence of the mission by making strong and convinced adherents. In such drive, history extends a hand of fellowship as it beckons for a necessary review of past experiences in order to avoid the mistakes of the past. In such a search too, the nature of the society is usually evaluated, so as to employ the strategies that will be easily productive in a given society.

Over a century ago, when Catholic Holy Ghost missionaries arrived the shores of Igboland in south-east, Nigeria, their primary preoccupations included the evangelizing strategy that would yield quick and remarkable results. The missionaries experimented on many strategies including the redemption and rehabilitation of slaves; the employment of charitable works; medical services; education and the development of Christian Villages, among others. Of particular interest to this research is the Christian village experiment. It was a practice that encouraged converts and adherents to abandon their kith and kin, and move in to live with other adherents close to their ministers, the missionaries.

The pioneer Catholic Holy Ghost missionaries who evangelized Igboland at the close of the 19th century tinkered on the Christian village practice of many shapes and styles in a number of towns and villages, especially in Onitsha, Aguleri, Nsugbe, Nteje and Emekuku among others. For the missionaries, it was initially a great idea and they expended much accolades on the imaginary successes of the experiment. Their enthusiasm for it soon waned. The furtherance of the practice was abandoned after a few years. Even the established few soon became fragile or closed. The most durable among them, the Christian village at Aguleri, survived a few decades and gradually disintegrated, leaving only its name and varied memories.

Seemingly, very little has been studied on the Christian village practice and its functionality in Igboland of the south-east Nigeria. What is more, very little is in prints concerning the result of such practice, and particularly, about the failure and collapse of the practice in Igboland. In a few works where these problems were mentioned, except for the article of Celestine A. Obi (1985), “The Christian village as an early missionary strategy for the

evangelisation in the Lower Niger mission”, they were not given a major attention, rather, they served to address some other issues. In the search for missionary strategies especially for breaking new mission grounds, it has become pertinent to evaluate the failure of the Christian village practice in Igboland, especially to unravel its connection with the cultures and traditions of both the missionaries and the natives. Evidently, there was a show of the force of social and cultural traditions, as well as a resultant clash of culture in making the practice unpopular, and in leading to its end. An exploration of the nature, the sequence, and the spread of these factors, seems very necessary in the bid to instruct the present and future missionary adventures.

Conceptual explanations

Culture was originally defined by a 19th century English anthropologist, Edward Burnett Tylor, as, “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/culture>). This relates culture to practices or dispositions that people have become accustomed to and adopted such as norms and values. Cambridge Dictionary, on the other hand, defines culture as “the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.” (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/culture>). From this perspective, culture relates to a given group, and is basically a way of life of that given group. From sociological background, Steensland (2018), noted that, “Among sociologists, “culture” just as often refers to the beliefs that people hold about reality, the norms that guide their behavior, the values that orient their moral commitments, or the symbols through which these beliefs, norms, and values are communicated.” Put, together, one can say that culture refers to ways of life obtainable in a given area, among a given people, and which have formed essentially, how the people see life in particular or in general.

Society is another concept of note here. Among other definitions, the New World Encyclopedia sees society as “a grouping of individuals, which is characterized by common interest and may have distinctive culture and institutions.” Generally, one sees the mark of a society, as a conglomeration of humans who share the same geographical space, common attributes like values, traditions and customs. Activities relating to these, that is, relating to human society and its organization, or the quality of people’s lives are said to be social.

Another concept, **Socio-cultural**, is a combination of two concepts, society and culture. The term is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as being “related to the different groups of people in society and their habits, traditions, and beliefs.” Similarly, the Collins Dictionary online sees it as “pertaining to, or signifying the combination or interaction of social and cultural elements.” People behave and respond to different circumstances, contexts, brands, and policies depending on their sociocultural factors. These drivers influence how people view and perceive the world and other people around them.

Tradition as a concept is “an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (such as a religious practice or a social custom).” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tradition>). Putting it more succinctly, the *Cambridge Dictionary* presents tradition as “a belief, principle, or way of acting that people in a particular society or group have continued to follow for a long time, or all of these beliefs, etc. in a particular society or group.” Tradition is thus, a way a group or a society has consciously or unconsciously accepted to be doing things; and conventionally, a tradition, perceived as a fixed truth from an authoritative source, for instance, ancestors, demands faithfulness and obedience.

