

THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN OLD EASTERN NIGERIA AND IMPACT OF SOME EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN, 1841-1950

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Abstract

The study examined the contributions of some European Christian women towards the success of the 19th century Christian missionary enterprise in Old Eastern Nigeria. It highlighted how these women made enormous efforts to see that the Bible and the Plough was fully implemented in the host communities that yielded the desired results. In the 19th century Christian missionary enterprise in Nigeria, it was observed that, some women were among the various Christian missionary bodies that came to the region. During this period, the Old Eastern region was thrown open to Christian missionary activities that contributed immensely to the civilization of the society. Some of these European Christian women missionaries joined their male counterparts in evangelizing the Old Eastern region, understood the fact that Jesus Christ achieved great success as he worked together with women, during his earthly ministry. Therefore, by joining their male counterparts in this apostolic work, the team will achieve greater results. This was indeed a dream come true. The research methodology is secondary source of data such as mainline books, textbooks, various unpublished projects related to the topic, journals among others.

Keywords: European, Christian, Women, Missionary, Enterprise, Eastern Nigeria

Introduction

Women right from God's creation were endowed with potentials, skills, talents and gifts which when harnessed can be of value to societal development and material progress. The significance of women in the society cannot be over emphasized. In this regard, Chukwuma-Offor (2017) affirms that:

The role of women in family, church and the society at large cannot be underestimated. They are indispensable in the actualization of a viable and productive human society. Exclusion of women from any human society is tantamount to the collapse of human

existence. In fact, no socio-economic progress could adequately and effectively be attained without the active involvement, support and participation of the women folk (pp. 185-186). Jesus Christ understood this during his earthly ministry did not neglect women. This could be the reason some scholars view Jesus as a social reformer and a feminist. He brought social changes to the Jewish patriarchal society and as a feminist which promoted and elevated the position of women. The Apostles and other members of the early church also involved women in spreading the gospel. For instance, Priscilla the wife of Aquila was an itinerant preacher of the gospel with her husband. Apostle Paul was among the Apostles that emulated Jesus Christ in the aspect of working together with women. Apostle Paul in his various missionary journeys within the Roman Empire was sometimes aided by some women such as Lydia among others which saw to the success of his missionary activity.

It could be probably said that the Roman Catholic missionaries from Portugal, whom were the earliest European Christian missionaries to evangelise Nigeria in the 15th century, have little or no way incorporated women in their evangelistic team. Hence, they did not record much success. In affirmation to the above viewpoint, Nwadior (2016) confirms that the pre-colonial missionaries failed due to many reasons one of which was lopsidedness. In this context, lopsidedness is taken to mean the failure of the early missionaries to include women in the mission agenda. However, some European Christian missionaries that visited Old Eastern Nigeria during the 19th century included women as missionary agents in evangelizing the Old Eastern region. These European Christian women missionaries that joined their male counterparts in evangelizing the Old Eastern Nigeria, understood that, Jesus Christ who mandated his disciples to obey the Great Commission, worked with women during his earthly ministry. This resulted to the success of Jesus' ministry. Therefore, the women thought that by joining the missionary enterprise to Old Eastern region of Nigeria, the team will achieve greater result. This was indeed a dream come true as presently, the Eastern part of Nigeria is largely dominated by Christians. This indicated that the 19th century European Christian missionary enterprise which included women were more successful than their earlier counterparts who excluded women.

The Position of Women in Old Eastern Nigeria Prior to the Advent of Christianity

Prior to the division of Nigeria into six geo-political zones, Igwe (1977) states that the ethnic groups in Old Eastern region of Nigeria were broadly divided into four main groups; the Ibos(sic) (also spelt Igbo), the Ibibio-Efik, the Delta-Ijaw and the small groups. The Igbo ethnic nationality is the largest ethnic group in Old Eastern Nigeria and they occupy more than half of the land mass of the study area. Before the advent of Christianity in Old Eastern Nigeria, patriarchy existed and this made the position of women not to be esteemed like their male counterparts in the society. According to William (1994), the word patriarchy

derives from two Greek words—*patēr* (πατήρ, father) and *archē* (αρχή, rule). Wood (2014) demystifies that patriarchy literally means the rule of the father in a male dominated family. Bhasin (1993) observes that:

Patriarchy is a system in which women experience discrimination, subordination, violence, exploitation and oppression by men. In a patriarchal society, women are treated as inferior in all aspects of their lives; men control women's reproductive power, their sexuality, their mobility and even their economic resources (pp. 6-9).

