

## **MAINTAINING THE RELEVANCE OF CHRISTIANITY IN NIGERIA: A CLARION CALL OF AN EDUCATIONIST**

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### **Abstract**

Christianity is very relevant to the development of Nigeria. Virtually all the noted developments in Nigeria have the influence and input of the Christianity. Currently Christianity in Nigeria is facing a lot of challenges as her adversaries have attacked her severely as if she has no relevance on the land. The study adopted historical approach to the study of religion with educational spectrum to address the relevance of Christianity and the expected honour that is due for her. The research work ventured to use written literatures about the history of Christianity in Nigeria at the arrival of selected orthodox denominations were narrated. Historical books, dailies and internet materials were used for the research. It was realised that Christianity has been changing the darkness of places where they moved to but are not currently been given the due regards from other religions who took up challenges as adversaries, Islam is most pronounced amidst others. The study revealed an urgent need for Departments of Religious Studies and in particular, Department of Religious Studies of Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, and which specializes in Christian Religious Studies to see to an urgent need to move for the sustainability of Christianity and see a need to convince Christians in Nigeria to maintain relevance of Christianity in Nigeria. The study revealed that some Christians are enemies within, and they are saboteurs who confess Christianity but are acting otherwise. They refuse to act practical Christianity because of money, wealth and positions. Bowing for mammon has made some Christians to lose their control over the dignity of Christianity. Faithful Christians in the Northern, middle belt and other parts of Nigeria are martyr of Christ Jesus. There is need for faithful Christians like scholars of Religious Studies, Ajayi Crowther University Oyo in Nigeria to maintain and promote the relevance of Christianity in the current dispensation by teaching and acting the same as it was at the emergence of the faith in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Relevance, Orthodox Christianity, Clarion Call, An Educationist, Educational Spectrum

### **Background to the Study**

The problem of the study is the Maintaining the relevance of Christianity in Nigeria: Clarion call of an Educationist. Orthodox Christianity are ancient kind of Christian Faith. They are the sect of denominations that commenced the faith with particular nomenclatures. They still answer the same name as it might have been declared in the antiquity. This sect of Christianity could be dated between 305 to 1929 established Churches. It was after this that a branch of the Christian Church in eastern Europe and Greece called orthodox Church<sup>1</sup> emerged. The sect of orthodox denominations that ranges from Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterians.

The Clarion Call of this study is a passionate and heart felt call of the attention of the Religious Scholars who are adherent of Christianity to view in a possible way that this educationist is viewing. As Educationist,

who is a practical Christian trust that the Religious Study Scholars will be in best position to act on the suggestions that this study will present through the spectrum or the side view of the researcher.

The study presents relevance of Christianity and her great impart at the inception. It was realised that this impart is about to be brushed aside by our generation. This called for concern for this study. It was observed that Christianity unlike some other Religions did not emerge aloof, it brought along other relevance issues to Christianity. Such as more development to Agriculture, Education, Health, Science and Technology.

The Study adopted the historical method to both the study of Religion and Education. The primary aim of this method is to gain the clearer perspective of the present and to desire to arrive at an accurate account of the research.<sup>2</sup> What the former life speaks is very relevant to life and the same many at times decides what the future brings forth. By this method, the commencement of Christianity and her relevance from then till now will be captured.

### **Ecclesia**

Some people, having attended Church services often ask why the Church? The study examines ecumenical ecclesiology: contemporary Africa Church's response through Old Testament Spectrum. Ecumenism is togetherness of the denominational gathering with one mind and a particular faith. The response of the Africans who are in the Christian Church in the context of this study is expedient. It is a phenomenon by which a template is been sighted from Old Testament which is a useful *Ecclesia* **ἐκκλησία**<sup>3</sup> in ancient Greece is the assembly of the elders of the community to make decision that will improve the standard and security of the Community. The gathering of such assembly in the antiquity includes the general figures of the particular region. As the discussion dealt with the issues that affected the society or decision over the germane events or rather on issues concern individual.<sup>4</sup>

*Ecclesia* hence is a Greek word that is borrowed from the antiquity practice on the togetherness into the tradition of Christianity. The word *oikos* means *house, family, and nation, as oikoumenē is the inhabited World.*<sup>5</sup> It was the assembly of the Israelites elders at the gate side over the decisions on vital issues concerning the community. *Ecclesia* constitutes a togetherness and thrust into one body of the belief and traditions. It may also mean the togetherness of the Christians scattered all over the world. *Ecclesia*,<sup>6</sup> interestingly means the unity of the saints' militant and saints triumphant. The Catholic theology has the Church Suffering been classified under the purgatory, there is also the Church and the teaching ministry in Catholicism called *Ecclesia Docens.*<sup>7</sup> **ἐκκλησία διδασκῶν**<sup>8</sup> This is the teaching techniques to the *ecclesia* of the Church. Hence, Ecumenism is the generality of the ecclesiastical.

