

**THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF
URHOBO PEOPLE**

BY

**UFUOMA FAITH YERIFOR
ART1801056**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES
FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY, EDO STATE**

SEPTEMBER 2023

**THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF
URHOB0 PEOPLE**

BY

**UFUOMA FAITH YERIFOR
ART1801056**

**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A)
HONOURS DEGREE IN HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,BENIN CITY.**

SEPTEMBER,2023

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by Ufuoma Faith Yerifor of the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, under my supervision.

Mrs. Itohan I. Igiebor

Project Supervisor

Dr. Ibert O. Onobhayedo

Ag. Head of Department

DATE

DATE

DEDICATION

Firstly, I dedicated this project to God Almighty for his grace all through my study days. Also, this project is dedicated to my lovely brothers Efe Yerifor, Monday Yerifor, Lucky Yerifor and my sweet father, Mr Onisuru Yerifor.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Throughout my time at this university, God has been merciful, providing for me, comforting me, and protecting me. He has also led me to the successful completion of my research project, and for that I am grateful.

My sincere gratitude also goes out to Mrs. Itohan I. Igiebor, my project supervisor, who acted as my dependable mentor throughout the study's research and writing. God bless you immensely.

I also want to express my gratitude to my father and brothers for their unwavering love, support, and concern for my education, wellbeing, and all other parts of my life. Your efforts go above and beyond what words can say. Thank you.

I also want to express my gratitude to my lecturers, who has worked hard to improve me as a student and person from the very beginning of my degree at this university. Prof. Eddy Erhagbe, Mr. Victor O. Aiguobarueghian and other outstanding departmental lecturers deserve my gratitude.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Cover page	-	-	-	i
Title	-	-	-	ii
Certification	-	-	-	iii
Dedication	-	-	-	iv
Acknowledgment	-	-	-	V
Table of Contents	-	-	-	vi

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Aim of the Study	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Scope of Study	-	--	-	-	-	-	-	3
Methodology-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Literature Review	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Chapterization-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
Endnotes	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12

CHAPTER TWO: THE URHOB0 TRADITIONAL RELIGION

The Urhobo Traditional Religion	-	-	-	13
Endnotes	-	-	-	24

CHAPTER THREE: CHRISTIANITY IN URHOBO LAND

Christianity in Urhobo Land- - - - - 26

Endnotes - - - - 37

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE URHOBO PEOPLE

The Contribution of Christianity to the Development

of the Urhobo People-- - 39Endnotes - - - 49

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Conclusion - - - - - 50

BIBLIOGRAPHY- - - - - 53

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO STUDY

INTRODUCTION

Christianity has played a significant role in the development of the Urhobo people, a major ethnic group in Nigeria. The Urhobo people, who are mainly found in Delta State, Nigeria, have a rich culture and history that dates back centuries. However, the introduction of Christianity to the Urhobo people has had a profound impact on their development.

In this project, i will explore the contributions of Christianity to the development of the Urhobo people. I will examine how Christianity has influenced various aspects of Urhobo society, including education, healthcare, social welfare, and economic development. i will also look at how Christianity has helped to shape the values and beliefs of the Urhobo people, and how it has contributed to the growth and evolution of their cultural identity. Overall, this project will demonstrate that Christianity has had a significant and positive impact on the development of the Urhobo people. Christianity has had a significant impact on the development of the Urhobo people, a Nigerian ethnic group located in the Niger Delta region. Christianity has had a significant impact on education in the Urhobo community. Missionary schools were established by Christian missionaries in the 19th century, providing education for the Urhobo people who were previously without access to formal education. These schools served as a means of enlightenment, empowering individuals with knowledge, and contributing to the development of the community.

Additionally, Christianity has also played a vital role in the social welfare of the Urhobo people. Christian organizations, such as the Anglican Church, have established healthcare facilities and

other social programs that have contributed to the betterment of the community. These programs have provided healthcare, employment, and other social services that have improved the living conditions of the Urhobo people. Furthermore, Christianity has contributed to the preservation of Urhobo culture. Christian missionaries have recognized the importance of the Urhobo culture and have made efforts to preserve it while also spreading the gospel. Christian songs, dances, and other forms of cultural expression have been integrated into Christian worship, allowing for the preservation and celebration of Urhobo culture.

The contributions of Christianity to the Urhobo people have been significant, with impacts on education, social welfare, and cultural preservation. The Urhobo people have benefited from the introduction of Christianity to their community, with improved living conditions, access to education, and preservation of their culture.³ The Church's influence can be seen in the abolition of cruel customs and institutions like slavery, child sacrifice, and twin slaughter, as well as in the founding of Christian villages that later gave way to formal educational institutions like schools. The construction of catechisms in vernacular languages and the translation of the Gospel into those languages demonstrated a good sense of cultural sensitivity because language is a major engine for cultural development. There is a need for inculturation in terms of appreciating and recognizing excellent traditional values today because many local rituals were outlawed as "pagan." The Church acknowledged the value of education in development by erecting schools from the primary to secondary levels. The Church also ran a program for social, psychological, and physical growth. The church places a strong focus on the importance of a just and widespread development for every region of the world, especially through the voices of current ecclesiastical authorities.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objectives of this study areas follows:

- I. To expose the impact of Christianity on theUrhobo people and culture and its role in the development of Urhobo nation.
- II. To create awareness, a consciousness of the Urhobo personality and access the place of Christianity within the context of the Urhobo nation.
- III.To invite an engaging conversation on the vital aspect of Urhobo history and culture which according to some scholars are under distress.

SCOPE OF STUDY

The work is limited to urhoboland. By urhoboland we mean the twenty-two geo-political units or subunits, which make up the Urhobo nation. It is limited to the contacts and relationship between the Urhobo people and the Christian missions-how the religion of the Urhobo people affects Christianity and how Christianity also affected their dependence and interdependence etc though references to other societies and religion will also be made.

The scope of this study is to look into the origin of Christianity in Urhoboland by the missionaries from Europe and also establish the impact on Urhoboland up till date.

METHODOLOGY

The major sources of this research work are from published books and internet materials. Occasional references to the sacred scripture of the religion in question will also be made.

Interviews conducted in the course of the research are also included in the work. The primary sources are textbooks while the interviews are to serve as the secondary source.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many academics from various backgrounds have shared their thoughts on the topic of how the spread of Christianity changed the Urhobo people. Given that, I will examine a number of the reviews that have been written on the subject matter.

According to Arawore in his book, "History of the church in Urhoboland"⁵ he stated that, in Nigeria, Urhobo would have been considered one of the earliest Christian centres had it not been for the failed Portuguese mission. The Urhobo hinterland

remained non-Christian for approximately four centuries as a result of the Roman Catholic mission's failure to penetrate it from Ode Itsekiri in the 16th century. The Reformation (Protestant) churches, particularly the Anglican Church, were able to advance the Christianization of the region as a result. Furthermore, he said that according to history, Samuel Ajayi Crowther attempted to spread Christianity during the Niger expeditions of 1841, 1854, and 1857 in Okwagbe in the Ughievwen ethnic group of Urhobo, present-day Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State. The effort was unsuccessful because no one could understand how a simple human could assert to have heard from Oghene (God), who is frequently associated with the sky. The region wasn't evangelized until the 20th century as a result of the region's rejection of Crowther's message.

