

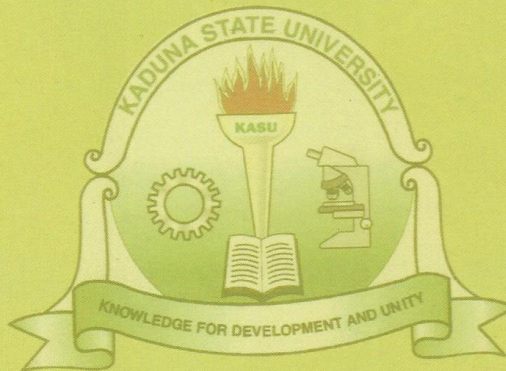


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# Christian Missionary Activities, Colonialism and the African Mentality: A Case Study of Nigeria and the Belgian Congo

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## **Abstract**

It is common knowledge that faith, fame and fortune motivated European incursion into Africa. There were, however, different agencies that carried out these objectives with the aim of disentanglement. The Christian missionaries saddled themselves with proselytizing, while colonial officials were charged with bringing fame to their home country, which will ultimately translate into fortune. Ostensibly, therefore—for the most part—colonialism and missionary activities operated as two parallels. Some scholars, however, remain unconvinced that each was independent of the other. While the extent to which one affected the other remains debatable, it is incontrovertible that Christianity was at the very least a good tool in, consciously or subconsciously, tempering the minds of Africans, which invariably aided colonial administration. The paper argues that together both Christianity and colonialism had lingering effect on the general African mentality. Three theories of imperialism ('conversionism', 'paternalism' and 'racial subordination') are adopted in presenting this argument. The case study of Nigeria and the Belgian Congo is important to our understanding in the sense that, although Britain and Belgium had contrasting colonial structures and missionary strategies, Nigerians and the Congolese suffered the same fate.

## **Introduction**

Christianity has always been a proselytizing religion. The bible records Jesus' great commission as: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15). In Africa Christianity is neither a recent happening nor a by-product of colonialism, but goes back to the Apostles' very time. The Church flourished on the northern and eastern shores of this continent, particularly in Carthage and

in Egypt to the north and Ethiopia to the east, for 600 years before Islam's arrival. Sadly, through Arab occupation, starting in 640, it received a heavy blow, surviving as an oppressed though significant minority in Egypt until today.

The same influence cannot be said to have been the case in the more interior locations of West and Central Africa. During the epoch of European exploration and expansion, however, the situation changed. Following missionary work in many places under Portuguese patronage, another king was carrying the torch of faith south of the Sahara: Afonso of the Kongo (1506-1543) helped by his son Henrique, the first bishop from Bantu tribes. For over 300 years this king's successors tried to maintain links with the Pope and brought as many as 440 Capuchins into the country (1645-1835).<sup>1</sup> Portuguese expansion during this period also brought Christianity to the shores of West Africa, particularly Benin, Nigeria. These efforts were, however, not as successful in converting Africans and entrenching Christianity in the continent until concerted efforts of European and American missionaries started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by both Protestant and Catholic churches.

Incidentally, the 19<sup>th</sup> century also coincided with another important landmark in the continent's history. After many years of informal imperial occupation of Africa by European powers like Britain, France, Portugal and Germany, a heightened impetus in the scramble for spheres of influence on the continent was a catalyst for the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, where the continent was formally shared among these powers thus marking the beginning of European colonization of Africa proper. While the administrative styles of these super powers were different—with the French, Portuguese and German operating a highly centralized rule, and the British being a decentralizing power—their intents were largely the same. The objectives of this 'New Imperialism' were similar to those of European exploration: to add to the prestige of the metropolis, serve as veritable source of raw materials and markets for finished goods, and lastly, the civilization of the 'dark continent'.

Though the case could be made that Christian Missionaries, acting independently of colonial authorities, neither sought fame nor fortune, but had civilization through the introduction of the 'true religion'—Christianity—as a priority aim. Because of the contemporaneity of both colonization and missionary activities it became inevitable that both processes would somewhat reinforce or influence each other. The essay attempts to give an account of missionary activities in Nigeria and Belgian Congo, drawing on the influences their colonial back-

ground had on this process. The remainder of the essay is, therefore, divided into four sections: a brief history of Christian missionary activities in Nigeria and Belgian Congo; the functional relationship between colonialism and Christian missionary activities and the impact of such relationship on Africans.