Ray (2011) explains patriarchy as the 'rule of the father' in a male-dominated family and as a social and ideological construct which considers men, as patriarchs, to be intrinsically superior to women. Jones (2000) enunciates that patriarchy is referred to as the "rule of men over women" and more broadly, it refers to the web of economic, political, social and religious regulations that have enforced the domination of women by men throughout the ages. Laurien (2004) is of the opinion that patriarchy in its narrowest sense is a social system controlled by men and as an inheritance which is passed on from father to son. Family members are dependent on, and submissive to, the male head of the household. Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children, including powers of physical abuse and often even those of murder and sale (Millet, 1968). In the then Greco-Roman world, the *pater-familia* (father of the house) has the power of life and death over his family members. Walby cited by Nwaozuru (2020) concludes that patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. The above viewpoint, best explains the position of women in Old Eastern Nigeria prior to the advent of Christianity.

History of Christianity in Old Eastern Nigeria

During the 19th century, various Christian missionary bodies came Old Eastern Nigeria. The first European Christian missionary body to plant the seed of Christianity in the soil of Old Eastern Nigeria was Church Missionary Society (CMS). According to Dike (1965), at the first sight, the 1841 expedition appears to have been a complete failure because within two months of its departure from England, two of the three ships were lost at the sea and 54 of its 162 white crew had died of malaria. But on the other hand, the survivors were able to conclude some treaties of friendship between Great Britain and some tribes in West Africa before sailing back to England. One of such treaties was with the Ibos (sic) through Obi (King) Ossai of Aboh. In addition, Christianity was also preached to the people and Simon Jonas, an Ibo (sic) ex-slave who joined the expedition in Sierra Leone was left behind at Aboh to preach the Gospel. It was also the experiences gained from this voyage that decided the CMS to use educated African from Sierra Leone for its evangelical activities in the West Africa and not Europeans directly and Samuel Ajayi Crowther was chosen to lead

the team for Nigeria. CMS also returned back to Aboh in 1845 but later left. After some time, Okoro (2018) traces that the Church of Scotland Mission also known as the United Presbyterians, sent an exploratory mission to Calabar in 1846. The group was led by the Reverend Hope Master ton Waddell, and comprised Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Edgerley, Andrew Chisholm and Edward Miller. Soon after its arrival, the mission opened the Duke Town School in Calabar. From there, it moved along the coasts and up to Cross-River and inland establishing schools and churches in the area. Njoku (2007) narrates that Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) came into Igboland in 1888 at Unwana, the home of late Ezeogo Akanu Ibiam. The mission from Unwana reached North Eastern Igboland at Uburu in 1912. Okposi was opened, Onicha was reached in 1916 along with Isu and it spread to Edda in 1920s as well as Afikpo in 1924. Mrs. Samuel Edgerley and Mary Slessor were among the notable female missionaries who joined CSM and recorded a resounding success in their missionary enterprise, which will be enumerated later in the study.

Ekechi (1971) points that in 1857, CMS carried out another expedition similar to the one of 1841 was being sent to the Niger, a number of them volunteered to join the missionary team on the voyage. It was jointly financed by the British Government and Macgregor Laird, a Liverpool merchant, and commanded by William Baikie. The evangelists in the crew were led by Crowther and the titular leader of the volunteers from Sierra Leone was Rev. John Christopher Taylor whose parents were Ibo (sic) ex-slaves. The expedition arrived at Onitsha on Sunday 26th July 1857 and was warmly received by the King, Obi Akazua and his chiefs. CMS opened a permanent mission station there and began to spread to other Igbo towns. According to Igwe (1977), the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) which had been operating in parts of Lagos, Yorubaland and Benin Province that turned up in 1885 to help accomplish the enormous task in the East of the Niger River. RCM arrived at Onitsha on December 5, 1885 under the leadership of Father Joseph Lutz, a French priest who had earlier worked in Sierra Leone for eight years. In 1902, when Father Joseph Lutz handed over to Father Shanahan (later Bishop Shanahan) he formed the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary in 1924. The RCM exhibited generosity and hospitality towards the indigenous people and this made the people to accept them. Okoro (2018) reports that the Qua Ibo of Northern Ireland established her first mission in Eket and Uyo areas in 1887 and spread to other parts of Eastern Nigeria. Inyang quoted in Igwe (1977) describes that the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society arrived in Calabar from the Island of Fernando Po in 1894 with an initial team of two missionaries, Rev. R. Fairley and Rev. M. Brown. Within twelve months of its arrival, it opened schools and churches in Calabar, Oron and Opobo all in the present Cross-River State. In 1896, the missionaries were invited to Archibonville also in the Old Calabar Province to open a school there. Archibonville was used as the headquarters of the mission till 1901 when it was transferred to its station at

Oron. By the end of the century, it had opened other schools and churches in different parts of Efik and Ibibio lands from where it later reached Owerri Province in Igboland. Other missionary bodies came to Old Eastern region during this period.