Onokpita in his thesis "Proliferation of churches in Ughelli town"⁶ said that a group of liberated slaves from Akatogbo and Owo in the Yoruba nation, led by Efnodo (Ifenodun in Yoruba), unofficially introduced Christianity to Urhobo during the last decade of the 19th century.

Urhovie in Abraka was their first stop. Ededje was given control of the new community's leadership. As the brethren's faith grew, ill and injured enemies from nearby settlements were brought to Urhovie. Several people were touched by God's mercy, and as a result, many were healed and converted. Many of them returned to their hometowns and established Christian worship facilities. The Ukwokori was one of these.

Erivwo in his book "A History of Christianity in Nigeria; The Urhobo, the Isoko and the hsekiri" noted that the gospel was brought to Ughelli by one Ewvwaire of Ogbowwan from the Ukwokori church around 1910, and from there it was extended to numerous other Urhobo towns. When Evwaire first learned about the new religion from Mr Oghenebrume in Ukwokori (Evwaire's maternal house), he travelled with Oghenebrume and the two of them made inquiries in the village of Etefe, which belongs to the Agbarha clan. They encountered a man named Ohre there who instructed them in the Christian faith and further pointed them in the direction of Bishop James Johnson in Sapele. Evwaire was given the mission by the bishop to spread the new faith in Ughelli and other areas. When Evwaire arrived in Afiesere, he constructed a hut where he performed his devotion and gave the word that Bishop Johnson had entrusted to him. He uttered these words: "Those who are serving carved figures, wood, water, and other deities other than the living God should come now and surrender to Him," which is Orhe. Many of the people gave up their conventional objects of worship, which were then burned in public, after becoming believers. So, throughout Ughelli and its surroundings, the word of God spread. Ogbegua were the name given to those who adhered to Afiesere (people who defiled the powers of the gods).

Onu in his work titled "The Anglican Heritage"⁸ stated that after being installed as the Niger Delta mission's assistant bishop, Bishop James Johnson made trips to Warri, Avwra (Abraka),

Sapele, and Benin. He encountered several religious groups in Sapele and Warri. On July 28, 1901, Bishop Johnson led the first formal worship service in

Warri, which 230 people attended. He organized these congregations under the Anglican Communion and displayed leadership over them. After that, he made annual bishop visits the area up until 1917 when he triumphantly entered the church. So, it may be stated that Christianity reached the rest of the Urhobo from Sapele and Warri. Some indigenous evangelists, like Pa Abi Oghnenkaro, who converted to Christianity while working in Lagos, later came home and established a church in his father's Udu compound. He also included the clans of Ughievwen. Mr. Akpigun, who is a member of the Owborde Church, followed suit and planted the current St. Peter's Anglican Church in Ekrokpe.

In Ajayi's "Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite"⁹he highlighted that the arrival of the missionaries served as a catalyst for the emergence of native music in Urhoboland. In 1470, Portuguese missionaries made their first attempt to convert the Urhobo people to Christianity. Insufficient funding, manpower, and the unfavourable environment all contributed to this effort's failure. Christianity arrived in Urhoboland in the middle of the 19th century from three different directions: Sapele, Urhuovie, and Warri. First appearing in Urhoboland in 1854 at Okwagbe, 1864 at Warri, and 1892 at Sapele and Urhuovie, the Christian Missionary Society. These missionary endeavours are a result of Samuel Ajayi Crowther and a few Sapele-freed slaves. In the hinterland of Urhobo, the church constructed stations and grew. Under Bishop James Johnson, it became known as the Niger Delta Pastorate. Ughelli and Oleh are now part of the Anglican Diocese of Warri. The former Warri diocese gave rise to the fourth diocese, Sapele. Among the three dioceses, there are four more tribes in addition to the Urhobo tribe. These dioceses were established legally and with the help

of a dedicated Bishop, Rt. Rev. Enuke. Afterwards, the Catholic Mission arrived in Urhobo-land. Parishes were founded at Warri in 1919 by Rev. Fr. Cavegenaire and Fr. Olier, Aragba in the Orogun clan in 1920 by Rev. Fr. George, and Eku in 1921 by Rev. Fr. Kelly all of whom arrived in a large way with both human and material resources. The church had already established itself in 1924 in Ow, Okurekpo, Okpara, Kokori, UgbeUi, Ovwo, Ekuigbo, Ewreni, Olomu, and Arhavwarien.

In Atanda's "Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850-1950" he revealed that the spread of Christianity in Urhoboland can be summed up in this way. Through Urhuovie, Sapele, Warri, Eku, and Ughelli, Christianity of various brands invaded the Urhobo hinterland in the three decades between 1901 and 1930. The property was covered in mission homes, schools, and hospitals by 1935. Their primary resource was the Bible. The Niger Delta Pastorate was the target of many plots and schisms by competing denominations. This resulted in some mutual animosity and mistrust. They were alienated by the Mother Church in England as well. As a result, they spent more than 50 years living in isolation without any help from the Church Missionary Society in England. The Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Missions have gained more followers in this area, despite the Baptist Mission making modest inroads. These Colonial Churches today deal with the evangelical strain and competition of the native Pentecostal Churches. The three orthodox Churches have been forced to critically examine themselves as a result. They were forced to choose between extinction and swallowing their pride, which was system was used for the first ten years of Christianity in Urhoboland: the Westminster hymns for Catholics and the Ancient and Modern hymns for Protestants. The popularity of these hymns persisted from 1920 through 1930. They stayed until some Urhobo Christians grew disinterested and bored, they

desired to sing and dance in their native tongue in order to successfully communicate the gospel among the populace.

In Okologbo's "A History of Christianity in Nigeria: The Ndosumili and the Ukwuani" he said that in Urhoboland, Christian activity started to decline around 1930. The Church's membership was falling off. The fact that missionaries educated Church Oyo in 1928. The method by which church services were held was the root of the issue. When the missionaries and their educated native employees began to lead church services, they brought a liturgy that was rather foreign in nature. Worship evolved into something that was quite unfamiliar to the Urhobo Christian: rigidity, order, and dullness. open worship and the services were standardized. While the native-trained workers rigorously adhered to the European form of religion, it does not affect the subconscious.

In Nabofa's "Adam: The Evangelist"¹² he noted that a powerful beat is not used in European liturgy. European churches likewise favour soothing, sensory-stimulating music. Due to the dull and unappealing nature of church services, people became disgruntled and attendance fell. The Urhobo are not used to listening to soft music. They are accustomed to energizing and soul-stirring rhythms. African worship is characterized by songs, dancing, and "music of heavy rhythm produced by drums, clapping of hands." The Udje and Opiri dance is familiar to the Urhobo man. In gratitude for everything God has done for him, he wants to sing, dance, and shake his body. Songs help him learn more quickly. So, he wants to impart and demonstrate these qualities in his new faith. The Church's authorities went back to the techniques used by Bishop Johnson's agents to demonstrate the drop in Church membership. These were prayer groups that included some involved lay Christians. The goal was to bring back the traditional method of using the Bible in the native language during worship, which was the foundational

principle of the early church in Urhoboland. Throughout the majority of Nigeria, this desire was in demand.