### **Christian Missionary Activities in Nigeria**

Christian missionaries in any part of the continent did not always come under a uniform umbrella as there were several denominations. It is important to note, however, that both the protestant and catholic churches were involved in these missionary activities. In this case study, therefore, a brief description of both Protestant and Catholic missionary activities are discussed. Because Protestant missions themselves did not come under a uniform umbrella, it is important to state here that emphasis are placed on the Anglican-owned Church Missionary Society.

#### ***Protestant Mission***

The foundations of missionary activities in Nigeria were laid in the Niger expedition of 1841. Delegates were commissioned by the British Crown to negotiate with important local chiefs treaties for the abolition of slave trade and to replace such trade with a friendly commercial relationship between the British and the natives of Africa. Trade was not the only item the British Government was interested in, in the instructions given to the leaders of the expedition the government enjoined them to tell the native rulers 'that the Queen and the people of England profess the Christian religion; and that by this religion they are commanded to assist in promoting goodwill, peace. And brotherly love, among all nations and men; and that in endeavoring to commence further intercourse with the African nations, Her Majesty's Government is actuated and guided by these (Christian) principles.'<sup>2</sup> This was particularly the reason why the Church Mission Society (C.M.S) was very involved in the expedition.

The immediate outcome of the expedition was that, of the 162 white men who embarked on the journey through the three ships of Wilberforce, the Albert, and the Sudan, 54 died of malaria.<sup>3</sup> Accompanying the troop was a certain Bishop Ajayi Crowther, who was an ex-slave boy of Yoruba parentage that had been based in Sierra Leone. Given the large number of recorded deaths and the fact that only one of the ships survived, this expedition was largely a failed one. It was however a catalyst for two future successful ones of which Samuel Ajayi Crowther played an important part, 1954 and 1957.

Meanwhile, between 1793 and 1842, about 500 freed-slaves in Sierra-Leone had returned to Badagry and other parts of Yoruba land. The immigrants at Badagry had sent urgent messages and earnest entreaties to the missionaries in Sierra Leone to send Christian teachers. The response to this appeal was the birth of missionary activity in Yoruba land. This was what led Thomas Birch Freeman being sent to Badagry by the Methodist Church. He was accompanied by William Graft and his wife. There in Badagry they were permitted to establish a mission station, which was completed on 24 December, 1842. That same month Reverend Henry Townsend of the Church Missionary society arrived in Badagry and worshipped with Reverend Birch Freeman. However, by the period these missionaries got to Badagry, they met the traditional rulers divided into factions. In Badagry, one of the factions favoured the advent of missionaries, whose presence, it was hoped, would confer definite political and military advantages on their patrons. In Badagry, there arose pro-missionary and anti-missionary factions. Wawu, chief of English town in Badagry professed hatred for the slave-trade, love for legitimate trade and the warmest of friendliness towards the British. He welcomed the missionaries and English traders in order to use them to claim a first-class status.<sup>4</sup>

On 29 December 1842, Townsend left Badagry for Egbaland. He was received by Oba Sodeke of Abeokutá. All commercial activities were suspended to welcome the Missionaries to Egbaland since they requested for them to plant Christianity in the land. By this time Townsend had formed a partnership with Samuel Ajayi Crowther who was instrumental in communicating with the natives in Yoruba language. The Missionaries established Mission Station in Abeokuta on 27 July, 1846. Abeokuta was made the Headquarters of the other Mission Stations for Yorubaland. In 1847, the Church Missionary Society planted their Missions in the following towns: Ake-Owu, Ikija-Itoku, and Igbein. The missionaries established Sunday school and primary schools for both the old and young people in Egbaland. The people of Egba, therefore, raised no objection to their children being initiated into the white man's mystery of reading and writing. They saw the advantages of imitating his technological superiority in house-building and cotton-ginning.<sup>5</sup>

Abeokuta served as a home place for those freed slaves that settled there. While in Abeokuta, they practiced their Christian faith. They also preached the religion to others who were not Christians. However, in Egbaland, missionary propaganda from its beginning was bound up with political considerations. The political situation was such that the first time missionaries arrived in the land, the tradi-

tional rulers in Egba were divided into factions. But, one faction favoured the advent of missionaries, whose presence, they hoped, would confer definite political and military advantages on their leaders. At Abeokuta, there arose pro-missionary and anti-missionary factions. For several years, the position of the Egba had been insecure. Often they encountered with their neighbours. Driven southwards from their once flourishing towns, over 100 townships had settled in Abeokuta about 1830 under the leadership of Sodeke.

