

**The Spread of Christianity in Old Eastern Nigeria and the Impact of Some European Christian Women
(1841-1950)**

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

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Abstract

The study examines the contributions of some European Christian women towards the success of the 19th-century Christian missionary enterprise in Old Eastern Nigeria. It highlights how these women worked tirelessly to ensure that the Bible and the Plough were fully implemented in host communities, yielding the desired results. In the 19th-century Christian missionary enterprise in Nigeria, some women were among the various Christian missionary bodies that came to the region. During this period, the Old Eastern region opened to Christian missionary activities that contributed immensely to the civilisation of the society. Some of these European Christian women missionaries joined their male counterparts in evangelising the Old Eastern region, recognising that Jesus Christ achieved great success by working 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 The research methodology uses secondary data sources such as mainline books, textbooks, various unpublished projects related to the topic, journals, among others.

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

Introduction

As part of God's creation, women were endowed with potential, skills, talents, and gifts that, when harnessed, can contribute to societal development and material progress. The significance of women in society cannot be overemphasised. In this regard, Chukwuma-Offor (2017) affirms that:

The role of women in the family, church, and society at large cannot be underestimated. They are indispensable in the actualisation 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 be attained adequately and effectively without women's active involvement, support, and participation (pp. 185-186).

Jesus Christ understood this during his earthly ministry and did not neglect women. This may be why some scholars view Jesus as a social reformer and a feminist, arguing that He brought social change to Jewish patriarchal society and, as a feminist, promoted and elevated women's position. The Apostles and other early church members also involved women in spreading the gospel. For instance, Priscilla, Aquila's wife, preached the gospel as an itinerant preacher with her husband.

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Paul was among the Apostles who emulated Jesus Christ by working with women. In his various missionary journeys within the Roman Empire, Apostle Paul was sometimes aided by women such as Lydia, among others, who helped ensure the success of his missionary activity.

It could be said that Portuguese Roman Catholic missionaries, the earliest European Christian missionaries to evangelise Nigeria in the 15th century, had little or no way to incorporate women into their evangelistic team. As a result, they recorded little success. Supporting this view, Nwadiolor (2016) confirms that pre-colonial missionaries failed for many reasons, including lopsidedness. In this context, lopsidedness refers to the early missionaries' failure to include women in the mission agenda. However, some European Christian missionaries who visited Old Eastern Nigeria in the 19th century included women as missionary agents in evangelising the region. These European Christian women missionaries who joined their male counterparts in evangelising 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 in the success of Jesus' ministry. Therefore, the women believed that joining the missionary enterprise in Old Eastern Nigeria would yield greater results. This proved to be a dream come true, as eastern Nigeria is now largely Christian. This suggests that the 19th-century European Christian missionary enterprise, which included women, was more successful than earlier counterparts that excluded women.

The Position of Women in Old Eastern Nigeria Before the Advent of Christianity

Before Nigeria was divided into six geo-political zones, Igwe (1977) states that the ethnic groups in the Old Eastern region of Nigeria fell broadly into four main groups: the Ibos (sic) (also spelt Igbo), the Ibibio-Efik, the Delta-Ijaws, and the small groups. The Igbo ethnic group is the largest in Old Eastern Nigeria and occupies more than half of the study area's landmass. Before the advent of Christianity in Old Eastern Nigeria, patriarchy existed, and this meant that women were not esteemed like their male counterparts in society. According to William (1994), the word patriarchy derives from two Greek words—*patēr* (πατήρ, father) and *archē* (αρχή, rule). Wood (2014) demystifies the idea 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) states 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) thinks that patriarchy in its narrowest sense is a social system controlled by men and an inheritance which is passed on from father to son. Family members depend on and submit 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

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(Millet, 1968). In the then Greco-Roman world, the *paterfamilias* (father of the house) had 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. This viewpoint best explains women's position in Old Eastern Nigeria before Christianity's arrival.

History of Christianity in Old Eastern Nigeria

During the 19th century, various Christian missionary bodies came to Old Eastern Nigeria. The first European Christian missionary body to plant the seed of Christianity in Old Eastern Nigeria was the Church Missionary Society (CMS). According to Dike (1965), at first glance, the 1841 expedition appears to have been a complete failure because, within two months of leaving England, two of the three ships were lost at sea and 54 of its 162 white crew died of malaria. However, the survivors concluded treaties of friendship with some West African tribes before sailing back to England. One such treaty was with the Ibos (sic) through Obi (King) Ossai of Aboh. In addition, the expedition preached Christianity, and Simon Jonas, an Ibo (sic) ex-slave who joined the expedition in Sierra Leone, was left behind at Aboh to preach the Gospel. These experiences also led the CMS to use educated Africans from Sierra Leone for its evangelical activities in West Africa, rather than Europeans directly. Samuel Ajayi Crowther was chosen to lead the team for Nigeria. CMS also returned to Aboh in 1845 but later left.

