

Authenticating “Vennism”: Men of Local Prominence and Anglicanism in the Early Twentieth Century in Ukwuaniland, Delta State, 1900-194

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Abstract

Most historians enter into indigenous Christian historiography by focusing more on the activities of “foreign missionaries” in mission fields; the natives are often portrayed as being dormant and passive, waiting without will to be Christianized. Resting on McGavran’s (1980) indigenous principle theory, this study gives credence and authenticity to the relevance of considering indigenous human resources in addressing religious, economic and political issues in indigenous milieus. Using the historical approach to the study of Religious phenomenon, this study reveals that to assume the passiveness of natives in their encounter with a foreign religion is to adopt, consciously or unconsciously, the passivity of the Black race, the favourite opinion of the paternalist. To enhance the growth of Anglicanism in that land, there should be a change in the theology of the mission, methods and strategies of evangelism while indigenous lay leaders should be encouraged to pursue pastoral training.

Keywords: Vennism, Anglicanism, Native Agency, Evangelisation and Conversion.

Introduction

There is an axiom that most historians enter into indigenous Christian historiography by focusing more on the activities of “foreign missionaries” in mission fields to the utter neglect of natives who aided them, the natives are often portrayed as being dormant and passive, waiting without will to be Christianized (Turner 1974, Kalu 2005a 2005b, Odili 2008). In Africa, at the dawn of the 19th century the Church in that continent was faced with a dilemma that bothered on who would best evangelize Africa, the Western or African missionaries, and whether the natives have comprehended the Gospel sufficiently enough as to be entrusted with its propagation to their kith and kin. Such arguments were catastrophic to Venn’s policy of “self-propagation” (Ajayi 1968, Shenk 1983, Isichei 1995, Williams 2000) and tend to properly position Crowther as an “experimental bishop (Epelle 1955, Ajayi 1965, Okolugbo 1984, Eriwwo 1991, Daudu and Gbule 2000, Sanneh 2000, Spickard *et al.* 2003). This study is poised to give credence and authenticity to the relevance of employing indigenous human resources, who are more conversant with their indigenous worldviews in religious, economic and political issues than expatriated in indigenous milieus. With respect to propagation of Anglicanism in an indigenous society, it assessing the evangelical models, challenges, successes and near failures of native agency in Ukwuaniland.

Theoretical Framework

In his book, *Understanding Church Growth*, McGavran (1980) applauds the indigenous principle as having great value for the propagation of the Gospel. Differentiating indigenous church principles from nationalism, he states, that the latter has to do with turning authority to “Africanian” Church leaders, while the former deals with the ways in which self-propagating churches are planted. He added that indigenous church principles have theological and ecclesiological overtones. Developing a biblical base for indigenous principles, he points out that Paul always appointed unpaid elders from among the new Christians and left all matters of church discipline to the local churches. Anchoring indigenous principles to the early Church, he asserts that they are not only pragmatically sound but also scripturally correct.

McGavran (1980) proposes that indigenous churches grow better than others do because they follow indigenous principles. He also postulates that non-Christians see unpaid leaders of indigenous churches as people like themselves, indeed, for most part, their own relatives. He further explains that indigenous principles emphasize the naturalness of Christian life and worship. Often the idea communicated may not be entirely biblical according to Western notions, but it will commend the Saviour to those who have not yet believed, in terms they understood. In truly indigenous congregations, ordinary Christians speak openly about the advantages and blessings of being a Christian. When ordinary Christians witness for Christ and persuade others to become his disciples and responsible members of his Church, then churches multiply in extraordinary places from family to family, village to village, clan to clan, and so on. In this way, indigenous church principles encourage group action. The more indigenous the type of evangelism used, the more likely it is that many will respond. The indigenous principle requires that each convert should abide in the calling wherein he or she was called. Each should continue to earn his living as he did before he became a Christian.

