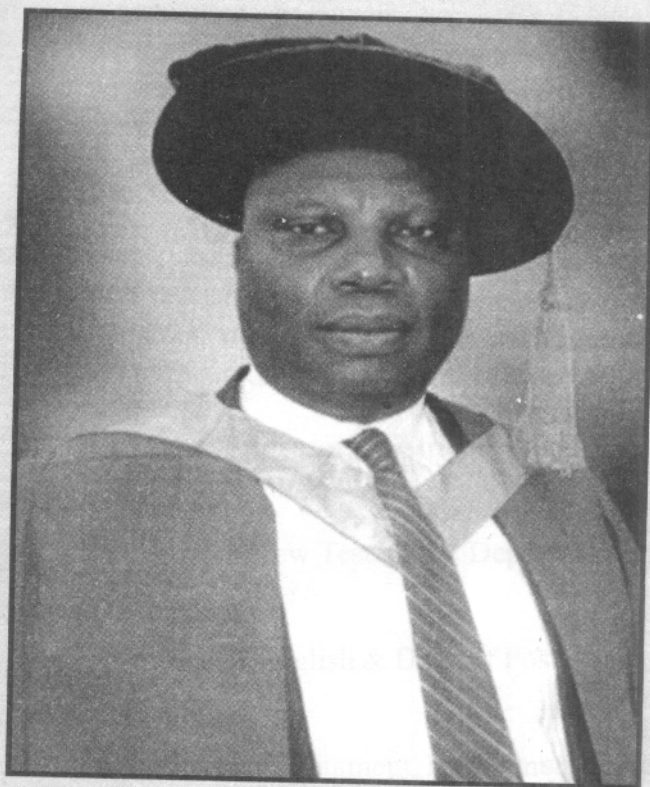


CHRISTIANITY AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN NIGERIA

A Festschrift in Honour of
Prof. Rotimi Williams OMOTOYE

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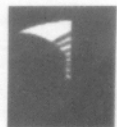
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CHAPTER 23

MISSIONARIES' CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF SUDAN INTERIOR MISSION/EVANGELICAL CHURCH WINNING ALL (SIM/ECWA)

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Abstract

This paper historically evaluates the contributions of the early Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) and Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) Missionaries to national development. It is no news that Christianity came to Nigeria through the activities of Missionaries from the Western World and was firmly established in the late 18th century. Missionaries' activities have gone through many stages in Nigeria; the roles of the stages are germane in writing the history of Christianity and the contributions of the missionaries in the development of Nigeria. To achieve this aim, some relevant literature works were consulted to gather historical facts. The findings revealed that the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) and Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) achieved significant success in literacy, health care, technology, rural development and more, though not without clashing with some of Nigeria's traditional values.

Keywords – Missionaries, development, Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA).

Introduction

Nigeria, as a nation, can be described as a religiously diverse society. Islam and Christianity are the two major religions practised in Nigeria, though African Traditional Religions existed before the advent of the two religions mentioned above. Nigeria is divided along religious lines, with Muslims dominating the northern part while Christians dominate the southern part. The history of missionaries coming to Nigeria can be traced back to the 15th Century when the Europeans from Portugal landed on the country's shores through the Atlantic.¹ They brought Christianity but did not successfully plant the religion because they were interested mainly in trading. It can be argued that their primary aim was business; rather than missionary work; because they were not committed to mission work. Many groups attempted later but were not successful until after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807.² Badagry was the point of entry for the freed slaves, and they were warmly received there. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) was the second Missionary Society to enter the Yoruba mission at about the end of 1842.³

This paper will focus on the role played by SIM/ECWA Missionaries in Nigeria. The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) was not from an ecclesiastical organisation like the Church Missionary Society (CMS) or other Church Mission Board. It was borne and funded by individuals who were burdened to bring the Gospel of Christ to places that were yet to hear the Gospel. It was a non-denominational mission that arrived in Nigeria in 1893⁴ and, today has become a renowned Christian denomination in Nigeria and beyond. SIM was changed to the

Evangelical Church of West Africa in 1954 to indigenise her. In 2010, her name was equally changed to Evangelical Church Willing All.⁵

A Brief History of Sudan Interior Mission/Evangelical Church Winning All (SIM/ECWA)

Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) (formerly known as Evangelical Church of West Africa) has roots in the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM). It is interesting to note that this name change resulted from the restrictiveness of the Mission to West Africa. By moving from this restrictive status quo, it was considered necessary to globalise the mission intention, resulting in the name "Evangelical Church Winning All". The story of ECWA cannot be discussed in isolation; the SIM being the mother body of ECWA, it is, therefore, appropriate to begin this work with a brief history of SIM.