Later, Okoro (2018) traces the Church of Scotland Mission, also known as the United Presbyterians, to an exploratory mission to Calabar in 1846. The group was led by the Reverend Hope Masterton Waddell and comprised Mr and Mrs Samuel Edgerley, Andrew Chisholm, and Edward Miller. Soon after arriving, 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) notes that the Church of Scotland Mission (CSM) came into Igboland in 1888 at Unwana, the home of the late Ezeogo Akanu Ibiam. The mission 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 the 1920s as well as Afikpo in 1924. Mrs Samuel Edgerley and Mary Slessor were among the notable female missionaries who joined CMS and recorded a resounding success in their missionary enterprise, which will be enumerated later in the study.

Ekechi (1971) notes that in 1857, CMS carried out another expedition similar to the one of 1841, which was sent to the Niger; several volunteered to join the missionary team on the voyage. The British Government and Macgregor Laird, a Liverpool merchant, jointly financed it, and William Baikie commanded it. Crowther led the evangelists on the crew, and Rev. John Christopher Taylor, whose parents were Ibo (sic) ex-slaves, was the titular leader of the volunteers from Sierra Leone. The expedition arrived at Onitsha on Sunday 26th July 1857 and was warmly received by the King, Obi Akazua and his chiefs. The CMS opened a permanent mission station there and began spreading 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, arrived 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

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handed over to Father Shanahan (later Bishop Shanahan), he formed the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary in 1924. The RCM showed generosity and hospitality toward indigenous people, which helped them gain acceptance. Okoro (2018) reports that the Qua Ibo of Northern Nigeria established its first mission in the Eket and Uyo areas in 1887 and later spread to other parts of Eastern Nigeria.

Inyang, cited in Igwe (1977), describes that the Primitive Methodist Missionary Society arrived in Calabar from the Island of Fernada Po in 1894 with an initial team of two missionaries, Rev. R. Fairley and Rev. M. Brown. Within twelve months, it opened schools and churches in Calabar, Oron, and Opobo, all in present-day Cross River State. In 1896, the missionaries were invited to open a school in Archibonville, also in the Old Calabar Province. Archibonville served as the mission headquarters until 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, and later reached Owerri Province in Igboland. Other missionary bodies came to the Old Eastern region during this period.

Societal Impact of Christianity on Women in Old Eastern Nigeria

As European Christian missionaries arrived in Old Eastern Nigeria, they saw that women's position in society was not as esteemed as that of men. During 19th-century missionary activity, some European Christian women were among them. The female missionaries saw that women in host communities were not as honoured and respected as men. Besides, women suffered ill treatment as a result of socio-cultural practices such as the banishment of mothers who gave birth to twins, the killing of twins, which could cause psychological trauma to the mother of the twins, and ancient widowhood practices, among others. The above-mentioned practices were considered detrimental to the dignity of the human person. They therefore encouraged other missionaries to emulate Jesus, who elevated women's status even in a patriarchal Jewish society. Moreover, Mary Magdalene was the first to share the Good News that Christ had risen. To this end, European Christian missionaries sought to elevate women's status. Thus, they adopted various strategies to achieve gender equality.

Christianity Advocates for Gender Equality

European Christian missionaries based their position on gender equality on a 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 on 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 Roman Pontiff, Pope John Paul II, had to make a historic apology to women for centuries of obnoxious and oppressive treatment. This could be as a result of patriarchy in society. John Paul II, cited by Casimir et al. (2014), adds that the Pontiff also corrected the "submission" clause in Ephesians 5: 21-33 attributed to Saint Paul, stating 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) argues that the Creator did not support gender inequality, and could not have, since both share a common origin. According to the priority account of creation's origin, God created humans male and female, each to mirror His

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(God's) image in creation. Jesus Christ defended gender equality and reminded people that the Creator made them male and female from the beginning (Matthew 19:3-10; Genesis 1:27).

Kohm (2008) argues that applying Christianity to women's lives is grounded 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 especially liberation for women. 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 to know, ultimately to know 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 an integral part of the great liberation God has won for the human race through the singular sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Payne (2015) avows that:

Men and women 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 responsibility in the church and in 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. Women's unrestricted gifts are integral to the work of the Holy Spirit and essential for advancing the gospel in the world (pp. 3-5).