According to Ogbu Kalu (1982) “Doing Church History in Africa Today”, the approach to African history has changed drastically. A clear shift has taken place away from the missionaries to the arena itself, the

African societies and their peoples. It is a shift from missionary historiography, often hagiographic, to a truly African Christian history, which is holistic. Debates are no longer between “blacks” and “whites”, but “between us and about us”. A holistic approach is concerned with the study of the past and present experiences of the people with the Gospel, both during and at the end of the missionary period (Kalu 1988:19). This approach eschews elitism by concentrating on people’s history. It calls for a dialogical approach: a need to understand the inner history of African traditional religiosity as a means of assessing the encounter with Christianity.

A new look at African Church history requires a new methodology that combines the use of written (archival) and oral sources. The new approach to history is based on the perspectives, reactions, responses and initiatives of Africans, most of which are not found in missionary accounts. Documentary evidences provide, therefore, only a very limited basis for African Church history much of, which is contained in oral history, which contains a vast and rich wealth of historical data. Another reason why an authentic history of the Church in Africa should be reconstructed not only from records of missions or their reportages, but also from eye witness account, is that Western missionaries’ records played down the roles of indigenous agents, neglected the contributions of African cosmological ideas, and gave little or no attention at all to the roles played by African ecology, socio-economic and political structures in the Christianizing of Africa. The point also should be made that missionaries could not have kept records of all that ever happened in their interaction with the various communities in which they worked. Additionally, they could not have reported those incidents that portrayed them in bad light. Thus oral history would evidently enrich history by way of filling in the gaps left as a result of the missionaries’ selectivity of the information they sent home. Even where written document exists oral history throws a great deal of light on problems that would otherwise have been unintelligible; while confirming some written sources, it amplifies others.

One of the problems of the native agency discourse is that it operated in the missionary framework that privileged the insertion of the institutional church and gospel within the communities. Its concern is akin to the diatribe of a certain brand of feminism that queries the fact that in the Gospel account two people took their needs to Jesus. One was a man and the other a woman. The writer named the man, Jairus, and forgot the name of the woman who had an issue of blood. In the heart of the political independence, the ecclesiastical brand of nationalism and indigenization project demanded that the African protagonist be named.

Native Agency in Ukwuaniland, 1900-1941

The first Anglican Church in Ukwuaniland after the Aboh saga (Odili 2010) was opened in Obiaruku in 1910 through the agency of one Otene and his wife, Beatrice in conjunction with Bishop James Johnson’s men. The church came from St. Luke’s Anglican Church Sapele, which was under the superintendence of Reverend J.M. Ologundudu. One Edeje, an Edo man residing at Urhovie-Abraka went to Sapele, and he was converted during one of the services in St. Luke’s Church. He then brought the Anglican Church to Urhovie in 1910. When Otene and his wife heard of the miraculous activities of the church at Urhovie; that many sick people who joined the new faith has been healed, that people had been delivered from their troubles, that those in bondage of *Nso* (religious sanctions) were freed and the power of witchcraft neutralized and that the barren conceived, they went there and requested that a branch of the Anglican church be established at Obiaruku.

In 1911, the church was formally launched and people like Enuanumbi Egenegbe, Ewofosi, and Anuto joined the family of Otene to form the nucleus of the new faith. As the group increased, they built a thatched hut at the present site of the Christ Anglican Church and sent representatives to St. Luke’s Church Sapele to ask for an agent. In response to their demand Rose, a Sierra Leonean was posted to Obiaruku as church agent cum school teacher about the end of 1911. Ross was not an eloquent speaker. In fact, he spoke Croele and addressed the Ukwuani people through an Ibo interpreter. The obvious result was that there was neither proper instruction from the Bible nor adequate preparation from the catechism. This hindered church growth and organization. The services were not well organized. The congregation merely sang and danced during Sunday services. Since there were no expositions from the Bible, the people sang, prayed and dispersed, when they were tired of dancing and singing.