The military state of Ibadan on the north-east and the relatively tranquil Ijebu state on the south-east, which had contributed to their misfortunes, were still hostile neighbours. To the west laid the powerful military kingdom of Dahomey, under Gezo, dedicated to their destruction. Although the Owiwi war of about 1833, in which they defeated the Ijebu and Ibadan, transformed them from the defensive to the offensive in their relations with their neighbours, yet they looked forward to an external agency to ensure their continued existence and sustain their solidarity. It was therefore natural that the political usefulness of the white man was (colonial or missionary) uppermost in Sodeke's mind when in December 1842 Henry Townsend visited Egbaland before making his stay there permanent in 1846.<sup>6</sup> Sodeke invited him to settle in the town and bring other missionaries and traders with him.

The Saros in Abeokuta succeeded in putting across to the British government their pressing needs early in 1844. Sodeke asked for military help against Ado with which war had broken out since 1841, petitioned for missionaries and traders and described himself and his people as crusaders against the slave trade in Yoruba land. In response to the pressure of these liberated Africans, missionaries followed them to Abeokuta.<sup>7</sup> There, they exercised political influence in Egbaland. For instance, when Henry Townsend returned and settled in Abeokuta in 1846 he became a member of Ogboni, a Yoruba fraternity and 'senate' of Egba.<sup>8</sup> He became secretary to the Alake of Egbaland in 1850.<sup>9</sup> In this capacity he exercised a great deal of influence on the Alake and was the sole director of the Anglo-Egba policy from Egba side. Townsend turned the Egba government into a theocracy that united all Egbaland. The Egba people, therefore, raised no objection to their children being initiated into the white man's education. The Egba people also saw the advantages of imitating Townsend's technological superiority in house-building and cotton-ginning.

### *Catholic Missions*

The history of Catholic missions in Nigeria is not as eventful and elaborate as that of the protestant churches. However, they also were actively involved in the land. The Catholics arrived a little later than the protestant missionaries and owed their spread and successes to a certain Father Borghero, who had initially thrived in spreading the Catholic mission in states like Sierra Leone and Dahomey. Between 1860 and 1862, the Italian Roman Catholic Father, Borghero who was stationed at Whydah in Dahomey paid a visit to Abeokuta and Lagos. And on reaching there, he met some Nigerian Catholics who were freed slaves from Brazil and had settled there. In addition to this, Father Borghero was also surprised at meeting some Brazilians who had baptized in the Roman Catholic Church, but, were living in Lagos. He was therefore encouraged when he saw some of his natives and Nigerians who were adherents of the Roman Catholic faith in Lagos. He consequently established a mission station at Lagos. But, it had no permanent Priest. He made Lagos one of the out-stations of Ouidah in Dahomey. By 1862, Father Borghero sent a Catechist named Padre Antonio who was a freed slave from Sao Tome Island to the Lagos Mission.<sup>10</sup>

While Catechist Padre was stationed in Lagos, he taught Nigerians and other nationals who lived in Lagos the Roman Catholic faith. He baptised children, prayed with the dying and buried the dead.<sup>11</sup> In 1868, Father Pierre Bouche was sent to Lagos by the Catholic Mission to resume duty as the residential Priest in Nigeria. The Roman Catholic Mission built a Chapel in Lagos in 1869 for the adherents of the Catholic faith.<sup>12</sup> The Church also established a primary school in Lagos the same year. From Lagos, the Roman Catholic faith spread across Nigeria to places like Onitsha through another Father named Lutz who worked around Onitsha town. This marked the growth and expansion of the Roman Catholic faith towards the Niger Delta area. The Catholic adherents further sent Fathers Chausés and Holley from Onitsha, towards Ilorin, and Ondo. Through efforts from Catholic missionaries sent from Ireland Catholicism also spread and resonated throughout Igboland.<sup>13</sup>

### *Synthesis*

A cursory look at mission activities of both Protestants and Catholics has suggested that this episode happened contemporaneously with the colonial era. In fact the success of missionaries during this period was due in large part to the onset of colonial rule.<sup>14</sup> Indeed it was sometimes difficult separating both, as the British crown was itself at

times responsible for sponsoring expeditions of convoys containing missionaries. It has also been portrayed that these missionaries were always received with mixed feelings, with a divided populace on whether to embrace or reject them.

