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Conflict between Christianity and African Culture in the 21st Century: A study of Ezza North Local Government Area Of Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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Abstract
The study explores the implicit motivations of religious conflicts drawing from the activities of Christians and adherents of African Traditional Religions (ATR). Extant literature implicates dogmatic constructs, uncritical zeal and fanaticism that are driving the intractable conflict between Christians and members of ATR. Using descriptive survey design, with samples from Ezza communities in Ezza North Local Government Area of Ebonyi state, this study makes a case that there are implicit factors leading to intractable conflict between the adherents of the aforesaid religious. As the findings suggest, ideological differences, lack of recognition of one another's religion, illiteracy, chanvinism, blackmail and non –participation of Christians in cultural practices and cultural festivals etc, are the dominant variables leading such conflict. This narrative add to the discourse on religious conflicts in post-colonial environment.

Keywords: *Conflict, Christianity, Culture, Africa, Imperialism.*

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Introduction

The introduction of foreign religion especially Christianity into Africa by the missionaries had a tremendous impact on the people and their culture. The religion altered the way of life of Ezza North people. More so, the imposition of foreign cultures and values created a lot of discontentment, dissatisfaction and conflict. This culture conflict strangely has persisted even in more post-colonial period (when it was thought that the stability has achieved and colonial domination and oppression had withered away) (Emmanuel, 2022).

One then may ask, why have some of these social problems created by Christianity persisted in post-colonial Nigeria and in what new forms have they manifested? Edward (1975) seems to answer the above question when he noted that, despite the political independence of many African nations, the churches still operate on a dependency or domination axis and are still the agents of western colonial mentality and cultural imperialism. Too many of the missions founded churches are content with the imported theologies, patterns of ministries, church structures and architecture, liturgies and spirituality. Indeed, Christianity and westernization of African have been received with mixed feelings. Even more, the rationale for evangelization has been questioned by African anthropological scholars (Joel, 2021; Adedamola & Lilian, 2022).

Hence Edward (1975) rightly observed that Christianity in Africa is increasing by geometrical progression, and the forecast for the future growth of the church bright. Although, this situation has not led to complacency. However, missionary methods and motives for evangelism have been and are being subjected to rigorous scrutiny and critical review. Why Christianity in

Africa? Many reasons have been adduced for the importation of western religion into Africa and Nigeria in particular, from economic, political, socio-cultural and spiritual perspective. This has been a general consensus among Marxist scholars in analysis of Christianity from economic dimension for the reason that missionaries were being sponsored by the merchantalist class to propagate Christianity in Africa but were accused of being part of western imperialism as it has advanced to prepare the ground (market) for the plantation of capitalist drive (for profit accumulation) in the new world.

In addition, the missionaries and early anthropologist like Ayandele (2008), in quest for ideological justification for colonial rule claimed that African has no history, uncivilized, primitive, barbaric etc. In other words, the missionaries came to evangelize God to the people and to civilize them and also to exploit African resources.

Accordingly, Edward (1975), stressed that "the missionary is the initiator and centre of the religious revolution now taking place in Africa. As a matter of fact, his beliefs is to regard all other forms of religion as misguided fit only for destruction and to regard Christianity entirely different, the only true religion to be planted far from leaving other cult side by side in juxta position with the message of the gospel, thus, missionary is actively engaged in superseding them." Others are of the opinion that Christianity as part of western imperialism is characterized by the sole aim of domesticating and providing the Africans with false class-consciousness as enshrined in the doctrine (Bible), thereby building a favourable atmosphere for eventual colonialism. As part of the doctrine, the people are enjoined not to revolt against any constituted authority (colonial rule) because it is instituted by God. The Book of first Peter (chapter 2:13-15) encourage Christians to be submissive to every human institution for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme or to the governors as commissioned by him to bring criminals to justice. The Christian dogma also enjoined the coverts to look forward to heaven and think less about materialism. Moreso, they should lay their treasure in heaven than on earth where moth will eventually destroy it while at the same time the missionaries were pre-occupied with stealing large expense of the people's land and human resources. Probably, this explains the saying, do not pray with "all" eyes closed or when you open your eyes, property could be missing?

In addition, moralist have credited Christianity as it creed functions for the abolition of all forms of unjustifiable social discrimination and an indispensable pre condition for equality, justice, peace, progress in society coupled with the fact that it ensures security from fears and provides for eternal life for its members. They have also urged that missionaries educated Africans well; whatever theoretical or ideological stands point is a matter of individual perception (Michael 2000). Nevertheless, it is a fact that Christianity has spread across every part of Nigeria despite the continued conflict that has ensued between it and African religion and culture. According to Lesley,(2023), millions of people from all walks of life have embraced Christianity: students, lecturers, professionals, bureaucrats, business executives, top-military echelon, rural dwellers etc. one may ask, to what extent has Christianity actually westernized the Africans? Otherwise, why do some of these Christians in a moment of crisis reintegrate or identify into African culture for solution? The focus of the study then is to know the extent of religious conflict, the consequences of religious conflict, the causes of religious conflict and the actions that will be taken to resolve religious conflict in Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi state unlike other studies reviewed.