CHAPTERIZATION

Chapter One-Background to the Study

This chapter provides an introduction to the background to the study, stating the relevance of this study, with its aim and objectives, the methodology used in carrying out this research work, the scope of the research and the various literature reviewed in relation to this research.

Chapter Two-The Urhobo Traditional Religion

This chapter discusses the traditional religion of the Urhobo people before the advent of Christianity into the land by European missionaries.

Chapter Three-Christianity in Urhobo Land

This chapter gives a detailed insight into the workings of Christianity in Urhobo and how it came to be cum the effects that Christianity had on the people.

Chapter Four-The Contributions of Christianity to The Development of Urhobo People

The chapter explains in great detail of the contributions of Christianity towards the development of the people of Urhobo.

Chapter Five-Conclusion

This chapter scrutinizes the general overview of the entire research work.

ENDNOTES

1. Nabofa M.Y. and Ben O. Elugbe, (Epha: An Urhobo System of Divination and Its Esoteric) Language, Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies, 1,1981,3-19.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Arawore, O. O, History of the church in Urhoboland, Warri: Soliq prints Asama,2010, pp20-23.
6. Onokpite F. A., Proliferation of churches in Ughelli town, 2014, The project. Theological College of Northern Nigeria.
7. Erivwo, S. U, A history of Christianity in Nigeria; The Urhobo, the Isoko and the Itsekiri, Ibadan: daystar press, 1979, pp 90-92.
8. Onu, B. O, The Anglican Heritage, Saint Peter's Rumuepirikom Deanery at 50and Contemporary Issues: A Book of Readings. Biz pages, Lagos.Pp.145-198.

9. Ajayi J.F. A, Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite, New Elite.Essex: Longman,1981, p88.
10. Atanda J.A, Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850-1950, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1988, pp121-122.
- 11.Okologbo E, A History of Christianity in Nigeria: The Ndosumili and the Ukwuani, Ibadan: Daystar Press,1984, p23.
- 12.Nabofa M.Y, Adam: The Evangelist, Ibadan: Daystar Press,1992, pp33-35.

CHAPTER TWO

THE URHOB0 TRADITIONAL RELIGION

The worship of "Oghene," the ultimate deity, and the acknowledgement of Edjo and Erhan (divinities), is at the centre of Urhobo traditional religion. Some of these deities can be seen as personified manifestations of Oghene. Orhen (white chalk) is another form of worship used by the Urhobo. An Urhobo will ask Oghene, whom he regards as a fair arbitrator, to decide a dispute between him and his adversary if he feels oppressed by that person. All divinities have Oghene as their core component and manifestation. Four broad categories can be made for Urhobo deities, which likely correspond to historical progression. Guardian deities, War deities, Prosperity deities, Fertility deities, and Ethical deities fall under these categories. Another crucial component is erivwin, which is the cult of the ancestors and predecessors (Esemo and Iniemo). The deceased are perceived as active family members who keep an eye on their family's affairs and are thought to be alive. The Urhobos hold that there are two aspects of human existence: the physical body (Ugboma) and the spiritual body (Erhi). Before a man becomes physically present in the world, the Erhi determines his destiny and oversees his self-realization. The man's general

well-being (Ufuoma) is likewise under the control of Erhi. Oghene is comparable to a king who places his seal on the course of history. However, the Urhobo people have a dominant traditional religion called Igbe.'

The Urhobo word meaning "dance" is called Igbe. Like many other Africans, the Urhobo people use singing and dancing whenever they gather for communal worship. They like singing, clapping their hands, and dancing in such circumstances to convey their inner religious feelings, delight, and fidelity to the God of their hearts, their realization, and any other spiritual beings they may want to recognise. Even in situations where an Urhobo is engaged in private worship, such as when he charges his charm or offers sacrifices and libations to his private object of worship in his inner chamber, there is always some kind of dance going on, no matter how informal and confined that devotion may be. The Urhobo mostly communicate their inner religious experiences and feelings through music, singing, and dance. Their preferred medium for communicating with the divine is this. Since dance is the physical expression of their mystical experience, inner conviction, and religion demand that they connect with and try to control via ritual drama those elements over which they have no actual control, dancing is not a luxury to them; it is a need. Therefore, one of the best ways for them to communicate with the spiritual powers they believe in is through dancing.

The term "dance" in Urhobo is Egha, which implies play. Dance is referred to as Igbe in a strict religious sense. The word Igbe comes from the verb gbe, which means to "shake," "quiver," or "rock and row." Egha egba, which translates to "quivering or shaking in response to dance," is the term for the act of dancing. Since it is believed that when the divine enters man and takes full possession of him, he would begin to gbe, which is vibrate, shake, quiver, and/or rock and row, the meaning behind the Urhobo word Igbe, which means quivering, shaking, or rocking and

rowing, is very operative and significant in describing religious dance. The fact that several religious organizations or factions of the Urhobo traditional religion have used the name "Igbe" is important. There are Igbe Ubiesha, Igbe-Ame, Igbe Everhe, Igbe Olokun, and Igbe Ogheneku, as examples. Christianity was initially known as Igbe Ijesu or Igbe Ishoshi, which is a dance performed in devotion or honour of Jesus when it was first brought to various Urhobo communities. Muslims were referred to as Igbe Alfa members in the same way. Igbe, which means dancing in certain languages, also refers to devotion and religion. Therefore, dance, a key component of Urhobo indigenous religion, arises from the worshipper's emotion of delight during their religious experience.

In Urhobo Land, a religion known as Igbe-Ame-literally "Dance of the Water"-is practiced. The cult of the water divinities is known as Igbe-Ame in Urhobo land, and according to research, its history is shrouded in secrecy because it was initially mixed up with other religious sects and grouped with them because they all wear similar white clothing. The then-district officer also gave it the nickname "white-chalk juju." Even though the Uhobo are typically thought to have moved from Bini, some Urhobo people believe that the notion and religion came from Edo (Binis) and have attempted to link their beginnings with the cult of Olukun. The Urhobo, on the other hand, maintain the belief that any body of water--be it a lake, pond, river, sea, or ocean-is home to enigmatic powers. The abilities that are in a body of water grow more and more potent the larger it is. Each lake or body of water is supposed to be under the authority of a specific divinity, who releases fish when it pleases and locks them up when it is not. As a result, when fishing in a particular lake, the fisherman frequently builds a shrine near the water where they can pray to and worship the local deities. This religious system is surrounded by a number of myths, stories, and legends, and witnesses are only allowed to speak on behalf of those whom

edjo ame or "Mami-wota" appeared and with whose communications had been made. The majority of them show the visitor from the submarine plenty of wealth. Once such a connection has been made between the mortal and the divine, they both agree to be married to one another, creating a covenant relationship that is both compulsory and suzerainty. in nature. Similar to the Ijo, the Ijebu, and the Ilaje, who live along rivers, these people firmly believe that there are divine creatures living under the water and that they have wonderful towns of their own. They refer to these creatures as mammi wota and believe that they have light skin and are exquisitely dressed in coral beads and pricey garments.