The Sudan Interior Mission (SIM)

The Canadian College Dictionary affirms that the word "Sudan" is an Arabic word meaning "the land of the blacks."⁶ The central portion of the vast territory between Africa's north and south-west coast was called the central Sudan. It is usually referred to as Hausa Land and later northern Nigeria. According to Helser: "The Sudan is a great stretch of country, 600 miles wide, extending 3000 miles across the heart of Africa from Liberia to Ethiopia. It covers an area more than one-third that of the United States and embraces a population of over 40,000."⁷

The Establishment of SIM

The (Sudan Interior Mission) and its existence have a direct link with Evangelical Mission Movements in the European and North American societies, especially in the Toronto area of Canada. In the 18th and 19th centuries, these Evangelical mission movements were the main machinery behind SIM's formation.⁸ In addition to the great revival in Europe and North America during these periods, many Evangelical mission movements came up with some mission societies. These provided SIM with spiritual and social factors which later became an international and non-denominational mission agency.⁹

During the 18th and 19th centuries, London was the centre of evangelical and missionary movements and activities. There were large migrations of people from Europe, especially from London to North America.¹⁰ These migrations also added to the existing evangelical and missionary movement in North America, particularly around the Toronto area of Canada, Boston, New York, and Chicago areas of the USA.¹¹

The Evangelical mission movement was non-denominational with an international focus who believed strongly in the work of charity and social improvement of other people through medical and educational missions. They held firmly to the reformation orthodoxy, the absolute authority of the Holy Scripture, and the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit. SIM embraced the main characteristics and features of the early Evangelical mission movements, and these social and spiritual factors of the movement upon the SIM cannot be overstated.

The First Decade (1893 - 1900) was the beginning of the SIM in Nigeria. It was the period when the Mission was formed and it made several unsuccessful and fruitless attempts at gaining a foothold in the Sudan. The first attempt made in 1893 by the three pioneering missionaries, namely, Walter Gowans, Thomas Kent and Rowland Bingham, was met with total failure. They could not gain any foothold in Nigeria. Instead, Gowans and Kent died at the end of 1893. The disappointing return of Bingham to Canada could be viewed as fruitless, but spiritually, it was the sowing of the seed of the gospel by means of "martyrdom", which was to germinate in later years. The two early pioneers became "martyrs" for a good cause, "The burden of the Sudan."¹²

The second attempt by Bingham, Albert Taylor and Moline to enter Sudan in 1900 was also unsuccessful, even though there was no loss of life. Sickness and discouragement kept them from a successful entry into the Sudan. Bingham revisited Nigeria for the third time in 1901; this time was a victorious and blessed one. Osatoba said, "In 1901 God raised another set of missionaries to go with Bingham to Nigeria. Among them were E.A. Anthony, Charles Robinson, Albert Taylor and A.W. Banfield."¹³

The third attempt included Alex W. Banfield, E. Anthony, Albert Taylor and Charles Robinson. This party finally ended the years of fruitless and unsuccessful attempts and gained a foothold in the Sudan in 1901. They arrived in Lokoja in November 1901, and spent some months before travelling as far as Kabba with one Mr. Aikem of the CMS prospecting for a mission station. They finally established the first mission station at Patigi in Nupeland in March 1902 and were joined later by another missionary called Dr. Andrew Stirrett in less than a year. This station became the centre of missionary activities in the field, but only for a while. According to Yusufu Turaki, "Nupeland was very resistant to the Gospel, being predominantly Muslim."¹⁴ This made the gospel difficult in gaining ground during the early stages of the missionary work; there was not much fruit until later in the 1930s.

