Colonialism, Christianity and Cultural Transmutation in Idoma Land of North Central Nigeria, c. 1900 – 1960

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Abstract

In Idoma land, right from the onset, the indigenous culture and religion encompasses the entire superstructure of the society and exert probably the greatest influence in the life and thinking of the people. There was absolutely no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. To be human is to belong to the whole community, thereby, invariably participating in the belief, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the people. The socio-economic and political structures of the people were interconnected to the cultural and religious systems. Given the dialectical nexus between the Christian Missionaries and the political/administrative aspirations of the British colonial government; they unleashed deadly blow on the Idoma culture with the immediate consequence of the introduction of alien values and the disruption of the indigenous machinery of cultural homogeneity and practices. Apart from the economic exploitative agenda, colonialism expressed and deepened ethnocentricism in Idoma land, creating social inequality and enhanced individualism while Christianity, on the other hand, created two classes one being the superogatory and the other the subordinator, thereby, denouncing the cultural inclination of the colonized and christianised people. Based on the historical method of research, using primary and secondary sources, this paper is poised to discuss the trajectory of the foregoing scenarios in Idoma land. The paper fundamentally posits that colonialism and Christianity precipitated changes in the cultural landscape of Idoma land, some of which had debilitating effects on the people.

Key words: Colonialism, Christianity, Cultural Transmutation, Ethno Centrism, Social Inequality.

Introduction

The conquest, suppression and final pacification of Idoma land by the British in the opening decade of the twentieth century, undoubtedly, resulted to the erosion of traditional cultural institution, given that colonialism essentially was a violent phenomenon which disrupted indigenous cultural systems and altered cultural relations between peoples. Cultural progress, which emanated from the age long heritage of a people was deliberately hampered and in its stead, obsoleth and alien forms of social relations were put in place.[1]

The historicity of the cultural effect of colonialism in Idoma land can best be appreciated from the point of view of the extent of bastardization of the cultural system of the people, especially the traditional institution where kingly authority was based. The systematic separation of the secular from the religious; in line with the European liberal political philosophies from the era of the enlightenment, was to wreak havoc to the Idoma precolonial political dynamics.[2] On the other hand, the European Christian missionaries, who were harbingers of the Christian religious in Idoma land were poised to replace what they derogatively termed "pagan" institutions and practices with a civilized authority and system. They vehemently sought the creation of a completely new social order which would wipe away most of the customs and institutions of the "old Idoma Society". Inseparable from the British imperial convictions, the missions perceived no wisdom in compromising with indigenous customs and institutions. They were convinced of the immense superiority of the western culture which Idoma land must wholly absorb, if it was to be rescued from the claws of barbarism, savagery, paganism and superstition.[3] These two western institutions were instrumental to the cultural transformation of Idoma land from the beginning of the twentieth century. The prevailing reality, as a direct consequence of the cultural mutations accentuated by colonialism and Christianity in Idoma land is the fact that traditional values and ethos were subsumed by western and Christian values. Thus, the prevalent mindset which was preponderant in Idoma society is apt to be described as the "retreat of the gods". This paper therefore interrogates colonialism and Christianity in the context of the indigenous cultural system of the Idoma people from the perspective of history. The focus of the paper is to bring to the fore the extent of the cultural changes that was accentuated in the Idoma land as a result of the imposition of colonial rule and the advent of Christianity.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

Given that theories are heuristic devices which assists in shedding light on the nature of the evidence on the used or the mode of analysis adopted, this paper therefore adopts the Marxist perspective of analyzing both colonialism and religion, in this case, Christianity.

