

## ANGLICANISM IN THE IGBO HEARTLAND: THE OHOHIA-MBIERI AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

**Kanayo Nwadiolor**

**&**

**Felix Ugoeze Ononiwu**

*Department of Religion and Human Relations,  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka*

### **Abstract**

*Ohohia-Mbieri was evangelized by the Anglican mission through Okwu-Orodo and tremendous socio-economic successes were recorded, yet this aspect of the history of the people is yet to get adequate scholarly attention that it deserves. Furthermore, the Anglican mission in Ohohia was largely carried out by the pioneer converts to Christianity: the local chiefs, church teachers and traders, who gave out lands, offered free labour and made financial contributions towards the consolidation of the mission, yet their efforts were not acknowledged in the few historical records of Anglicanism in area. This study aimed at reconstructing the presence of the Anglican Church in Ohohia-Mbieri, Imo State; bringing together a detailed history of her stability and internal cohesion in relation to its continued dialogue between traditional values, norms and beliefs. It also brings to limelight the salient labour of some indigenous agents of the mission whose contributions have previously been less reported by Church historians of missionary historiography. This study further sought to discuss the socio-economic effects of the presence of the Anglican Church in Ohohia and her neighbours. The study employed primary and secondary methods of the qualitative research approach. The primary methods included missionary diaries, archival evidence, oral sources, and unpublished materials while the secondary sources included text books, journal articles, magazines, etc. The study adopted descriptive and historical phenomenology to analyze the data collected. The study reveals that the growth of the Anglican Church in Ohohia-Mbieri was largely made possible by the tireless and voluntary services of the indigenous and non-stipendiary local agents of the mission whose contributions were neglected in missionary historiography but whose efforts occasioned enormous socio-economic developments in the area. The study recommends a continuous participation of the indigenous people so as to consolidate the pioneering efforts of the early converts and to ensure recognizable cultural assimilation of Christianity within the host communities.*

## **Introduction**

Christian evangelization of Igboland was majorly through the waterways before the Arochukwu expedition of 1901/2 which guaranteed relative safety of the missionaries and subsequently the interiors witnessed great movement towards Christianity. By 1917 Ohohia was evangelized by the Anglican mission through Okwu-Orodo. Anglicanism through the invitation of colonial leadership pioneered the fertile, but yet un-evangelized ground and confirmed that the hinterland was truly secured for evangelization. Ohohia benefited from this evangelistic endeavour, however, the labour and undaunted bravery of the pioneer missionaries and of course certain native individuals whose force of character and contributions complemented the efforts of their foreign counterparts have not or limitedly been recognized historically. In the same vein, the contributions of some local chiefs in Ohohia during the cradle of Anglican Church have largely been obscured and or have not received much needed academic study.

Again, in most parts of Igbo land the early converts covered much distance to keep the light of their new found religion aglow; and the weight of evangelization borne by them. The power of their new found faith coupled with their determined effort to convince their people to embrace Christianity is worth researching. They interpreted within their little knowledge of the language of communicating the gospel in bringing the message through their native idioms and ideology; thus, their contributions in the process of Christianization cannot be ignored or neglected.

The Anglican brand of Christianity in her centenary presence had made tremendous impacts on the socio-economic and political lives of the people of Ohohia Mbieri, yet not much has been studied about the history and activities of the Anglican missionary enterprise in the area. It is to be noted that the Anglican Church has occasioned development in the area of education, health care delivery, positive cultural change, widowhood practices and inter-community relationships in the study area, yet it does appear that historians of ecclesiastical history have either wittingly or unwittingly given much more attention to the history and growth of the Catholic Church in the area almost at the neglect of the Anglican mission. The Anglican Church has fostered a collective consciousness between Ohohia-Mbieri and her neighbours which has determined the patterns of relationship devoid of rivalry. All these are conspicuously missing in the history of the people of Ohohia-Mbieri. Again, much that has been penned down in relation to the history of the Anglican Church in the study area seems to suggest that the bulk of the work were carried out by foreign missionaries as if the native agents of the mission were mere observers. The activities and contributions of many unsung heroes of the faith are grossly underreported.

This research is, therefore, geared towards investigating oral history to bring to limelight the salient labour of some local agents whose contributions have previously been less reported by Church historians in contemporary historiography. Hence, the research will provide a platform for a reconstruction of the already official history and bring to knowledge the contributions of native agents that contemporary historiographers have not harnessed. The study further seeks to discuss the socio-economic effects of the presence of the Anglican Church in Ohohia-Mbieri and their neighbours as a consequence of their religious affiliation. The study will undertake to issues that pertain to missionary historiography in relation to omissions in Igbo church history especially where the efforts of the native heroes of the mission were underreported.