Societal Impact of Christianity on Women in Old Eastern Nigeria

As the European Christian missionaries came to Old Eastern Nigeria, they saw that the position of women in the society was not esteemed as their male counterparts. It could be observed that during the 19th century missionary activity, some European Christian females were among them. The female missionaries saw that the position of women in the host communities, were not as honoured and respected as the men. Besides, women suffered ill treatments as a result of socio-cultural practices such as banishment of mothers who gave birth to twins, killing of twins which could cause psychological trauma to the mother of the twins, ancient widowhood practices among others. These above mentioned were considered detrimental to the dignity of human person. They therefore, engineered other missionaries to emulate the life of Jesus who elevated the position of women even though, the Jewish society was patriarchal. Moreover, the first person to share the Goodnews that Christ has resurrected was Mary Magdalene a female or a woman. To this end, the European Christian missionaries pursued the course of elevating women to a better position. Thus, they adopted various strategies through which to achieve gender equality in the society.

Christianity Advocates for Gender Equality

The European Christian missionaries took their position about gender equality from the Biblical perspective. According to Uchem (2005) the Bible is rooted in the fact that men and women are equally made in God's image, God said, let us make (the human) in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves (Genesis 1: 26). Equality of men and women is based in God's image. God created (the human) male and female in His own image (Genesis 1: 26-27) thus both the male and the female originate from God. Casmir, Chukwuelobe and Ugwu (2014) state that the late Papal Pontiff Pope John Paul had to make a historic apology to women for the centuries of obnoxious and oppressive treatment meted out to them. This could be as a result of patriarchy in the society. Dignitatem cited by Casimir et al (2014) adds that Papal Pontiff Pope also corrected the "submission" clause in Ephesians 5: 21-33 attributed to Saint Paul that all the reasons given in favour of the subjection of woman to man in marriage should be understood as mutual subjection of (man and woman) to one another out of reverence to Christ. Uchem (2005) posits that gender inequality was not, and could not have been supported by the Creator as in terms of common origin. God created humans male and female, each to mirror His (God's) image in creation, according to the priority account of the origin of creation. Jesus Christ himself defended gender equality and

reminded people that the creator made them male and female in the very beginning (Mathew 19: 3-10, Genesis 1: 27).

Kohm (2008) posits that the application of Christianity to women's lives based in the person of Jesus Christ and His revolutionary treatment of women. It presents personal examples of women whose lives were transformed not by uncovering the social construction of gender roles, but by knowing Jesus Christ brought freedom for humanity from sin, regardless of gender, status or national origin. He offered true liberty and women especially liberation. It is understandable why many Roman women were drawn to Christianity before their spouses were. The Jesus movement offered women a seat at the table and a place in the church. Hence woman is created in the image of God. Like man, she is created for the purpose of knowing, ultimately knowing God. Chiegboka (2001) avers that "appreciating that the bible is the word of God, a manifestation of God's revelation in a concrete human, social, cultural structure and containing the liberation enjoyed by humanity from God" (p. 66). For Chukwuma-Offor (2017), women, therefore, form the integral part of the great liberation that God has gained for human race through the singular sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Payne (2015) avows that:

Men and woman are equally created in God's image and given equal authority and stewardship of God's creation. Christians both male and female are equally called to exercise their God given gifts (2Timothy 1:6) with equal authority and equal responsibility in the church and in the society. While the Bible reflects patriarchal culture, the Bible does not teach patriarchy in human relations. Christ's redemptive work frees all people from patriarchy, calling women and men to share authority equally in service and leadership. The unrestricted gifts of women are integral to the work of the Holy Spirit and essential for the advancement of the gospel in the world (pp. 3-5).

Thus, God upholds equality of human beings he created. The European Christian missionaries portrayed this idea in the host communities. This granted women a better place in the society.