When Otene complained about the inefficiency of Ross, one Emedo of Orogun in Western Urhobo was sent to replace him in 1913. Emedo set about organizing the church, conducting Bible classes, and preaching sermons from the Bible on Sundays. He conducted services in Urhobo language and interpreted into Ukwuani language. He opened a primary school where he taught English alphabet. He was transferred in 1915, but before his transfer, the church and school had started to make steady progress. G. Egbojule, an Itsekiri (1915-1917) succeeded him, and Ajayi, a Yoruba (1917-1918), followed him. These agents used various languages during services. This hampered the growth of the church that by the end of 1921, there was no baptism, because the parent church at Sapele felt that the new converts should be properly taught the catechism before they could be baptized. Otene was refused baptism because he was a polygamist.

Okolugbo (1984) reports that Otene was a volatile preacher. He was the chorus leader. He led evangelistic song of the victory of Jesus Christ over the gods and divinities of the land. He campaigned

strenuously against witchcraft, magic and other social vices. He condemned polygamy, the *mmawu* (masquerade), and *awushi* cult, which is similar to *Igbe* cult in Urhobo and Isokoland, and the *Ogene* of *Ukwata* festival. Otene was a man of faith; he was given to spirituality and evangelism. Throughout his mission among his people, Otene challenged indigenous religious practices and did not accommodate them to the Christian message. His message focused on the power of Jesus Christ to conquer traditional spirits. He insisted on the destruction of “fetishes”. He focused on the immediate parousia which required a radical life change. He urged his converts to avoid adultery and he rejected idolatry and the use of charms. Otene was used to spending whole nights at prayer in the church. He was pre-occupied to an unusual degree with the state of his soul. He emphasized fasting as an indispensable exercise.

On the social side, he preached an uncompromised abhorrence of alcohol. He was said to have led a life of self-sacrifice even to the detriment of his household. He spent his time and foodstuff catering for head teachers. He went from house to house compelling parents to send their children and wards to school. He was in charge of recruiting teachers. Otene was also patriotic. To him, religion and society are inseparable. The one is to promote the other. On one occasion he was said to have found an Abbi man who lost his way in the forest. Rather than behead him to obtain an honour as a great man, as was customary, he took the man to Obiaruku and helped him to trace his home. This surprised the people. It was quite unusual. Otene was indeed a pious man. A man of uncommon abilities, steady in conduct and an indefatigable lay agent.

Obiaruku was the main base from where evangelistic tours were organized to most parts of Ukwuaniland (Iwegbue 1981). The converts in Obiaruku provided carrier men, “escorts”, then known as “guides”, and their material resources to support Anglican agents in long distant itineration, which were undertaken from time to time. Christianity spread from Obiaruku to Abbi in 1911. The faith came to Abbi in 1911 through the agency of Ishicheli of Ukanabo-Uku, Abbi, who went down to Obiaruku to join the new faith. Consequently, Christian worship started at Abbi, in the house of Ishicheli, where the converts met for Sunday worship and daily prayers. New converts paid the sum of three kobo on admission, while the Christians paid one kobo every Sunday. This three kobo registration was not paid to Ishicheli because he was not mandated to receive the money by the mother church at Obiaruku. Anyone wishing to join the Abbi congregation would first go to Obiaruku, to the church leaders there, who in turn would recommend his membership to Abbi Congregation. Ishicheli, before accepting any convert’s money, would cross-examine the individual to determine his faith. The most pertinent question was, “Why do you want to join the Church”. Some would say to engage God’s help to overcome witchcraft, barrenness, sickness and poverty. Others would say they were tired of the indigenous religion, and wished to gain Christian enlightenment, and the “mysteries” of Western civilization. There were many reasons given for joining the church. According to David Adenu (2005):

Almost all of them bothered on economic, social and material problems. Spiritual problems were not necessary matters, which led the new converts to overcome sin and accept Jesus as Christ and Saviour, rather it was a matter of engaging God’s support to overcome the immediate enemies and obstacles.

After listening to their requests, Mr. Ishicheli would enjoin them to abstain from the worship of the traditional divinities, sacrifices of various forms and to cling tenaciously to their Christian faith. He would then pray for the potential member, and after assuring him or her of God’s providential care, and immediate intervention in his present obstacles would accept the three kobo.