The Marxist theory offers a radical alternative to functionalism, as a theoretical model. Marxism views colonialism as a form of capitalism imposing exploitation and social variations.[4]

At the heart of the colonial system is the institutionalization of inequalities, discrimination, and the cause of social tension and conflict. Marxism maintains that all historical societies contain basic contradictions. These contradictions, among others, involve the exploitation of one social group by another.[5] The relevance of this theoretical postulation in relation to Idoma land in the context of its historical dynamics during colonial rule cannot be overemphasized. The nature of social relations between the people and the colonialists was inherently exploitative and created class distinctions, struggle and conflict. Under the guise of "civilizing mission" the people of Idoma land termed as "uncivilized". Idoma were subjected to political domination as a "necessary" precondition for entry into a civilized and liberalized world, created by the imperial West.[6] The goal of this triumphant entry is to be liberated from devil worshipping and to advance to the point where they could be capable of sustaining liberal institutions and self-government. Therefore, "the British were bringing to the dark places of the earth, the abode of cruelty and barbarism, the torch of culture and civilization".[7]

From the Marxist point of view, in addition, religion was rooted in societies that exploited and alienated their members and that the social principles of Christianity does not wholly support the cause of the oppressed and it legitimates the subordination of the subject class and domination of the ruling class. Marxism posits that religion distorts reality and provides many of the deceptions that form the basis of the ruling – class ideology and false class consciousness.[8] In Idoma land, while the European Christian missionaries preached the equality of all races, as a fundamental belief system of the Christian religion, there, however, existed deep seated racial inequality and discrimination upon which the colonial system was premised. In this regard, religion was turned into a potent tool for elitism as seen in the deliberate and conscious creation of a new group of well advanced people who were ultimately dismissive of the indigenous cultural system which predated Christianity.[9]

Idoma Land: Geography, Peoples and Tradition

Idoma land is located in the southern valley of the Benue River. It occupies a continuous stretch of territory extending from the southern banks of the Benue River to the borders of Abakaliki and Nsukka in the South. It has boundaries with Igala land in the West; on the East with Tiv land and on the south – east with Ogoja land.[10] Idoma land is about one hundred and forty four kilometres from north to South and about thirty – two kilometres

from east to west. Thus, it occupies an area of about four thousand, six hundred and eight square kilometres.[11] Lying in the southern part of the Central Nigerian area, the natural vegetation was probably once tropical rain forest, although it has degenerated into "derived savannah" or orchard bush. The relics of tropical forest still survives mainly along the streams and river course and in the southern parts. Idoma land lies within the oil palm belt.[12]

Palm produce, oil and kernel were some of the important exports. Other economic trees found in Idoma land include Iroko, Mahogany, Obeche, Silk cotton and rubber trees. It was the rubber trees that attracted the Hausa rubber collectors to the territory, even before the British established their colonial domination in the area. The trees served the British in the construction of the eastern railway, in building bridges and other colonial infrastructures.[13] The most important single occupation of the inhabitants is farming while subsidiary occupations include hunting, fishing, pottery, cloth – mat – and basket – weaving, wood carving, iron smelters and blacksmithing. From the 1920's onwards, a good amount of food stuff was exported annually to other parts of Nigeria, particularly to Igbo land. The export of food stuffs from Idoma land was encouraged by the passage of the eastern railway through it in the 1920's and the roads in the 1930's from the Southern to the Northern part of Nigeria.[14]

The people of Idoma land are of four main groups, namely the Idoma, the Akweya, the Igede and the Ufia. Of these four groups, the Idoma and the Akweya have a tradition of migration from the Kwararafa for confederacy, which the Idoma refer to as Apa. Igede tradition is silent about Apa and Ufia tradition is definite on their migration from the Cross River valley to their present location. According to Erim, the ancestors of the Idoma lived in small autonomous groups in the valleys of the Gongola and the Upper Benue before 1500 AD, and as a result of unstable social and political conditions in that region, the people migrated in waves at different times from the aforementioned settlements.[15]

The basic unit of social structure in Idoma land was the family, consisting of a man, his wives, their children, and the wives and children of his sons. The compound was also the basic economic unit of the society. The sub – lineage and lineage, which comprised of several compounds related through the male line, both constituted political units in pre – colonial Idoma. The members of each of this units claim descent from a common male ancestor and also identify with a particular parcel of land. Related lineages generally reside around a common council known as *Ojila*, which served as a venue for lineage ceremonies and deliberations.[16]