Impact of Some Selected European Christian Women in the 19th Century Missionary in Old Eastern Nigeria

Mrs. Samuel Edgerley

Mrs. Samuel Edgerley was probably among the first woman Christian missionary from Britain to Old Eastern Nigeria. She was of British origin, a member of Church of Scotland Mission. Her way to Eastern Nigeria was captured by Okoro (2018) who stated that, the Church of Scotland Mission also known as the United Presbyterians, sent an exploratory mission to Calabar in 1846. The group was led by the Reverend Hope Master ton Waddell,

and comprised Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Edgerley among others. From Okoro's account, Mrs. Samuel Edgerley came to carry out missionary activities along with her husband Mr. Samuel Edgerley and other groups. It could be said that Mrs. Samuel Edgerley was consumed with enthusiasm and zeal to preach Christ to the indigenous despite that Africa was described as a Whiteman's grave. As they arrived, the missionaries considered school as a veritable means of converting the indigenous people. Jordan (1949) affirmed that the missionary wanted to preach the Gospel and to win converts CSM adopted this strategy. It could be said that Mrs. Samuel Edgerley was instrumental to the establishment of Duke Town School in Calabar and other schools along the coasts and up to Cross-River Eastern Nigeria. She also carried out missionary activities within the area. Hardage (2003) reports that:

When the first church building at Creek Town became too crowded, Ensa (Nsa) Okoho known as King Eyo Honesty VII of Creek Town wrote to the Foreign Mission Committee in Scotland requesting help to obtain a new church. When the new, ready-built, church arrived, it could accommodate 500 to 600 people comfortably. Its dedication on 9 July 1879 was cause for celebration. Missionary wife Mrs. Samuel Edgerley wrote, flags were flying, and guns were fired in the early morning by the King, to intimate to the people that it was a day of glad tidings, and at ten o'clock the new church bell rung out, calling all to the opening. About a thousand people attended, despite heavy rain.

The above statement showed that Mrs. Samuel Edgerley played a role in the building of the new church and further used the new church as an avenue to teach women and children about the risen Christ. She also assisted her husband Mr. Samuel Edgerley who was both a catechist and a printer, not only in church matters, but in writing Christian based articles. These articles helped in changing and transforming lives of the indigenous people during her missionary activity. Mrs. Samuel Edgerley's presence during the missionary enterprise in Old Eastern Nigeria, aided CSM to achieve considerable results.

Mary Slessor

Mary Slessor is from Britain. According to Peña (2021), Mary was born on December 2nd, 1848 to a Scottish family in Aberdeen. Her mother was a Christian, through her mother, Mary and other of her siblings attended church services and programmes. When she came to full knowledge of what salvation is, she was zealous to fulfil the Great Commission in African soil. Her desire was granted when Mary joined the United Presbyterian Church as a missionary teacher. Mary was also accepted into the Foreign Missions Board; Mary with other agents of CSM, who came to Old Eastern Nigeria precisely in Calabar in 1875. Umoh (2016) observes that Mary operated around three contiguous regions and peoples; the Ibibio, Efik and Igbo. From Creek Town (in present day Cross River State) through Itu (in present day Akwa Ibom State) to Arochuku (in present day Abia State). Mary was

appointed by United Presbyterian Church to Nigeria as a missionary and teacher. She was stationed in Duke Town as a school teacher in 1879; her missionary activities later reached Itu Arochukwu and other parts of Igboland. She returned back to Scotland due to illness. After she recovered, she came back to Old Eastern Nigeria in 1880 and was in charge of the women's work at old Town. This time, she began to learn the culture and language of the indigenous people. Being led by the zeal to spread the gospel within the host communities, she decided to live in interior area with the people in order to easily preach the Goodnews to them. She observed various cultural practices of the indigenous people, and considered some of the cultural practices such as; killing of twins, banishment of mothers of twins, ancient widowhood practices and other ill treatment meted out against women, human sacrifice and so on. These were considered detrimental to the dignity of human person. All these motivated her to continue missionary activities and to ameliorate these cultural practices. Peña (2021) reports that in 1903, Mary started a mission at Itu which reached Arochukwu. During this time in her life, Mary focused a great deal of energy and effort to saving twins who were facing death by the ethnic leaders. She also devoted herself to ministering to the twin's mothers, who were often isolated from the village to die. In one of the occasions, she took a small child she had rescued from death. She named the girl Janie, who was six-months-old at the time and began to raise her. Furthermore, Mary saved even more twin babies and got to the heart of many vile and superstitious practices. Mary rescued hundreds of twin babies thrown out into the forest, stopped the practice of trying to determine guilt by making them drink poison, healed the sick. She taught that guilt was not determined by poison drinking and that gods do not need sacrifices. Mary then started to preach the Gospel to the indigenous people. For instance, in Okoyong town, Peña (2021) states that about 12 children were living in her home, all children she has saved from being left for dead. Her continues missionary works in the town for over a decade despite oppositions, yielded positive results. Later, many Okoyong people were introduced to Christ by other ethnic groups that Mary had evangelized.