The concept of the **Christian village** was born out of the desire of Christian missionaries to promote the dignity of the human person, and to achieve a positive Christian evangelism. The definition and description of Christian village vary according to the intention and the practice. In the 21st century society, a Christian village may simply be an estate with merely the name Christian prefixed to it. However, a common denominator in the nature of the Christian villages under discussion, is a settlement consisting of worship centre(s), the mission house surrounded with out-houses for the locals who are to some extent, under the directives of the ministers in-charge of the mission. These locals could be adherents (Converts), liberated slaves or captives, run-away outlaws, and so on. In the essence, it is an evangelizing strategy.

A brief historical background of the Christian village practice in Nigeria

The Christian village practice was popularised in the late 19th century, especially across Africa. It was employed by various Christian denominations in their mission lands. Obi (1985b, p.23) noted that most Christian missions in Black Africa of the period adopted the Christian village experiment as a method to combat slavery and slave trade, which though outlawed, was still ravaging many African societies. The Wesleyan Methodists and the C.M.S. seem to be the first to have practised it in Nigeria, in an area around Badagri, after 1842. the first Catholic attempt to experiment on this in Nigeria was initiated by Father Broghero, and it was opened as an agricultural orphanage in 1876, at St. Joseph’s Topo, near Badagri (Obi, 1985, pp.18-19).

The Christian village experiment was not new to the Catholic Holy Ghost missionaries who came to Igboland in the 1880s. Their members working in Senegal, opened a kind of Christian “boys’ republic” in 1844, under Bishop Truffet (Koren, 1983, p.451). There, they educated the boys in European fashion, while at the same time schooling them on austere Christian living. Within those early years of its practice, they also experimented on Christian “girls’ village”, preparing the young girls for future marriages, and in view of fostering Christian family life. Koren (1983, p.454) reports that as early as 1845, Father Briot had formulated a plan for expanded Christian village, where Christian families could live together, separated from others. The first settlement in line with this plan began in Gabon, in 1852. They lived near the mission, supporting themselves in an attempt to live according to the Gospel. From the 1870s, the practice became more popular amongst the Holy Ghost missionaries with the successes it recorded in the villages of St. Joseph (Ngazobil) and St. Benedict (Mbodien) in Senegal. According to Koren, “In the following decades, the Spiritans gradually extended this “closed society” system throughout most of their missions: Nigeria, the Congo, Angola, East Africa and, after the World War I, Camerouns as well” (1983, p.454).

The launch of Catholicism in south-east, Nigeria

While on a reconnaissance adventure that looked towards Lokoja in northern Nigeria for a possible berth of their missionary activity in the country, four missionaries of the Holy Ghost Congregation: two priests, Fathers Joseph Lutz and Jean Nicolas Horne; and two Brothers, Hermas Huck and Jean Gotto, arrived at Onitsha, on December 5, 1885, and rather changed their plans, opting to establish in Onitsha instead. With a parcel of land secured there, and a deed for the land signed on January 6, 1886 (Eke, 2006, p.91), the story of the Catholic Church in south-east Nigeria began. They completed and moved into residence at Onitsha on April 7, 1886. The mission station named Holy Trinity, was officially opened on Easter Sunday, April 25, 1886 (Nnabuike, 1983, p.113). From here, Catholicism spread to the rest of south-east Nigeria.

The expansion of the Christian village practice in south-east, Nigeria, 1886-1912

The original mission of the Lower Niger (south-east, Nigeria), was part and parcel of the Vicariate of the two Guineas, a mission under the Holy Ghost missionaries. This Vicariate had come to greatly appreciate the Christian village practice as already demonstrated in the cases of Senegal and Gabon above. The pioneer Holy Ghost missionaries to south-east Nigeria saw it as a worthy strategy, and soon considered it for their mission. It was first experimented in 1886 at the **Onitsha Wharf** mission, situated in the site that currently sits the Holy Trinity Basilica, Onitsha. The community served as a centre for learning and practicing of the Catholic faith (Obi, 1985a). Obi noted that the “Onitsha Christian village modelled on the French “*Villages de liberte*” in western Sudan, was made up of freed-slaves, the outcasts, breach-babies, run-away slaves and the flotsam and jetsam outlawed by violations of Igbo customs and traditional laws” (1985b, p.21). The missionaries’ involvement in ransoming slaves gave rise to the village. To combat slavery and slave trade, the missionaries visited local slave centres, ransoming as many slaves as their fund could afford, and giving them freedom. Nevertheless, it became apparent that letting them free into the open society exposed them to being recaptured and resold. To forestall such, the missionaries decided to resettle the ransomed slaves around the mission. This approach served multiple purposes: the premises offered the freed slaves some measure of protection; it also got them gradually integrated into the society; and it offered the missionaries the opportunity to make converts of the ransomed slaves. With time, some run-away slaves found their ways into the village, thus helping the village to grow.