The Problem

The introduction of Christianity into Ezza North has altered social institutions existing in Nigeria especially that of Ezza North people in particular. Christian religion has brought serious attack on the religious life of African people more than any other aspect of our people's culture. This invariably has created social problems as consequences, thus the conflict between the opposing cultures. The study therefore attempts to explicate the persistent cultural conflict in post independent Nigeria rural areas with particular reference to Ezza North. The people of Ezza North Local Government Area of Ebonyi State have been factionalized into two religious affiliations. Some practiced Christianity whereas others are traditional religious worshippers. It is on this basis that the researcher intends to investigate the issue of conflict between Christianity and African culture, thus unveiling its causes, consequences and remedies in human society.

Objectives

The general objective of this study is to evaluate religious conflict in Umuezeoka. Specifically, this study has the following objectives:

i. To examine the causes of religious conflict in Umuezeoka.
ii. To investigate the implications of religious conflict in Umuezeoka.
iii. To proffer possible solutions to religious conflict in Umuezeoka.

Review of Literature

Concept of Conflict

Conflict is defined in many ways; there is no unanimity among scholars about what constitute a conflict. One school, dominant in North America, defines conflict in terms of clash of interest between two parties. According to Michel (2000), "a conflict exists when two people wish to carry out acts which are mutually inconsistent. The definition of conflict can be extended from single people to groups and more than two parties can be involved in a conflict. Awu (2008), opined that "conflict is an activity that is found everywhere" and numerous academic theories have been formulated to show that it is an inevitable product of human relations. Conflict may be personal, between individuals, or public, between societies. Individual conflict may turn into societal conflict and societal conflict can turn into individual conflict. This shows that the phenomenon itself is problematic, needing strategic and careful handling.

Culture

Culture, in a general sense, is the sum of all that have spontaneously arisen for the advancement of material life, and as an expression of spiritual and moral life – all social intercourse, technologies, arts, literature and science, Nmah (2004), sees culture as an indigenous and a way of life of the people in a particular environment. In other words, culture is the work of man's minds and hands. According to Ekoko and Amadi (2009), culture is the totality of human action and its products, which is socially transmitted from one generation to another. It is what man inherits through being a member of a particular society or group-social heritage. However, Tylor (1891), made it clear that culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society." Culture is the name of all things and events peculiar to the human species.

Religion

Nmah (2004) citing Bouquet observed that religion is an English word. But, a Roman writer Cicero holds the view that the word religion came from a root "leg" – meaning to take up,

gather, count, or observe, that is "to observe the signs of divine communication." Another Roman writer, services, on the other hand, held that it came from another root "lig" – meaning to bind. According to Nmah, Karl Bahner described the term religion as something derived from three Latin verbs namely: relegare, religare and religere. Relegere means "constantly turn to" or "conscientiously observe", or "to study closely". Religare means "binding oneself back to one's origin and goal", or "to bind oneself fast to God", while religere means to choose and select again. The possible derivation from the three verbs thus offers converging perspectives, which are more than an etymology, since they describe possible religious attitudes. Many scholars have given different definitions of religion, each defining it from his area of study. Emile Durkheim in Nmah (2004) sees religion as a social fact par excellence. Religion, he emphasizes, is a "social fact" in contrast to the theologians who regard it as something supernatural. The social facts are empirical facts, which are open to scientific investigations. He then concluded that law, contract, morality and education have religious foundations. Indeed, he defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices, that unite one single moral community called a Church and all those who adhere to them. From all indications, religion could be summarily defined as the belief in the unknown being.

Overview of African Traditional Religions

During the early days of missionaries, travellers, anthropologists and historians said that there was no acceptance of any existence of anything called African history (Fage, 1997) and ATR(s), despite the fact that they struggled with the adherents of this religion and tried to condemn what they thought never existed. Consequently, the one without history cannot have religion. To some anthropologists, 'untutored' Africans cannot know God as the idea of God is philosophical. To the missionaries in the early days, Africans were not fully human; they prohibited polygamy, initiation rites, ancestor worship and other indigenous practices (Fage, 1997). In this post-colonial period, it has come to be established that there is what we may call African Traditional Religion(s); however, there is no unanimous agreement as to whether it is religions in the plural or religion in the singular. Mbiti (1995) believes that it should be religions in the plural. His reason is that Africans are notoriously religious and there are different beliefs and tradition according to ethnic groups. There are so many ethnic groups as there are many traditional religions according him. He argues further that ATR does not have one origin or one historic movement and that the beliefs amongst the different communities differ greatly. Fage (1997), believes that we can speak of the African religion in the singular, because of the basic unity of African religious systems: although they (African religious systems) were separate and self contained systems, they interact with one another and influenced one another to different degrees. This justifies our using the term African Traditional Religion in the singular to refer to the whole African religious phenomena, even if we are, in fact, dealing with multiplicity of theologies.