Invariably, the elite rulers of these African communities were usually pro-missionaries, with the Alake of Egbaland being a typical example. The missionaries were also responsible for putting in place several technological advancements like the building of schools, roads, industries and health centres. However, there always appeared to be a superior/inferior relationship between the European missionaries and the native Africans. Such a feeling percolated through to how the stations and churches were managed and how Africans perceived themselves, their religion and their customs in the face of a perceived superior culture. The next sections of the essay more carefully evaluate this theme.

#### **The Vicissitude of Christian Missionary Enterprise in Nigeria after 1884: Colonialism and Clash of Mission Theories**

By the mid-nineteenth century, the expansiveness of missionary activities in Africa and elsewhere had caused the development of 'mission theories.' These theories influenced mission priorities and long term objectives. The dominant of these theories was one held by the secretary to Church Missionary Society, Henry Venn, known as the 'three-self theory'. It stated that the main goal of the mission was to found churches characterized by self-support, self-government, and self-propagation.<sup>15</sup> The spirit of this theory was not in tandem with imperialistic agenda. It was one that sought to promote indigenous leadership.

It was conceived that the training of a 'native ministry' was the key to the independence and sustainability of churches in each area where missionary activities were ongoing. Venn was therefore committed to the promotion of nonwestern leadership to the extent that under his guide there was the formation of eight bishoprics in foreign mission fields, as well as the consecration of Samuel Ajayi Crowther as the first African Anglican bishop in 1864.<sup>16</sup>

However, In the 1870s, during the period of 'High Imperialism', there was an increased colonialist and racist mentality. This caused a backlash against the 'three-self' theory of Henry Venn. While the CMS was committed to the founding of self-governing native churches, to be led by indigenous bishops, colonial tendencies opposed that logic.<sup>17</sup> By the 1880s, for instance, the white missionaries under Bishop Ajayi Crowther objected to having an African supervise them. In fact, dur-

ing that era, there arose a High Church (conservative) movement that demanded even tighter white ecclesiastical control over missions and church formation by the more evangelical 'Low Church' (progressives) practices of the CMS. As a result of the new pressure that was influenced by colonial settlement, towards the twilight of his existence, Henry Venn advocated a deviation from Anglican tradition by advancing the idea of establishing separate episcopates in one geographical area.<sup>18</sup> He urged that indigenous people have an independent native church governed by a national bishop who reflected their own cultural heritage, while the white colonists have a separate 'English' version of the church. He conceived this as the only way to fight the colonization of the CMS missions, and the forced cultural westernization of the indigenous people. In addition, he stressed that where native churches were already established, European colonists should come under its authority, rather than forcing the indigenous people into the English-controlled churches.

When Henry Venn died in 1873, as high imperialism triumphed, Venn's successors resisted his interpretation of the three-self principles. One of the manifestations of such resistance came when the time came to appoint the successor to Ajayi Crowther as bishop. Appointing another African to succeed him was vehemently resisted by the secretariat. Rather, it was advocated that the CMS should have a more direct control of the so-called 'Native Churches.'<sup>19</sup> This ultimately ended the policy aimed at an independent self-governing church. The Venn theory evaporated even further by the late 1880s as the continent became firmly rooted in colonialism. This became evident in 1889 when one of the Centenary Committees charged with examining the issue of 'Native Churches' claimed there was a reluctance in mind of the committee as regard this policy which tended to hinder or prevent the realization of such plan. The aftermath of such a development was the tight control of mission churches by Europeans. And from that time onwards natives were principally subordinate to white bishops and clergy men.

### **The Belgian Congo: A Case of a Monopoly in Christian Missionary Activities**

Missionary history in Belgian Congo sharply contrasts to that of Nigeria. Indeed, unlike in most parts of Africa where missionary activities had started with European expansion on the continent, the early efforts yielded lasting effects. In 1482, the Portuguese explorer Diego Cũo discovered the Congo River and established the first Western contact with the people of the Congo. Naturally, missionaries soon

followed. The first boats of missionaries arrived in 1491 carrying "Franciscans, Dominicans, Canons of St. John the Evangelist.