Contemporary Church has a practical template from the Old Testament worship. There was gradual change in the structure of worship in the Old Testament Tent to Temple, the same metamorphosed to Synagogue and later in the New Testament days to Church. Details of the metamorphosis is in the context of Old Testament spectrum. The common factor to the buildings for the temple, synagogue and the church as the edifices are believed to be the habitation of the Most High God.

The Africans were used to the shrines of the ancestors, which is highly revered as the place of the spirits. The mind on the abode of the spirits is transferred from the mentality of an average African to the abode of Yahweh and the Church of Jesus Christ in our contemporary Africa context. It is scarce for the African

religion practitioners or traditionalists to burn the Church at any African setting. The leader of Christianity and members of the Church at the persecution against Christianity may face trials or ill health and even death, in the hands of the African Religions Traditionalists, but very scarce that the Church will be set ablaze by them.

Christianity has suffered demolitions and burning of Churches and killings of adherent of Christianity in high records so far from the hands of Islam. The Africans give high regard to any consecrated worship place of Christianity despite their hostility against the religion from other aspect. Historiography in the context of this work spelt out the cultural, social, economic, and political forces that shape historical writings<sup>9</sup> of *ecclesia* in ecclesiology with Africa Church responses.

The Church is more evident through its physical evidence of the place of Worship. There used to be one Church immediately after the generation of the Apostle known as Catholicism. This is the belief in One God and Jesus Christ, His Son, and Holy Spirit the revealer of great things to the Church. This continued until 1054 A.D.<sup>10</sup> when there was separation between the Church of the West and the Church of the East. The major reason for the separation is the language barrier. Eastern Churches used Greek rite while the Rome used Latin Rite and Latin Vulgate.

### **Spread of Christianity in Africa**

The commencement of Christianity in the World marked the commencement of Christianity in Africa, this because Africans knew God since the inception of her existence. Africa as a continent is one of the witnesses of the Baptism of Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The New Testament Bible agrees that Africa, in Egypt was a place of refuge for Jesus Christ when Herod wanted to get rid of Jesus. Very expedient to note is the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem.

The list of the Africa Countries in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:5-8) were: Parthians, Medes, Elimites, Egypt, Libya, Cyrene, Ethiopians, etc, These People from these countries went back home with jubilation and spreading of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which marks the commencement of Christianity in West Africa. Eunuch of Ethiopia went back to his Nation with the Gospel of Salvation. Meaning that the Africans have been in the scene of history of Christianity since inception. There was noted Catechetical school of Alexandria among other schools of Christian Guidelines. Many Church Fathers who compiled the Apostle Creed were Africans. The conclusion of the Nicene Creed under Emperor Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantine had good number of the African Church Fathers around 325 AD. Operation in Egypt spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the interior of Egypt through the Coptic Egyptian Language and planted Churches all over Egypt. Also, Latin Language was the *liqua franca* which helped the spread of Christianity.

Good numbers of African Fathers were involved in History of Christianity in the World. Some of them were St. Augustine of Hippo (Algeria), Clement and Origen of Alexandria in Egypt, etc. Joseph of Cyrene was constrained to carry to cross of Jesus Christ. Cyrene is in North Africa. Between 64 AD and 311 AD, the Churches in the North Africa the persecution affected the Northern Churches greatly. This shows that history of Christianity in general is inconclusive without the mention of Africans contributions to the development of Christianity worldwide. Africans were on stage of theatre of Christianity since her inception.