Okonkwo and Ekebuisi (2018) wrote on the topic “a centenary of Archdeacon T.J. Dennis Union Igbo”; where they seek to redress the largely ensuing and misconstrued important role of T. J. Dennis. It also seeks to reply to critics of the project “Union Igbo”. They present clinically and carefully the history, linguistics and religion. The work is a valuable material for scholars and students who have interest in the development of the Igbo language and the evangelization of the Igbo hinterland and efforts of local agents in the translation process. The work is important to this study, which tends to appreciate extension of the missionary endeavors to Ohohia-Mbieri and provides a much-detailed study through the main thrust of the research topic. Hence, the present research will complement their work in areas of missionary enterprise in the Owerri area and also bring to limelight the work of many local agents that history has not recognized. Orisakwe (2006) edited the centenary symposium covering very interesting topics such as Anglican–Missionary movement by Obilo which provides the reader a wider view on the Anglican Church in Igboland. It enables the researchers to understand the advent and growth so far presented. However, non inclusion of the contributions of the local agents in that research project created a gap for further studies and academic discussion. Dike (1996) constitutes a manifestation of outstanding scholarship. He brought to bear a critical analysis of the Niger mission: origin, growth and impact, 1857–1995. It is quite an appraisal of the significance of the labour of the Church Missionary Society, east of Niger. Dike drew heavily upon rigorous analysis and astute prescription. While it is true that he did an analysis and prescription, yet it suffices to observe that his work is much of denominational history, which did not give considerations to Ohohia-Mbieri. The work will be useful to the present researchers because it has provision not only for a wide range of topics or themes covering nearly fourteen decades in the annals of the Anglican Church in Igboland, however, a gap exists because of his limited attention to denominational history and periodization. Chiegere (2013) tried to capture for posterity the rich cultural and religious heritage and the retrace of loss of identity of Igbo people. He exposes the

destructions, discriminations and oppression experienced during the evangelization epoch of Igbo land. He aptly highlights the interplay and dialectical struggles that was evident in the evolution of Christianity in Africa, Nigeria and Igbo nation. His work took interest mostly in evangelization of Igbo land: the foreign missionary era and indigenous period. It left academic gaps that are begging for study in the areas of those who bore the major task of evangelizing their kins and kin. Scholars like Kalu (1998), Okeke (2006) Anyabuike (1996) use their literature to bring to bear the neglect of missionary historiographers and their failure to adequately project the contributions of the natives in the evangelization and growth of their local congregations. This work shall add to their pioneering efforts.

### **Ohohia-Mbaeri Nwaotuoke in Historical Perspective**

Nwoye (2011) posits that: The traditional societies of the world depended mainly on oral transmission of their history and storage of their traditions from one generation to another. Societies that had no chroniclers in the king's court and particularly, the Igbo societies that did not see anything germane in surrendering their autonomy to a single authority had community historians and these were men endowed with a great degree of wisdom and tact. Some appear to be village musicians and native doctors or priests who always communed with the local deities. These classes of beings were revered and they symbolized continuity and remained reliable in carrying out their responsibilities. They have been able to ensure accurate transmission of the events of the past, significantly, the origin of societies.

According to Mba (1982), "Mbieri is one of the nine (9) towns that make up the present Mbaitoli Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria. It is the largest and the most populous of the nine towns with a population of about 125,000 people" (p 23). The oral history of Mbieri traces its origin to its legendary father, Mbaerilam Nwaotuoke. But there has continued to be controversy and many schools of thought over where this legendary founder of Mbieri came from. The schools of thought could be outlined in three obvious views on the history of Nwaotuoke, the father of Mbaerilam. One of such schools of thought traces the history of the origin of Nwaotuoke to Awka where he was said to have migrated to Isu around the Orlu area and from there, he arrived at the present Orie Mbieri Market Square and settled permanently. The second school of thought rather traces Nwaotuoke migration from Arochukwu in the present-day Abia State from where he migrated and settled among his kinsmen at Orji Uratta in the present day Owerri North L.G.A. of Imo State, and from there he relocated to a nearby virgin forest (now Orie Mbieri) because of oppression and disagreement that ensued between them. A third school of thought opines that Nwaotuoke was a core Igbo man who came to this part of the world when other Igbo-stock migrated into this present Igbo land, and that he settled

at Orie Mbieri as others were also settling in other convenient places in the South East (Anukam, 2009). Mbaerilam founded the Orie-Mbieri-Central Square. Nwaotuoque settled permanently at a spot which is the present day Orie-Mbieri Market square and it has continued to be of immense significance to the people.