Nevertheless, African Traditional Religion can be defined as the aboriginal religion of Africans, embraced by the forefathers of the present generations (Mokhoath, 2020). It is described as the religion that emerged from the sustaining faith of the forebears of the present generation of Africans passed from generation to generations and still practiced today by the present generation of Africans. According to Awolalu (1991), African Traditional Religion is the belief of the forefathers on the existence of the Supreme God, divinities, spirit beings, ancestors and mysterious powers, good and evil and the afterlife. The main feature of African Indigenous Religious is the whole of the African worldview, which forms the essential characteristics. According to Ajah (1994), the following are essential characteristics of African Indigenous Religion: The Supreme God and human beings, the divinities, ancestor veneration, spirits, good and evil, sacrifices, the afterlife and the final end.

Emergence of Christianity in Nigeria

Christianity is one of the major religions in Nigeria. It is said to have entered Nigeria in three phases. In the first phase, Christianity is reported to have made its appearance in Nigeria in the 15th century. Historical facts abound that Benin and Warri in the region were the first cities to witness missionary presence in Nigeria. The earliest known Christian Mission that first showed up in Nigeria was the Portuguese Roman Catholic Mission which came to Benin in 1485 at the invitation of Oba Uzolua and later in 1514 by Oba Esigie, Kings of Benin (Agha, 1999; Tasie, 1997). History shows that the initial attempt in planting Christianity in Benin failed because "The Kings of Benin City remained strongly attached to their indigenous religion" (Baur, 2009). It is said that there were enough evidences for such failures in Benin in the 15th century of which the above was but one of them.

The second attempt in the 16th century under Oba Esigie succeeded to a certain extent as the Oba himself and most of his chiefs actually professed and practiced Christian religion somewhat in their own terms. Eventually, Christian churches were built but unfortunately the Benin Mission appears to have remained confined to the royal court. Much later, it is reported that some Spanish Capuchins, some Augustinian monks and some missionaries from the Sacred Congregation de propaganda Fidei had their turn in the Benin and Warri Mission field with both positive and negative responses each time. How far this Benin mission expanded is not known. But it is most likely that the crucifixes, mutilated statues of saints and several Catholic emblems that were discovered within the Benin royal court several years later go to prove that some measure of success was recorded in the Benin missionary work. In the second phase, Christianity is reported to have penetrated Nigeria through western Nigeria. Lagos as at 1841 had developed into a notorious slave market with its King Kosoko as the Principal promoter of the trade (Dike, 1995). Evidence indicates that it was after his deportation by British administration that real missionary enterprise began in Yoruba land. Among the earliest missions that evangelized Yoruba land are the Wesleyan Methodist Mission and the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S) ably represented by the Reverend Thomas Birch Freeman and Catechist Henry Townsend respectively in 1842. Samuel Ajayi Crowther became the first Yoruba man to get converted at Sierra Leone as a freed slave. He became instrumental in reaching his own people with the gospel (Anyandele, 2008). This was followed by the Calabar Mission in 1846 with the Scottish Presbyterian Mission taking the lead in evangelizing the Efik people. Essien Ukpabio, a native of Creek town emerged the first convert and was baptized by the Reverend Hope Waddle, the first pioneer missionary to Calabar after being to Ethiopia. Other missionaries like Mary Slessor joined later in the missionary work in Calabar. King of Creek town, King Eyo.

Honesty was one of the main actors that helped missionaries to plant Christianity in Calabar. From Calabar, the Presbyterian Church spread to the other parts of the former Eastern region (Ajayi, 1996; Kalu, 1997). According to Ajah (1994), "Christian Missions came to Eastern Nigeria mainly through two angles. The first angle was through Lagos area or from Western Nigeria. The second angle was directly to the eastern end of the country through a sea port." Ajah fails to mention for clarity purposes the Sea Port in question. He confirms that the Presbyterian and Qua Iboe Churches penetrated the east through Calabar. With the passage of time, Christian Missions over spread the whole of Eastern Nigeria.