The Urhobo firmly believe that just as there are towns, cities, and villages for humans on the surface of the land, there are towns, cities, and villages for spiritual creatures below the ocean. It is stated that their homes are more lovely than those of mortals. Due to the aforementioned idea, there are numerous cultic practices or shrines in all of Urhobo Land's rivers and streams. For instance, there is a narrative among the Idjerhe people about the beginning of Okunuvu, the "cult of a water divinity." According to oral tradition, Erhiekevwe and Onovwo, the ancestors of the Idjerhe tribe, created the cult. Since Onovwo was the oldest member in the society, Erhiekevwe took the small white pot he had seen floating in the river home and kept it there. Little did he know, however, that the white pot possessed enigmatic abilities. In the middle of the night, the pot began speaking in a tongue that Onovwo could understand. Astounded and perplexed by the pot's mystery, Onovwo contacted his lover Erhiekevwe. They went to contact their neighbour Qbasuyi, a Benin hunter who was staying with them at the moment since they were unable to handle their experience. He informed them that the pot was the home of a water deity by the name of Qkunovu. They persuaded Qbasuyi to assist in making sacrifices to this supernatural

power. He carried out this, and as a result, cultic practices and worship developed. Later, Okunovu" emerged as a significant cult and divinity among the ancestors of all Idjerhe people, and nearly everyone participates actively in its annual celebration. The priestly family of Okunovu now is made up of Qbasuyi's descendants, and it is from this line that the cultic officials of the god known as Orhere are chosen. The first Orhere, Qbasuyi, is thought to have fallen into the river during a courtesy call to Qkunovu on the first yearly festival. He is said to have surfaced seven days later with an adjudju (leather fan) and orhen (white chalk). IgbeAme adherents think that man himself is the origin of the religion. One of their ritual melodies expresses how, in their view, religion has existed since the beginning of time.

“Qke ovoro wan re E'Oghene vwo tu ma akpo nanu 0 de reyo ame vwo ghwo Koye ode se mammi wota ta ne Me vwo akpo na ko wen,gbe sunu Otu ri ruen imuemu eyi ghwo Ihwo re'vwe enwen kpoho mammi wota Ayi gbe Jiro Foko ridie mammi wota oye ho O kpako r'Akpo na eje. Meaning: Once upon a time When God had created the world He used water to destroy it He later called water-goddess saying: I have given you authority to govern the world Only sinners should die Those who believe in water divinity let them praise and worship her Because the water-goddess is the most senior creature in the world".

Regarding the historical genesis of Igbe Ame, there is no single theory. According to the widespread belief among the Urhobo, when a person interacts with one of the kind aquatic animals, they either become friends or get married and form a covenant connection. Igbe-Ame has as many different beginnings as it does sects. The majority of Igbe-Ame chiefs are female, and they represent characteristics of the water divinity. Additionally, faith or post is not inherited. The founder's passing signals the dissolution of that religious movement. All of the founders of Igbe-Ame assert to have received direct revelation from the water goddess. The following

examples serve as proofs: the ability to work miracles, talk in tongues, and even prophesy; and the direct gift of white-chalk (orhen), a traditional emblem of God's revelation and power that can be discovered at the river's edge. The majority of the founders asserted that these manifestations serve as evidence to convince the general public that their religious experiences and visions are inspired by God and that He has given them the authority to found these religious sects in order to advance and defend humankind.⁸ Additionally, they assert that they are representatives of the water-divinities, who are revered as God's servants. According to them, the water divinities, who are not all-powerful on their own, take care of all facets of their human endeavors. It is thought that Oghene, who created them, gave them their powers. Members profess absolute faith and trust in "mami-wota", and this is fully expressed in the following lyric:

Oni me r"me Me vwe o gwa oko Oche vweio odo Uvi me na Ohwo
 r'akpo se mie vwe e Akpo me an Ohwo akpo se mie vwe-eFok ridie
 owen ochuko me.

Meaning; My mother in the water, I am like a paddle That fell into the water But my paddle, no one can take it My life, no one can take it Because, you are my helper, saviour and redeemer It is forbidden for any initiate to offer devotion to or make vows to other conventional deities. All agreements between the members and the water divinity must be made through the priestess. The use of drugs, charms, amulets, and divination are strictly prohibited. Healing is accomplished through prayer or the use of special emblems to drive out demons. Consecrated powder, water, perfumes, and orhen are the main tools used in healing. In a symbolic sense, the powder is used for cleansing, the perfume is used to drive away evil forces, and the bird that is eaten is used to govern internal remedies and protection. As a result, members of the cult are both internally and externally cured and protected by these main artifacts. The finely fixated priestess may beat the

patient's body with an adjudju to draw out impurities from the worshipper as a type of corporal punishment or penance. This could entail making a confession for crimes like witchcraft, adultery, theft, and so forth. This could occasionally result in ritual cleansing or bathing in the river as a way of purification or exorcism. People spread white powder liberally after being so clean.

The first condition for such a person is life membership in that sect of Igbe-Ame, in order to ensure a successful, permanent cure and ongoing protection, aside from divine call. Membership could also come from one who is healed from affliction or whose prayers are granted. This may be one of the key causes for the religious sect's widespread membership in the Urhobo area. People join organizations to both safeguard their lives and defend themselves from the threat of witchcraft. Members of the Igbe-Ame religion, like the majority of spiritual Christian churches, place a higher value on prophecy and vision. The same sentiments are expressed by the leaders of Igbe-Ame religious cults. Prophecies are utilized to look into each member's past, present, and future spiritual states of mind. Starting with the water-divinities' inspiration, it progresses to visionary experiences and euphoric dialogue. Through dreams and visions, leaders can also make medical diagnoses and settle disagreements. During public worship, any casual gathering of members, or with the leader alone, prophesies and prophetic analysis may take place. They frequently include particular spiritual messages, counsel, and cautions for members' personal interests and essential actions. They also held the belief that members can receive clearance from the water divinity in dreams or visions before undertaking any task or travelling somewhere. The members of Igbe-Ame sects believe that the religion is founded on revelation, in contrast to other Igbe sects like Igbe-IJBiesha, which is a syncretistic movement. Igbe-Ame is purely an African traditional religion in terms of form, context, and beliefs. They assert that there

is only one God, Oghene, who created and sustains the universe and who "sent and gave control of the earth or world to the water divinities out of His overflowing love." Since they all share and practice this concept, they do not directly worship Him in ceremonial ways. Igbe-Ame people interact more closely with the aquatic deities even if they believe in Oghene. In their minds, there is nothing wrong with engaging directly with the water divinities because Oghene has granted them the freedom to do as they like, which should also be in conformity with God's desire."