The name “Mbieri is corrupted by the people as generation evolved and of course contacts with the white. The original name “Mbaeri” was abridged from “Mbaerilam”, which may have been done erroneously probably by the colonial authorities who found it difficult to get the word correctly and decided to pronounce and write it in their best possible way. Chukwudire (2010) believes that:

The name Mbaeri or Mbaerilam is a prayer or wish that "I may not perish in a distant land", which suggests that the bearer of the name or may be his father prayed not to perish in a distant land; that is, the new land he found himself in (p 36).

Oral tradition has it that Nwaotuoque had a son whom he named Mbaerilam (Mbaeri), which literally translated to ‘may I not perish or be devoured in a foreign or distant land’. Mbaeri later metamorphosed into Mbieri. Mbaerilam, the son of Nwaotuoque later got married and begot five (5) sons, who in turn got married and begot twenty-eight (28) other sons, which constituted the original 28 villages or umunna groups of Mbieri land and each of the leaders of the various umunna groups or villages has respect for their sacred *Ofo* which symbolized power, authority and influence. These twenty-eight villages from the twenty-eight sons of Mbaeri and their respective *Ofo* represent the origin of “*Mbieri ugu-ofo-na-ofo-asato*”, which is a corporate identity slogan of Mbieri people. Awujo (1974) opines further that Nwaotuoque, the ancestral father of Mbieri had migrated from Isuama in the present day Orlu area of Imo State. He argued that Nwaotuoque had an only son called Mbaerilam and that both father and son migrated from Isu Ama and settled down at Orie Mbieri which is now the central square for all the communities in Mbieri town. He also believes that it was Mbaerilam, the only son of Nwaotuoque that gave birth to the original twenty-eight (28) villages that made up the Mbieri community at its inception. The initial twenty-eight (28) villages that made up Mbieri land at its inception have dwindled to eighteen (18) villages now; one of them is now extinct, while nine others had merged with some other villages. The existing eighteen (18) villages now in Mbieri are as follows: Achi, Amankuta, Amaulu, Awo, Obazu, Obokwe, Ohohia, Ebom, Eziome, Ubakuru, Umuagwu, Umuahii, Umudagu, Umuduru, Umunjam, Umuonyeali, Umuobom and Umuomumu. Mbaeri, the son of Nwaotuoque is believed to have married five (5) wives who begot six male children for him as follows: Nwarusim, Amaike, Nwaeze, Nwaoha, Ezi and Ihitte. It was through the five wives that the existing names of five groups in Mbieri – Ime Nneise came about and they are as follows: Amaike, Umunwaeze,

Umunwaoha, Ezi and Ihitte. The names of these sons are now used to identify each of the groups. Mbieri community till today still shares any booty into five places, according to their mothers or “ime-nne”. It is the tradition of Mbieri (in a polygamous family) to share a late father's property among his sons based on the number of wives he had. The above five maternal clusters (IME NNE ISE) of Mbieri were constituted as follows: - AMAIKE GROUP was made up of the following villages: Umuarusim, Umuagwuru, Obokwe, Umuahii, Okwoba and Umuduru. Over time, Okwoba was absorbed into Umuahii and it became kindred in Umuahii village and is no longer one of the villages that make up the Amaike group. Umuagwu (Umuagwuru) which is now one of the villages that make up Amaike Group is believed by the people to be an immigrant group and not one of the sons of Mbaeri. But her inclusion as one of the villages that make up the present day Amaike group is because Umuagwu which had immigrated into Mbieri had absorbed Umuarusi, the original village and Umuarusi has now integrated into Umuagwu as kindred as they are no longer a village. UMUNWAEZE GROUP was made up of the following villages: Ubakuru, Amankuta, Obuzi, Umuomumu, and Umuobom. Obuzi, which was one of the initial villages in Umunwaeze group was absorbed by Amankuta, making Obuzi now kindred in Amankuta village. UMUNWOHA GROUP was composed of the following villages: Awo, Ohohia, Ebom, Oboro. Oboro is now in extinction. Oral tradition has it that most of the descendants of Oboro had migrated up north to Oboro-UmuezeOgwa as a result of insufficient land space for expansion and farming. EZI GROUP is made up of the following villages: Eziome, Achi, Obazu, Amaogwugwu, Obilubi and Umuneke. It is believed that the original sons of Mbaeri in this Group were Eziome, Achi and Umuneke villages. Amaogwugwu, Obilubi and Obazu were said to have migrated into the area from Amaruruiho in the present day Ikeduru L.G.A. of Imo State, in about 1850. IHITTE GROUP is composed of Amaulu, Umuonyeali, Umudagu and Umunjam. (Chukwudire, 2010).