These early efforts were extremely successful: the missionaries converted and baptized the Congolese ruler and constructed a large stone church in the capital city.<sup>20</sup> The Portuguese carried their evangelical successes into the sixteenth century under the reign of King Afonso I. Afonso's son Henry, who had studied in Portugal, became the first Black African to be appointed as bishop in the Catholic Church. In the ensuing decades, however, Portugal's relations with the Congo Kingdom waned because an African had not been made Henry's successor. The situation got worse because of Portugal's involvement in the flourishing European slave trade. Slaves were exported to nearby Portuguese islands and subsequently to the Americas. Over the years the number of slaves exported by these Portuguese increased exponentially to the extent that by the early 1850s, about 150,000 indigenous people were being exported annually.<sup>21</sup>

By the time the slave trade waned at about the same period, the Portuguese colonies had expanded southward into present-day Angola, making the Belgian Congo almost entirely neglected. In the interim, courtesy of the exploration of the voyager, Henry Morton Stanley, who voyaged from East Africa to the mouth of the Congo River between 1874 and 1877, King Leopold II of Belgium became aware of the area's potential value and became interested. Stanley was sponsored to explore the area further, signing treaties with local chiefs on Leopold's behalf. By 1885 when the Berlin Conference was held, Leopold's claim to the Basin was recognized and approved.

With Leopold being Catholic, the Catholic Church enjoyed privileged status throughout the colonial period. Leopold had in fact persuaded the Vatican that the evangelization of the Congo should remain a Belgian affair and that only Belgian national missions should be involved.<sup>22</sup> With such permission granted, Leopold himself personalized the colony as well as the missionary activities to the extent that he went as far as controlling the placement of missionaries. In rewarding the church for this prerogative, Leopold granted the church large tracts of land, subsidies, right to fulfill certain state functions, and a monopoly over educational and medical services.<sup>23</sup> Such brazen interference and commingling of missionary activities with colonial lordship ensured the geometric increase in the number of Christians in the Congo. A source states that while there were 124,650 Christians (1.4% of the population), the total Christian population by 1970 amounted to 20 million (90% of the population).<sup>24</sup>

It is important to mention at this juncture that the colonial influence on this Catholic mission in The Belgian Congo was typical of the colonial/Catholic missionary enterprise of predominantly catholic countries like Portugal, Spain, Italy, France and Belgium. Unlike in the British colonies where Protestant and Catholic churches were treated equally, Catholic countries had explicit or implicit bias for Catholicism in their colonies.<sup>25</sup> Although it is worth noting that the British had originally tried to block non-protestant missionaries from many of their territories, political pressure by evangelical missionary supporters forced them to allow religious liberty after 1813 and provide grants for education that all religious groups could apply for.<sup>26</sup>

Even though some of the restrictions of Catholic churches against protestant churches were not explicit, they sometimes required all education and printing to be in the colonial language, which required teachers and medical personnel to have a credential from the colonizing state.<sup>27</sup> As a result, because few Protestants lived in these Catholic countries and because acquiring the relevant degrees and linguistic facility took time, Protestant missionaries were diverted to non-Catholic colonies and areas that had not been colonized.<sup>28</sup>

It is however worth noting that despite the ordeals, some dedicated Protestant missionaries overcame these handicaps and entered Catholic territories, particularly Belgium. Their number was, however, infinitesimal compared to the Catholic mission. It is also worth noting that the Belgian Congo had more Protestant missionaries than many Catholic states in Africa because they needed US, British and Swedish support to lay claim to the Congo River basin. For this reason, protestant missionaries like David Livingston and Robert Arthington, under the auspices of the Baptist Missionary Society, became involved in protestant missionary activities in Belgian Congo. Even so, the activities of these missionaries were rather obscure.

#### **Functional Relationship between Missionary Activities and Colonial Rule: The Debate**

Scholars are generally of the opinion that the practical relationship, which existed between missionaries, traders and administrators in colonial Africa, was not coincidental. While there is hardly any contention on colonialism having significant implications on missionary activities in The Belgian Congo, its role in British West Africa (Nigeria in particular) is subject to debate. According to Michael Crowder, for example "... early missionaries in West Africa had a dual purpose to promote legitimate trade between African and Europeans and to convert Africans to their own religion."<sup>29</sup> Emmanuel Ayandele con-

curred with Crowder when he described Christian missionaries as the 'spiritual wing of secular imperialism'.<sup>30</sup>