Furthermore, Nigeria witnessed the third phase of missionaries' entrance into Northern Nigeria as from 1870. This was said to be in three phases too. The first phase 1870 – 1888 was met with relative success even though there was no single convert won, but the missionaries succeeded in making contact with the north and opening it up for further missionary work. The

major players during this enterprise were Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Nigerian freed slave, Dr. Baike, Archdeacon Henry John and Charles Paul. The second phase was between 1888 and 1900. During this era, the missionary enterprise was associated with British imperialism which made the people to discredit the missionaries. In 1890, the CMS sponsored what is called the Sudan party and later the Hausa Association with the mandate to evangelize Northern Nigeria and to study and translate the Gospel into Hausa language as well as establishing a college. Membership of this group comprised of graduates from Cambridge and Oxford Universities, Presidents of the CMS and the Wesleyan Missionary Society among others (Michael, 2000). At this time, all efforts to convert the Muslim proved abortive, but the missionaries were able to convert some adherents of traditional religion in the north. Gradually, Mission stations were established here and there in the region which became bases for the spread and penetration of the Gospel in Northern Nigeria. Later on, other missionary bodies equally started showing interest in reaching northern Nigeria. In the third phase 1900-1918, the British administration under Sir Frederick Lugard appeared to be anti-missionary by restricting missionary activities in the territory. But generally the initial eagerness shown by some emirs to establish trading links with the Europeans helped to some extent in paving way for the establishment and solidifying of Christianity in the Northern region.

Origin of Conflict between Christianity and African Culture

The origin of the clash of religious and African culture in Nigeria as it is throughout Africa, is rooted in the history of African encounter with foreign religions, particularly Islam and Christianity. Before their arrival there were several religious belief systems, collectively called the African Traditional Religion (ATR). It could be argued that Africa, and indeed Nigeria, was not unreligious before their encounter with Islam and Christianity. This assertion is upheld by Ekoko & Amadi (2009) thus: Long before the coming of Islam and Christianity, the people who occupied the area of the present day Nigeria were not unreligious. A typical traditional society in the Nigeria area evolved religious strategies which ensured the survival of the cornerstones of social norms, hopes, expectations and existence. It is plausible to state in tandem that, religious practices across Nigeria essentially traditional religion was not prone to conflict, both at the immediate and the larger social milieu. According to Ajayi, (1996), 'Religion was the cement of goodwill and the fear that kept the family as a unit and the village as distinctive community.' In fact, throughout the pre-colonial times, 'all activities and instrument of governance and survival were clothed in religion' (Kalu, 1997). This assertion may be disputed, but evidence from the extant literatures have shown that, Islam was never known to the Hausa speaking people and of course, other northern extraction, not until the second half of the fourteenth century, when it was introduced by refugees from Mali (Michael, 2000). Islam has been the practice in the Borno Empire before penetrating the Hausaland. It is equally evident that, in spite of the long history of Islamic religious standing among the Kanuri and the Shuwa Arabs, it has not defied their traditional religious practices in the present day Nigeria. The spread of Islam into other parts of the country was both piecemeal and forceful (Okwori, 2003; Awu, 2008; Ahmad, 2010). With the conquest of hitherto existing state formations, it marked the beginning of Islamic domination, or alternatively, colonization of these states, that were arbitrarily 'independent and existing in varied forms and sizes with different structures of political and social systems' (Odofin, 2003). For them, their incorporation and gradual imposition of Islam as a state religion was externally negotiated into their respective societies and presented them as vassal states and communities at the periphery of the Sokoto Caliphate (Michael, 2000).

In most parts of the northern Nigeria there was no such thing as Muslims before the arrival of the refugee from Mali into Hausaland, and of course, throughout northern Nigeria. In the same

manner there was no Christianity in Nigeria. In this regard, Idowu (1997), stated that: … In most parts of the Africa and particularly Nigeria, there was no such thing as a Christian identity before the arrival of the white man and his cultural baggage. Christianisation was not only the sharp contrast to, say, African Muslim identity or traditional identity. This explains that Christianity is a later arrival on African soil, particularly in the Nigeria area after Islam had long arrived the northern Nigeria. It was introduced into the Benin and Warri areas, before spreading into other areas of the southern Nigeria in the 16th century including Ebonyi State (Awu, 2008). The presence of Christianity in the region marked the beginning of the rejection and destruction of the traditional religious practices of the people which they considered as the cement of their societies (Adebisi, 2008). It must be stated that in the same manner, Islam was introduced in most parts of northern Nigeria. Although, Islam entered into the region as early as at the 7th century in the Borno area, it entered the Hausaland in the 11th century. In other territories within the region, the people were forced to surrender peacefully or by means of warfare to accept Islam (Adebisi, 2008; Okwori, 2003).

Colonialism reinforced the spread of Christianity into the middle belt areas where Islam was at the stage of development, particularly along the Benue valley. Accordingly, in the northern Nigeria Christian missionaries concentrated in Shonga, Zaria, Wase, Pategi, Lokoja, Bida, Wushishi, and Kuta among other areas, preaching among the Muslim communities rather than the pagan area. Their expansion into the core Islamic areas of the northern Nigeria, particularly the Kano emirate in the later century, attracted serious concern from within the northern Nigeria and in England, leading to their overt restriction by the colonialist as a measure to keep to their promise of protecting the region from Christiansation (Adebisi, 2008; Okwori, 2003). While restricting Christian missionary activities from the core areas of northern Nigeria where Islam has been dominant, the colonialist allowed the missionaries to perpetuate cultural violence in the pagan areas by preaching and attacking the shrines and priests and incarcerating those who refused to accept Christianity. This ensured that two dominant religions existed, seemingly as conscious political design to maintain neo-colonial influence in Nigeria after their departure (Adebisi, 2008).