Before colonial rule was established in Idoma land, nearly every communal project was organized in village (*Ojila*) units. Thus, the construction of roads (footpaths), worship of certain gods, celebration of events such as funerals and organization of age grades were conducted in village units. Each village had a council of elders (Igabo) whose members were selected from all the sub – lineages in the village. The council of elders performed some important functions such as deliberating on religious matters, marriage, death, burial and funeral affairs.[17] The middle – aged men were the next socio – political force. This group was called *Oklokia* (young men). They were responsible for all executive functions in the village. These included political, economic, social and military functions. The organization of secret societies, age – grade associations and dance guilds was in most cases designed to facilitate their discharge of the functions. These were the traditional elite of pre – colonial Idoma society. Most villages had traditional priests who served as the mouth pieces of certain gods and shrines. Although this group of people seemed to be concerned with matters of religion, their pronouncements affected the political, social and economic life of the people. Women played no public role in the political life of the people.[18]

The people of Idoma land believed in the existence of a supreme God who the Idoma call *Owoicho* and the Igede call *Ohe – Oluhe*. The will of this God was communicated to the people through the earth – shrine and the ancestors known as *Alekwu* in Idoma and *Alegwu* in Igede cults. In worshipping the earth shrine and the ancestral cults, the people believed they were communicating with their God in the sky. Although the people believed in the existence of the supreme God, they also believed in the existence of evil forces which were capable of being used by some people against others.[19] Therefore, in order to protect oneself from attack by the people who possess evil powers, one had to worship and offer sacrifices to different types of idols and objects. Some of the popular worshipping places include hill – tops, the bottom of some big trees and some ponds in the rivers and streams. Most of such worshipping places and objects were holy places and not many people could visit there freely before colonial rule and Christianity were established.

The traditional religion of the Idoma permeated all aspects of their life. Amongst the people, to be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so invariably involves participating in the belief, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community. A person, therefore, cannot detach himself from the religion of the clan. To do so is to be severed from ones root, ones foundation, his context of security and survival. His kinship and the entire group of those who make him aware of his existence.[20]

Every person in Idoma land is believed to be the result of a reincarnation process, usually by the influence of a dead relative, transformed and living among other 'living dead' of the society. Only the head of the family, *Adole*, can conduct ritual sacrifices or libations on behalf of the family. This point reinforces, at the family level, the gerontocratic order of the society at large. All those who ceased to exist in the world of the living are believed to have passed into the world of the "living – dead", known as *Alekwu*. Though seemingly detached from their kin in the living community on earth. The *Alekwu* in Idoma society keep keen interest in the activities of the living, and are believed to protect the society from any impending danger or external aggression.[21] In recognition of the powers of the *Alekwu*, which is a manifestation of God's delegated power to more higher forces than mere mortals, the people kept contact with them through libations and ritual ceremonies. Only those men who had attained the age of about fifty years or more and who have children are believed to have joined the ancestral cult in the world of the "living dead". Furthermore, not all dead fathers are members of the ancestral cult, for admission into this cult had special conditions to be met, because the ancestors were believed to have the powers over life. According to an informant, "this traditional arrangement from time immemorial is important for political and social order and for individual sense of security".[22]

The *Alekwu* in Idoma society presupposes the triumph of parenthood and recognizes the imperative of the moral norms, emanating from society, and guiding it from inordinate immoral attachments and evil tendencies. Closely related to the above is the land known as *Aje*, which is regarded as sacred in Idoma society because, it not only contains the dead, or the "living dead", but sustains the living in a society of sedentary agriculturalists who ultimately depended on the land for their substenace.[23] This was the prevailing belief system amongst the Idoma people on the eve of the British conquest and the advent of the European Christian missionaries.

The Colonization and Christianization of Idoma Land

There was no attempt at Christian Missionary enterprise in Idoma land prior to colonial conquest and rule. In this respect, therefore, colonialism paved the way for missionary enterprise in Idoma land rather than vice – versa as was the case in the southern parts of Nigeria and even in these southern parts, it has been correctly observed that the spread of Christianity did not make any serious headway until the conquest and establishment of colonial rule.[24] It is therefore, logical, in this context, to firstly discuss the historical circumstances of the British colonial conquest and establishment of colonial rule before discussing the process of the evolution and development of Christianity in the area, and how they precipitated the cultural transformation of Idoma land.

