

THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIANITY ON THE PRACTICES OF AFRICAN
INDIGENOUS RELIGION IN BADAGRY, LAGOS STATE.

NBTS
M. DIV
Bel - 41

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGICAL STUDIES
OF THE NIGERIAN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, OGBOMOSO

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF DIVINITY IN MISSIOLOGY

BY
BELLO, MOSES IBRAHIM
11/0119

2014 - 0116

JUNE, 2014.

ABSTRACT

History is the reenactment of the past for the purpose of informing the present generation of actors so as to furnish and equip them to leave a formidable impression on the sands of time for future generations to emulate. People without history are people without the past, and even probably without the future. The command of our Lord Jesus Christ in the great commission prompted the missionaries that first sow the seed of the gospel on African soil to come to Nigeria despite various problems and difficulties they encountered. Some died along the way, some were incapacitated and flown back to America and some were persecuted. One important thing to note about Badagry is that it is an historical city which carries major histories of Christianity on the soil of Africa. Christianity came into Nigeria through Badagry according to historical records. Many denominations today took their root or started from Badagry. This work serves to educate the unformed member of the church and missionary on the traditional, heritage and the ancient land mark of the faith our fathers, to provide written document that will serve as resource material for future work in mission, to recognize and acknowledge the labor of love of the founding fathers of Christianity in Badagry, to create more curiosity and develop the interest of historical and religious scholars in undertaking graduate work in the field of knowledge. The scope of this work covers the history of Christianity in Badagry, from 1842. It explores the historical origin and religious situation of Badagry before the coming of Christianity. The use of personal interviews and interaction together with information from elders and well informed members and churches, and some of the museums, first storey building and text books helped this research a lot. Despite the early contact with Christianity coupled with the influence of Islam on the people, the Badagry people still cherish and protect their traditional religion faithfully. Though, there are good numbers of Christians and Muslims, the traditional religion is still in practice among the people. In fact some of them even believe that the practice of Christianity or Islamic faith does not prevent them from practicing their traditional religion. However, majority of the people especially the young ones are now finding their way into the Church every Sunday. Though this does not nullify the practice of the tradition of their forefathers because, some are inherited by the family head of their home or their family compound. Christians should utilize modern methods through the translated literature and mass media for greater outreach. It is therefore, recommended that, more denunciation should be made of syncretism attitude of the people, churches should unanimous in exposing and discipline such practitioners, and contemporary evangelist should deem it fit to learn a lot from the spirit zeal and commitment; of early missionaries who endured hardship and made immeasurable sacrifices.

5.2 CONCLUSION

There are conflicting reports of the attitude and experience of early missionaries in Badagry. It is not unlikely that they were arrogantly preconceived in their denunciation of the peoples traditional religion, in which case persecution of the missionaries could have occurred, otherwise nothing less severe could compel missionaries to abandon their mission no matter how unfavorable their condition. Yet this can still not be proved and the myth of persecution remains inconclusive.

Despite the advantages of indigenizing Christianity in Africa, one vital caution needs to be made. Christianity must, despite the religion and culture of any people, declare uncompromisingly the uniqueness of the Christian gospel, of Jesus' death and atonement for the sins of the world. As Peter declared in Acts 4:12, "And there is no other name given among men whereby he can be saved except the name of Jesus." In dealing with the Badagry situation as indeed every settling in the world, this truth cannot be compromised. Here, even symbolic and doctrinal semblance between Christianity and

vodun religion should not be taken as 'oneness' or 'sameness' but rather as partially, 'likeness'. The vodun cross is definitely not the Cross of Jesus.

As regards the success or failure of Missionary enterprise in Badagry, this is only relative. It is noteworthy that successful evangelism from Biblical perspective is not quantitative but qualitative. Matthew 24:14 regards evangelization as a 'testimony' or evidence that people have heard the gospel and cannot claim excuse of ignorance on the judgment day. Thus people are to be preached to and invited out of love; they being free to choose to be converted or not. Thus, as rightly put by Heldenbrand, successful evangelism should be seen in terms of the message delivered and not compulsorily on the account of the number of converts realized (even though this is the ultimate goal).

From this perspective, missionary efforts in Badagry can be adjudged to be successful having evangelized the town and its environs, enhanced education and health care, etc., all of which have contributed on the long term as a fruit planted which had yielded the result of the spread of Christian activity in the town today. However this success could have been earlier realized if Henry Venn's concept of absolute native pastorate for African missions was adopted. Perhaps the African people were best suited to evangelize their own people having been familiar with their background and characteristics and indeed the climate and language. Yet this success must not be taken for granted since it is known that prophets sometimes do not have much respect in their homelands.

The modern charismatic and prophetic churches in Badagry in recent time have a brighter chance of winning more converts among the Egun if their appeal is well presented to the people. The mission churches have even found themselves modifying

their practices and evangelistic drive due to loss of membership to the charismatics or even to the vibrant traditionalists. Christian festivals should provide such good facilities as entertainment for people to prevent deflection to vodun festivals where they enjoy the facility. Notwithstanding, the trend among modern day evangelists is a sickening indulgence in selfish materialism and comfort which do not allow for effective identification with the spiritual needs of the people of Badagry.

Undoubtedly, the evangelization of Badagry started by the early missionaries is an ongoing process that, despite existent problems and obstacles there are bright prospects. Perhaps it was this optimism that prompted the current Archbishop of Nigeria, Most Rev. Abiodun Adetiloye to postulate the possibility of Badagry being a future (Headquarter) of the Anglican Diocese of Nigeria. The reality of this would be for Badagry a regain of her lost glory as the 'Cradle' of Christianity in Nigeria.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The task before the churches in evangelizing the people of Badagry remains gigantic. The following itemized ideas are formed to further help the work of evangelism in Badagry, if they are thoroughly examined and put into action.

1. Christians should utilize modern methods through the translated literature and mass media for greater outreach.
2. More denunciation should be made of syncretism attitude of the people.
3. Churches should unanimously expose and correct people who are involved.
4. Contemporary evangelist should do it fit to learn a lot from the spirit zeal and commitment; of early missionaries who endured hardship and made immeasurable sacrifices.