Furthermore, Mary visited other towns such as Azo, Itu and various towns in Igboland spreading the gospel and abolishing ancient cultural practices that were detrimental to dignity of human person. Peña (2021) agreed that Mary had much fruit with the Ibo (sic) people. In 1908 she established a home for women and girls. Through this medium, she advocated for the protection of the rights of women in the society. Mary died in 1915, at the age of 66. Mary Slessor was a dedicated missionary, with vigour and passion to establish Christianity in Eastern Nigeria and by extension West Africa at large. Mary Slessor was an astute, devoted and fearless missionary. She was bold in her ministry preaching the resurrected Christ in interior villages deferring oppositions from indigenous chiefs. Peña (2021) affirms that Mary transformed communities with the love of the Gospel;

starting orphanages, preaching the Good News, standing up for women's rights, and saving many innocent lives from death. Today, hospitals, schools, orphanages, and churches are all scattered all over Nigeria because of the impact of Mary Slessor during her missionary enterprise in the area.

Mrs Beswick, Miss Kate Beswick and Miss Brandeth

These female European Christian missionaries worked under CMS in Igboland. Mrs. Beswick and Miss Kate Beswick of the CMS in 1912 opened a Women's Christian mothers' Home at Emii with a deliberate intention to convert for the church. According to Nwadiolor and Okpe (2023), this Women's Christian mothers' Home was initiated under the guidance of Frances. The indigenes looked at the hospice respectfully as *Ogige Nwanyi Bekee* (The white woman's Home). Girl's school and a sort of home vocational training were established for the women with Frances in charge. The White Woman's Home offered to the indigenes, especially women, a wide range of home management and home economics training; which laid the background to Egbu Women Training Home started in 1907. Onyeidu (2004) asserts that Kate Beswick was the founder of the Women's Home at Emii and in Egbu Owerri in 1910. Women attended the Women's Christian Mothers Home from neighbouring towns like Agbala, Emeke-Obibi, Uzoagba, Mbaise, Egbelu-obube, Imerienwe, and Upe. *Ogige Nwanyi Bekee* became the platform for recruiting volunteers to assist in the conversion of souls. The time a mud-house was erected at Ebikoro Emeohe, a woman missionary, Miss K. Beswick was deemed to have come to enlighten the people of Emii, especially the women. She was accommodated in the mud-house. She established hostels for women and taught religion including Bible reading and home management. She also built clinic and all these attracted large number of followers. She worked in consultation with Rev. A. C. Onyeabo and Archdeacon Dennis. Later in 1912, Miss K. Beswick was joined by Miss Brandeth. On her arrival, she was placed in charge of schools. This was the situation at Egbu as reported by Katae. Beswick (cited in Onyeidu, 2004) remarks thus, ten young women evangelists are living and working in a way no Ibo young woman has ever worked before. They have many dangers and difficulties; they have to bear being scoffed at because they uphold a standard of Christian conduct for others to see. We need a hundred such women for our mass movement district. Onyeidu (2004) further observes that the Owerri District had two female institutions; one was the girls' school, while the other was the women's home' set up for married Christian women. *Ogige Nwanyi Bekee* operated by these female European Christian missionaries contributed immensely in advocacy for care and support of children and women of Igboland.

Mrs. Hanney Mary

Mrs. Hanney Mary was a member of Methodist Missionary Society (MMS). She just like the New Testament Prisca or Priscilla joined her husband Rev. Hanney in missionary

voyage to Old Eastern Nigeria. She was hospitable and friendly to the indigenous people especially to new converts. For instance, Akpan (2020) recalled that, as the Methodist Mission established a school called Methodist Boys' High School in Oron in 1905, one of the first Igbo students in the school, Rev. Chima Nwana and others who left their nativity to Oron for the purpose of education, at their arrival at the school, they were joyfully received by Etubom Hanney, his wife Mary Hanney and the Rev. C.P. Groves. She ensured that the boys were properly taken care off. Mrs. Hanney Mary made several efforts to see that just like the male folks; their female counterparts were not left out in the quest to be educated. She made several attempts through writing to the missionary headquarters at Britain to ensure that the girls were also given access to education. Her efforts bore fruitful result. Akpan (2020) reports that another significant step in the educational development of Eastern Nigeria was taken by the Primitive Methodist when they established the Girls' Institute at Jamestown in 1909 under Rev. Hanney's wife, Mary. It was initially set up to improve the character and domestic abilities of house wives and other girls. The school's curriculum included hygiene, needlework, Bible lessons, reading, writing, arithmetic, general knowledge talks, English and Efik lessons, grammar and physical education. Mrs. Hanney Mary ensured that while the school was under her care, impacting Christian values into the lives of the students was her priority. Through education of women, Mgbemena (2022) observed that women were liberated and were helped to acquire higher status. They were taught the basis of personal hygiene thus those under menstruation were no longer isolated and socially intimidate but were protected. Mrs. Hanney Mary ensured that godly girls by extension mothers were raised to portray Christian virtues in the society.

The Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary

When father Shanahan (later Bishop Shanahan) took charge of Roman Catholic Mission in Igboland, he understood that for greater impacts to be made in the host communities, the involvement of religious women is non-negotiable. According to Obi (1985), the need for more hands to assist in the ministry challenged the new bishop to found, in 1924, the congregation of the Holy Rosary Sisters in Ireland to be deployed to Nigeria for the formation of a large number of girls in the special convent schools already built by him. Nwosu (1985) observed that Shanahan realized that by himself, and even with the help of his priests, he could not give Igbo women the spiritual elevation necessary to enable them to raise to the level of their male companions, as God originally intended them to be. So in 1924 he founded the congregation of the Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary in Old Eastern region, to undertake this task, since women are better qualified than men to train other women to the full development of womanly qualities. It is the charisma of these religious women that Shanahan added as part of his missionary and educational outreach to the

indigenous people. The congregation of the Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary instituted in Old Eastern Nigeria by Shanahan began with just two Irish sisters.

Shanahan instituted these women religious orders knowing the need to reduce the marginalization of girls in this area. Consequently, he thus introduced them to a life that would comprise much sacrifice, making them ready to give their life to mission not only to win souls but also to add value to the lives of others, especially women and girls, exemplified by their life of selfless and dedicated service. The congregations of the Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary were able to extend this mission to the education of girls, thus creating mutual solidarity between the nuns and the local community, which in turn created a sense of mission and Church within the local Christian context. Oranusi (2018) states that the congregation of the Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary following Shanahan's example of cultural immersion and respect for local customs, their approach to mission was strikingly different to the prevalent approach of the time. They made great achievements because of the balance they kept between contemplation and action. Njoku, (2012) reports that the Holy Rosary Rev. Sisters who arrived Emekuku on the 7th March 1924 instituted a convent and with time established a clinic that grew into a hospital today known as Holy Rosary hospital, Emekuku with later establishment of vast network of clinics and maternity homes attached to the growing Holy Rosary hospital.

From the foregoing, it could be said that, the European catholic religious women made progress in bringing more indigenous people to God. According to Nwosu (1985) as at 1966, a family had given their three girls out to the religious way of life. More families were sending their children to convents to be trained. Some were nurses and midwives in hospitals and maternity homes. They established Mary League Girls Association (a Catholic pious organisation for young girls) and the Legion of Mary (a pious organisation for all categories of Catholics who are devoted to Mary, the mother of Jesus). They took care of the orphans and prepared children for sacraments. In this way, the involvement of the sisters in missionary activities yielded fruitful results.

Conclusion

Roman Catholic missionaries from Portugal, being the first European Christian missionaries to come into Nigeria, recorded limited success in their apostolic work. This could be attributed to lack of inclusion of women in the evangelistic team among other factors. The second phase of European Christian missionary enterprise in Nigeria especially in Old Eastern region included females a missionary agent. Just as it is said, when a woman or mother is converted, the possibility of converting other members of the family or nation is inevitable. As the European Christian missionaries came along with their female counterparts, many indigenous women flocked around them and listened to the gospel of

Jesus Christ. These female missionaries showed love, hospitality, generosity and did not discriminate. All these, coupled with the fact that the missionaries made efforts to ameliorate some socio-cultural practices considered detrimental to women in Old Eastern Nigeria, motivated many indigenous women to quickly accept the Christian religion, which they considered a saving grace to their plights. With time, greater number of the indigenous people in the Old Eastern region accepted Christianity. Presently, Eastern Nigeria is dominated by Christianity. Therefore, it could be unequivocally said that, the European Christian women who joined the missionary enterprise in Old Eastern Nigeria, contributed immensely to the success of the Christian missionary enterprise in the region.

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