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POVERTY AND IGNORANCE: CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN EVANGELISATION IN NSUKKA CULTURAL ZONE

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ABSTRACT

This study sets out to investigate the reason, why some people relapse after a period of time, to African Traditional Religion Practices after embracing Christianity. It was observed that some of our youths today due to inordinate quest for wealth, get themselves involved in money rituals, frauds, worship of idols and re-establishment of forgotten and abandoned deities. This study discovered that the cause of this relapse is due to poverty, ignorance, quest for wealth and lack of proper conversion. The research further shows that, even though some Christians patronise African Traditional Religious Practices, this does not mean that they are returning to the said religion, rather it is more of patronage than conversion. The paper therefore recommends that for the Christian Religious communities in Nsukka Cultural Zone to curb this, they should repackage their method of teaching catechesis to be more convincing, attractive and appealing to the youths without changing the essence of doctrines. The method used in this work is historic-descriptive.

Keywords: Poverty, Ignorance, Challenge, Christianity, Evangelisation, Nsukka Cultural Zone.

INTRODUCTION

Evangelisation is from the word evangelise which means to advocate a cause with the object of making converts.

1. To preach the gospel
2. To convert to Christianity
3. To promulgate or promote (a doctrine or idols for example) enthusiastically. (The free dictionary).

The Vatican II Document talks equally of New Evangelisation as:
The church's response to the challenge of communicating the Christian faith in ever-changing societies and cultures. This involves a renewed impetus for ongoing dialogue with a secularity which pervades in societies which may or may not have been evangelized in the past (Robinson 2012:1).

This term "new evangelization" was coined by John Paul II. He described it as "a commitment not to evangelization, but rather of a new evangelization; new in its ardour, methods and expression (John Paul II, 1983:1)". This does not imply a redoing of a thing which has not been ab-initio inadequately done or something that has not achieved its purpose as if the new activity is an implicit judgment on the failure of first evangelization: nor is it repeating the past or is it taking up the first evangelization again. Rather, it is the strength and courage to

forge new paths in response to the changing circumstances facing the Church in her call to live and proclaim the gospel today.

A Critical reflection on this study shows that even though African Traditional Religion is perceived as pagan and a wrong religion, African Christians still support and endorse practices that are of ATR. The methodology of conversion and sustaining of conversion adopted by the Christian missionaries did not deter African Christians from returning to the ATR. ATR is still been patronized by people when faced with practical life issues and challenges, life choices, ailments etc. Even though the missionaries offered various services that were humanitarian in nature this includes the rehabilitation of slaves and the socially disadvantaged people. The missionaries created and sponsored the re-habilitation homes. They created homes where they kept early converts. One notable and observable fact is that despite the efforts of the missionaries to transform the heart of the Africans from ATR. The hearts of many still remained in the religion (ATR) and traditional practices. This regular identification with ATR and traditional practices seems to suggest that for most part that the conversion to Christianity was external and not internal (from the heart). This externality can be observed sometimes thus, the illiterate become learned, the rural dweller dwells in the city but the intrinsic and the inner nature was not converted nor changed. Buttressing this Mbiti (1992) said that:

> *When Africans are converted to other religions, they often mix their traditional religion with the one to which they are converted. In this way, they think and feel that they are not losing something valuable, but are gaining something from both religious systems.*

There are reasons also why people fall back to ATR. First for protection against spiritual attacks which the individual perceives as caused by spiritual forces like witches, evil spirit and ancestral deities, secondly, people still go back to ATR when they are confronted with serious challenging life issues like when one is not able to conceive and bear children.

According to Akinmayowa (2019:33):

> *This is very different from what some scholars have referred to as lack of total conversion to…, Christianity… There are practices that ATR allows but are forbidden in… Christianity… such practices include patronage of diviners and seeking solution to problem through means that are not prescribed in… the Bible.*

When these means are patronized by Christians as it is forbidden in the Bible. It is viewed by many as a conversion to ATR (from Christianity) which in real fact may not be, but a partial conversion and lack, or rejection of some aspects or elements of the Christian belief and doctrine. This is against the backdrop of some notable scholars like Mbiti that are of the view that African Christians convert back to ATR after some period of being initiated into Christianity.

Although Christianity does not encourage African Traditional Religion patronage, many Christians believe that after patronizing ATR that they can return to their religion and ask for forgiveness from God. Many believe that return to ATR is only a solution seeking movement

that is embarked upon to resolve practical life issues and not an abandonment of Christianity. To buttress this Ejizu ( ) was of the view that:

> *Severe misfortune like sickness, death and spirit possession are significant developments that motivate religious conversion.*

The emphasis is not on conversion but on patronage. The African Traditional Religion is patronized while holding on to Christianity. It is the nature of Africans not to abandon their culture even when they have been converted to the new religion.

POVERTY

Poverty has been defined by (Ighadalo, 2012:52) United Nations (1998) cited in Gordon (2005:4):

> *As a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities, it means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation.*

According to (Barnes, 2010:1):

The poor are people who have insufficient income and inadequate food intake, lack basic healthcare, lack shelter and safe-drinking water, have power-environmental cleanliness, lack access to basic education and skills, are ignorant of fundamental human rights and lack access to information.