Nwaotuoke Mbierilam enjoined his Mbieri people to cherish high moral standard and to be hard working. Bad behaviour (*nso ala*) is condemned in its entirety and strictly sanctioned to serve as deterrent to others. This was his concept of maintaining peace and stability in Mbieri land. Also, Mbieri people have strong attachment to their culture belief in (*Chukwu*) the true God, however, the difference with contemporary religions lies in the approach to the supreme God. Therefore, the people of Mbieri believed in the Supreme God (*Chi- Ukwu*) and other minor deities through whom they reached this Supreme God. Among these deities are *Agwu-ishi*, *Amadioha* (the son of Ala, god of thunder), *Odu Mbieri (Odu Orié deity)*, *Ezeala (Ala deity)*, *Odu Eze Elu (Kamalu Ozuzu)*, *Iyi-afo* (god of Okitankwo stream). The most notable or chief of all these deities in Mbieri is *Odu-Mbieri*, - a peace-loving and self-contented deity- not interested in tasking the people with

expensive sacrifices. It expects three things from the people of Mbieri such as: Any man that becomes an Nze na Ozo must take a cow and do outing ceremony of going round Orie Mbieri (*igba-Ohoahia*), amidst jubilation, feasting, merry making, etc.; Any young girl in Mbieri that reached the puberty age should take part in the *Iri-nta* Festival, which was like fattening ceremony (*Mgbede*). It was a developmental task of female adolescents growing into maturity and adulthood. It was where young girls were taught mother-craft, how to handle babies, their husbands and how to run their homes generally. Lucky and beautiful girls, including the families they came from often took part only once in the *Nta* festival and got married. It was the unlucky ones that could participate in the *Nta* festival up to two or three times – Iri-bi-Nta. It was a show of the wealth of their families with food items – dried lumps of meat and fish, etc., that your family could boast of. The Odu-Mbieri deity expected all the married women in Mbieri to do an outing ceremony (child dedication), usually two or three months after delivery at Orie-Mbieri, carrying the baby and the Oba Nzu. She would smear her body and that of the baby with nzu (white chalk or calcium carbonate) moving from one shade to the other, showing the baby and attracting compliments from the people both in cash and kind, in the tradition of “Omugwo” ceremony in Igbo culture. Nzu traditionally is a sign of peace. In Igbo land, it is used as a mark of purity of mind or kind gesture shown to a visitor. It represents the present-day powder.

### **Early Anglican Missionary Endeavours in Ohohia-Mbieri and Environs**

In the year 1909, God by His grace, projected the rays of the gospel onto Ogwa town, with Abazu village as the focus. Till today, some people have continued to wonder how and why Abazu became the springboard from where evangelical work took off in this part of the world in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It has remained a mystery that God has often used the humanly unimportant, and humanly neglected, to achieve His designs. At a time, when the probability of the very existence of the Abazu village was very slim, God opened the door of salvation to ignorant men and women, who groped in the dark, looking for security where it did not exist. However, the search for security brought Abazu into contact with the white missionaries in 1909. In this memorable year, a white lady missionary arrived at Abazu in Ogwa. This became the origin of the Christian Church, which spread from Abazu to all parts of Mbaitoli, Ikeduru, and beyond.

### **Growth and Impacts of Anglicanism in Ohohia-Mbieri**

The little flock of the early congregation has grown to become an iroko tree in the Anglican Communion in Ohohia. Through faithful mission and evangelization, the first Christian Church that was established in Ohohia came to be Nazareth Anglican Church

which was established in 1917 from various places of the early converts such as Abazu Ogwa, and Okwu Orodo. These pioneer congregation led by Mr. Samuel Anyanwu, began to grow in numbers and it became pertinent that they needed a branch at Ohohia. Chief Ononiwu Okwara-Ahiajoku obliged to this request even though not amongst the converts, but he gave out his Palace (*Obuma*), for worship and also protected them from molestations from the native traditional worshippers. This accommodation uniquely marked the establishment of the first CMS Christian Church at Ohohia Mbieri in 1917.