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

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

Mrs Samuel Edgerley

Mrs Samuel Edgerley was likely among the first British women Christian missionaries to Old Eastern Nigeria. She was of British origin, a member of the Church of Scotland Mission. Okoro (2018) notes that the Church of Scotland Mission, also known as the United Presbyterians, sent an exploratory mission to Calabar in 1846. The group, which included Mr and Mrs Samuel Edgerley, was led by the Reverend Hope Masterton Waddell. According to Okoro's account, Mrs Samuel Edgerley came to carry out missionary activities 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 people, even though Africa was described as a Whiteman's grave. As they arrived, the missionaries considered school a veritable means of converting the indigenous people. Jordan (1949) affirmed that missionaries wanted to preach the Gospel and win converts; CSM adopted this strategy. Mrs Samuel Edgerley was instrumental in establishing Duke Town School in Calabar and other schools along the coasts and up to Cross

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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 that flags were flying and guns were fired in the early morning by the King to signal to the people that it was a day of glad tidings, and at ten o'clock the new church bell rang out, calling all to the opening. About a thousand people attended, despite heavy rain.

The above statement shows that Mrs Samuel Edgerley helped build the new church and used it to teach women and children about the risen Christ. She also assisted her husband, Mr Samuel Edgerley, a catechist and printer, not only in church matters but also in writing Christian-based articles. These articles helped change and transform the lives of indigenous people during her missionary work. 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 her siblings attended church services and programmes. When she learned about salvation, she became zealous to fulfil the Great Commission on African soil. Her desire was granted when Mary joined the United Presbyterian Church as a missionary teacher. The Foreign Missions Board also accepted Mary. Mary, along with other CSM agents, came to Old Eastern Nigeria, specifically Calabar, in 1875.

Umoh (2016) notes that Mary worked across three contiguous regions and peoples: the Ibibio, Efik, and Igbo, from Creek Town (present-day Cross River State) through Itu (present-day Akwa Ibom State) to Arochukwu (present-day Abia State). The United Presbyterian Church appointed Mary as a missionary and teacher in Nigeria. She was stationed in Duke Town as a schoolteacher in 1879; her missionary activities later reached Itu, Arochukwu, and other parts of Igboland. She returned to Scotland because she fell ill. After she recovered, she returned to Old Eastern Nigeria in 1880 and oversaw the women's work at Old Town. This time, she began to learn the culture and language of the indigenous people. Driven by zeal to spread the gospel within host communities, she decided to live in the interior with the people to preach the Good News more easily. She observed various cultural practices of the indigenous people. She 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 human dignity. These experiences motivated her to continue missionary activities and to challenge these cultural practices.

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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 on saving twins who were facing death at the hands of the ethnic leaders. She also devoted herself to ministering to the twins' mothers, who were often isolated from the village to die. On one occasion, 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 raising 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, and healed the sick. She taught that guilt was not determined by drinking poison and that gods do not need sacrifices. Mary then began preaching 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 had saved from being left for dead. Her continued missionary work in the town for over a decade, despite opposition, yielded positive results. Later, other ethnic groups Mary had evangelised introduced many Okoyong people to Christ.

Furthermore, Mary visited other towns such as Azo, Itu, and various towns in Igboland, spreading the gospel and abolishing ancient cultural practices that undermined human dignity. 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 work, she advocated for women's rights. Mary died in 1915 at age 66. Mary Slessor was a dedicated missionary, with a vigour and passion to establish Christianity in Eastern Nigeria and, by extension, West Africa. Mary Slessor was an astute, devoted and fearless missionary. She was bold in her ministry, preaching the resurrected Christ in interior villages, defying opposition from indigenous chiefs. Peña (2021) affirms that Mary transformed communities through the love of the Gospel: starting orphanages, preaching the Good News, standing up for women's rights, and saving many innocent lives. Today, hospitals, schools, orphanages, and churches are scattered across Nigeria because of Mary Slessor's impact 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. In 1912, Mrs Beswick and Miss Kate Beswick of the CMS opened a Women's Christian Mothers' Home at Emii with the deliberate intention of converting people to the church. According to Nwadiolor and Okpe (2023), Frances initiated this Women's Christian Mothers' Home. Indigenes viewed the hospice respectfully as *Ogige Nwanyi Bekee* (the white woman's Home). Frances established a girls' school and vocational training for women, with Frances in charge. The White Woman's Home offered indigenes, especially women, a wide range of home management and home economics training, laying the groundwork for the Egbu Women Training Home, started in 1907. Onyeidu (2004) asserts that Kate Beswick founded 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 help convert souls. When a mud house was erected at Ebikoro Emeohe, a woman missionary, Miss K. Beswick, was seen as having 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

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and home management. She also built a clinic, and all these attracted a 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 Katae reported. Beswick (cited in Onyeidu, 2004) remarks thus: ten young women evangelists were living and working in a way no Ibo young woman had ever worked before. They faced many dangers and difficulties; they had to endure being scoffed at because they upheld a standard of Christian conduct for others to see. We need a hundred such women for our mass movement district. Onyeidu (2004) further notes that the Owerri District had two female institutions: a girls' school and a women's home for married Christian women. *Ogige Nwanyi Bekee*, run by these female European Christian missionaries, contributed immensely to advocating for the care and support of children and women in Igboland.