In 1912, Ishicheli led delegates to Sapele to ask for baptism. He was advised to employ a church teacher who would prepare them for baptism. He was dissatisfied with the result of the mission to Sapele. He, therefore, resolved to send a delegation to Onitsha to get a pastor to baptize them. One Osuya, a retired steward, and a non-Christian offered to lead the delegation to Onitsha where they would get a pastor for their purpose, on condition that they paid him five pounds fee. The delegation arrived Onitsha, but they were referred back to the superintended in charge of Asaba District. In 1913 delegates from Asaba Christians led by the Senior Catechist, Asioku arrived at Abbi. Among the delegation also were Hezekiah Tolefe, a church agent and many schoolteachers. The delegates told the Abbi congregation the importance of proper instruction before baptism, and that they had brought Hezekiah Tolefe to teach them the Gospel. They remained for a week preaching and having fellowship with the church. After laying a useful and firm foundation, they left for Asaba leaving Hezekiah behind at Abbi as the church agent-cum-teacher.

By the middle of 1913, the congregation built its first church at Ogbenami. Abbi Community burnt down the church probably because the “obscurity” of the Christian culture and behaviour. Details of this would be given later. In 1914, “*Agha Ine*” (Abbi war with Europeans) broke out, and Hezekiah left for safety. The Sapele church then sent an Edo man, Douglass as the church agent/teacher. He taught in English, Itsekiri and Yoruba, and it was interpreted into Ukwuani language by Ishicheli. In 1916, Ogbolu an Urhobo succeeded Douglass. A new church was built at Ogbe-Ofu Street. There were frantic efforts from the traditional religion adherents, predominantly ancestral worshippers to pull down the church again, but their attempt was halted by the intervention of Chief I.T. Palmer of Sapele. The first Christians from Abbi were Ishicheli, Paul Oyeneke, P.

Uruada, E. Ishie, John Onwudiegwu and Chiogo. These trekked from Abbi to St. Luke's Church Sapele where Ologundudu baptized them. Ishicheli carried out his evangelical campaign to Okiloki, an Abbi village. Abbi then became the missionary base from where Anglican mission expanded into the hinterlands of Ukwuaniland. Soon, Christianity overflowed its narrow bank of Abbi and extended to the neighbouring towns of Emu-Unor, Ezionum, Ogume, Utue-Ogume, Utagba-Ogba, Ashaka Utagbe-Unor, Amai, Umutu, Ozuede, Isselegu and Ossissa.

Another man of local prominence who invited and patronized missionaries was one Adanu Onu of Emu-Unor (Odili 2003). Nothing beyond the fact that he was from the Ikosa quarters of Emu-Unor and a textile merchant who suffered infant mortality was known of him. Anglican Christianity came to Emu-Unor from Ewarie-Aradhe in Isokoland in 1911. Adanu Onu was frustrated by infant mortality. On hearing of the miraculous activities of the gospel at Ewarie-Aradhe, namely that the sick received healing, people were set free from social and psychological problems; many saved from the bond of *nso ani* (taboos); the power of witchcraft neutralized; and the conception of the barren; he left Emu-Unor for Ewarie-Aradhe to embrace the Christian faith. In 1911, he returned and established the church at Emu-Unor and became the leader himself. Later, he went back to Ewarie-Aradhe to learn more about the new faith and invited them to Emu-Unor to teach them the new faith. An Isoko convert was sent to Emu-Unor and he stayed for three days instructing them in the new faith. With the passage of time the new faith attracted a following. The earliest converts included Isselegu, Abraham Osaele, Godwin Ikwuasom Okeriaka, Joshua Okwuana, and Madam Mary Ibeso.

With the passage of time, they heard of the activities of the church at Abraka. Godwin Okeriaka and Abraham Osaele trekked down to Abraka to worship for some days at the end of which they demanded for a church teacher to be sent to them. In response, one Monday Amudo, a C.M.S. Church agent and school teacher was sent to them in 1913. This was, however, an unofficial arrangement. Hence, the onus of catering for him fell on the infant Church. This was done in kind and not in cash. The personal belongings of the agents that headed the church at Emu-Unor were carried on foot from Abraka to Emu-Unor. These came and established an evening school. They went from house to house requesting parents to send their children and wards to school. Some children, attracted by the school songs came on their own. There were equally those who went because they thought it was a good thing to do what others were doing. With these methods they got some of the early pupils that included Benson Maledo, Aaron Ochonogo and Humphrey Enumejo (Okuegbue, 2002). Some adults were interested to read the alphabet and to know how to write their names. These were equally attracted to the evening school, which became a morning school a year later.