These religious civilizations, Islam and Christianity, have come to exert more influence over and above indigenous norms and value systems of Nigerians. These religions came with different cultural orientations as gamut of their respective civilizations. Islam came with Arab cultural orientation and civilizations, as Christianity with Western cultural orientation and civilizations. The different orientation and civilizations have defied the existence of indigenous social and cultural value systems, leading to serious collision, subsumed as the 'clash of religious civilizations.' The central Nigeria is the epic centre of the religious collision, with the southern and northern Nigeria fanning its manifestation. The arrival of these foreign religions on the Nigerian soil first ensured the weakening of the indigenous religion. After a successful collapse of their reservoirs, they instituted hegemony and moved southward and northward respectively, to collide at the central region of Nigeria in search of converts and dominance, leading to 'clash of religious civilizations' (Lenshie & Abel, 2012).

Christian Religion and Cultural Conflicts

Nwosu (1993) defined nationalism as a policy designed to achieve national self- determination. Again, nationalism is defined as a protest against colonial power. it is the identification of a people with the aspirations and interests of their nation, especially in matters related to their independence and sovereignty. In this, nationalism should be seen as a protest against religio-cultural dominance by the missionaries.

European missionaries, labeled African Traditional Religion with many derogatory terminologies such as primitive or "lower" than that of paganus, heathern, fetish, magic, polytheistic, animistic and idol worship. To Nwosu (1993), the rise of nationalist oriented movements and agitations in the church was a direct result of missionary attitude towards the indigenous cultures and peoples. In their evangelical campaigns, in their sermons, in their utterances during meetings with the indigenous agents, the missionaries and their converts condemned everything African, including their religion of the various peoples of Africa. Using Igbo land as a study, he stated that the refusal of the early missionaries to allow the Igbo converts to seek initiation into the various cults and societies in Igbo traditional society, greatly embarrassed the Igbo evangelists and majority of the Igbo Christians. This action led them to employing every force of argument to convince their European counterparts that these social customs, including naming ceremonies, second burials and so on which were fabrics of society did not conflict with Christian belief. To the Igbo converts, preventing them from getting initiated into their cultural pattern of life was automatically excluding political, cultural, religious and social participation and hitherto a denial of their right of citizenship. This evokes religo-cultural nationalism in Igboland. Citing Ayandele, Babalola (1988) avers that Christianity seemed a much greater disturber of the African society especially its denunciation of polygamy and other important African customs and institutions that could be tolerated with the impression that Africans could not become Christians unless they become Europeanised or Latinized. That is to speak English or Latin, dress like them and behave like them. In their mission schools, the missionaries intended to produce a group of people who were Nigerian only in blood but European in culture, thought, habit and religion.

According to Nwosu (1993), to become a Christian, the proselyte had to abandon his old ways mostly his culture and religion and to become an European in every way including abandoning his wives as a polygamist and renouncing his indigenous name for a European name obviously at baptism. This was a reminiscence of the behaviour of the Jewish Christians towards the gentile proselyte. This European attitude of condemnation of the entire gamut of innocent African religio-cultural and social practices evoked nationalism (spirit of brotherhood) among the Nigerian populace. During this period, many African cultural nationalists including some African church catechists and pastor especially in Igboland tried to convince their European counterparts that most of their customs such as naming ceremonies, second burials, new yam festivals, initiation rituals, title – taking, polygamous marriage, traditional music, African style of dressing among others which they condemned were not entirely bad nor did they conflict with Christian values and practices. This was because most of these cultural practices were in consonance with European and Old Testament customs and values.

Idowu (1997), affirming the above statement questioned whether the church's purpose in Nigeria is not to serve as an effective tool of imperialism, a veritable means of softening up Nigerians for the purpose of convenient exploitation by Europeans. To him, while accepting Christianity, Nigerians did not need to throw away that which is good and valuable in their own culture. And so, for the gospel to have impact on the lives of Nigerians, it must take cognizance of the cultural background of the society and preach in clear accents rather than commending her savior to Nigeria in strange tongues. The nationalists, especially the African church leaders, created African theology that has cultural nationalist dimension. That is to say that the Africans who are Christians can now interpret the gospel within the context of their culture such as in music, art and dance. Christ will be real to Nigerians only when the church in this country develops a distinctive theology in consequence of their own personal knowledge of God and a personal appropriation of the Lordship of Christ. It is wrong to condemn indiscriminately as evil everything connected with our cultural life style. King Jaja of Opobo was one of those

powerful rulers who forbid missionaries from entering his kingdom in order not to distort his culture. He described the advent of the missionaries as British factor for cultural, political, religious and economic imperialism. Determined on preserving indigenous religion and institutions at all costs, even when it began to show that he was resisting the irresistible, he spared no effort to oppose the Christianization of the Niger Delta (Anyandele, 2008). Okonkwo, in the "Things Fall Apart" Achebe (1958), did not mince words against the missionaries' attitude towards his people's culture.