The contributions of Mr. David Nwanyanwu and Jonathan Ofoegbu equally laid a solid foundation for the growth and spread of the gospel. As the congregation grew in number, it became obvious that Chief Ononiwu's compound was no longer spacious and conducive for church services and there arose the need for relocation to a more permanent and suitable place. Again, Chief Ononiwu gave a parcel of his land, alongside others like Amaho Maduwike, Awaziama Ekerue, Opara, Oparaukwuoma Duruwune, Oparaugo Ugwuani and Ozoamaka Agunwoke for the erection of the church building in 1919. Mr. Samuel Anyanwu served as its substantive agent/teacher till Mr. Matthias Nume of Naze (Owerri North L.G.A) became the first officially sent church teacher transferred from Ndegwu, Owerri West L.G.A. He was accommodated at Chief Ononiwu Okwara-Ahiajoku's compound. In 1935 the foundation stone of the first building was laid, and dedicated in 1940 by the Rt. Rev. C. J. Patterson, bishop on the Niger Diocese. In 1994 Nazareth Anglican Church Ohohia established a chapel at Ebom-Mbieri, now known as St. Peter's Anglican Church and in 2000 it was granted parish status with Nazareth Church as the headquarters. Nazareth Church Ohohia-Mbieri began the construction of its modern parsonage in 1994. In 2020, another church was established as an extension of evangelistic outreach to Obiakabo village in Ohohia Mbieri.

In the early forties, what is now Achi Mbieri archdeaconry was designated as Achi Group of Churches in Mbieri District which then was superintendent by Rev. Ikejiani, resident at Orie Mbieri. Later Achi Mbieri Group of Churches popularly known as 'Umunna' churches under the leadership of Mr. Onukeme, Reginald Nwaopara and Obed Iwuajoku became part of Mbieri Parish with the Headquarters at Holy Trinity Church Obazu Mbieri. In 1986, the Parish Standing Committee (P.S.C) upon a motion made by late Chief Sir. Sylvanus Ekeanyanwu and seconded by late Chief Sir. Sydney U.S Amadi decided to split Mbieri Parish into three viz. Obazu Mbieri, Amaike Mbieri and Achi Mbieri. The Parish Council gave its approval. Whereupon the then Parish Priest Rev. Canon C. B. A. Okafor, gave details of the requirements for creation of Parishes. A reference Committee was immediately put in place under the chairmanship of late Sir. R. N. Okwodu and Sir George Ihunyere as secretary, to actualize the proposals, one of which is Achi Mbieri Parish. All conditions met and in due course; Achi Mbieri Parish was

among the three parishes created in Mbieri by his lordship the Rt. Rev. B.C. Nwankiti the then bishop of the Diocese of Owerri Anglican Communion. Thus it was a thing of joy for the congregation of Achi Mbieri Group of Churches to be inaugurated as a Parish on 8th February 1987 with the Headquarters as St. Luke's Anglican Church Achi Mbieri. There are five (5) stations that made up the Parish viz, St. Luke's Achi, Nazareth Church Ohohia, St. Thomas Umuagwuru, St. Paul's Ubomiri and All Saint's Awo.

As the congregation increased, Ohohia Mbieri was carved out from Achi Mbieri Parish and was inaugurated on Sunday 23rd July, 2000 by his lordship, the Rt. Rev. C.C. Okorocho Ph.D, the then bishop of Owerri Diocese. It was named Ohohia Mbieri Parish with the Headquarters at Nazareth Church. As part of the growth of the area through evangelism and church planting, in the Mbieri Deanery meeting held at St. Peter's Anglican Church Umunjam, it was resolved that an Anglican Church be planted at Ebom. Then in November 1993, the first service was held at Nwaorie Ebom market square. The first Church teacher was Mr. Festus Opara (Now Ven. Barr. Festus Opara Ph.D). The Church has grown from having a church teacher to a Priest in the person of Rev. Benjamin Odunna. On December 17th 2023, Nazareth Church Ohohia Mbieri parish was pronounced Missionary Archdeaconry by his lordship the Rt. Rev. Chukwuma Chinekezi Oparah Ph.D, with the Rev. Canon Johnson Egbujor as the first Administrator.

### **Impacts**

The impact of CMS Christianity on Ohohia is nothing short of massive, and is thereafter presented in terms of both its positive and negative effects. It is expedient to note that the role of the missionaries seemed to have been motivated by a deeper commitment and sense of true loyalty to the Almighty God (Frankema 2012). Christianity definitely had an impact, both positive and negative, on the socio-political life of the people of Ohohia and Mbieri at large.