The first place of worship was in Adanu Onu's house. He and his family constituted the first nucleus of the Church. When Godwin Ikwuasom Okeriaka, Abraham Osaele and others joined Onu's family they later built a shed like structure on the piece of land they bought at four pence from Osaye Ezute. This was shortly converted to a hut of wattle walls filled with mud. They cast mud benches of two feet high, which were arranged in rows. These were cleaned every Saturday, with cocoyam leaves, which did not stain when dry. The hut walls were painted white with clay every Saturday. Their gathering was called *Uka*, "gossip". *Uka* today means "Church". For example, *Unu Uka* means Church building. Before the building of the hut, the converts went daily from house to house for worship but congregated in the shed weekly. With the building of the hut the place of worship was centralized. Services were not properly organized: no hymns were taught, the leaders simply invented songs in Igbo and Ukwuani; often they sang songs they had learnt from Abraka. The congregations sang and danced during Sunday services. Local musical instrument such as *Udu* (gourds) *ekwe* (conga drum) and *ishaki* were employed. Their music also included the clapping of hands and Ukwuani dancing steps.

There was no proper instruction or exposition from the Bible since the Church agents were untrained catechists. They simply told stories from the Bible. They prayed and dispersed when they were tired of singing and dancing. They visited new converts on daily basis. They helped one another on their farm works and other personal demanding tasks. In the evenings, they went for evangelism entreating people to accept Jesus Christ.

Bia nari Jesus, owe ife dini uwa keni.

(Come and accept Jesus, there is nothing in this world).

They went from house to house preaching to heads of each family. They also entreated parents to send their children to school. During these evangelical outreaches, they sang along the way as they went. They sang that the power of Satan, *mmo* (divinities and spirits) and witchcraft had been broken. They also called on the people to do away with their charms. Polygamy was not attacked. This may be due to the fact that the church did not come directly from foreign missionaries or other trained Europeanized missionaries. Nor were religious issues relating to certain totems and taboos preached against. Even the converts still observed such taboos and totems as not eating snails, tortoise and alligator, putting on light while having sex with one's wife etc. They merely entreated people to stop idolatry and worship *Chukwu* through Jesus Christ.

The most notable man of local prominence who contributed immensely to the indigenization of the Anglican Church in Emu-Unor was Godwin Ikwuasom Okeriaka, the *Onye Uka* (churchman). Much of the early biography of Okeriaka was shrouded in antiquity of which nothing could be recalled than that he divorced his wife because of childlessness and he refused, like Paul in the New Testament, to remarry. Prior to his conversion

to the Christian faith he was a civil servant at Burutu. On his return to Emu-Unor in the late 1900s he picked up a new vocation as a trader and a farmer. Much of what Onu Adanu preached interested him and he decided to abandon his traditional beliefs and practices for the Christian faith. In fact, much of the history of St. Peter's Anglican Church Emu-Unor revolves around him. There was scarcely a street or compound in Emu-Unor in, which he did not preach Christ.

Godwin was both baptized and confirmed in the Anglican Church in 1913 and 1915 respectively. To have attained this status, he must have been able to memories the catechism, the Ten Commandments, and passed an oral examination on these, in a foreign language, the Urhobo language. As a convert, he was expected to observe certain high moral standards of behaviour. He was, as reported by Andrew Osabiku (2006), a man of courage and truth. His reputation was greatly esteemed, a man giving to a quiet disposition, calculative, sturdy, and tender at heart; he possessed considerable self-confidence which non-Christians saw as imperiousness. He grasped the importance of the school approach to evangelism. He often woke up earlier than the head-teachers to ring the Church/school bell. He would not mind trekking to Abraka to report and ask for the dismissal of any teacher or head-teacher guilty of the slightest act of misconduct such as coming to school late. The pupils dreaded him more than they did the teachers. He often went from house to house waking converts up for the early morning prayers and praying for them himself. Okoligwe Enunekwu (2002) remarked that Godwin and Abraham Osale evangelized in words, deeds and action.