The cultural awakening among Africans did not owe its origins to any external influence, rather it was spontaneous and consequent reactions to the factors aforementioned. The first African voices against the denationalizing methods of Christian missions in West Africa were those of James Johnson and Blyden (Anyandele, 2008). Though James Johnson advocated for cultural nationalism during his life time, the most prolific apostle of cultural nationalism was Edward Blyden. His contribution to African nationalism did not lie in the distinctly political, but in the cultural sphere. To him, no greater calamity could befall a race than the loss of its culture; for culture is the soul of every race and to exterminate it is to commit a terrible homicide. An educated African who approximates to a practical cultural nationalist was D. B. Vincent, leader of Native Baptist Church who latter in 1899 while in Liberia changed his name to Mojola Agbe and decided to go in African "agbada" as it is being observed every Wednesday for civil servants in Abia State. In order to create high-sounding or polysyllable names, the educated African nationalists discarded their foreign names such as Rev. J. H. Samuel, secretary of Lagos Institute founded in 1901, became Adegboye Edum; Joseph Pythagoras Haastrup became Ademyiwa Haastrup; while George William Johnson of the Egba Board of Management became Oshokala Tejumade Johnson among others (Ayandele, 2008). Today, many Africans desire to answer native names at baptism and confirmation.

According to Barrett (2007), "the African reactions to mission attitude towards African culture are classified into four analyses which represent traditional religion and society namely polygyny, ancestral cult, the earth goddess and the traditional African family." The conflict of missions with polygamy was often in fact violent, and the reaction massive. A polygamist desiring baptism had only to choose one favourite wife; but the fate of the other wives then sent away under the stigma of disgrace was tragic. Neither were those in the church much better off; women were not permitted in the ministry nor in the hierarchy of its executive structure. In numerous other ways too, the rigidity of institutionalized churches such as their frequent refusal to baptize illegitimate children was felt primarily by women. A further cause of antagonism was the hypocrisy of many members of the mission churches ostensibly monogamous but actually living in concubinage. Closely related to polygamy and kinship is the ancestor cult, or to use a contemporary phrase, the remembrance of the living dead. Hence in the majority of societies across Africa, as an expression of family and clan continuity and solidarity, the recently deceased family ancestors (especially three of illustrious personality or any who died with a grievance) are regarded as still inhabiting the family land. Special shrines may be built for them, or masks worn for them to speak through. To Barrett (2007), "the ancestors, the custodians of the source of life, were the reservoir of power and vitality, the source whence flowed all the forces of vigour, sustenance and growth." In Nigeria, two small independent groups among the Yakurr combined memberships with respect for, and underlying belief in the spirits of the clan and other shrines. Another important aspect of African religion for centuries past in many tribes has been ritual related to the earth, regarded as a female goddess or occasionally as a male.

Causes of Religious Violence
Many factors are responsible for religious conflict in Nigeria. The factors ranges as follows: lack of recognition of one another; campaigns of hatred and blackmail; lack of genuine desire to understand each other's belief and culture as well as the issue of extremism.

Implications of the Religious Conflict
Like any other form of conflict, religious conflict when they occurred leave in its wake, tales of woe, which the country and its citizens had to content with. In Nigeria, a major consequence and implication of perennial religious conflict is the devastating effect it has on human capital and material resources. With massive loss of lives and properties that accompany religious violence, there is no need denying the fact that valuable human and material resources would have eluded the country. For instance, in the ethno religious crises of 1999 between the Hausa community and some traditional worshippers in Ogun State, several items including residential houses and commercial centers were destroyed in addition to loss of Tens of lives. The same account but on a higher scale goes for the conflicts that rocked Plateau State between 2001 and 2004 among others in the country (Nmah, 2004).
Beyond the above, religious conflicts also have implications for economic growth and national development. This is because conflicts does not only stagnate the economy but also stultifies growth in as much as it scares away foreign investors. Even local entrepreneurs are at the risk of loosing their investments thus, reducing the pace of economic activities. Apart from this, the increasing number of internally displaced persons as a result of conflicts aggravates poverty, while resources which could have been channeled to other developmental projects are diverted by the government to re-settle victims of conflicts.