Africa at west and east has Oceans. Atlantic Ocean by the west and India Ocean by the Eastern part. The coasts of the Countries of West Africa are of advantages to the development of Christianity in West Africa. The Coastal Countries were able to abhor the Europeans in the Countries who ignited the fire of Evangelism and brought development to humanities. Much more pronounced among the Countries was

Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, etc. Freetown was the headquarters of Sierra Leone. Freetown was the place where the apprehended slaves were first kept before they were developed and sent back to their countries as others resolved to stay and adopt Sierra Leone as their Country. There are pronounced obstacles to the spread of Christianity. The Obstacles to the spread of Christianity in Africa Countries are: i. Language ii. Lack of Acclimatisation iii. Division, disunity, and heretical teaching iv. Onslaught of Christianity by Islam v. Persecution and Maltreatment of Christians vi. Climatic condition in Africa against the Europeans Health vii. Underestimation of the magnitude of the task of evangelising Africa viii. Lack of Man's Power as Africa Countries were seen as the graveyard of the White Man. Many of the missionaries died and were buried in the wilderness of Africa. It should be noted that about 700 years after the invasion of Islam in the North Africa and Christianity had been swept off as there was opportunity to re-evangelize the North Africa. This was made possible by Prince Henry of Portugal. Prince Henry was the third surviving son of King John and Queen Philippe. The hobby of Prince Henry was the Sea adventure. The quest of Henry was influenced by: i. Curiosity about Canary Island and many undiscovered areas in Africa ii. Commercial reasons; meaning to make profit out of the Voyage iii. Political Reason- Henry was the first Portuguese to get place for his country in Africa iv. Christians allies through the trade and military strength v. Missionary reasons, since Christianity here is Nationalistic. The Portuguese aimed at spreading what they brought throughout Africa Continent.

## **Protestant Reformation**

The Protestant Reformation came up in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Pronounced among the frontiers of the Protestantism was Martin Luther with his 95 Thesis, on the 10<sup>th</sup> November 1517<sup>11</sup> that proved the expected mission of the Protestants from the Catholic Church. Known among the reformers who supported Martin Luther were, John Calvin and King Henry VIII challenge the Papal authority and requested the Catholic Faith practice to defend the Christian Faith. They presented the practices of the Church without the backing of the Holy Bible, but with gains to their purses. This reformation triggered in persecution, war and counter-reformation. The Catholic Church forcefully responded to the Protestants. The Pietists were believed by a source to have been influenced by mysticism. Mystics are people who have transformation experience where they have unity with the creator. This could be likened to salvation and baptism of the Holy Spirit as anybody may have such experience.

Thomas Merton says Mysticism is a spiritual experience with one's brethren. Pietist movement have a hand in formation of the Lutheran Church and in 1670s led to a reform movement. Notable among people who have been influenced by Pietism is Philipp Jakob Spener, who later encouraged Bible Study to smaller groups of people. This movement influenced CMS, BMS, and MMS to evangelised Africa later. Church Missionary Society was a group of spiritual members of Church of Britain Anglican Communion. The Society evangelised Nigeria and Anglican Communion in Nigeria is an arm of the Church Missionary Society of Britain. C.M.S. was a frontier of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 under Lord Mansfield judgement.

Other people who fought for the abolition of the slave trade were: William Wilberforce, David

Livingstone, Henry Venn (who later became secretary to C.M.S.) C.M.S. has two means of evangelism:

- i. Through Knowledge of- SPCK (Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge)
- ii. Through Evangelism of- SPG (Society for the Propagation of the Gospel).

John Wesley was an Anglican Priest like his Father Revd. Samuel Wesley. The name of their Mother was Susannah. John had a blood brother called Charles. Both of them were hymnologists. They composed thousands of hymn been used in our current dispensation across all denominations. Their ways of evangelism which was in a methodical way coined out the nomenclature- Methodist. Both John and Charles attended Oxford College and were ordained in Anglican Communion. At the College they both started a club called the Holy Club where fellowships of Bible studies and prayer meetings are being held. John and Charles through their Moravian Friends had Salvation experience on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1738. This is the reason why the members of Methodist Church are being referred to as the Wesleyan. George Whitefield was another good friend who collaborated with the Wesleyans in Evangelism. Whitefield was at the forefront of leadership and later travelled from London leaving about 1,000 members in charge of the Wesleyans. Whitefield came back to realise that the members were not interested in his continuation but with John and Charles Wesley's ministries.

William Carey a British Missionary commenced the ministry of Baptist Missionary Society. Carey lived between 17<sup>th</sup> August 1671 and 9<sup>th</sup> June 1834. The names of the parents of Carey are Edmund and Elizabeth Carey. William was very inquisitive as a child and his parents were members of Church of England Anglican Communion where Edmund was a clerk and School Master under Church of England. Williams loved Natural Science, most importantly Botany and taught himself Latin Language.