The British colonial conquest of Idoma land was part of the grand imperialist plan to conquer the various polities within the Nigerian area which involved, among others, the removal of all visible resistance to the imposition of their rule, geared towards the actualization of the economic interest of colonialism.[15] Thus, the military conquest of Idoma land commenced in 1899 when, capitalizing on the age – long hostility between the Idoma and the Hausa traders, the British initiated the systematic penetration and occupation of Idoma land, characterized by the wanton display of brutal force. Due to resistance to alien rule, the Idoma colonial episode was particularly bitter. Villages were burnt down, considerable number of inhabitants killed, foodstuffs and livestocks were confiscated. Northern and Central Idoma land was subjugated by the British troops operating from their base at Ankpa. In 1910, Adoka was revisited to ensure what the British termed the complete elimination of the stigmata of a primitive people.[26] In that year, a boundary demarcation expedition under Captain Byn – Hall passed through Ugboju and Onyagede to link up with their counterparts from Southern Nigeria in Otukpo territory. In their military patrols, and during the Niger Cross expedition of 1908 – 1909 under Colonel Trenchard, many Idoma villages, despite resistance were pacified. Despite the high handedness with which the British military officials carried out their assignments, resistance in Idoma land was partly hampered by lack of unity and the fact that the resistance were ill – organized, compared to the superior military might of the British.[27]

Colonial policies and actions in Idoma land reflected a deep seated prejudice against the Idoma. The dimension of such preconceptions was such that the people acquired the unpleasant stereotype of being singularly "barbaric, ill – tempered, intransigent and of low intelligence".[28] All the reports of the colonial administrators about the people well illustrated this point. As V.G Okwu contends, "this savage brutality which characterized the occupation of Idoma land produced on the part of the Idoma bitterness, distrust and aloofness towards the colonial administration".[29]

The British, fascinated by the Emirate political system in the upper north, attempted to rule the Idoma people under the Native Administration, using alien District heads in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and the Idoma naturally refused to cooperate. The British were obsessed with the presumed superior intelligence and powers of the Hausa and Fulani caste. This however, gave rise to a number of significant developments which affected the administration of the non – Muslim areas generally throughout the Northern Provinces.[30] Categorized under the "Pagan tribes", and "in a low level of political development" Idoma land, according to V.G. Okwu, became a punishment Division under colonial rule, for recalcitrant staff and possibly a dumping ground for mediocre officials. British conservatism, which was predicated on the unscientific concept of racial

superiority, greatly influenced the colonial government's perception and attitude towards the Idoma people. Therefore, Fredrick Lugard made frantic effort to assimilate the administration of "pagan" areas to the emirate model. The British colonial administration's solution to the virtual absence of an overriding influence which could hold the disperate peoples together as Islam had done in the emirate was the gradual formation of "pagan" groups into "tribal" units under paramount chiefs of their "race". This encouraged the "tribalization" of the Idoma who in the course of the development of this policy became increasingly aware of their socio-cultural affiliations.[31]

After what was clearly a series of internal boundary adjustments, Idoma land was then broken into twenty – one administrative units called Districts, based to some extent, on the *Aje* (land) which represented the territory occupied by a kindred group at the time of British conquest. When the Idoma opposed the practice of appointing alien Muslim District Heads, the colonial administrators started to appoint indigenous District Heads and those appointed were not necessarily titled holders. Prior to colonial rule, it was usually the most suitable senior elder of the appropriate lineage that was elected to such position as *Oche Aje* (Chief) but because the colonial administration wanted effective agents, age and other traditional qualifications meant nothing. The traditional process of selecting chiefs were blatantly violated.[32] The *Oche Aje* was reduced to the position of a "Clan Head" or "Districts Head" and he became a mere executive functionary. Thus, in the place of the highly respected elderly chiefs of the past had emerged a new class of "chiefs" who ensured the execution of the unpopular policies of the British. Thus, apart from being particularly autocratic in the discharge of their duties, this category of chiefs became oppressive and corrupt. These, together with the economic benefits the office bequeathed, turned it into a sort of center of attraction to the younger and more ambitious members of the society, resulting in the final analysis, into the convulsive phenomenon of unregulated struggles for succession for which the Idoma were well known during this period.[33]

Studies abound about how the Christian missionaries came to be perceived as agents of British imperialism and how they spread tales about the military might of their own country and even persuaded the indigenous people to accept British rule as the only panacea for the political and social evils that had engulfed the Nigerian area".[34] Therefore, Christian evangelism became an instrument in the softening up process which ultimately led to the British conquest of Nigeria.