Theoretical Anchor
It will not be out of place to appreciate at the onset that a number of theories are of value in our attempt to understand the issue of conflict in society. A prominent theory that falls within this purview is the value conflict theory of Karl Marx (1848). The theory argued that, the hierarchal structure of the society gives rise to serious conflict between two economic class-boureois and proletariat over the means of production and its distribution. Karl Marx began with a simple assumption that: the structure of the society is determined by economic organization particularly the ownership of property, the next basic assumption is that cultural values, personal beliefs, institutional arrangement and class structure are basically reflections of the economic organizations of the society. Karl Marx posited that it is the unequal distribution of power, wealth, prestige in the society, hierarchical arrangement in relation to production that gave birth to discrimination and dominance of one religion over another. The implication of this is that they brought their foreign culture and religion into the African nation thereby influencing our Traditional African Religion. Another example is when the European missionaries came to Nigeria they labeled African culture with many derogatory terminologies such as primitive, fetish, magic, polytheistic, animistic and idol worship.
Finally, Christianity is currently dominating African culture most especially African Traditional Religion which is the desire of the western culture to replace the African culture with their cultural way of life thereby dominating African countries.

Methodology
The study adopts the descriptive survey research design which is seen as a mode of enquiry that combines a distinct method of data collection with a distinct form of analysis. The survey design is seems as appropriate in collecting original data and designing a population too large to observe directly. Moreso, the essence of choosing this type of design is because it is particularly well suited for the study of individual's attitudes, feelings and opinion. The study

population comprises of indigenes and non-indigenes residing in Ezza North Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The sample size will involve 390 respondents selected from men and women aged 15 years and above resident in the study area. The data analyzed here were obtained from 390 men and women aged, 15+ as well. The three hundred and ninety (390) population was used based on the fact that the researcher will not be able to cover all the total population of one hundred and forty five thousand, six hundred and nineteen (145,619) people due to the large number of the population. To determine the sample size from the population of the study, the Taro Yameni formula for sample size determination was used. The Probability sampling techniques was adopted using simple random sampling. Here, it gives each element of the population equal chances of being selected. Samples resulting from the application of this procedure are said to be unbiased and are therefore representative of the population. The researcher distributed the structured questionnaire to indigene and non-indigene residing in the study area and equal opportunity was given to them to complete their questionnaire without discriminating against them based on culture, race or indigene. However, in-depth interview was equally carried out by the researcher.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected from the research questionnaires, and in-depth interview responses were presented in percentages to interpret the frequency of responses and these response frequencies were put into tables.

The responses were carefully concentrated into values as follows:

$$\frac{X}{N} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

X = Observed value

N = Total observation

Study Area

Ezza North is a Local Government Area in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Its headquarters is in the town of Ebiaji. The people of Ezza North LGA are among the off springs of Ezekuna, the Father of Ezza Nation. The inhabitants of Ezzas are spread across the communities in Ezza South and Ezza North respectively. It includes Ameka, Amudo, Ezzama, Amana, Okoffia, Nsokkara, Echara, Amezekwe, Umunwagu Idembia, Amagu- Amezekwe and Ikwuato Idembia. These communities are grouped under two predominant clans: the Izzikworos and the Kpakpajis. The Izzikworos include: Amezekwe, Umunwagu Idembia, Amagu-Amezekwe and Ikwuato Idembia. Under the Ezza North, they include: Okposhi, Nsokkara, Ameka, and Okoffia. Ezza North Local Government practice the new yam festival known as Oke Aku Festival. It is still revered and celebrated with pomp and grandeur. The festival marks the commencement of a new calendar year for the Ezza.

Ezza people live in virtually all three senatorial zones of Ebonyi State and beyond, but are concentrated in Ezza North, Ezza South, Onicha, Ishielu and Ohaukwu Local Government Areas and even in some parts of Enugu State. Onueke is the ancestral headquarters of the Ezza, one of the most populous clans in Ebonyi State of Nigeria, hence the Oke Aku Festival takes place in the town. The traditional Ezza in these areas still return to Onueke to offer sacrifices to the graves of their progenitors. Coincidentally, Sacred Heart Parish, Onueke serves as the headquarters of Christianity for Ezza Catholics. Onueke has been quite important, politically speaking, it used to be the headquarters of the old Ezzikwo Division. It was also the headquarters of the old Ezza Local Government Area. Right now, it doubles as the headquarters of the Ezza South Local Government Area and Ebonyi Central Senatorial Zone, comprising Ezza South, Ezza North, Ishielu and Ikwo Local Government Area. Marriage is one of the most