### **Positive Impacts**

The coming of Christianity to Ohohia played a vital role in the development of the community. Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) observe that the missionaries effected serious changes on indigenous Igbo societies. This section therefore examines the positive influence of Christianity in Ohohia-Mbieri, taking into consideration concerned areas of exploits.

### **Development of Western Education**

It is pertinent to note that the Europeans brought the Western type of education; hence a truism that, long before 1858 in Igboland, traditional system of education was largely informal, in that it had neither fixed venues (schools) for its practice nor professional teachers or graded durations (classes 1,2,3, etc; years 1,2,3 or intervals of rest/ holiday). It was also non-literate in that it did not utilize reading of books or writing. It transmitted knowledge and skills orally through parents and adults, relations and acquaintances to the young, adolescents and adults. Suffice it to say that, the missionaries, alongside the churches, introduced Western education; which eventually became one of the most revolutionary influences operative in Igbo land and Ohohia in particular.

According to Okoro (2018), one reason for the desire of the Igbo, especially their chiefs to have the presence of the mission at their communities was probably because of the advantages such presence brought with it high moral principles, churches, schools, and hospitals. It became evident that literacy rates were higher in Christianity dominated communities. Missionaries gave in deeply dedicated involvement in the formal education of Owerri and Ohohia in particular. General Education was the responsibility of missionary societies and “was to be primarily concerned with reading and writing with a view to proselytize and to train African teachers” (Urch 1971).

The introduction of Christianity and Western education brought remarkable changes in the socio-political, economic and cultural relations. Ozigbo rightly pointed out since man is mortal, every society must perpetuate itself physically by procreation and socially by process of education. Through education, the customs, values, beliefs, skills and so on, are passed on from generation to generation. Without this, the society would disintegrate. The new generation must be taught the way of thinking and behaving which preserved the society in the past and are believed to keep it in the future. The function of education is to mould individuals to the social norm. Among those who benefited from missionary education in Ohohia include: Late Chief Sir Sylvanus Ekeanyanwu, Late Chief Benjamin Onweni, Prince Uche Okorie (a Human Right Activist), late Prof. Humphrey C. Anyanwu, Sir. Dr. Maxwell Anyanwu, Sir. Jonas Iroka, just mention a few. The schools were built by the community’s efforts, in order to make sure they have these new endeavours close for their benefits. The land donated for these purposes were regarded as (ajo ohia), evil forest in some communities.

### **Introduction of new Economic System**

The arrival of whites especially boosted commercial activities of Ohohia people as well as some dignitaries who collaborated with the whites in slave trade. This new economic

system which entails free participation by all and sundry was the foundation for the free enterprising nature of the people of Ohohia. The impact of this development on the society was quite far reaching. Egwuonwu and Mgbemena (2019) observed that Western commerce vested a new value on raw cash as such and the Igbo came to say *ego bekee na ekwu okwu* meaning the white man's money talks. The fact is that hitherto people made money and accumulated wealth in order to marry wives, raise a large yam barns, and buy admission to the revered title and secret societies since it was from these that prestige and status derived. Amongst those who benefited from the Whiteman new economic system in Ohohia is Chief Benjamin Onweni.

### **Abolition of Certain Traditional Practices**

The arrival of the Christian missionaries helped to stop some ritual practices that were against the right of people in Ohohia society such as *osu*, *ume*, and *ohu*; human sacrifices to deities and other traditional and religious practice to appease the gods of the land. Chief Oweni and his twin brother were among the twins that C.M.S missionaries rescued from the traditional worshippers in Ohohia.

### **Christianity and Inter-group Relations in Ohohia**

Each community had its own Church and development in Ohohia. Churches were grouped under different parishes and dioceses thereby enabling inter-group relations especially during church activities such as youth programmes, conferences, and anniversary celebrations, among many others. Through these activities, people from different communities, who attended such programmes, came into contact. It was indeed, an avenue for interaction between people. Such interactions helped build relations among individuals and communities over time. The missionaries sometimes insisted that the Igbo people and their neighbours could not actually become good Christians or attain salvation unless they modified their societies drastically along prescribed western lines.