While the argument seems to favour the view that some missionaries cooperated essentially with colonial authorities in the exploitation and cultural subjugation of Africa, there is yet to be scholarly consensus on the precise role of the missionaries in the colonization of Africa. Walter Rodney was perhaps the most critical of such relationship. He argued that missionaries were agents of imperialism: 'The Christian missionaries were as much part of the colonizing forces as were the explorers, traders and soldiers... missionaries were agents of colonialism in the practical sense, whether or not they saw themselves in that light.'<sup>31</sup>

He also accused missionaries of preaching humility and submission in the face of gross injustice, inhumanity and dehumanization. While British traders were exploiting their African customers, the missionaries preached peace, forgiveness and good neighborliness, which actually prevented genuine rebellion, self-preservation and determination. Missionaries worked towards the preservation of the status quo and upholding of the master-servant relationship between Africans and Europeans. Rodney argues:

The church's role was primarily to preserve the social relations of colonialism... the Christian church stressed humility, docility and acceptance. Ever since the days of slavery in the West Indies, the church had been brought in on condition that it should not excite the African slaves with doctrine of equality before God.<sup>32</sup>

Some scholars are, however, on the other side of the divide. They argue that missionary activities are completely independent and different from colonialism. N. S. S. Iwe, for instance, does not agree totally with the view that missionaries collaborated with colonial administrators and traders to the detriment of Africa. He opined that colonization was a forceful imposition that did not require substantial cooperation between imperial powers, adventurers and the missionaries.<sup>33</sup> Godwin Tasie and Richard Gray are of the opinion that the alliance between missionaries and colonial agents, though intimate, was never complete to the extent of equating missionary enterprise as a dimension of European colonialism. 'The message and impact of the missions could in varying degree be distinguished from the apparatus of alien rule.'<sup>34</sup>

Contributing to the debate, Ogbu Kalu admitted that 'evidence abounds of collaboration between missions and colonial and mercantile power.'<sup>35</sup> Kalu, however, criticized Emmanuel Ayandele for stating the case in its most extreme form in his *Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*, which according to Kalu belongs to a class of nationalist historiography, which cannot be ignored. It is his personal opinion that the relationship between missionaries, traders and the colonial government was far more complex than Ayandele portrays.

He went on to make critical analysis of Christianity in colonial society observed that similarity of interest between colonial officials; mercantile powers and missionary cannot be interpreted as identity of purpose. He noted categorically that government did not establish the colonies for missionary goals; rather the purposes of government and that of missions often differed both in content, philosophy and in execution: 'Lord Lugard once endeavored to remind the C.M.S of what he believed to be their identical interest, namely that both the government and the missions looked upon the civilization of the black man as their paramount goal.'<sup>36</sup>

#### **Impact of Missionary Activities on African Mentality: Cultural Arrogance and Inferiority Complex**

If the debate on the tangible relationship between colonialism and missionary activities is inconclusive, the psychological effect is pretty clear to see. In understanding such an effect, it is important to appreciate the thoughts that had always guided European interactions with Africa. Before colonialism or missionary activities Europeans had theories that justified the conquest and governance of non-European territories. These theories were based on pseudo-scientific racism and cultural arrogance. Europeans did not only exert technological superiority over the African, but also displayed a feeling of moral and a racial superiority. Such feelings played out during their missionary exercise. According to Michael Crowder,

Christian Europe, which had abolished the slave trade, felt itself morally superior to heathen Africa... this sense of moral superiority was reinforced by theories of racial superiority which placed the white man at the top of the hierarchy, the black man at the bottom. Thus the European colonial powers found nothing wrong in occupying and ruling lands belonging to African peoples...<sup>37</sup>

Philip Curtin in his *The Image of Africa*, asserted that the white man made himself a moral giant, and saw the African as inferior and senseless. During the age, European opinions were usually divided into three: 'conversionism', 'paternalism' and 'racial subordination'. "Conversionism" theory held that the best way to wipe away darkness, heathenism and collective ignorance from Africa was to impose European culture, religion and philosophy on Africa by force. Africans must be compelled to abandon their religion and culture, adopt western values. On humanitarian principles and from the point of conscience, Africa became 'The white man's burden' or a 'sacred trust'. It was hoped that through the process of intensive conversionism, a colony that excelled in adopting western values to the maximum may achieve a pseudo independent status and merit the description like 'overseas France' or 'overseas Portugal'.