respected institutions in Ezza culture. Customs and traditions associated with marriage are therefore thoroughly adhered to and respected by all Ezza people. This is because Ezza is one of those family-oriented people. For them, family is everything; whatever will be done to begin a family in a proper footing is very welcome. According to the Ezza traditional set up, marriage is contracted after circumcision and Obuwhu. Once initiated into adulthood, a young man informs his parents of his intention to marry a particular girl if he has found one. Giving in marriage (Okee Nwanyi) in Ezza is when a bride price is paid; a day will be fixed when the girl would be officially given out in marriage to the man. The following items are used for this ceremony: A hen, a wooden tray called okwa, ukpara, kola nuts, plantain, groundnuts, dried meat and palm wine. The people are mostly farmers who take advantage of the rich and abundant farm land to cultivate yam, rice, cassava, cereals and vegetables, among others. Some people engage in animal husbandry which includes: piggery, fishery, livestock farming and rearing of cattle. Others engage in trading and skill work such as wood work, mat weaving, basket weaving and blacksmithing. When the white men came, they came with their religion and their method of education. The Umuezeoka communities of Ezza North Local Government Areas embraced both their education and their religion. The Umuezeoka communities are predominantly of Roman Catholic denomination and CMS (Anglican church) and other Pentecostal churches mainly Assemblies of God, Methodist church, Grace of God Mission and many others.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Sex	Male	190	48.7
	Female	200	51.3
	Total	**390**	**100**
Age Brackets	15-18	100	25.6
	19-21	120	30.7
	22-25	80	20.6
	26 and above	90	23.1
	Total	**390**	**100**
Educational qualification	FSLC	50	12.8
	SSCE/WAEC	90	23.1
	OND/NCE	110	28.3
	B.Sc/HND	100	25.6
	MSc	40	10.3
	Total	**390**	**100**
Marital status	Single	220	56.5
	Married	170	43.5
	Total	**390**	**100**
Occupation	Civil servant	180	46.1
	Business/Trading	100	25.6
	Public servant	40	10.3
	Students	20	5.2
	Farmers	50	12.8
	Total	**390**	**100**
Religious background	Christian	190	48.7
	ATR	120	30.7
	Others	80	20.5
	Total	**390**	**100**

Source: Field Work Survey, 2018.

Discussion of Findings

In the course of this study, it was find out that there are causes of religious conflict in Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi state. There are also implications of religious conflict in Ezza North LGA. Equally, there are ways of reducing religious conflict in Ezza North LGA. In a nutshell, the study revealed obviously that there are causes of religious conflict which ranges from ideological differences among Christianity and African culture which causes conflict in Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi state. Also, lack of recognition of one another religion causes conflict in Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi state. Illiteracy also tantamount to religious conflict in Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi state. It was also revealed that hatred and blackmail causes religious conflict in Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi state and the non-participation of Christians in cultural practices and cultural festivals in Ezza North LGA of Ebonyi state which causes religious conflict. In another development, the study revealed as well that there are implications of religious conflict in Ezza North LGA of which ranges from loss of lives and properties. Thus, religious conflict have brought slow development in Ezza North LGA as well as promoting hatred among the Christian faithful and Traditional African cultural believers in the study area.

Finally, the research revealed that there are ways of reducing religious conflict in Umuezeoka which ranges from the fact that Christians should tolerate the ideological difference existing among African culture and Christianity in order to avert religious conflict. Also, there is need for Christian religion to focus on the preaching of their doctrines and avoid condemning in totality African cultural practices because some aspect of African culture is good and it is the way of life of the people. Likewise, there is need for Christian preachers to aim at appreciating and relating their teachings to the culture of the people rather than condemnation of an imperfectly understood culture, as way of encouraging a spirit of tolerance and respect to mutual benefits of the two groups and there is need for tolerance and respect among the two groups in order to reduce, eliminate or ameliorate the cases of blackmail and criticisms which will go a long way in reducing religious conflict in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Christianity in its various institutional and social form and manifestations is a human and moral, spiritual and cultural force to be reckoned with. As a religion, its claims are both human and divine. In view of its human character, Christianity has, in the course of human history demonstrated itself as the custodian and promoter of human values as well as a preserver of a people's cultural heritage. Despite, the inherent value of Christianity to human lives, it has gone a long way in contradicting with African traditional culture which has resulted to conflict among the two groups. For instance, the Christianity preached against any form of gathering that does not glorify God such as Traditional Festivals (New Yam festival, masquerade festival etc) which has in many cases resulted to conflict of ideological beliefs and many at times lead to hatred, blackmail, rancor and loss of properties among the two groups.

Recommendations

As a panacea for religious conflict among Christianity and African culture, the following suggestions were made by the researcher.

1. Christians should try as much as possible to tolerate the ideological differences existing among African culture and Christianity in order to avert continuous religious conflict.
2. There is need for Christian religion to focus on the preaching of their doctrines and avoid condemning in totality African culture because some aspect of African culture is good and it is the way of life of the people.

3. There is also need for Christian preachers to aim at appreciating and relating their teachings to the culture of the people rather than condemnation of an imperfectly understood culture, as a way of encouraging a spirit of tolerance and respect to mutual benefits of the two groups.
4. Finally, there is need for tolerance and respect among the two groups in order to avert cases of blackmail and criticism which will help to reduce conflict in Nigeria.

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