The introduction of Christianity in Idoma land goes hand in hand with the passage of the railway from Southern to Northern Nigeria. Many of the Christian converts, who were basically labourers from Igbo land came to Igumale District in Idoma land. Given that they

were far from home and needed pastoral attention, missionaries from the Methodist, Roman Catholic, the Church Missionary Society and the Christian Mission in many Land were instrumental in providing the needed attention from 1921.[35]

From inception, the aim of all the Christian Missionaries was basically to convert as many Idoma people as possible, but that notwithstanding, keen competition existed between them. The Methodists and the Roman Catholics were the largest Christian missions in Idoma land but were also the strongest rivals. This acute rivalry revealed the other dimension of the missionary enterprise in Idoma land side by side with their Christianization agenda. So intense was their rivalry that it culminated in some cases to deep-seated misunderstanding and even open confrontation on matters of doctrines and other societal issues that had little or no bearing on their main calling. This prompted Reverend Father Shanahan to once remarked that "We have been in an atmosphere of war and of conquest! War with the Protestants… War with the Pagans, war with enemies in different forms.[36] The expansion of Catholicism persisted to the annoyance and fear of the Methodists and the Anglicans. By 1930, the visible monopoly which the Methodists, and by extension, the Protestants had in Idoma land ended. This precipitated the unification of all the Protestant missions in Idoma land. Thus, in 1932, all the Anglican Churches in Idoma land were handed over to the Methodist Church as a result of this unification. The educational and societal transformation of Idoma land was largely the handiwork of the Christian missionaries. Christianity, in addition, served as an ideological tool for the political development of Idoma land in the context of the evolving political dynamics of the Post World War II political development in Northern Nigeria.[37] However, the identification of the Christian religion with European cultural preferences, at least going by the actions and inactions of the missionaries who operated in Idoma land up to the attainment of national independence, was considered ethnocentric and in some instances constituted a clog on the wheel of progress of Christianity amongst the people.

The idea behind the inculturation of Christianity in Idoma land was conceived partly in response to address the ethnocentricism of the activities of the missions. To start with, the missionaries felt that the indigenous people were in the grip of a system that was entirely irrational from which they ought to be liberated.[38] Christianity, therefore, was presented as a frontal attack on the beliefs, the customs and the social structures and basis of the Idoma society. This rationalization was based squarely upon a persistent major assumption that, with the advent of Christianity, all the "primitive religions" were destined to perish and disappear. Therefore, the missionaries, in the execution of their "divine mandate" could not shade off the concomitant colonial mentality of their time. Rather, they mixed imperial realities with the message of Christianity and bequeathed a

somewhat distorted image of the religion to their teeming followers.[39] Not only was the religions brought by the European missionaries presumed to be higher than African indigenous religions, but European values and institutions were considered superior to those of Africans, Idoma land inclusive.

Cultural Transmutation in Idoma Land

The essential drawback of Christianity, as brought by the European missionaries before World War II, was that it could not completely overcome racial and ethnic differences. The mission churches appeared as accomplices of colonialism in many African societies. It is indisputable that European missionaries, in some instances, championed the cause of their Christian converts and had good relations with them, but the hierarchy of colonial society and European class distinctions, were rarely transcended in the daily life of mission stations, and they hardly ever intermarried, especially amongst the Protestants.[40]