THE IGBE-AME-OGWA CULT

A shrine is essentially the divinity's face. Here, the divine is represented through its symbols, which are thought to serve as adequate reminders of his characteristics. Any location utilized for worship in the traditional religion of the Urhobo is referred to as an "Ogwa" (shrine). For instance, every deity in Urhobo Land has its own Ogwa, such as Ogwa-Esemo, which is an ancestral shrine, and Ogwa Igbe, which is a temple dedicated to Igbe. In some instances, a location where deities are worshipped is referred to as Uwevwi-Orhan, which means the "abode or temple of a deity."

Comparatively speaking, an Ogwa is typically not a gorgeous structure like the other religions. According to the Urhobo, a splendid temple is not a guarantee of a devotee's piety, but rather their mental state. Therefore, places of worship are simply built as handy gathering places for worshippers and the deities they believe in. It is a location where the divine is called upon and invited to visit in order to commune, converse, and also to hear its devotee's requests. The number of worshippers who frequent an Ogwa

determines its size primarily. Some are large halls, while others are only slightly smaller. Every Ogwa-Igbe-Ame has an altar or holy of holies that is placed purposefully at one end of the Ogwa, across from the temple's sole main entrance. The cultic officials occupy seats close to the Shekinah and face the entrance so they can watch everyone entering or leaving with ease. Usually, the construction is pretty straightforward. Typically, an average-sized wooden table draped in a white cloth serves as the Igbe-Ame altar. Depending on the directives the head priestess received from the divinity, the objects set on such an altar differ from one religion to the next. Two people may have the same holy experience, but when they want to explicitly express it, they use various symbolic objects, such as those found on the altars. Nevertheless, there are a few things that each of them has in common. The banks of rivers, which were thought to be the homes of the aquatic spiritual entities, were once the sites of Igbe-Ame altars. These altars had tables with cups of powder, fragrances, native white chalk, and coconut fruits as well as palm fronds as decoration. Only the priest and one or two acolytes are allowed inside the palm-frond-enclosed arena during service. It is due to the location's tiny size that it could only hold one or two worshipers. In addition, there may be some sacred symbols that are only visible to individuals who have been particularly dedicated. An Ogwa is now constructed with iron sheets and concrete blocks.¹³ Every Ogwalgbe-rame has a very simple interior. The altar is located at the far end of the open space, as was already indicated. The table with cups of white powder, vials of perfumes, candles, a little white dish, lumps of native white chalk, and a small mirror are the most noticeable common items seen inside Ogwa Igbe-rame. All of these items provide beauty to the altar. The Ogwa's walls are embellished with a large mirror, some leather fans (adjudju), sketches, paintings, and images of some aquatic animals, including snakes and crocodiles. This wall is particularly close to the table. Images of stunning women can also be

seen on the walls. The mural painting of a gorgeous female-looking monster, whose trunk appears to be a mortal from below and has a fishtail, is the most remarkable of all the wall decorations.

All of these breathtaking images serve to illustrate and evoke in worshippers' minds the mysteries of their object of worship. There are candle stands with six branches, each with a candle on it, directly in front of the altar. We have a ground-level water basin in front of this. White cowries are dispersed all the way from under the table to where the water basin is. These cowries serve as a representation of the wealth that the divine being is said to fetch from the sea and give upon her devotees. The priestess occupies a seat next to the altar; no other Igbe person is allowed to occupy this regal and sacred stool. If the chief priestess is married, Ose-Igbe, the father of Igbe, occupies the other seat; if not, the position is vacant or nonexistent. Ose-Igbe is often the chief priestess' spouse.

The hall, which is located on the other section of the Ogwa, is open to all members. However, it is frequently the case that each member has a designated position or seat, and no one is allowed to trespass into anybody else's space. There is enough space between the chairs to allow for dancing and other cultic activities. All of the aforementioned artifacts are on an additional altar outside the Ogwa. It is not permitted to wear shoes inside the Ogwa-Igbe Ame.

ENDNOTE

1. Idamarhare A. O, Amoroghene Religious movement in Urhoboland, University of Ibadan Press, 1976,pp 70-71.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Okpoku K. A, West African Traditional Religion, Accra: F.E.B. International Private Limited,1978,p 52.
5. Nabofa N. Y, Igbe Religion in Urhoboland, University of Ibadan Press, 1973, pp 100-101.
6. Ibid.
7. Awolalu J. O and Dopemu P.A, West African Traditional Religion, Ibadan.Onibonje Press,1979,pp 99-102.
8. Ibid.
9. Awolalu J. O, Sin and its removal in African Traditional Religion,Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 1976, 4(2),212-213.

10.Ibid.

11.Erivwo S.U, Urhobo Traditional Religion, Lagos: Urhobo Historical Society,2005,pp 152-154.

12.Ibid.

13.Banwune U.O and Okobia F. N, Rethinking totemism among the Urhobo Traditional Religions, Continental Journal of Arts and Humanities, 2011, 3(2),77-80

14.Ibid.

15.Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

CHRISTIANITY IN URHOBOLAND

In the late 19th century, missionary activity brought Christianity to Urhoboland. One important evangelistic tactic used by Christian missionaries to gain ground was to demonize the prevalent Igbo religious traditions in Urhoboland. In Nigeria, Urhobo would have been considered one of the earliest Christian centers had it not been for the failed Portuguese mission. The Urhobo hinterland remained non-Christian for almost four centuries as a result of the Roman Catholic mission's failure to reach it from Ode Itsekiri in the 16th century. The Reformation (Protestant) churches, particularly the Anglican Church, were able to advance the Christianization of the region as a result. According to history, Samuel Ajayi Crowther attempted to spread Christianity during the Niger expeditions of 1841, 1854, and 1857 in Okwagbe in the Ughievwen ethnic group of Urhobo, present-day Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State.

The effort was unsuccessful because no one could understand how a simple human could assert to have heard from Oghene (God), who is frequently associated with the sky. The region wasn't evangelized until the 20th century as a result of the region's rejection of Crowther's message. A group of liberated slaves from Akatogbo and Owo in Yoruba nation, led by Efnodo (Ifenodun in Yoruba), unofficially introduced Christianity to Urhobo during the last decade of the 19th century. Urhovie in Abraka was their first stop. Ededje was given control of the new community's leadership. As the brethren's faith grew, ill and injured enemies from nearby settlements were brought to Urhovie. Many people were touched by God's mercy, and as a result, many were healed and converted. Many of them returned to their hometowns and established Christian worship facilities. One of these facilities was Ukwokori.

The gospel was brought to Ughelli by one Ewvwaire of Ogbovwan from the Ukwokori church around 1910, and from there it was extended to numerous other Urhobo towns. When Ewvwaire first learned about the new religion from Mr. Oghenebrume in Ukwokori (Ewvwaire's maternal house), he traveled with Oghenebrume and the two of them made inquiries in the village of Etefe, which belongs to the Agbarha clan. They encountered a man named Ohre there, who instructed them in the religion and then pointed them in the direction of Sapele so they could see Bishop James Johnson. Ewvwaire was given the mission by the bishop to spread the new faith in Ughelli and other areas.