Life in the Christian village at Onitsha was regimental and semi-monastic in nature. Every resident had to follow the set down rules in the village, and must be an exemplary Christian. They were expected to attend all the spiritual exercises held in the mission. Besides, they participated in farm works organised by the mission. Obedience to the missionaries and their instructions was an obligation, as “Every Christian villager was expected to be fervent; there was no room for laggards” (Obi, 1985b, p.22). Simply put, it was taken for granted that every resident must become Catholic. The village was a nursery for future and well-groomed Catholics. With time, the strategy was extended to new mission towns as the missionaries wanted to hold their converts and “possibly remove them from further contact with “paganism” and their “pagan” kinsmen and women” (Okafor, 2020, p.264). Many factors weighed against the village at Onitsha, and it died out within a few years, possibly before 1920s (Chike Enweonwu, Personal communication, 10/12/2023).

Aguleri became the next Catholic residential mission in the south-east. It started earlier as a Catechist mission station at Umuala Eziagulu village of Aguleri. Unacceptable practices of the new mission vis-à-vis the culture and traditions of the people, especially, the place serving as a meeting point for the rejects and for those who fell foul of abominations, forced Umuala community to eject the group. This development latter led to the choice of a new site for a more permanent mission at a place called *Mbaito* (Okafor, 1998, p.13). It became a residential mission on 23rd October, 1891 (Ozigboh, 1988, p.55). The distance from the inhabited villages to the new isolated mission

site; the circumstances that led to the ejection of the mission from Umuala; the large expanse of land given to the missionaries; and some other factors including a possible effective missionary strategy, must have encouraged the early establishment of the Christian village at Aguleri. Muokwe (Personal communication, 03/10/1994) was of the opinion that the natives began to settle near the mission while the missionaries were preparing their residence there. This could explain the presence of a number of persons in the mission at the Midnight Mass of Christmas, 1891, when the reception of the First Holy Communion of their first convert, Ogbuevi Onyekomeli Idigo was celebrated with pomp and pageantry.

Soon, the settlement began to grow. It evolved into a "Christian village" as converts moved in to take up settlement around the mission. Unlike the case at Onitsha where the initial residents were slaves and outlaws, the initial converts and residents of Aguleri Christian village were of mixed groups. Those treated, especially of such diseases thought to be incurable or hard to cure, easily became converts. The dejected and rejected of the society, in order to find solace, quickly turned Christians. Then came the freeborn group who were attracted by varied reasons including gifts from the missionaries; those touched by the cure given to various sicknesses; those who wished to learn the whiteman's language and wizardry; and those who converted for the failure of the gods to punish Idigo for abandoning them and his handing over his traditional effigies and instruments of office to be destroyed by the European missionaries (Okafor, 2023, p.157). Thus the movement to the Aguleri Christian village had able bodied free men and women among its founding pillars. Residents like Muokwe, Azodo Manafa, Okonkwo Manafa, Kwazu, Okafor, Nduanya, Orekyeh, Obadiogwu, and so on, were all fit and freeborn (Muokwe, Personal communication, 03/10/1994). An interesting thing here was the zeal with which these early converts embraced the new religion. They abandoned their families, relations, and friends only to settle with these strangers in a thick bush distant and cut off from the settled area of the town. What was more, they lived amidst the rejected people of the society and under strict rules. This becomes more interesting when the calibre of men involved is considered. These were influential and titled men of the town.

Like the Christian village at Onitsha, life here was organised in a semi-monastic order as the inhabitants were highly regulated. The daily regulation was reported to be as follows:

Morning Mass - 4.45 a.m.
Communal Prayer and Meditation - After Mass
Work on the Coffee Plantation - the rest of the Morning)
Catechism Class - One hour in the afternoon
Free time and private devotions and other duties in the mission - the rest of the afternoon till evening (Obi, 1985b, p.32).