The primary goal of the missionaries was to convert the natives to Christianity through education, and this motivated them to give formal education so that the natives could read the Bible and spread the Gospel to others; this made Christianity and education go hand in hand; so, with Christianity, came western education. ECWA Theological Seminary, Igbaja has people that are gainfully employed. For the missionaries to achieve their aim, they condemned all traditional ways of life of the natives to convert as many as possible to Christianity.

SIM Missionaries' Influence on Education

SIM Missionaries provided a platform for establishing Western education, gradually replacing traditional values. These ideologies portrayed the natives' tradition as backward and uncivilised. Though some traditional practices might have been barbaric, introducing Christianity and Western education set biased standards that overshadowed some rich cultural values. Literature distribution became one of the significant activities of the SIM. Ijagbemi said, "Its first bookshop was established at Minna in 1913 and spread to over thirty-six towns by the 1970s."¹⁵ The distribution and sales of Christian literature were well organised throughout Nigeria. So, the distribution of Christian tracts and literature was a method of evangelism they engaged in. Some of these works of literature were given free, while some were sold at subsidised prices. According to Madam Elizabeth Olowosulu, "A missionary called Mrs Prowse carried the books and tracts in her Volkswagen vehicle from Kuroko to Okene for distribution. She would preach the gospel and then give out or sell out the books to back up what she had preached."¹⁶

Publications department was created to handle translations and publications of needed literature. For instance, the translation of the Hausa Bible was completed in 1932 by some missionaries under the leadership of Dr Andrew Stirrett. According to Sanusi, Stirrett recounted his joy over the completion of the work as he said:

Hallelujah! Oh, what a glad day that was when the first complete Hausa Bible, beautifully and strongly bound and in good distinct type, arrived in Jos, Kano and Zaria. Well, may we call upon the whole wide Sudan to rejoice in that day. Here now is the sword of the spirit with which to liberate Muslims, Pagans and give them, the light of life in Christ Jesus Our Lord.¹⁷

Medical Influence

The contact that saw the establishment of the Church was the provision of medical services to the people. The medical services were, to a large extent, an enticement and motivation to the people to accept the missionaries and Christianity. The medical centres were used as preaching centres. Prayers and sermons accompanied the administration of drugs. Patients receiving treatment in the dispensaries and those for both pre-and post-natal care were given the gospel alongside physical medicine.

ECWA health ministries are both institutional and non-institutional. ECWA hospitals and many health clinics serve as bases for preventive programme. Training and supervision of village health teams, training local midwives and developing public health information programmes are vital elements in the health ministries. ECWA found the hospital's work to be one of the most effective ministries among all the Yoruba and Hausa people. Small dispensaries are established in almost all the towns in Nigeria, where they nurse the sick, provide available medicines and minister to the families of the sick.

A teaching hospital at Egbe in Kogi State, Nigeria, trains national midwives, treats the seriously ill, and performs major and minor surgeries. The eye hospital in Kano also restored sight to many Nigerians who might otherwise have been blind. Their physical sight was restored, and spiritual eyes were opened to see Jesus as their saviour. The Evangel hospital in Jos plays her part in physical and spiritual healing.

According to Sanusi, "the Kano eye hospital has several full-time evangelists who work with the patients day and night. Neighbouring pastors are invited to preach to the patients at the beginning of the day."¹⁸

Leprosarium was established in order to care for lepers. Such hospitals exist in Omu-Aran in Kwara State, Mopa in Kogi State, Sokoto in Sokoto State, and many others. Thousands had been healed, were shown the way to eternal life, and were equally rehabilitated. On this, Helser said:

Scores of patients crowded about our hospital in Africa. Few lepers presented themselves because they had been told that nothing could be done for them. A leper woman was saved. Her cup of blessing was full. How she rejoiced in the hope that one day she would have a new body that no disease – not even leprosy – could touch.¹⁹

Today, one major area where SIM works in partnership with ECWA is providing medical services. SIM medical doctors assist in the work of ECWA general hospitals in Jos, Kano, Egbe and others.

