

CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATION AND ECONOMIC STABILITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Economic stability is the bedrock of national development and must be one of the concerns of government and the governed including religious organizations like Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). From the inception of Christianity in Nigeria till date, Christianity has been playing a pivotal role by inculcating in its adherents uncompromising moral values, respect for human life and dignity through adequate education and social tasks to sustain the economy of Nigeria, taking part in the indices that drive the economy such as education, health, manpower development and infrastructure. Before Western Europe came to Sub-Saharan Africa, there was no Nigeria, but economic activities were going on by the peoples that made the present-day Nigeria. The colonialists that came with Christianity were committed to upholding social justice, equality, and the welfare of people all of which helped a country achieve national development through humanitarian, education infrastructure improvement by involving in various economic activities. Some social critics have constantly, and erroneously under-estimated contributions made by Christian missionary work in Nigeria. Despite this, missionaries were involved in building the economy of Nigeria. To do justice to this write-up, literature review and historical analysis approaches were used. Views of past authors that were part of history and their immediate subjects were critically reviewed and analyzed. Christianity is an ideal religion, and it has contributed enormously to the areas of education, agriculture, healthcare, human capital development to sustain the economy of Nigeria till date. Not only that, the Christian body had also instilled morality in its members to ensure peace of mind and national security. The coming of the missionaries that brought Christianity to Nigeria shaped her national identity. Religion being an inmate in man, the paper recommended that those condemning religion especially Christianity should be wary, and that any criticism of religion should be constructive taking cognizance that you cannot but find one Judas among the twelve. For those who may not be students of history but casting aspersion on Christianity can best be informed of Christianity and her organizational contributions to National economic growth.

Keywords: Christian Missionaries, Economic Stability, Nigeria.

Introduction:

Christianity is more than a religion, it is a way of life entrenched on the life and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ to regulate human behaviour in this life with more emphasis on life after death. Christianity as an agent of transformation shows that its influential powers are quite irresistible. It has not penetrated any human society or institution without making a remarkable impact (Asadu 2015). Right from the time the British berthed at the shores of Nigeria, they started making efforts to get Nigerians to learn about their foreign ways, including Western education even though the local traditional education was already in place, and this made many parents to insist on their kids on learning both ways. This new education therefore open Nigeria and Nigerians to the outside world.

Formal western education was introduced to Nigeria through the efforts of the Missionaries that berthed on Nigeria soil through Badagry coast in 1841. The aim of these missionaries was to create through their missionary efforts African churches that were independent, self-governing, self supporting and self-propagating. These Africans that were converted by these missionaries were trained in skilled labour, teaching them to manage schools and churches, quickly grasped this education and started to use their talents and skills so that school masters could emerge. Very many Africans became well educated and had University degrees. Although western kind of education did not gain full recognition in the Nigerian society until during the 20th century, when the three British interests became firmly entrenched in Nigeria; these three were the Formal colonial masters, the British commerce, and the Christian Mission. The activities of the Christian mission began in Nigeria through the activities of various evangelical bodies in Europe and America.

The Christian mission work in Nigeria involved humanitarian activities like the total eradication of slave trade, slave trade eradication was sponsored by the joint efforts of Christians in the British parliament quoting Jesus in the gospel according to saint John chapter 8:36; ... *If the son shall set you free you shall be freed indeed.* Illiteracy is a form of mental slavery while education gives mental enlightenment efforts in medicine. The coming of Christianity and the efforts of Christian association of Nigeria has impacted Nigeria economy as the churches get involved in business activities both in small, medium or large scale businesses which were established by various Christian churches for community development, elevation of people out of poverty through the formal education.

Christians' Contributions to Education in Nigeria.

Christian mission believes that education is a vital part of every society and the church in Nigeria is greatly contributing to this sector by not only establishing institution but by ensuring that premium value is delivered constantly. The Christian mission was the first to educate Nigerian children and also in the British way of life. The very first school was established in 1843 by the Methodist Church "the Nursery of Infant Church by Rev. Golmer in Badagry, the name was later changed to St Thomas Anglican Nursery and Primary School.