The necessity of creating Christian brotherhood was proclaimed from the pulpit, but, in practical terms, the task could hardly be achieved as a result of the gross inequalities of the colonial milieu. The reasons for all of these cannot be farfetched. The idea of European cultural superiority and ethnocentric nationalism was the dominant theme during this epoch. Therefore, progress in whatever form, and moral excellence were all regarded as aspects of monolithic whole – the concept of Christian civilization. Thus, the European missionaries worked tirelessly at emasculating the local converts to Christianity from their traditional culture in Idoma land. In the words of Walter Rodney, "… in serving colonialism, the church often took up the role of arbiter of what was culturally correct and African ancestral beliefs were equated with the devil…"[41] To buttress this further, Bishop Herbert Tugwell remarked that … "England is the only hope of this country and the gospel the only power that can effectually set them free"[42]

From the cultural prism, the Christian missionaries rejected the Idoma indigenous belief system in its entirely. Most elders regarded this as an offence to the ancestors, *Alekwu*. From the 1940's, only a few elders attended church services seriously and some of the elders who attended church services had to combine the indigenous religion with Christianity, giving rise to syncretism. Christianity, at this stage, had barely touched the core of the life of most Idoma people. In spite of their being christened as Christians, some people held the beliefs of the traditional religion. When faced with ill-health or natural calamities, some of these Christians discreetly practiced the old religion, particularly the invocation of ancestral spirits of the *Alekwu*.[43] Though Christianity, up to the 1960's had become the dominant religion in Idoma land; a form of syncretism, however, had evolved, as Christianity was practiced side by side with traditional beliefs. In spite of the perceived

"triumph of the Cross", as championed by the missionaries, nearly everybody that converted believed in the possibility of malediction and witchcraft within the world view of the indigenous religion. This state of affair was exacerbated when, from the early 1960's some of the missionaries contended that the Church ought to identify itself with traditional insights by co – opting and transcending them, thinking that through this way; it will be possible that the entire traditional spectrum will ultimately be permeated with Christian values. This logic, in spite of its supposed articulated benefits, seems to be ill founded in practical terms. In Idoma land, at least at the early stage of its experimentation, many converts, having not properly grasped the theological logic behind this teaching, took it to mean a gradual relapse to the traditional religion which they properly understood and grasped. There were instances, based on circumstances, in which Christianity and the traditional religion were mixed for various reasons. For example, when the purchase of fowls, goats, dogs etc. for sacrifice to the *Alekwu* (ancestral spirits was more expensive, than simply becoming Christians, some elders would pretend to be Christians, but when they fell ill or fell into trouble of one kind or the other, they would go back to plead and worship the *Alekwu*.[44]

Meanwhile, majority of the elders regarded this syncretistic practice as being dangerous because they believed that these two opposing 'deities' could punish those who combined their worship. For this reason, many parents even tried to prevent their children from attending Church services. However, many Idoma liked schools where their children could acquire the 'white man's' knowledge of reading, writing and speaking English.

Nevertheless, the cherished Christian idea of the equality of all people in the sight of God was believed to be taken to the extreme. Young people who occupied seats in the Churches before the arrival of the few elders, who cared to attend and most times came late, did not vacate their seats for these elders, quite contrary to the seniority principle upheld by the Idoma society in the precolonial General Assembly (*Ojila*). This attitude of the young men was bitterly resented by the few elders who accepted Christianity. According to local custom, children and young people must always vacate seats for elderly people in any situation at all times, when both youths and elders had to seat together.[45] Local people in Idoma land, therefore, felt that their children became arrogant and disobedient when they attend Church services. To this situation, Jonah Elaigion remarked thus:

> The advent of Christian religion marked the beginning of a new center for the challenge of kingly and elderly authority, especially by those whom the new faith provided excuse for evading certain traditional obligations.[46]

Equally, Okpeh O. Okpeh posited that the impact of Christianity on Idoma traditional religion and cultural orientation was predominantly negative. He said that:

> With the advent of Christian religion, the belief system of the traditional religion was shattered, uprooted, stripped of its identity and thrown overboard in most families in the communities.[47]