Business and Administration Works

ECWA witness to people both verbally and through administrative responsibilities. For instance, guest houses were built to cater for the accommodation of travelling missionaries. "Such guest houses were built in Jos, Miango, Lagos, Kano, Minna, and Ilorin."²⁰

Furthermore, the SIM missionaries ventured into the agricultural business to encourage new converts and win more converts. "The agricultural project took off in Bukuru near Jos in the late 1970s."²¹ emphasis was laid on poultry farming and agricultural extension programme. In 1985, the project was registered as a limited liability company under the name "ECWA Rural Development Limited." This rural development programme is now called 'People Oriented Development' (POD). This help to empower many people.

Eternal Love Winning All (ELWA Radio Ministry)

This is a radio ministry as an electronic media evangelism, established in 1954 at Monrovia in Liberia.²² Gospel broadcasts were done in many major West African languages, including English, French and Arabic. Adebisi buttressed this when he wrote, "ELWA was broadcasting in 49 languages. During that time, ECWA had twenty-five recording centres. Igbaja ELWA recording studio was the starting point in Nigeria."²³

Radio ministry stations were also built at Igbaja in the present Ifelodun Local Government Area of Kwara State, where Yoruba, Nupe and English languages were aired. Studios were built in Kano and Jos, where Hausa, Fulfulde and Igbo languages were aired. This Radio ministry was functioning well in Liberia until it was destroyed during the civil crisis in 1989. Harold asserted, "from the beginning, ELWA enjoyed a remarkable rapport with the Liberian government... the senate gave the nation the best stretch on Liberia's coast. Also, President Tubman had taken a personal interest in the station."²⁴

Radio ELWA has a counselling department where spiritual problems are tackled; the department is working seriously by answering spiritual questions from listeners. Adebisi reiterated: "The counselling workers carefully follow up all letters answering the listener's spiritual problems and ensuring all of them get a useful literature that can build them up spiritually."²⁵

ELWA programmes have had some positive influences in listeners' lives and have helped the booming of evangelism through the media. This ministry has been playing significant role in the growth of ECWA Church. Churches were established; examples of such Churches can be found in Osogbo and Onitsha. According to Sanusi "the Church at Onitsha even called herself ELWA Church before it was corrected to ECWA Church when they sent a delegate to Igbaja."²⁶

The radio ministry studio in Nigeria is still functioning even now as of the time of this writing. Added to this is the annual week of songs tagged "Festigos," festival of gospel songs. This is being organised yearly by Radio ELWA, whereby all ECWA Churches in Ilorin and beyond normally converge to minister in songs. This method assisted ELWA in purchasing musical equipment. "Festigos" started in Ilorin in 1990 and has spread to areas like Igbaja, Kogi and Lagos States.²⁷ Elder M. Ade Ajayi of ECWA Kulende, Ilorin, is the current Chairman of Festigos.

Conclusion

Nigeria has witnessed remarkable changes in many, if not all, areas of life of the natives. A good number of Nigerians are religious because they have embraced the religion of the missionaries. The African Traditional Religion that was predominant before the coming of the Missionaries experienced strong opposition and criticism and was abandoned by its adherents for a foreign religion, i.e., Christianity; the effect of Christianity on culture continues to deepen until now. For instance, artistic objects and materials that showcase Nigeria's rich cultural traditions had been destroyed by foreign missionaries.

Family indigenous names were replaced with either missionaries or Biblical names. Monogamy was encouraged and practised to the detriment of polygamy, which was an integral part of the traditional way of life of the natives. Missionaries impacted social behaviour; traditional clothing was ditched for Western clothing. Western ways contributed to the use of modern building materials for construction. In this era, building materials such as mud, raffia, and sticks can only be found in remote areas of the country.

Language as an essential element of culture has been adulterated. The English language has become popular among the natives, and this has influenced traditional ways of communication and interaction. Modernisation spread so fast that small towns became urban centres. The agrarian way of life has been replaced with white-collar job opportunities, and this caused over-population in major cities because nobody wants to live in remote areas any longer; therefore, the history of traditional practices and culture in Nigeria faded gradually until contemporary times. The ideologies of the missionaries portrayed the natives' tradition as backward. Though a couple of traditional practices might have been barbaric, the introduction of Christianity and Western Education set biased standards that overshadowed some rich cultural values. Foreign missionaries destroyed or carried away artistic objects and materials that showcase Nigeria's rich cultural traditions. The history of traditional practices and culture in Nigeria faded gradually until contemporary times.

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