Despite the plentiful agricultural resources, and oil wealth in Nigeria, poverty has continued to ravage the greater population. Stressing this indubitable fact Ayegba (2015:) is of the view that: "Some of the crimes being committed in Nigeria, such as human trafficking, kidnapping, armed robbery and various insurgencies, may be linked to poverty"

Peace and sustainable development have been much hampered by these crimes. Nigeria is the tenth largest producer of crude oil in the world and the sixth largest exporter among organizations of petroleum exporting countries (OPEC)s (Odeh 2011:4). This is inclusive to other untapped natural resources and minerals in the country. Nigeria has slumped and retrogressed to be among the first twenty five poorest nations in the world. A considerable number of Nigerians live below US $1.25 a day. Poverty is more severe in the rural areas where majority of the population live below the poverty line.

Many Nigerians today are migrating to foreign countries especially to the West because of unemployment and poverty. Among the 189 countries that endorsed the millennium Development Goals in 2000, was Nigeria. They had the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger as its number one goal before the elapse of 2015. Over the years, the Nigerian government has instituted policies and programme for poverty alleviation, eradication and

reduction. Despite these efforts, amidst corruption among the governing class and some citizens, Poverty has persisted and continued to create socio-economic challenges.

POVERTY AND SUDDEN WEALTH

Because of this hard economic challenge, some people resolve to make money by any means irrespective of the moral consequences and implications, to this end Omegoh et al (2022:1) wrote to say that that:

> *There is no pretence anymore, Nigeria has never been at such crossroads as another monster of gargantuan size and stature-ritual killing for money-bulldozes its way into the national psyche, staring everyone in the face. It has a dimension of a national malaise. Denying this evil is awful, fruitless and needless. This is the reality many are now slowly, but regrettably beginning to acknowledge.*

Abduction of people over the years has been on a shocking rise. People from time to time just vanish without trace. Stories have been told by the few who came home alive about the unbelievable and nightmarish tales of what they passed through and saw in camps where they were taken to for ritual. There, before their own eyes victims were dismembered in a devastating, shocking gruesome, mindless orgy, leaving their blood streaming down in rivulets. "Their essential parts were chopped off there and then, and kept away for customer who needed them" (Omegoh 2022:1). The people, who are behind these sales of human parts trade, are the medicine men and women who prepare these charms for their clients to enable them make money which they never worked for. They therefore abduct their victims kill them, and later discard their remains, when the buying of an already harvested parts are not available. Then, they go on to use what they have in alliance with their juju doctors. How this is done is a mystery yet to be unraveled.

These yahoo boys as they are called who does this, in the beginning dwelt mainly on scamming and defrauding of people in the internet, gradually this developed into human rituals. It is the believe of some people however, that "money ritual" has already attained a high proportion of epidemic menace threatening treacherously the real existence of the Nigerian society that is already in distress and shambles, and spreading faster than ever imagined.

IDOL WORSHIP: The Effect of Ignorance and Quest for Sudden Wealth

The revival of idol worship and heathenism by some youths after over hundred years of the advent of Christianity in Igboland is becoming worrisome. Stressing this fact, Okonkwo cited by Okose (2021:1) was of the view that:

> *The rate at which some Igbo youths these days drifted into idol worship was too alarming and wondered how, after jettisoning heathenism and its characteristic idolatry about 164 years ago, some people in Igbo land ignorantly turned round to reintroduce the long forgotten lifestyles, which he described as "satanic, abominable evil and dangerous practices".*

The guest for sudden wealth have made some of our youths to go back to the worship of idols and abandoned deities in Igboland. They believe that patronizing these deities and sacrificing to them brings about sudden fortune.

This does not mean that they are no longer Christians nor place Christianity secondary to idol worship. The fact is that they paid this allegiance to whatever it be that brings this quick money; be it the devil himself or the deity-all they want is money.

Poor knowledge of the Christian doctrine (ignorance) after the preliminary catechetical instructions before baptism is another major factor that makes our youths to start paying allegiance to idols and deities. There is a great need therefore for an ongoing catechetical teachings and instructions for these youths in order that they be deep rooted in the Christian faith.

The negative effect of the Nollywood movies as well has a serious damaging and devastating impact on the psyche of our youths. Most of the Nollywood films are based on secret cult, rituals, human sacrifice and their impact, influence in acquiring (sudden) wealth. This to a great extent has triggered off this sudden guest and desire for quick money through rituals, sacrifices and idol worship.

The social media in Nigeria with its idolization of wealth and promotion of people of affluence at the detriment of the poor and the less privileged, has made some people mainly youths to get rich quick by any means regardless of what the implication and consequences might be in order to be reorganized by the society.

FINDINGS

The findings of this work suggest that:

1. Even though some Christians patronize ATR, this does not mean that they are returning back to ATR. It is more of patronage than conversion.
2. The Christian Communities in Nsukka Cultural Zone should devise a means of repackaging the catechesis without changing the essence of the Christian Message so as to make it more attractive to the youths, in order that their interest in the church's teaching be sustained. This as well will help curb this hydra-headed menace.
3. The Catholic Church as well has been of great help towards the alleviation of poverty in Nsukka Cultural Zone. She should be encouraged to do more towards youth empowerment, skill acquisition and creating of more job opportunities for the youths, even though this is not the duty of the Church but of the government.
4. The various Christian Denominations in Nsukka should through her consistent preaching and teaching wake up the government from her slumber, insensitivity, ineptitude and apathy towards unemployment and youths restiveness.

CONCLUSION

The Church in her mission to evangelise all peoples, especially in Nsukka Cultural Zone, should as apriority at this point in time organize a synod on this on-going menace, onslaught, relapse of faith and Christian commitment and listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in fashioning a better way of making the gospel new in its approach and ardor as recommended by Pope John Paul II. With this in view and by catechizing the people more on the bane and

vanity of material things as against the substance therein in heavenly things, a better Christian society will be made.

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