Mrs. Hanney Mary

Mrs Hanney Mary was a member of the Methodist Missionary Society (MMS). Like the New Testament Prisca, or Priscilla, she joined her husband, Rev. Hanney, on a 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 education, at their arrival at the school, were joyfully received by Etubom Hanney, his wife Mary Hanney and the Rev. C.P. Groves. She ensured the boys were properly cared for.

Mrs Mary Hanney made several efforts to ensure that, just like the male students, their female counterparts were not left out in the quest for education. She wrote to the missionary headquarters in Britain to ensure the girls also had access to education. Her efforts bore fruitful results. Akpan (2020) reports that the Primitive Methodists took another significant step in Eastern Nigeria's educational development when they established the Girls' Institute at Jamestown in 1909 under Rev. Hanney's wife, Mary. It was initially established to improve the character and domestic skills of housewives 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, instilling Christian values in the students' lives was her priority. Through women's education, Mgbemena (2022) observed that women were liberated and gained higher status. They were taught the basics of personal hygiene; thus, those menstruating were no longer isolated and socially stigmatised but were protected. Mrs Hanney Mary ensured that godly girls, and by extension mothers, were raised to embody Christian virtues in society.

The Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary

When Father Shanahan (later Bishop Shanahan) took charge of the Roman Catholic Mission in Igboland, he understood that, for greater impact in the host communities, religious women's involvement was 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

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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 realised 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 rise to the level of their male companions, as God originally intended. So in 1924 he founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary in the Old Eastern region to undertake this task, since women are better qualified than men to train other women in the full development of womanly qualities. Shanahan added the charisma of these religious women to his missionary and educational outreach to the indigenous people. Shanahan instituted the congregation of the Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary in Old Eastern Nigeria with just two Irish sisters.

Shanahan instituted these women religious orders knowing the need to reduce the marginalisation of girls in this area. Consequently, he introduced them to a life of sacrifice, preparing them to give their lives to the mission not only to win souls but also to add value to others' lives, especially women and girls, as shown by their selfless, dedicated service. The Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary extended this mission to girls' education, creating mutual solidarity between the nuns and the local community and, in turn, a sense of mission and Church within the local Christian context. Oranusi (2018) states that the Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary, following Shanahan's example of cultural immersion and respect for local customs, took a mission approach strikingly different from the prevalent one at the time. They achieved great things by balancing contemplation and action. Njoku (2012) reports that the Holy Rosary Rev. Sisters who arrived in Emekuku on 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 the later establishment of a vast network of clinics and maternity homes attached to the growing Holy Rosary Hospital.

From the foregoing, it can be said that 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 to the religious way of life. More families sent their children to convents for training. Some were nurses and midwives in hospitals and maternity homes. They established the 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 cared for orphans and prepared children for the sacraments. In this way, the sisters' involvement in missionary activities yielded fruitful results.

Conclusion

Roman Catholic missionaries from Portugal, the first European Christian missionaries to come into Nigeria, recorded limited success in their apostolic work. This may have been due to the lack of women in the evangelistic team, among other factors. The second phase of European Christian missionary enterprise in Nigeria, especially in the Old Eastern region, included females as missionary agents. As it is said, when a woman or mother is converted, converting other members of the family or nation becomes easier. As European Christian male missionaries arrived with their female counterparts, many indigenous women flocked around them and listened to the gospel of Jesus Christ. These female missionaries showed love, hospitality, and generosity, and they did not discriminate. Coupled with the missionaries' efforts to ameliorate

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socio-cultural practices considered detrimental to women in Old Eastern Nigeria, this motivated many indigenous women to quickly accept Christianity, which they saw as a saving grace for their plights. Over time, more indigenous people in the Old Eastern region accepted Christianity. Presently, Eastern Nigeria is dominated by Christianity. Therefore, it can be said that European Christian women who joined the missionary enterprise in Old Eastern Nigeria contributed immensely to its success in the region.

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