The first Secondary School in Nigeria was the CMS Grammar School, located in Lagos; it was established in 1859. The first higher Institution in Nigeria, the Hope Waddell Training Institute, Calabar was established in 1895. Other secondary Schools established by the Christian Mission included Methodist Boys High School 1879, Methodist Girls High School 1880, Baptists Academy 1885, Abeokuta Grammar School 1908, Kings College Lagos 1909, Ijebu Ode Grammar School, and Eko Boys High School 1913. In 1919, Ondo Boys High School was established while Dennis Memorial Grammar School was established in 1925.

The establishment of these Schools made Western Education spread fast across through the political power of the Western World using economic power to process the spread. The parents through indirect force sent their children to school as this was the only means to court the favour of the colonial masters. Also, the ability of the children to speak the colonial master's language was another wonder that persuaded parents to send their children to school. Christian mission did not stop in primary school and secondary school, these bodies went as far as establishing tertiary education institutions. Presently, Christian Mission in Nigeria has 38 functioning Universities and 15 proposed Universities.

Christian missionaries laid the foundation of education in Nigeria before Lagos became a British colony in 1861. These missionaries worked in Yoruba land, They laid the foundation for primary and secondary education in Nigeria with the attendant burden of running these schools with financial resources without fund from the colonial government. They built schools, employed teachers, remunerated these teachers, provided books and other writing materials. According to Fafunwa Mr. and Mrs. De Graft and their successor Mr. and Mrs. Annear founded the first known school in Badagry, the first 50 pupils were Sierra Leone emigrant children. Fafunwa continued by crediting the missionaries thus.

While Methodist should be credited with establishing the first school in Nigeria; it was the CMS mission that was to make most important contribution to education in the early period Fafunwa (1974 p.78).

Igboland was opened to Western education in 1857 through the efforts of Rev. J.C. Taylor that started a school at Onitsha with 20 children brought to him by their parents and guardians followed by the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) in 1885. One of the early Catholic missionaries to Igboland Fr. Shanahan was of the strong opinion that schools could serve as best instrument for evangelization of the society, schools were then built near in every village under his jurisdiction. Thus, the missionaries made enormous financial sacrifices not only to convert but also to educate the converts without government assistance. According to (Osokoya 1989:60), "It was only in the year 1872 that colonial masters made available the sum of 30 pounds to each mission society involved in education activities in Lagos". Up till this present time, Christian body has not stopped providing quality education to Nigeria development from primary to tertiary education. The good jobs started by the early missionaries continue despite the forceful taken over of schools and change of moral and religious curriculum to secular one.

Christians and National Development

Christianity according to Advance Oxford English Dictionary (1995) is the religion based on the person and teachings of Jesus Christ, or its belief and practices. According to Arinze (1982.7)

The church is a society in which religion shows itself as practically organized. our Saviour Jesus Christ made me, established the church as the concrete way in which we are to exercise religion. The Christian is a follower of Christ and a member of the church. His religion has much to say to him about the orientation of his whole life, and therefore, certainly, about politics and his involvement.

Christian religion has what it takes to instill in its converts strong moral values, regard for human life and integrity through religious education to drive national economic growth and sustainability. Uka (2008.40) remarked that, 'Educating and enlightening our children and

adherents to be more loving and tolerant is a duty religious leader has to perform'. The former President of Nigeria, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan while speaking with some religious leaders in 2014 acknowledged that there was a bond between the secular state and the ecclesiastical body resulting a rather fruitful synergy. If moral education is relegated to the background development will be a mirage. Therefore, Christian mission should not shy in its responsibilities towards economic sustainability.

National development according to Oxford English Dictionary (1995) means 'to grow or cause something to grow gradually.' Growth is a process that is defined by the increase that occurs over time in the life of an object, in terms of size, strength or its extremities. It is essential for all facets of nation's life to contribute to National development. The degree of a nation's economic growth and its sustainability will be determined by the contribution of culture, politics, and spirituality. National development and economic sustainability can be structural and functional, it can also be physical such as high-rise buildings, factories, institutional buildings etc; it can also be mental such as when education is giving priority over structural development (Mama 2001).

It is disheartening that education that drives growth and development of Nigeria was at a time in history, the government saw the church and her morality as a rival group and forcefully took over the mission school from the church, relegated religious education in our public schools to the background and the attendant result is the moral decadence and falling standard of education in schools.