In 1793 Carey was sent to India and Kolkata. He joined Baptist Missionary in Danish Colony of Frederiksnagar in Indian. He started schools for the children to educated and pass on the Gospel of Jesus Christ across to them. He gave a Philanthropy encouragement to the Missionaries. Carey was a frontier of social mission works that established institutions that aid people like hospital, orphanage and schools. No wonder Carey was called 'father of modern mission'. Hebrew 11:6 is the motto of B.M.S. which was taken from the sermon of William Carey, believing that God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

The CMS, MMS and BMS were set for the Evangelism of the West Africa in the early 1800s. These evangelical groups led by CMS are derogatory refer to as the Protestants. There are benefits of the rise of Churches in Nigeria. These are:

- i. The translation of the Bible was promoted by the distributions of tracts and journals as the missionaries were able to learn the native languages of the localities, which is useful for the propagation of the Gospel.
- ii. The Revival was an impetus to Evangelism and Revival in the Catholic Church
- iii. People who are been ministered to, donated in huge forms
- iv. Missions and Missionaries were highly encouraged

### **Attempt at Spreading Christianity in West Africa**

- It is expedient to note that the abolition of slave trade played a wonderful role in the development of Christianity in West Africa. Prince Henry of Portugal Founded African Tropical coasts and traded with the people in the West India.
- Slave trade increased local wars, divided families, devastated fertile communities, separated members of family for life, subjected victims to inhumane treatment worse than what their animals can witness and when the captured are marked or branded. Africans captured were chained, as women or younger daughters were raped.
- The abolitionists rose against the in-humanitarian reasons against the slave trade. Besides this, were moral and religious reasons. Millions of victims of slave trade were thrown into Sea. It

took over 200 years before the fight against the abolition of the slave trade was successful. Reason for this delay was that the beneficiaries of slave trade found the business so lucrative market. The struggles of the abolitionists were first recorded in 1772 by Lord Mansfield's Judgement. On 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1807, an act was passed and on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 1807 it got the Royal assent of the Queen of England. On 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1808, the enforcement of the abolition of the slave trade was left to the hands of Navy Squad of England for the implementation.

- The Clapham Common Sect, the Brotherhood of Christian Politicians, etc, were instrumental to the abolition as they supported Committee for assisting the black poor. Some of the people in all these groups were also involved in the missionary work and Sierra Leone Company Platform of the Freed slaves. The Free Town was so named as land set aside for the Freed Slaves. Some Free Slaves did not know the destination of their foreparents, some others were born on a ship, etc. Those who would have loved to stay abroad were left behind and others were returned to Freetown.

### **Developments in Nigeria through Christianity**

Christianity has been able to aid the development of social amenities in Nigeria. Buxton suggested supplements to the Bible such as Education and Agriculture. Through education, schools were established, and people were trained into several professions. At the inception of Christianity, many of the Church Missionaries were headmasters in the established Schools. At times, the headmaster may be the Church Choir master who enforced Students to attend Choir meetings and other Church programmes. As the minister has influence in Schools and Churches, so is the Wife supporting her husband as a professional nurse. A story was told of Anne Hinderer who was treating a sore of a child in Kudeti,<sup>12</sup> Ibadan, as the ward slapped her when he felt the pain. Mrs. Ann Hinderer never reacted negatively as the father of the household declared that the entire family will follow Jesus Christ all through their life. The professional of the ministers then has a lot to do in aiding the membership of their Churches. Some of these professions were teaching, nursing, and farming. There is a lot of work that is expected from the Department of Religious Studies in maintaining the ancient landmark.

### **End Time War against the Church**

Wolf in Sheep Clothing is common among the leaders of the Church. It is difficult to identify the true leader to the folk. Heresy is on the higher portions in the Church than it has been in the past. Recently, a leader of the Church named, Prophet Penuel Mnguni, acclaimed General Overseer of End Times Disciples, told his members that they need to masturbate and drop some fluids from their private parts onto the floor and he will grant them their wishes.<sup>13</sup> With all these heretical actions, the relevance of the Church is gradually diminishing as things that a least expected are happening in the sphere of Christian fold. Youths are daily flooding these Churches for lack of knowledge.

War without from Islamic Terrorists is very severe. In the current day of Nigeria, these sects appeared as ISIS, Boko-Haram, Fulani Herdsmen, and Islamic Fundamental human rite activists. Conflicts of the Church against these sects of people have resulted in several chaos and death of Christians.