### **Health Care Delivery**

The presence of modern hospitals, health research, electricity, water supply and other social infrastructure were the legacy of Christian missionaries. According to Ozigbo, “a veritable revolution occurred in medicare services in 20th century Igbo land and Ohohia in particular. It was the Christian missionaries who pioneered the introduction of Western medical practice in Ohohia; before this, the people depended on herbs, native doctors (*dibia naborogwu*) and diviners (*dibia afa*) for their health-related concerns. Women gave birth in their homes, under the supervision of older and experienced women. The medical needs of the people were settled through the use of herbs gathered from the bush and

forest. Different types of roots were used to cure diseases and other illnesses. Ozigbo writes that the missionaries-built health facilities in some cities around Igbo land. Herbert Oguine noted that the things we call health centers and hospitals today were not known here. It was when the 'white man' came, in fact, when churches were built in the 1920s, that maternity homes were cited in some places. People who had one minor health need or the other had a missionary maternity within Mbieri to attend. Many with severe health problems were referred to Queen Elizabeth Hospital at Umuahia. The C.M.S was largely instrumental in establishing maternity homes in Mbieri communities from the 1920s. These maternity facilities were supervised by British doctors and trained nurses from Iyi-Enu, Ogidi where the Medical Mission, Onitsha was relocated in 1907. Bishop Iwuagwu noted that such doctors extended their services to maternity homes in Owerri Province. For instance, in 1942, Dr. Rosevera worked at Egbu from where he also inspected the maternity homes in parts of Owerri District. In the 1950s, Dr. Dorothy Dykes also worked faithfully at Iyi-Enu. The nursing school at that mission hospital has also played a major role in the training of nurses and other paramedical staff sent to the maternities. It was only in the 1950s and 1960s that other hospitals were set up to support the health care delivery provided such as the Queen Elizabeth Hospitals. From the beginning, there had always been Medical Officers or supervising midwives that supervised the health centers.

Health care provision has been variously referred to as the important impact of Christianity in the introduction of especially on medical science: Mkandawire (2009) observed that:

Christian missions have been almost everywhere the introducer of western medical, surgical, and public health methods, and the pioneer trainer of Africans in these skills." Missionaries made a point of ensuring that hospitals and other health facilities were erected in their area of missionary activity (p. 63).

As a result, it is true to say that the Ohohia health landscape changed for the better; gradually there was a sharp decline in child and maternal mortality rates, and an increase in the life expectancy of the people. As mission establishments increased, so did the need for medical services.

### **Negative Impact of Christianity in Ohohia**

On the negative impact of Christianity in Igbo land and Ohohia in particular, what readily comes to mind will be the encounter between Christianity and local traditional religion and culture. This encounter truly adversely affected the traditional cultures, practices, norms and values of Ohohia people to the extent that many traditional beliefs, social values, customs, and rituals were either totally destroyed or ignored; in this vein, Afolabi (2015) states that a modern Igbo has been brain-washed into disowning his own culture

and embracing alien religion, culture and values, some of which he does not claim to understand. Uche (2014) asserts that Christianity made some damaging blows on the culture of the people of Igbo land and these impacts can be felt in our method of worship, political system, eating habits, marriage, social system, the economic lifestyle, architecture and so on. Discussing the change in social life, marriage and family of Ohohia people, brings to mind that the missionaries abolished polygamy thereby giving way to monogamy and extended family giving way to nuclear family. The missionaries did not take into consideration the reasons for polygamy: One could easily remember agricultural purposes. In the primordial days, agriculture was the main economy of the Ohohia people. Then many farmers needed more children to work in their farmlands thus, to ensure that marrying many wives to bear many children was the key.

### **Influence on Traditional Political Structure**

The missionary played a vital role in dismantling Igbo traditional political structure. Ozo title holders and other traditional political structures began to give way to the educated which are mostly the slaves who got educated earlier in the advent of Christianity. In many Ohohia, it did not come with its rejections but brewed up internal rivalry amongst the traditional political class. Military expeditions were used in places they considered hostile to missionary activity/colonial authorities. It was through Aro expedition that Aro town and other powerful towns such as Umuohia and environs got conquered. In turn, the British Warrant Chiefs were appointed especially Christians to advance the missionary objectives. These new Warrant chiefs ceased promoting traditional governance rather than colonial rules. These impositions on various towns were against Igbo egalitarian society which was in place before the colonial government and missionaries came. The missionary further threatened to excommunicate any convert who join traditional secret societies or vie for traditional political positions and or partake in Ohohia traditional ceremonies. Thus, there was a total change in the political system and traditional landscape of Ohohia.

The establishment of Christianity in Ohohia was not without some controversies. The controversy came mainly in respect to choice of denomination. In 1919, late Chief Duruaku Eronini of Awo Mbieri gave an order that all the villages in Mbieri should change to Roman Catholic Church membership, and no village should remain Anglican. All the villages obeyed him except Ohohia and Obazu. Because of this refusal, Chief Eronini persecuted the villages. He took late Messrs Ononiwu Okwaraohajiko and Madufo Maduwuihe to court for punishment. These people were detained and severely punished before they were released. There was also a division among the early converts.