Development must start from the man and then the infrastructure, if the man inside is not developed intellectually, the un-informed or mis-informed will become a nuisance to national development. Achimugu (2000) opines that 'a nation's prosperity is measured not on the wealth of its income, nor on the power of its army, nor on the elegance of its environment, but on its citizens who are educated and religious and work for their country growth. Overall development cannot be attained without moral agency that can instill moral values on its citizens. The major function of religious leaders is to educate and enlighten their children and adherents to be more loving and tolerant of other people and other religion. Ever before the conception of the present-day Nigeria, Christian missionaries had established their mission in some areas that were later amalgamated to become one Nigeria in 1914 and without the collaboration of Church and Government in the past, Nigeria have charted a different course of development that had a slower rate of development. Without the use of schools as a veritable instrument of conversion, it would have been difficult to convert the natives.

Christians Contribution to Human Capital Development.

Christianity has contributed greatly to human capital development in Nigeria as human capital development is the missionaries concern towards emancipation of the poor Africans. These missionaries established industrial schools, to train the natives various skills. According to (Nwankiti 1996:39)

The first industrial school was established in Abeokuta in 1851... the first students who were sent abroad by CMS went to study brick and tile making, navigation, horticulture, and industrial management.

These industrial school was not limited to Lagos protectorate, in Eastern Nigeria, such institution at Onitsha produced accountants and clerks in addition to carpenters and masons. About their products, (Nwankiti 1996) quips:

Their imprints abide with us. Before the Biafran war, Diocesan, Archdeaconry and District offices were manned by people whose teachers were the fruits of these industrial institutions. Almost all the odd churches in the former diocese on the Niger were built by people trained by them, Pews, Pulpits, Lecterns, and Altar Rails etc. bore their 'trademark'- solid, heavy, durable and attention to details. Mr. Stephen Emekekwe who taught carpentry at the Dennis Memorial Grammar School (DMGS) Onitsha in the forties was the last manager of the Onitsha Industrial Mission as it was called then.

To raise manpower for the mission, another type of school that was established by Christian Missionaries was the ministerial School. In 1883, Ajayi Crowther built a missionary school in Kippo Hill Lokoja and Asaba. Even though some people criticized the education provided by the missionaries being inferior, that notwithstanding Agha (2004) inferred that no matter its inadequacy, it was better than the informal system of native education that existed prior to the arrival of western education. It is not only better than the native education of then, it surpasses the amoral educational curriculum of this present day that lacks moral and spiritual contents.

Agriculture is another area where Christianity has contributed to Nigeria economy. Food is a basic need of all mankind, once there is life, there must be food to sustain life. Jesus was an example to Christianity of the need not only to preach and teach also to feed the people the four gospels gave account of Jesus feeding the multitude after his evangelistic outreaches; this made feeding the fundamental holistic evangelism of the soul as well as the body. This is the reason missionaries took agriculture very seriously and educated the Africans on commercial farming. Mgbemena (1996 p.441) has this to say on agricultural development efforts of the missionaries:

At a wider and higher level, the church knowing agriculture to be a way of life of a higher percentage of Nigerians early enough showed concern for it by including agricultural science in the educational curriculum of the schools and this subject were taught by teachers trained for the purpose.

Christianity shaped the life of the people of Nigeria to a reasonable degree as these missionaries' brought varieties of crops, which proved to have a better quality than the one in existence in the area. Also artificial fertilizer was introduced to boost production. 'It was the missionary agents and the colonial masters that introduced different species of flowers, carpet grass, fruit trees and vegetables which we have taken for granted today'. (Agha 2004). Farm settlement was introduced by Fr. Borghero of the Roman Catholic Mission along the nine-mile strip of farmland along the coast of Badagry in 1875.

Christians and Development of National Language in Nigeria

To acculturate, the missionaries delved into the language of the Africans which was not in writing then. The missionaries wanted to use African languages and literature as a tool to make Africans understand the language better. The missionaries realized early that to establish an efficient Christian mission in Africa, the gospel should be preached in the language of the converts. Therefore, they began on time to develop the African languages, which they used to transmit Christianity and civilization. (Onyeidu 224:80) quips 'Interest in the study, teaching and translations of West African languages which had enriched the "world culture" of the people began in Sierra Leone'. Starting from 1804, when the CMS occupied

Sierra Leone, it instructed its agents to learn the native language to facilitate evangelism in the area.