Recitation of the rosary followed communal night prayer. It is worthy of note that work in the mission was compulsory. The missionaries' view was that strict regulation and manual work would create a diligent group of Christians that would always cherish work and abhor laziness. The regulations were obligatory for the residents as failure to comply with them or the directives, attracted expulsion from the village. The priests (missionaries) were completely in charge. Often they were at the manual work site for supervision. For many years the inhabitants of the Aguleri Christian village continued to increase in number. Ozigboh recorded that;

By November 1896, twenty-two Christian and ten catechumen families were recorded. Five Christian marriages were also celebrated there that year. By July 1898, the population had shot up to 202 of which 150 were baptised and 52 were catechumens. The number of families in the village stood at 41 (1988, p.73).

The increased numerical strength of the Christian village at this period was as a result of increased number of converts. These, became converts for various reasons as have already been expressed. By 1900, another record has the number of families in the Christian village as 65 families and it described the village "as the most flourishing of the existing three Christian villages in Eastern Nigeria" (Obadiogwu, 1991, p.14). New entrants increased the number in subsequent years. However, a gradual depopulation of resident families in the village set in with the relocation of Igwe Akwuba Idigo II to Amaeze in 1915.

Nsugbe was the next town to experiment on Christian village, the missionaries haven been encouraged by the successes they felt they were recording at Aguleri. Impressed by developments at Aguleri as a result of the presence of the European missionaries, the people of Nsugbe persistently invited the mission to their town. With a station opened there, a Catechist was sent on March 21, 1892 to reside there. Subsequently, a resident priest was appointed to the station on April 17, 1894 (Nnabuike, 1983, pp.157-158). It took another seven years, August 1901, for a Christian village to be started at Nsugbe (Obi, 1985b, p.33). Not much is known about the Nsugbe

Christian village. Though the people had joyously received the Catholic missionaries when they arrived, the happy moments were short-lived for both parties. The situation was worsened by the acute shortage of missionary personnel. By 1904, Nsugbe had no resident priests. In 1907, the parish was moved to Nteje and Nsugbe became an outstation of Aguleri. The situation also brought an end to its Christian village.

With **Nteje** becoming a resident mission, it equally began a Christian village patterned after that of Aguleri. A record has it that in 1916, the village was inhabited by about 15 families (Obi, 1985b, p.33). Though it had a promising outlook with its rapid growth, the village soon disintegrated with the closing of Nteje Parish, which was rather transferred to Adazi in 1924.

A shot at a Christian village experiment at **Emekuku** had no chance of survival. With the invitation of the paramount ruler of Emekuku, Chief Obi Ejeshi, a Holy Ghost missionary priest, Father Feral, with his companions, arrived on the 16th of July to establish a Catholic mission in Emekuku (Njoku, 2012, pp.6-7). With Chief Ejeshi's promises of "plenty" land and adequate security to the missionaries, Father Feral nursed a great hope of exploiting the Christian village strategy in evangelizing Emekuku. That hope was dashed as the people showed great apathy to abandoning their kinsmen to take up residence near the whiteman. Raymond Emeribe, reminiscing the tales he heard while he was young, said that:

The early Catholic missionaries to our place went about inviting converts to abandon their homes and to take up residence near the mission, where they could stay away from pagan influences. We heard that our people showed apathy to such as they could not imagine separating themselves from their kith and kin, even though they fancied the whiteman's new religion (Personal communication, 23/11/2023).

Coupled with some other factors and reasons, the plan of establishing a Christian village at Emekuku was abandoned. Nevertheless, a quasi-Christian village in the form of a Catholic "Girls' Republic" was later established at the location of the present Holy Rosary Hospital Emekuku in the late 1920s. Here, young girls were groomed on how to be good Christians, good wives; and later on, to learn and train as nurses and midwives. This became the genesis of the School of Nursing and Midwifery, Emekuku (Njoku, 2012, p.9).

Socio-cultural traditions and the end of the Christian village in south east, Nigeria.

To all intent and purposes, the use of Christian villages for evangelization in south-east Nigeria yielded some positive results, especially as some of their products turned out to be excellent Christians. Blessed Iwene Tansi, for instance, was a product of the Aguleri Christian Village. This notwithstanding, the Christian village venture was laden with many problems including lack of missionary personnel and the heavy financial burden that it placed on the missionaries who to a great extent, financed the villages. However, much of the problems seem to relate to social and cultural issues, as well as traditions. The Missionaries, at a point, abandon the strategy, leaving only the Christian village at Aguleri which gradually failed as well.