At a point in time, he became the oldest man, not only in Emu-Unor, but also in the whole of Emu clan. This qualified him to the priest-king position as the *Okpara Uku*. As long as he was alive, no other man would occupy this position without evoking the wrath of the *Ndichie* (ancestors) upon himself. Hence, the community pressed on him to occupy this position and uphold the *Ofo Ndichie* (the ancestral symbol) of Emu-Unor. However, he requested that the *Ofo Ndichie* (the ancestral symbol) be brought to his compound, burnt and buried, and a copy of the Holy Bible be given to him in place of *Ofo Ndichie* before he would accept to be the *Okpara Uku*. The community was not ready to bargain the symbol of their traditional beliefs and practices with anything. To strike a compromise, he devolved the title to another next in age. A thing he did five times before he died. However, homage was still paid to him as "*Okpara Uku*" de jure. Godwin Ikwasum Okeriaka exerted a tremendous influence on Christianity in Emu. Chief Osamezu Maledo was to follow his steps in refusing to accept the title of *Onotu* of Ibilijie, a title attained solely by seniority (Okuegbue 2002). Godwin Ikuasum Okeriaka died on 17th January 1994. Commenting on his works Peter Okwuegbue (2002) stated:

I honour especially in him the dedication of life to a noble course with an uncompromising entireness of devotion, which had in it all the elements of true Christian heroism. Somehow, his life was so bold, so completed, and so successful that, we did not feel the least as if his death was a thing to be sad about.

One must look on his life as a grand epic poem, which has ended in a victory and rest. He was a great and good man whose name for the Emu people had become a familiar household ring, which has never failed to kindle in their hearts a feeling of enthusiasm. Godwin Ikwuazum Okeriaka was the man who laid his time, his talents, and whatever he had of this world's goods, upon the altar of the sacrifice, laboured with uncommon energy and zeal, and died thinking and praying for Emu-Unor. The school and the Church in Emu-Unor are indebted for much of what they are to him this day.

Mention should also be made of Ubiagba, a onetime *Okpara Uku* of Ezionum. As have been mentioned earlier on, the office of the *Okpara Uku* goes to the oldest man in the community. This office carries with it communal ritual worship and ceremonies. It is against this backdrop that Mr. Ubiagu refused to assume the position of the *Okpara Uku*. The traditionalists saw this as a negation of the tradition and customs of the people, and it was unreligious to pass on the post of *Okpara-Uku* to the next person in terms of age. The traditionalists, in pursuance of their custom, carried the symbols of the community divinities, the *Ofo* and *Ndichie* to Ubiagba. He refused to accept them, and consequently abandoned his house. This precipitated a crisis between the Christians and traditionalists. The Anglican Church in Ogume clan owes its existence to the agency of Ambrose Ossai Onekpe and Opiah. In 1914, Ambrose who was frustrated by a constant infant mortality went to consult an *Efa* oracle at Abbi. The *Efa* priest told him to destroy his *Ossai* divinity and be converted to Christianity so that his future births might survive. As a follow up of the oracle's advice, Ambrose embraced Christianity. The irrepressible Ambrose was reported to have made several contacts with the Anglican Church in Obiaruku between 1914 and 1917. Without such intensive contacts, it is doubtful if the Anglican Church would have been opened at Ogume. Ambrose Ossai Onekpe was so closely associated with the Anglican agents that his lounge was turned into a guesthouse for the visiting agents. At first there was neither a church nor a school building. A section of Ambrose's house served both purposes. The average attendance of the converts ranged from fourteen to twenty. With the cooperation of Ambrose and a few converts, a small mud house for the Anglican agents was set up, and the work of preaching began in earnest. The work in the new station was divided into four – open air preaching, which was organized form time to time; visitation of people; church services and schoolwork. Open-air preaching took place in the market square, the town square and anywhere else, they could find some

gatherings.