The efforts and achievements of these missionaries were rewarded when in 1841 Igbo language had become a written language through the efforts of John F. Schon the German Philologists (Tasie 1996 p.82) and by 1841, Taylor a foundation member of CMS church Onitsha had translated the entire New Testament Bible into Igbo language which was to be published in England. The Efik alphabets and languages were produced by the Presbyterian Mission in Calabar (Agha, 2004). Crowther concentrated on the Yoruba language, wrote the grammar of the language and translated part of the Bible for their worship, thus it was possible for the Yoruba mission to have the Bible in their mother tongue as early as 1884. Bowen was interested in developing Yoruba language and produce Yoruba dictionary. Rev. Schon blazed the trail in respect of the academic approach to the study of Hausa language, while Rev. Bagery was the first scholar to recognize tone as an essential feature of Hausa language. Rev. Banifield produced Nupe dictionary and completed the translation of the Bible to Nupe language in 1927, which was published in 1947 (Ayadele 1966).

Christian's contribution to Health Development towards Economic Sustainability

Prior to the arrival of the missionaries, the health condition of the indigenous people was so poor that the death rate in Nigeria was alarming. There was no known cure for certain deadly diseases, which quickly went wild and caused severe death toll among the population. Moreover, there was a complete lack of information about many of these diseases (Agha 2004:124) When the missionaries arrived in Nigeria and saw the infant mortality rate that was a cause for alarm seeing many of them died before he age of 2 years and how the native doctors were exploiting the populace, they were so moved with great compassion and this was demonstrated by their early response which resulted to the quick discovery of quinine by these early missionaries for the treatment of malaria fever.

Also, because of many sicknesses that were prevalent in those days, fever, dysentery, leprosy, sores and wounds, the missionary began early medical ministrations. The patients were nursed within the church premises. Subsequently, Christian missionaries-built hospitals in different places within the country.

Sacred Heart Hospital Lantoro Abeokuta, was the first hospital in Nigeria which was built in 1885 by the Roman Catholic Mission before the General Hospital Lagos Island built by the colonial masters in 1893 as a military hospital to cater for the health of members of the British Armed Forces. In the same year 1893, another hospital was built in Onitsha by the Roman Catholic mission, and in 1896, the CMS opened a hospital at Dobinson, which was later transferred to Iyi-Enu Hospital in 1907. In September 1905, Church of Scotland; the Mary Slessor Hospital. In 1928, the CMS Founded Wusasa Hospital in Northern Nigeria. The first tertiary hospital to be opened in Nigeria was the Baptist Hospital Ogbomosho by the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention which has expanded to include other aspects of medical work, such as the training of General Medical Practitioners, Nurses and housemen providing treatment for victims of Hansen's Disease and tuberculosis, caring for the motherless babies and malnourished children, and providing dental care.

Various Christian bodies that were providing healthcare were scattered all over the country. There are also Faith-based organisations (FBO) that are playing significant role in providing healthcare in Nigeria, they include and not limited to: Christian Health Association of Nigeria, Rural Health Services, Isaiah 58 Care Foundation, Life Builders Ministries International and

World Renew. These organizations are working on family planning, Immunization, nutrition, wealth, and overall health systems strengthening and more.

Christians Contribution to Literacy in Nigeria.

Apart from the contributions to economic development, literacy among the populace made a clergyman to start the first Newspaper in Nigeria and another milestone in reaching the populace. It should be noted that in Nigeria, the first printing press was installed by the Presbyterian mission when they arrived in Calabar in 1846. Eight years later, Rev. Henry Townsend fitted up a printing press and inaugurated a printing school in the mission compound at Abeokuta. Townsend, an Anglican came from England. He was sent to Abeokuta by the mission authority in Calabar to help in ministering the spiritual needs of many Sierra Leonian immigrants who were emancipated from slave trade. He arrived Badagry and worked with Sierra Leonian immigrants at its headquarters at a place known as English Town. It was said that during the publication of *Iwe Irohin*, there were at least 300 people in CMS compound who had learnt how to read and write, and this generated the need for English man to set the newspaper.