When Ewvwaire arrived in Afiesere, he constructed a hut where he performed his devotion and gave the word that Bishop Johnson had entrusted to him. He uttered these words: "People who are serving carved images, wood, water, and other deities other than the living God should come

now and surrender to Him," which is Orhe. Many of the people gave up their conventional objects of worship, which were then burned in public, after becoming believers.² Therefore, throughout Ughelli and its surroundings, the word of God spread. After being installed as the Niger Delta mission's assistant bishop, Bishop James Johnson made trips to Warri, Avwraaka (Abraka), Sapele, and Benin. He encountered some religious groups in Warri and Sapele, and on July 28, 1901, Bishop Johnson led the first organized worship service in Warri, which 230 people attended.

He organized these congregations under the Anglican Communion and shown leadership over them. After that, he made annual bishop visits to the area up until 1917, when he triumphantly entered the church. Therefore, it may be stated that Christianity reached the rest of Urhobo from Sapele and Warri. Some indigenous evangelists, like Pa Abi Oghnenkaro, who converted to Christianity while working in Lagos, came home and established a church in his father's Udu compound. He also reached out to the clans of Ughievwen. Mr. Akpigun, who is a member of the Owborde Church, followed suit and planted the current St. Peter's Anglican Church in Ekrokpe. Since each church was started by a single person, practically all of the founders claimed a certain level of "ownership" over each congregation. The churches were also given names of their "founders" or "headmen" by early converts and locals.³ This would have allowed for proper indigenization of the Anglican congregations, but some individuals abused the circumstance by converting others to other denominations. The spiritual energy infused into these congregations by James Johnson re-invigorated the zeal of members and other converts like Omofoye Emuakpor of Ephron, Masima Ebosa of Ughoton, Ogugun of Ohrere, Evwaire of Ughelli, and Ejovi Agambi of Eku who established Anglican congregations in Ukwokori, Urhovie-Avwraaka, Ohrere Agbarho, and Eku among others.

From the beginning, the Urhobo congregations were under the mission of the Yoruba Church Missionary Society (CMS). Before being baptized, converts were required to learn the catechism in Yoruba, which did not sit well with the natives, who questioned why they had to learn Christian doctrine in a language they do not speak. It will be recalled that the Scripture must be read in the people's vernacular during Anglican public liturgy. Due to the demand, some converts left the Anglican Church and joined other churches that subsequently moved into the region. For instance, Omofoye Emuakpor joined the African Church. Aghoghin Omatsola organized a protest walkout at St. Luke's Sapele and established the Baptist Church. His actions were motivated by accusations of dominance by a Yoruba team and money theft from the church. Another issue with newly established mission stations was the absence of staff in the churches. James Johnson organized to care for the new believers. Bishop Johnson quickly used all accessible native agents.⁵ He was impressed by Masima Ebosa's enthusiasm, devotion, and commitment to serve the Lord, and he Ebosa was given the position of church instructor. He oversaw the Urhobo churches that looked to St. Andrew's Warri for pastoral guidance, assisted Warri-based priests on their missionary trips to other Urhobo outposts, and could interpret the Bible. However, he was not formally educated, received only rudimentary Anglicanism instruction, and spoke Itsekiri rather than Urhobo. Congregations of Urhobo expressed their unease and opposition to Ebosa's ministry to the bishop. Due of his subpar instruction, they grumbled that they were being deprived of the word of God. As stated in Psalm 119:130, "The entrance of your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple," therefore their hunger for the word of God was to enable them to acquire light and understanding in their straightforward walk with God. Additionally, they yearned for the sacrament. "He who consumes My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him," declared Jesus. He who feeds on Me

will live because of Me, just as the living Father sent Me, and I exist because of the Father (John 6:56-57). The populace needed a highly educated catechist who could instruct them more successfully. The son of Ebosa was sent to catechist training by the bishop, but he was unable to complete it. In order to successfully serve the expanding church, Urhobo native Christians urgently needed to receive training. The native converts made the decision to labor for their own salvation while quaking in their boots (Phil 2:12). In order to be "self-governing," they vowed to adhere to the CMS's "self-propagating" and "self-financing" principles. They paid taxes and supported Awori Iwe, a young guy who had just finished his primary education at St. Andrew's School in Warri. He was assigned to a catechist training program in Oyo in 1924, and after graduating, Rev. J. C. C. Thomas, then the vicar of St. Andrew's Warri, moved him to St. Luke's Church in Otowodo Ughelli. Agori Iwe became the first native Urhobo to get Anglican training as a catechist and eventually the first to be consecrated as a minister and bishop.

Agori Iwe, a catechist, was posted to Otowodo Ughelli, which caused conflict of personalities and division within the church. Agori-Iwe's leadership was challenged by many members and leaders who viewed Ebosa as their mentor and hero, and they contended that he ought to have been assigned to Eruemukowharien. Several complaints were sent to the Bishop of Lagos, Rt. Rev. Frank Melville Jones, by Umukoro Kaigho, Lelegbele, Oluku and Adjarho, among others, criticizing Rev. J.C.C. Thomas' leadership. One of these petitions, dated April 26, 1929, asked the bishop to direct Rev. I.T. Akande, who was at Sapele at the time, to instruct congregations in Urhobo to come and receive the sacrament. We have opted not to have Rev. Thomas as our minister, the letter states in part. We are therefore pleading with your worship to direct Rev. I.T. Akande of Sapele to advise the communicants to be administered the Lord's Supper at intervals and his travel expenses will be covered by us. The bishop extended an

invitation to Ebosa and his colleagues as well as Rev. J.C.C. Thomas and Agorilwe visited Lagos in response to the series of petitions and counterpetition. Bishop Jones asked the parties to make amends after hearing from both of them. A charismatic movement was born as a result of the Lagos gathering. Ebosa allegedly planned to launch the Ishoshi Erhi (Spirit movement) in the church after his return. Others report that Ebosa discovered his daughter had passed away after the group arrived back in Lagos in May 1929. He made the decision to fast and pray that, if his sins were to blame for the catastrophe, he would be pardoned after being disturbed by the untimely death.' The development of Ishoshi Ehi by Ebosa and his adherents in 1929 was influenced by fasting and prayer. The Ishoshi Erhi charismatic movement emerged as a result of Ebosa and his group's fasting and prayers. And some of them became excited and said they had been filled with the Holy Spirit when they were fasting and praying at Egborodo. The Urhobo Anglican Church, God's promise in Joel 2:28 that "And it shall come to pass afterwards That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh," "Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions," had been realized through them.