In the first place, practically all the Christian villages established in the area under study welcomed slaves and the rejects of the society. Such people moved into the village, not necessarily out of conviction that they wanted to be Christians, but in search of solace. With the austere nature of the village, most of these abandoned the village once the society turned more friendly. In addition to this was the psychological trauma of sharing the same space with the rejects of the society. Sir Christopher Anazonwu said that they "were informed by their elders, that many freeborn in Onitsha began to turn their back on the Christian village, following the negative psychological impact of staying with slaves and the rejects of the society in the same environment" (Personal communication, 14/12/2023). Such socio-cultural disposition led people to gradually leave the village.

There was also the situation, especially at Onitsha, whereby the Christian village became an unacceptable "city of refuge". Obi wrote that,

The Christian village experiment was beginning to be seen as burdensome by the natives and the missionaries. It later began to be used as a "city of refuge" by certain criminals and revolutionists who violated the laws of the traditional religion and then would run into the Christian village for shelter and protection (Obi, 1985a, p.54).

Such acts that brought acrimony from the natives against the missionaries and the mission were unwelcome for the progress of the mission, and thus, at some point, became discouraging to even the missionaries.

Again, the Christian village setting involved some measure of coercion or confrontation. Occasionally, residents were reluctant in participating at church activities. Often times, some missionaries went round to drive out such people to the activities. At times, such drive used physical abuse to compel obedience. Evidently, such situation forced the women to rise in a demonstration that is accredited the now famous statement of 1892; "We believe in freedom, we pray in freedom, we don't want to be baptised" (Obi, 1985b, p.37). There was one such incident at Aguleri Christian village that turned sour. Father. C. T. MacNamara, Parish Priest of Aguleri from 1919 through early 1920s, frequently got ill-tempered when many villagers were absent or late to mission activities. He would abandon the activity and go with his whip to drive them from their homes. At such moment, he had little regard for age. In one such occasion, after he had started Mass, Fr. MacNamara realized that many elders were yet to come. He left the Mass, picked a stick and went from house to house hitting late comers and absentees. He arrived Ayia's house and started beating up the elderly man who was yet to set out for the church. The old man ran back to his sitting room where his son, Peter, a headmaster of a school in Udi, and who visited home, was preparing for the Mass. His son, "who was a stranger to such spectacle, emerged and retaliated by giving a deadly blow on the head of the Rev. Father" (Obadiegwu, 1991, p.21). The priest's action was more provocative than confrontational. Such constraints on the villagers' freedom pushed many to dissenting the Christian village.

There were also occasions where interesting social and cultural activities conflicted with the demands of the Christian village. The missionaries thought that to make better converts and to have firm hold on them and their thoughts, converts should be separated from their kith and kin, and from their culture. But, this failed to work out very well since the converts found it too hard to quickly shed off their culture totally. Mbefo opined that the missionaries "underestimated the force of Igbo social cohesion (the *umunna* factor) and the strength of their attachment to landed inherited property (the Obiefuna principle)" (June, 1999, p.57). In fact, confronted with losing their inheritance in some cases, most converts soon got fed up with the Christian village and returned to their kith and kin. It should be recalled that this was a major reason why the Emekuku people also found the Christian village unattractive.

Considering another aspect of this culture clash, Joe Idigo who partly grew up in Aguleri Christian village told that:

Mass would be going on in the church and there would be drumming and dancing in the nearby village. Of course, such distracted the people because it was difficult for one to make up one's mind, whether to stay at the mass, or go for the more attractive drumming and dancing that were going on in the villages. So there the conflict started (Personal communication, 12/08/2014).

John Melifeonwu (Personal communication, 28/11/2023) confirmed of tales of similar experience among early Catholics in Onitsha.