This misunderstanding led the members from Obiakabo out of the kindred to quit from the church to embrace and establish the Roman Catholic Church in Ohohia.

## **Conclusion**

Christianity, no doubt was in the forefront of social and political reform. Indeed, in the 1950s, the Christian church and missionary institutions of higher learning served as a catalyst that heightened political awareness among Owerri people and Ohohia specifically. Christianity and its values, as well as the active participation by church ministers and church members, provided an enormous “boost” to seeking for indigenous leaderships. The church literally became, in the words of Walshe (1991:28), “a site of the struggle”. As a force of social change, the mainline churches became undoubtedly a channel of westernization through education and co-optation of indigenous peoples into the market economy.

It is an unarguable fact of history that Christianity and western education are two colonial institutions of note that brought significant changes in Owerri, Mbieri and Ohohia. It is imperative to conclude that the presence of the Anglican Church challenged the foundation of Ohohia culture and lifestyle. To say the least, Christianity and Western education had both negative and positive consequences on society and its people. For one, they introduced western infrastructure such as church buildings, schools, Hospital/maternity homes built and owned by the church. There are also such things as pipe borne water, motorable roads and European styled houses and dress code. These institutions largely influenced the attitude of Ohohia people towards their culture and tradition. On the other hand, Christianity and Western education relegated Igbo traditional belief system to the background. This provided the nexus for the total disregard for Ohohia culture, tradition, norm and value systems. In fact, the negative influences witnessed in aspects of Ohohia life are attributed to activities of the Christian missionaries. From the findings, it is true that the CMS missionaries came to Abazu Ogwa, from there to Okwuch Orodo, through which the Anglican Church came to Ohohia Mbieri. From the data collated in this research, it is not a gain saying that the CMS met a host of culture in Ohohia Mbieri and the missionaries also came with a culture to Ohohia; the study makes bold to summarize that there are recognizable assimilation and rejection that occurred between the host culture and the encountered culture with the presence of Anglican Church.

## References

- Afolabi, O.O. (2015). The role of religion in African politics and its sustainability for political development. *Net Journals of Social Studies*, 3,2,42 - 49.
- Anyabuiké, I. D. E. (1996). *The painting of the Anglican Church in the Eastern State of Nigeria 1857-1927*. In Adiele S. N. (Ed.). *The Niger Mission; Origin, Growth and Impact 1857–1995*. Aba: Isaeco.
- Anukam, I. (2009). *The History of MbieriNwaotuoke*. Owerri: Memorabilia Books.
- Chigere, N. H. (2013). Foreign missionary background and indigenous evangelization in Igboland Owerri: living flame.
- Chukwudire, H.U.C. (2010). *MbieriNwaotuoke, oral tradition*, vol. I, Owerri, Ambix Printers.
- Egwuonwu, O. & Mgbemena, S. C. (2019). Effects of missionary enterprises in Igbo land. In *Interdisciplinary Journal of African and Asian Studies*, 5, 2, 1-9.
- Kalu, O. U. (1998). *The third response: Pentecostalism and the reconstruction of Christian Experience in Africa, 1970-1995*. *Studia Histoecclesiastes*, 24, 2, 1-34.
- Mba NE (1982). *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activities in Southern Nigeria, 1900-1965*. Institute of Internal Studies, Berkeley.
- Mkandawire, AC. 2009. David Livingstone's medical dimension in Malawi and how it is connected to his vision 150 years after his death. *The Society of Malawi Journal* 62(1), 62-65.
- Nwoye, C.M.A (2011). Igbo cultural and religious worldview: an insider's perspective. *International Journal of sociology and anthropology* vol. 3.9 pp 304 – 317. Retrieved on October, 2024 from <http://www.academicjournal.org/ITSA>
- Okeke, D. C. (2006), *People of the Boo: The Anglican Mission in Igboland*, Vol. 1 Enugu: Rabboni.
- Okoro, S. I. (2018). The Igbo and educational development in Nigeria, 1846 - 2015. In *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies*, 4, 1, 65-80
- Uche, N. (2014). *The practice of religion in a pluralistic society and its implications on politics in African*. A thesis submitted to the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria Nsukka.
- Urch, GE. 1971. Education and colonialism in Kenya. *History of Education Quarterly* 11(3), 249-264.
- Walshe, P. 1991. South Africa: prophetic Christianity and the liberation movement. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 29(1), 27-60.