The group started out on a crusade of violent evangelism, sending preachers out in pairs to spread the word and forgive sins of confessors. For instance, after Ebosa prayed for a Diasao who had been suspended by Rev. Thomas for adultery, Diasao was given the Holy Spirit. Together with their leader, the group members declared that the Holy Spirit had pardoned him. The movement swept into every corner of Urhobo like wildfire. They very likely built the brick structure that serves as the movement's headquarters and "Zion quarters" today in Ughoton. The movement is characterized by euphoric and orgiastic displays, aggressive evangelism, and fasting and prayer. The rise of the charismatic Ishoshi Erhi movement appeared to have completely confounded and alarmed the Anglican churches in Urhobo. The movement's actions

had an impact on the church because some of its members openly proclaimed their righteousness and adopted a "holier than thou" mentality, which caused certain acts of schism. After learning of the predicament in Warri, the Bishop of Lagos, F. M. Jones, despatched Rev. Canon S. C. Philips, who was then residing in Ondo, to look into the situation and make recommendations to him.? The Canon Philips study demonstrated the movement's irrationality and lack of biblical foundation. Some of the attendees at the location of the investigational meeting engaged in raving and orgiastic behavior. The Ishoshi Erhi movement was suppressed as a result of the recommendations, and many of the members who were considering quitting the church, including Pa Kila of Oginibo, Pa Oghenekaro Philip Abi of Owrode, and Pa Isaiah Akpigin Ikpen of Ekrokpe, kept their memberships. Ebosa departed and continued with Ishoshi Erhi outside the Anglican Church, but those who stayed to their guns, including Ije (an Edjekotawoman), Orhiunu of Edjekota, Edjederia of Okpavure, Owuoyovwere of Eruemukowhari, and Ogegede of Ovwor, remained. Pa Abi Oghenekaro learned that the Ishoshi Erhi commanded by Ogegede still existed when he was assigned to Ovwor in 1941 as the church agent. Because of their dedication to fasting and prayer, the leader, Ogegede, and his assistants sported long beards because they had no time to eat, take a bath, or shave. Again, during prayers, the members were frequently screaming and yelling, performing faith healing, prophesying, and speaking in unusual tongues (glossolalia). Many supernatural occurrences served as proof of their prayers.

Regardless, Ishoshi Erhi, Ebosa's fledgling charismatic movement, fizzled and died away in the 1940s. While many of the group's members who were on the verge of seceding from the Anglican Church, including Ebosa himself, returned, a few people from the area where Ebosa had a significant impact carried on independently and later left Anglicanism. Notably, people

who participated in the movement but later changed their minds and rejoined the Anglican Church did not perceive anything wrong with it. Instead, they believed that the church leadership mismanaged the movement and failed to use it for the good and edifying of the church. The general consensus is that the schism might have been avoided if all members of the Ishoshi Erhi movement had retracted their statements and reversed their course (as many did in response to Canon Philip's report). The striking aspect of the development was that there was no return to traditional religion, despite the battle between Rev J.C.C. Thomas, Agori-Iwe, and their supporters on the one side, and Ebosa and his supporters on the other. It was simply another form of Christianity, one that asserted to be more pragmatic than institutionalized Christianity, one that claimed to be returning to the purity of Christianity, and one that is currently exhibited in Charismatic or Pentecostal Christianity."

Cornelius Adam Igbudu of Araya, Isoko, Delta state created the Anglican Adam Preaching Society (AAPS), one of the influential charismatic groups in western Delta Anglicanism. He most likely arrived in the world in 1916, two years after a mystery Bible was discovered nearby. He was raised in a Christian (Anglican) family and learned to read and write Isoko through catechists John Mark I. Eloho and Michael A. Akara, which subsequently boasted his spiritual growth and improved his evangelistic performances despite the fact that he had no formal schooling. He was an excellent evangelist with a special talent for singing and dancing, and his ministry resulted in notable miracles and a powerful revival. As soon as he joined the Usini or Igoru traditional dance troupe, his musical talent was initially noted. Later, he quit and started the Ole-Orufo, which is a group that prays for cleanliness and purity. The group was active in charitable and communal sanitation projects. The organization eventually established itself as a movement within the church. They used indigenous musical instruments to perform native

melodies, clapping and dancing to the joy and glory of God. They gained popularity both within and outside the community, particularly among Roman Catholic churches. They prayed for individuals and urged them to "love one another and give faithful service to the one and true God" during their evangelistic endeavours.

In Itsekiri, Urhobo, and Isoko, many souls were revived and new believers were won to the Christian faith through their evangelistic journeys. Adam was authorized as a district lay reader in 1945 on the recommendation of the superintendent of Isoko CMS, who was delighted with Adam's ministerial accomplishments. The group's name was altered to "Ukoko Adam" the next year, 1946, which means "Adam's Preaching Society." The term "Anglican" was then added, leading to the name "Anglican Adam Preaching Society"(AAPS). He was appointed a diocesan lay reader by the Diocese of Benin in 1968. The majority of Anglican churches in Nigeria's south-south region can clearly see the influence of Adam's charismatic movement.

In the 1980s, a group of people led by Daniel D. Mimeyeraye founded the Anglican Fasting and Prayer Society (AFPS), which was originally known as the "Anglican Mimeyeraye Fasting and Prayer Society" (AMFPS). Every Friday, they gathered to fast and pray at Saint Andrew's Cathedral on Okere Road in Warri. Johnson Ivukiwhiaye (now Ivukevweraye), Evang S.U. Ayanyen, Evang. M. Mufia, and others were among those who founded the prayer band group that subsequently evolved into a charismatic movement. The group started fasting and passionately praying for the church and the success of AAPS's evangelistic campaigns every Friday from 10 am to 5 pm. Members of the Cathedral and other Anglicans began to join them as they gradually began to experience a manifestation of God's might. They held prayer gatherings, and many people were left with accounts of healing and deliverance. On July 13, 1984, the group was formally established in Warri's St. Andrew's Cathedral. They transferred the prayer and

fasting gatherings to the Okumagba layout of Warri in 1987 after purchasing a piece of land there, which afterwards served as their headquarters. The fact that the leader, Mimeyeraye, employs Urhobo as a medium of communication and operation and is not fluent in English was one of the grounds for quitting the Cathedral. It makes sense that the church that sprang out of the group continues to worship in Urhobo. When they noticed a rise in membership along with miracles, signs, and marvels, they asked Right Reverend John Dafiewhare, the Bishop of the Warri Diocese at the time, for official recognition. The bishop gave the organization the name "Anglican Mimeyeraye Fasting and Prayer Society" (AMFPS) at the 1990 Synod, which was held at St. Andrew's Cathedral. The bishop immediately saw Mimeyeraye as a potential successor to Adam Igbudu, who would carry out larger deeds and spark a resurgence in Urhobo Anglican churches and elsewhere. Actually, according to the testimony of numerous clergy and laity, Daniel Dikeji Mimeyeraye was a charismatic figure whose ministry was sanctioned by heaven with audible signs and wonders.¹⁴

ENDNOTE

1. Arawore O. O, History of the church in Urhoboland, Warri: Soliq prints, 2020,p 5.
2. Erivwo S. U, A history of Christianity in Nigeria; The Urhobo, the Isoko and the Itsekiri, Ibadan: daystar press, 1979, pp 220-223.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

5. Ojo M. A., Pentecostal-Charismatic movements in modern Africa, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2012, pp 100-101.
6. Okome O., History of the Urhobo nation, Ughelli: Joe Irimi press, 2004, pp70-71.
7. Ibid.
8. Onu B. O Pentecostalism and Rural Development in Ikwerreland, Niger Delta, Nigeria, International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development, 7(7), 2020, 5-10.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Onokpita F. A., The Activities of the Anglican Fasting and Prayer Society in Urhoboland (1990-2017), BA Dissertation, Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt, 2019, pp 40-44.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE URHOBOS PEOPLE

The spread of Christianity in Urhoboland caused changes and neglect in some locations, which people started to notice. People began to move between the mission homes and the rural villages to sell their wares to strangers or to respond to the gospel's urgent call and its associated material

rewards. A number of the locals moved closer to the mission stations throughout time so they could take advantage of the economic opportunities they provided. Significant changes were brought about in native Urohobo societies by Christianity.