Another theory was called 'permanent paternalism.' For this school of thought, Africans were incurably inferior to Europeans and are naturally incapable of adopting the civilized standards of the 'superior' races.<sup>38</sup> Here it is believed there is no possibility of future improvement or development and Africans were perpetually to be protected, supervised and monitored by the 'superior' races. The difference between 'conversionists' and 'trusteeship', was that the 'conversionists' were at least optimistic that with intensive guidance and kindergarten-like tutelage, Africans may reach minimal maturity, but the 'trusteeship' school were absolutely pessimistic on the possibility of transforming the African into a normal human being. Bohannon and Curtin observed that:

Believers in trusteeship nevertheless regarded Africans as human beings deserving the protection of their "superior". The best policy for a European empire was therefore to treat them as minors, incapable of running their own affairs, but entitled to the guidance and discipline of those who were wiser than they<sup>39</sup>

The third and most extreme theory of imperialism was called 'racial subordination'. For this school of thought Africa did not deserve even minimal exposure to the process of westernization, and are completely incapable of autonomous development. Bohannon and Curtin elucidates further on the views of 'racial subordination':

... the best possible future for Africans was neither westernization nor yet also autonomous development, but subordination as servants in a Western society and permanently so. It began with the underlying belief that

anything Africans could develop on their own was not worth having. But as servants of Europe they would at least enjoy some of the material benefits of industrialization, they would be protected in their weakness...

No matter how benign the European missionaries were, they largely belonged to at least one of these categories since it was the mind-set that prevailed in Europe when missionary interest was revived in European Christianity. The idea of a defective religion was anchored on the concept of heathenism, which was the preoccupation of missionaries in the nineteenth century. The conversion of heathens and abolition of paganism at all cost was a task that must be done. This also explains why African clergies were given subordinate roles to their white counterparts in the mission churches.

The influence the colonial background had on the mentality of Africans is also worth noting. Till this day many Africans appear to have a colonial mentality. Africans including the elites are ready to accept anything, if it has a Western label. This attitude started in the colonial/missionary era. It would be recalled that a good number of the elites in Africa readily conceded inferiority on the arrival of the European missionaries. For example, on the arrival of Henry Townsend in Egbaland, he was too readily accepted to the extent that he became the Alaake's secretary. Ibn Khaldun tried explaining the reason for such actions/mentality. According to him,

The vanquished always seek to imitate their victors in their dress, insignia, belief, and other customs and usages. This is because men are always inclined to attribute perfection to those who have defeated and subjugated them. Men do this either because the reverence they feel for their conqueror make them see perfection in them or because they refuse to admit that their defeat could have been brought about by ordinary causes, and hence they suppose that it is due to the perfection of the conquerors....<sup>40</sup>

Khaldun further observed that the imitation of the victor by the vanquished may be an unconscious phenomena, or consciously due to mistaken belief that the victory of the conqueror was attributed not to their superior solidarity and strength but to the inherent inferiority of the customs and beliefs of the conquered. The purpose of the imitation is the false belief that such an imitation will remove the cause of defeat.<sup>41</sup>

### Conclusion

In the final analysis, while it is incontrovertible that Christian missionaries made sacrifices to travel to Africa—bringing with them education, health care and infrastructural development—to the extent of risking infections and even death, these missionaries brought with them some baggage. One of such was the cultural arrogance and superiority complex that the Europeans displayed towards their African counterparts. This was of course most evident in The Belgian Congo where the harsh conditions of Belgian colonial rule peculated into missionary activities. It was the arrogance and superiority complex that readily made these Europeans condemn most of African traditions and religions as primitive.

It can also explain why Africans rarely held topmost positions in these ministries. African members of the church were denied opportunity to exercise their understanding in the administration of the church. No African was admitted unto the church's ruling class. For instance, the first two African to be ordained in Yoruba-land since 1842 were admitted to deacon's order only in 1854, and in 1855, three Africans were admitted, to Holy order in Abeokuta while in 1856 the first African ordinands (six in number) who had been wholly trained within the colony, were ordained by Bishop Weeks of Sierra Leone, while Reverend Crowther was consecrated Bishop in 1864. It must be noted that these Africans were given subordinate duties to perform in the church.<sup>42</sup>

It was only when nationalist sentiments started springing up as a political movement in Africa that a reawakening began among African converts within the mission churches. The fact that they could not infuse some of their traditional customs and values in their practice of mission Christianity for the reason that it was perceived as primitive, and the fact that they could only manage a subordinate role to the European priests, prompted these Africans to break away from these churches to form independent churches with African favour. The mission churches could however be thanked the Christian platform that had been created from which African Independent Churches sprung and thrived.

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