The missionaries disliked such influences, Even the traditional family tales after supper, the moonlight tales and plays that helped in educating children, were molested and prohibited. According to a former resident of Aguleri Christian village, Ambrose Kwazu:

The missionaries banned the residents from their age grades. There were other aspects of Igbo traditional social life that were equally important. The wrestling bouts, the moonlight plays, the musical and dancing groups and their competitions, and so on, helped so much in controlling crime and other social vices. The moonlight tales and tales around the fire were great forms of education. It was unfortunate that the missionaries saw most of these as evil and went all out to stop them. They even went to the extent of sending mission boys to molest people having the traditional moonlight plays. People resorted to trekking down to Amaeze to hold the plays, only to come back early in the morning for church activities (Personal communication, 05/01/1998).

Because of such conflicts, Igwe Idigo II of Aguleri, left the Christian village to a new site in 1915, beginning the Amaeze settlement of Aguleri. Many residents of the village followed him to Amaeze, leaving the missionaries to know who actually belonged to them, and ushering in a gradual but great decline of the once vibrant and famous Aguleri Christian village. By 1960, many residents had relocated, and by 1970, following the devastations of the Nigeria civil war, it was drastically downsized. In the last two decades however, many people have taking up residence in the area, but not as a Christian village. Currently, only the mission structures on the ground remind one of the Christian village as current residents are of diverse faith and denominations. Incidentally, it is the same case with the former Onitsha Christian village.

Scholars have expressed opinions on the use of Christian village as a missionary strategy in south-east Nigeria. A critical look at it reveals some successes, no doubt. It made for an easy reach of the converts by the missionaries and also made possible an easy control of the converts to the tune of the missionaries, thus producing some good Christians like Blessed Iwene Tansi. It helped the Christians to detach from unwanted aspects of their culture. As J. N. Anukwu also observed, it was also used as a base to get the converts learn and practise community living and love among brothers and sisters (Personal communication, 31/1/98). Thus, in the Christian village, people from varied quarters of Aguleri, who lived apart before, came to dwell together. The Aguleri person dwelt with peoples of other towns. In the Christian village, the converts were taught that there was no "Jew or Gentile" in Christianity. Thus, the titled and non-titled men, the slave and the freeborn, the leper and the healthy, male and female, the high and the lowly, all attended the same church, dwelt in the same area, and shared common interest. They were, however, not taught to dwell together with non-Catholics, particularly, the traditionalists. Nor were they unvested of their inferiority complex before the white men. The missionaries themselves, also paraded the "Whitman's superiority" rather than teach the equality of all races. Nevertheless, the slave and the estranged felt much at home in freedom. It created another social conflict. In essence, the village stunned the imparting of, and the practising of formidable gospel message, and as such, implanted a shaky church.

The use of the Christian village as a measure to divest the converts of their traditional cultural practices, to a great extent, denied them of their humanity. This is worse when it is considered that the missionaries knew little or nothing about these aspects of culture. The Council fathers of Vatican II strongly advocated that, "we must do everything possible to make all persons aware of their right to culture and their duty to develop themselves culturally..." (Gaudium Et Spes, Dec. 7, 1965, No. 60). A 1986 mission statement re-echoes in Scherer and Bevans that:

mission... will be deeply sensitive to the cultural reality, which is the very soil in which each person's existence is rooted. Given the social nature of people, the failure to respect their cultural reality is a failure to respect their personhood. The cultural reality of people includes their religious heritage (1992, p.58).

Agreed, not every aspect of traditional culture is compatible with the gospel message, yet the missionaries failed in patient inquiry and dialogue to discover the authentic values which animate the people they were sent to. Ozigboh rightly suggested that "where necessary, those values and ideals must be elevated, purified and infused with the right spirit of the Christian gospel. In that way, Christ is brought to non-Christians not as a total stranger but as one whom they have always sought for, without knowing..." (1985, p.70). The Christian village practice in south-east Nigeria, therefore, failed to achieve the full objectives of the Church's mission.

Conclusion

With such situations as noted above, it was, of course, difficult for the Christian village experiment to succeed. Such situations did not go down well with most inhabitants who preferred to keep away from the village. The Christian village project would have served as a veritable ground for the converts to share Christian experiences and encourage one another if the village was adapted to suit the socio-cultural sentiments of the Igbo, and if the high-handedness and semi monastic living was reduced. The notion and execution of the Christian village project were alien to the people and so, it was socially (psychologically), culturally and traditionally challenging and unacceptable to many. Ozigbo argued that, "It produced apparently pious Catholics who became culturally warped and disorientated" (1985, p.7). For evangelization strategy to be sustainably fruitful, the missionaries must be deeply sensitive to the social and cultural realities.

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