Further, the Christian teaching which discouraged the fear and reverence of ancestral spirits and idols, and regarded those who fell into such practices as guilty of the grave sin of idolatry, was regarded by the elderly as sacrilegious. Yong Christians who committed crimes with their colleagues who practiced the traditional religion, always refused to swear an oath to prove their innocence, while the traditionalists, apart from confessing to their crimes for fear of the ancestral spirits, *Alekwu* still maintained the sacredness of oath taking. This prevailing circumstances, especially from the 1940's discouraged some people from allowing their children to enter a Church building. They maintained that if their children became Christians, they would be free to steal or commit any crime because there would be no oath to prevent them. This situation occurred in Igumale District of Idoma land in 1944.[48]

The people viewed the Christian God in abstract terms, and a metaphysical being whose existence they could not perceive with their eyes, contrary to their traditional religion where people often see the representatives of their gods physically. Thus, they feared the gods they could see more than the invisible. Church and schools were regarded as the same because of the missionary's emphasis on the conversion of pupils to Christianity. Locals believed that Christianity and western education brought about loose behaviours among young people as it destroyed the traditional family bond and restrictions imposed by the society. On the other hand, young people regarded schools and Christian teachings as a liberation from their traditional fears and family restrictions. With all these mixed feelings, some local people rejected the Church and Schools, as exemplified in Odaje village Otukpo, where an early morning Church service was rudely and violently disrupted in June, 1935.[49] Traditional authority and legitimacy was grossly eroded and the challenge of kingly authority became the order of the day.

The advent of Christianity marked the beginning of the end of age grade associations, *ego*. Traditional and customary ceremonies such as the *Alekwu* ceremonies gradually received less attention and enthusiasm than during the pre-Christian era. From 1930, ceremonies such as Christmas, Easter, Good Friday and Empire Day began to receive more attention than some of the traditional ceremonies. From the 1940's, Christian converts began to

perform their marriages, death, burial and naming ceremonies according to the Christian rites, and polygamy was regarded by the new order as a violation to Christianity and the acquisition of western education marked the entry into a new life which was more comparable and approximated to the life style of Europeans.[50]

It is also instructive to note that virtually all the political appointments carried out by the British colonial administrators in Idoma land were arbitrary and undermined the traditional basis of legitimacy of Idoma traditional rulers, reason why these appointments met strong opposition from the people. All the British colonialists were concerned about was to get people who could extend the influence of the colonial administration. The main purpose of their political appointments and imposition of stooges was a step towards the institutionalization of colonial taxation, forced labour and the administration of justice in the society, as colonial particularism will not had provided a fertile ground for the just and equal participation of the locals into its affairs.[51] And in doing so, the colonialists blatantly abused, distorted and undermined the indigenous and traditional preconditions for the selection of traditional chiefs.

Conclusion

The thrust of this paper is an analysis of the various cultural changes that occurred in Idoma land, particularly in the aspect of the people's customs and practices, as a result of the advent of colonialism and Christianity. The paper posited that colonialism paved the way for Christianity in Idoma land, and that these two agencies were instrumental in the distortion of the traditions and culture of the people. The paper fundamentally argued that right from its inception, Christianity did not come to terms with the indigenous belief system of the Idoma, as seen in the attitudes of the Christian missionaries who outrightly condemned and vilified the traditional religion and even equated it with devil worshipping.

On the part of the Idoma people, they received the introduction of the Christian religion with mixed feelings. While there were aspects of the new religion the people condoned, there were other aspects they disliked too. What initially evolved was a sort of a syncretistic tendencies as both of the religions, old and new, were simultaneously practiced, depending on the prevailing circumstances. The extent of the complete entrenchment of the Christian value system into the Idoma society, coupled with its capacity to replace the indigenous religion of the pre – Christian era was marginal. However, Christianity wreaked havoc on the indigenous belief system, like the belief in the *Alekwu* ancestors. New practices, beliefs and activities that were Christian in

orientation were subsequently introduced to the detriment of the age long traditional belief of the people.

Colonialism on the other hand, obstructed, disrupted and undermined the traditional chieftaincy system of the Idoma. In appointing their stooges and surrogates, the British had no recourse to the traditional conditions of appointing chiefs but acted arbitrarily, geared towards institutionalizing colonial taxation, forced labour and an alien system of justice in a predominantly traditional society.

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