With the help of Ambrose, a night school for those who spend all their day in the farm was opened. The school, however, was closed down after a short while due to poor attendance. With respect to church services, the increase in the number of converts necessitated the building of a new church hall within Mr. Ambrose's compound. Missionary work was halted between 1921 and 1924 owing to the death of Ambrose in 1921, and the difficulty of finding a suitable successor. During this interval members of the church met in house of Opiah. Missionary work, however, was reinforced with the arrival of an energetic Anglican agent and schoolmaster, Okudinka. He contributed in no small measure to the revival of the church and school work at Ogume

The establishment of the Anglican Church in Otagba-Ogbe is credited to activities of a Muslim, Abu Agobi, an Ishan Man. Abu came to Utagba-Ogbe in 1930, and stayed with Olie Ugbe, the then *Okpala-Uku* of Utagba-Ogbe Community. He requested for a land from the community where he would build his Mosque. The community gave him *Uku Unya-Uku* a virgin forest believed to be infested with wild beasts and evil spirits. Abu Agobi cleared a portion of this forest and built his hut. In the course of time, Agobi met D. M. Maduegbuna, the Chief Clerk to the Resident at Kwale Station. He appealed to the clerk to send him someone who would stay with him in his hut. In response to his appeal, Mr. B.M. Maduegbuna, an Anglican Christian went to Asaba, where he held consultations with Reverend James E. Ibeneme in charge of Asaba District. In 1933 Ndigbo was sent from Asaba as the Church agent/teacher to open a mission station and school at Utagba-Ogbe.

Ndigbo met Agobi but resided with Mr. Okwueye Osademe, a prominent personality in the town. Thus, the church and school was first started in Okwueye's compound. Meanwhile the community was building the school/church in Agobi's area of land. When the church building was completed Rev. J.M. Ibeneme, and a group of Christians from Asaba came down to Utagba-Ogbe to dedicate the church. Ndigbo was transferred in 1936 and Osademe from Asaba was sent to man the church. The church was under the superintendence of the Asaba District until 1936 when Ukwuani District was constituted an ecclesiastical District with Abbi as the headquarters.

It was from Obiaruku that Christianity spread to Umutu in 1936 through the auspice Onyesom Utu. The early converts met in his house. When he died in 1930 the venue shifted to the house of Analogbe Thomas Okpor. In due course, when the congregation had increased in number, it decided to acquire a piece of land for their church building. Analogbe Thomas Okpor led a delegation to the then *Okpara Uku* of Umutu, one Iketemi, to request for land. The *Asua* sacred grove was allocated to them. The converts under the leadership of Okpor cleared up the groove and built their church there. The women members of the congregations feared to attend services in the new site because the *Asua* sacred grove was forbidden to women, and particularly because *Asua* divinity was believed to be a terrible and malignant divinity. Mr. Analogbe Thomas Okpor led a delegation to the mother church at Obiaruku to seek counsel on the situation. The Obiaruku elders, insisting on the omnipotence of God ordered the women folk of Umutu church, to attend services on the new site.

The name Analogbe Thomas Okpor is synonymous with the Anglican brand of Christianity at Umutu. The church there is referred to as "*Uka* Thomas Okpor". The whole history of the church is indissolubly linked up and interwoven with his activities and those of his family. The much that could be remembered of his father was that he was a farmer, a trader, and a member of the traditional ruling council. He was displeased at his conversion to the Christian faith. He, however, did not deny him his fatherly love, care and responsibility since Thomas was his only surviving child after a loss of seven children to infant mortality. Analogbe Thomas Okpor's intractable faith in Jesus Christ earned him the status of an antagonist and a calumniator before his relatives. When they realized that they could do nothing and that their grievances against him only substantiated his faith, they left him for good, and at best abstained from him. However, when he proved indispensable they sought counsel from him.