### **Clarion call of an Educationist to Christian Religious Studies Scholars**

As an educationist, who is outside the scope of the study of Religion, problems of different kinds have been raised in this study which need ways out. Religious Studies Scholars are in the best position to handle some issues, part of which will be presented across the study. The research study realised that many

students of Religious Studies were admitted to the Department when there are no longer options for admission and so sometimes feel inferior amidst their counterparts. Across this research work, a student of Religious Studies was not bold enough to confess before his colleagues that he was admitted for the Study of Religion. He had the inferiority complex that Religious Studies is nothing. It must be infused in the heart of the Students of Religious Studies that they are not inferior to their counterparts from other disciplines.

Pronounced amidst the first and second Niger Expenditure was Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who later became the first black Bishop.<sup>14</sup> Christianity laid the foundation of both the primary and secondary education in Nigeria. Fafunwa recalled that Reverend and Mrs Annear were succeeded by Mr. and Mrs. De Graft who started the first school in Badagry named 'Infant Church Nursery' which was the commencement of formal education in Nigeria.<sup>15</sup> George Asadu presented how Christians established leper colony as part of development to humanities.<sup>16</sup> Christianity of no doubt developed Agriculture, Academic and Health sectors of Nigeria. Christianity is a light in Jesus Christ that shines in darkness as darkness cannot comprehend it.

There has been records of some Pastors in Nigeria with numerous followers and their prophecies are fake.<sup>17</sup> Chima in a study presents that there was sexual exploitation of Female Church Members by 'Prophets' in Nigeria.<sup>18</sup> In his work a prophet told a lady that her private parts and waist have been ravaged by demons. These followers are so gullible and trust in whatever their fake pastors say. The vulnerable ladies of such kind need crusaders who are apologetics from the Study of Religion to savage the problematic situation.

The Department of Religious Studies should promptly address their students to be exposed to the prospects buried in the study of Religion and a need for them to be proud of the study of Religious. Like other professions, Religious Studies has her shoulders high in the public on the other hand; there are many works that one could use the certificate bagged from Religious Studies to hook. Certificate from Religious Studies could be used to work as teacher/ lecturer, work further in the Church, the certificate can be used in immigration offices.

There is also a need of Apologetic Authors to combat things that are warring against the Church. Theistic writings of different kinds will give defense for the Church. Luke the Apostle is a good example from the Acts of Apostles. The Apologetic writings of the Acts of the Apostles by Luke to Theophilus is a good example to emulate. Luke's account gives impression that the whole movement of Christianity was westward towards Europe.<sup>19</sup> Anybody is Christian Religious Studies who is not having flare for writing should be made known not to have reached his or her destination as belonging to such fold should enhance apologetic writings. Asaju made list in his work of Apostolic Fathers who are also apologetic authors such as: such as Clement of Rome (A.D.95), Ignatius of Antioch (110-117 A.D), Polycarp of Smyrna (117-118 A.D), Barnabas of Alexandria (130 A.D), Hermas of Rome (100 A.D),<sup>20</sup> etc, many of them are African Authors who were tools for theology.

The kind of Christian authors writings must be theistic compilations. The Christian Religious Scholars are the expectations that Nigerians are waiting to see on the scene defending the faith. Many of the ecumenical leaders are perplexed with the situation that the actual things to do is not unknown to them. The best this study felt could happen is to request the rise of the Departments of (Christian) Religious Studies to hold their pens for the apologetic message to the Church. Reverend Father Martin Luther, the reformer, was a mere lecturer at Wittenberg<sup>21</sup> and his 95 Theses turned the whole World around as she defended the faith in Christ Jesus with his Pen.

There should not be dichotomy between the ecclesia and the Christian academics. The two sides ought to work together in savaging violence against Christianity. Christian Academics should be the backbone of the Church of the Church. Many Church leaders who are founders emerged their Church's leadership through a displayed gift with almost no knowledge about the essence of the Church. Religious Studies should help in bridging this gap and make Church know what the Creed of the Church is, her vision, past challenges and the current position of the Church. This will aid knowledge of positive performance of the Church. It should not be taken for granted that Church leaders with big regalia know somethings about what they profess, there is need for better education from the Christian Religious Scholars.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

This study is giving a clarion call to all the Study of Religion to for a need to maintain the ancient landmark. The maintenance of what the Christian Religious Studies should be is in the study of religion. The Christian Religious Studies should ensure the fulfilments of teaching Church History in order for Christians to know the rudiments of Christianity and what is expected from their end.

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