Iwe Irohin was the first Yoruba Africa's vernacular newspaper to be printed, the name of the first print was "*Iwe Irohin Fun Awon Ara Egba Ati Yoruba*". Eight years later, "*Iwe Irohin*" was printed in two versions, One in English and the other in Yoruba. Reviewing the purpose of the newspaper, Townsend said, "My objective is to get the people to read and to beget the habit of seeking information by reading."

Conclusion.

Before the coming of Christianity and the Colonial masters into Nigeria Economy, Nigeria had only Communities and ethnic groups like the Hausa, the Igbo, the Yoruba, the Nupe, the Jukun, the Ibiobio, the Urhobo, the Ijaw, the Efik, the Kanuri, the Tiv etc. Various communities managed their economy to satisfy their people. The exchange of goods in various parts of Nigeria had been of long standing, most early, exchanges were the results of surplus production over above the subsistence level. Local markets were organized at regular intervals of three, five or seven days and occasionally fortnightly, for the exchange of products. The organization of such markets gave the people the opportunity to sell local products at regular intervals. A sense of specialization soon grew, items of local exchange included foodstuffs and household materials such as pottery and soap. These markets also developed as the central markets for local products such as Palm oil, which had begun to attract European merchants. In many communities, different markets were established for local products and foreign goods to encourage local production as well as to attract long distance traders from other areas.

Traditional rulers devised various means of raising adequate revenues for running their respective administration. Revenues were collected in kind, mainly in foodstuffs, and provided for the "rulers" and their officials. Long distance activities principally contributed to emergence, growth and sustenance of states and empires that controlled the different parts of the Nigerian era. From the Sixteenth century, there developed trans-Atlantic trade countries of South Latin and Latin America and later Western Europe.

The abolition of slave trade and the coming of Christian missionaries, improved the economy of Nigeria. The missionaries were not interested in taking over the politics of Nigeria but to improve the living standard, grow and sustain the economy. The missionaries put growth indices in place to make life meaningful and lived it abundantly. It was the colonial masters

that came to colonize us and amalgamated what is now Nigeria state in 1914. All the contributions of the Christian missions are still viable and contributing to our economy. Christian associations in Nigeria are not folding their arms after the departure of the missionaries. The mainland churches, Pentecostal churches, the Evangelicals, and the African Initiated churches are all using their resources to promote Nigeria economy.

Conclusions and Recommendations

When Nigeria economy was in the hand of the structured human capital that was brought up religiously with the fear of God in them, the economy had a sustainable growth. Education, road, power infrastructures and agriculture were given priority attention, there was not any trade imbalance either local or foreign, rulers were ruling with the fear of God. There was security of life and properties, every worker's life expectancy was high; child mortality rate was reduced through the orthodox health care introduced by the missionaries. But the game changed when the get rich syndrome became the order of the day and people are no longer loyal and committed to their various assignments. And when the government forcefully took over the education sector from the missionaries and subjected education to secularity, those that are being educated secularly became corrupt and the economy fell into the corruption tendencies of the elites. Nigeria's economic growth rate became dove nosed and things began to fall apart economically, and the centre can no longer hold. This paper is therefore recommended that:

1. Social critics should stop castigating Christian religious bodies for the woes that has befallen this country.
2. Religion, spirituality, and morality be returned to our educational systems.
3. Flashing back to Christian mission contribution to Nigeria's economy, there is hope for our national economic revival if handled by loyal and trustworthy members of the society.
4. Christian organizations be involved in modern agricultural enterprise as means of generating employment for the teeming jobless citizens.
5. The church is to support the government in its economic revitalization agenda to make the country great.
6. Christian organizations should not relent in empowering their youths towards economic development of the country.
7. The church is to improve and increase numbers of her duly registered financial institutions which will also boost the national economic growth.
8. Christian religious organizations should not relent in inculcating discipline, patriotism, nationalism and loyalty to her adherents.
9. Christian organizations to intensify their efforts in praying for the peace and growth of their country.
10. Christian organization to teach and advice their adherents to join and practice holistic politics and not stomach infrastructure politics.

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