Analogbe Thomas Okpor manned the church at Umutu. He conducted Bible studies, Sunday prayer meetings and church services. The church under Thomas Okpor had some teething problems. Church attendance was far and in between, the church was financially bankrupt, and they experienced a great deal of backsliding. The situation was so pitiable that they pleaded earnestly for a catechist. This request was not met until four years later.

He was the mediator between the church and the community. Whenever there is a conflict between the church and the community, Thomas Okpor would interfere and advocate in favour of the church, especially, the Anglican Church. A case at hand is when the youth of Umutu insisted that all head Christians, catechists and church leaders in Umutu be involved in the communal vigilante. The various church leaders were distributed into five vigilante groups. However, Thomas Okpor appealed to the members of the group to, which the Anglican agent belonged and paid some amount of money for him to be exempted. Other church leaders who had not known what transpired in the Anglican Agent's group refused to participate in their own groups on the grand that the Anglican agent was not participating in his own group. These were summoned and arraigned before the *Okpara Uku* and his council of chiefs, and were fined. Osaesu Matthew (2005) observes that:

Thomas Okpor's personal integrity was beyond suspicion. His tactful and gracious character is

shown in his immediate appeal to people. He was in some ways immensely practical. His straightforward manner, calmness of judgement and ability to take a long-range view gave him authority with the community.

Another respondent, Amali Bernard, (2005) asserts:

Thomas Okpor was a quiet man, who would rather say few intelligible words than say much without meaning. He was plainly modest and unassuming in himself, yet firm and strong in his belief. He was a man of warm friendship, eager to serve and help others.

He further explained that lay indigenous agent Thomas Okpor was a man of exemplary character and his faith shone through. One of his great strength was his shrewd insight into human nature. He enjoyed people and entertained a stream of inquirers even from non-Anglican folds. These qualities helped him to man the church.

Another respondent remarks that:

Mr. Thomas Okpor had an uncanny ability to confront problems head on and strove to succeed where lesser mortals would dare to try. His exemplary leadership left an indelible mark. His legacy continues to inspire and challenge his successors.... He was a source of inspiration and a tower of strength; owed him a debt of gratitude.

This explains why he was undaunted when he was given the challenge to build a church in his community. There is no doubt that he acquitted himself credibility in the execution of his task. He was a man of undoubted ability and integrity. He built a virile and cohesive church council. Indeed, he brought to bear on the office of the head Christian fairness, finesse, integrity, and honesty, and intellectual competence. Mr. Thomas Okpor died C. 1958.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the importance of indigenous agency. It has shown that the missionary, often a stranger who knows barely little or nothing of the people he wishes to pastor, tends to evaluate local customs and cultures in the light of his own cultural background and standards, thereby, unconsciously making certain errors of judgment even to matters, which in the eyes of the indigenes do not have any religious significance. To state that the Ukwuani received Anglicanism passively is to undermine the roles of native agency in the Christianization of Africa during the missionary era and today. Several issues have been raised in support of the proficiency of native agency so much so that it is glaring that the need for a new agency implies a deficiency, a lapse in the formal. In their own little way indigenous agents evangelized their kith and kin, bringing about social change and innovation in the fabric of that culture. Though not properly tutored in the new faith, they never waited to be given a commission to evangelize their people, rather, in sympathetic and simple ways, they told the Good News they have received. They knew that the church was theirs and none other but they would develop it.

Recommendations

It is pertinent to note that the growth of Anglicanism in Ukwuaniland in the period under review was a sluggish one. This may be attributed to the fact the native agents who bore the brunt of evangelizing the land were "untrained". Besides, social, political and economic developments of that society might have been a factor. The study, therefore, recommends that for the church to be more successful at indigenizing Anglicanism in Ukwuaniland, it has to present to the people on stronger terms than their forebears did, a more rewarding and promising religious tradition. To enhance the growth of Anglicanism in that land, there should be a change in the theology of the mission, methods and strategies of evangelism. Indigenous lay leaders, which the church still makes use of to a greater degree, should be encouraged to pursue pastoral training. Whatever the issue, the success recorded by indigenous agents in the evangelization of Ukwuaniland in the 20th century demonstrates and gives credence and authenticity to the axiom "Africa for Africans".

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