More drastically than either the government or the commerce, the missionaries fundamentally altered the Urohobo society of the native people. They achieved this by arguing that until the Urohobo people and their neighbours fundamentally altered their communities along specified Western lines, neither group could genuinely become good Christians or find salvation. They provided an extremely alluring lure that native religions were unable to provide: Western education. The Urohobo people sent flocks of their children to the schools over time because they were eager to learn the Whiteman's powerful magic and knew that attending school was the only way to do this. Soon, the natives who had learned the Whiteman's magic began to rule the political, economic, religious, and social spheres. All of these could be viewed in retrospect as the birth pains of Urohoboland's new society. The most significant factor in why Christian missions were accepted had been noted as being Western education.² Since the 1840s, numerous missionary organizations have worked hard to evangelize various regions of Urohoboland and advance education. By doing this, Christianity has contributed significantly to the creation of an Urohobo nation, albeit without doing so on purpose or as a matter of policy.

It is a truth that the C.M.S. and the Roman Catholic Churches led a significant missionary effort that eventually led to the formation of an Urohobo nation in 1857 (1885). For obvious reasons, missionaries had to get an education. When the kids had not entirely assimilated into the conventional beliefs of their diverse cultures, the missionaries initially thought it would be simpler-and correctly so-to accomplish their goal of conversion through the school. Second, they wanted to create locals through the schools who could help spread the gospel among their people

in their native tongues. Additionally, the growth of the colonial authority and the opening of new merchant establishments necessitated that the populace be educated in order to fill roles like clerks, messengers, church teachers, cooks, etc. So, for the first time, the Urhobo people themselves came to view education as the key to economic potential. They came to the startling realization that knowledge is power and that it demands social and economic importance. During the colonial era, Western education provided a way out of the petty tyranny of court clerks and warrant chiefs, but as local mission school products started to compete with them, the commercial benefits of education became clear to everyone. The emphasis on performance in a competitive environment applied to towns as well as to people.

A religious conflict between the two resulted from the spread of Christianity among the Urhobo people. It is impossible for the white missionaries' ideas and regulations to coexist with the customs and practices of the Urhobo people. The building of a church within the Urhobo community serves as a prime illustration of this unwillingness to coexist. The Urhobo tribe is made weaker by the church the Christians construct because the missionaries start imposing their views on the defenceless native population. A large portion of the Urhobo tribe decided to convert to Christianity as a result of the Church being erected and the numerous employees trying to promote their Western views throughout the nation. The converts believe that by accepting Christianity, they will experience greater comfort and freedom as well as the freedom to reject elements of Igbo culture that they previously did not hold dear. The early converts were outcasts in Urhobo culture; they lacked titles and had little regard for their neighbours. Such people might have self-respect because of Christianity since it ultimately gives them a chance to discover who they really are. The foreign missionaries continue to establish themselves in Urhoboland as the plot develops with the help of the Church. The Urhobo people have places

that they consider Evil lands or forests, thus the white men decide to build a church there. The church is still standing, and it appears that the evil forces concealed in the woods are unaffected by the white men, proving that they endure the challenges of the Evil Forest. As a result of the white men surviving the Evil Forest, their dominance grows throughout Urhoboland.⁴ The missionaries always urged the populace to convert from their wicked practices and worship of false deities and to turn to the Great God in order to be rescued when they died. The survival of the missionary huts and Church amid the Evil Forest puts a strain on the authority of the Igbo gods. The Urhobo culture's beliefs are challenged by Christianity since it opposes the Urhobo gods.

Many Igbo people believe that Christianity is the answer to all of their issues. People develop a strong conviction that accepting Christianity brings about peace and that it is superior to the Urhobo religion and its tenets (about the influence of sorcery, ill luck, and spirits). In general, Urhobo beliefs and social control techniques like divination and using oracles to settle disputes were destroyed by Christianity. Dead ancestors' status and power were questioned and questioned. The Osedjos (Chief priests), as my father once said, were ashamed since their profession now ran the risk of being exposed before the light of Christianity in the eyes of their long-suffering vassals.⁵ He talked to me about how happy he was to see the converts renounce the customs of their native country in their eagerness to follow the new faith. Actually, many converts attest to the Urhobo culture being subjugated by an advancing Christian culture. It also serves as a testament to the early Christians' frailty, who blindly imposed Western religious practices on the Osedjos without considering their social structure or cultural values.

When it comes to how Christianity interacts with elements of Urhobo society like marriage, religious intolerance is more pronounced. The vast majority of Christian churches have refused

to acknowledge polygamy in Urhobo culture. Others forbid their followers from getting married to people of another faith. The Urhobos view polygamy as a good system that promotes social security, curbs prostitution and flirtation, and ensures respect for husbands and affection for wives. Christianity's insistence on monogamy is an artificial imposition that fails to adequately take into account the traditional institution's polygamous foundation, which supports extended family patterns and ensures continuity as the cornerstone of ancestral worship. The Urhobo custom is to bury an aged person as soon as possible after death with simple rites, followed by a second burial with elaborate rituals a year or more later. In order for the spirit of such a deceased person to join and rest contentedly with the ancestors in the region of ancestral joy, a second burial is necessary. Without it, the ghost of the deceased floats through the air and might hurt its related living family members. However, after this second burial is completed, the departed's spirit takes up residence in the land of ancestral ecstasy where he is able to effectively appeal to the gods for the survival of his family. The missionaries used two strategies to combat this custom. Ese Ide, a traditional belief in ancestor spirits, was attacked in an effort to disprove it. This Christian initiative may have been spurred on by straightforward missionary passion to defend the monotheistic faith, but the results have not been favourable for either Christianity or Urhobo culture. The acquisition of chieftaincy titles is another traditional institution that was impacted by Christian pressures. Despite the strong social control principles linked with this institution, this traditionally exalted ethical and social title was denounced as pagan, and real Christians are not permitted to use it. The utter rejection of these old institutions without any prior evaluation of their significance or purpose was the most upsetting aspect of the entire situation.?

Christian culture and Urhobo culture are very similar in terms of morality, which is another aspect. This is most likely because, in both Urhobo and Christian cultures, man has an afterlife whose state is decided by the quality of one's current life, and morality follows logically from the religious creed. According to Urhobo culture, one must act in a way that complies with the unending requirements of the divinities and ancestors in order to obtain that afterlife as a haven of comfort. In this way, one's activities and behaviours must not bring about disaster for themselves, their family, or society as a whole. The weakening of Christianity's ability to punish evil may be the cause of the declining moral life in modern Urhobo society. Regarding the living, it saves punishment for the hereafter and in secret. The traditional religion of the Urhobo people holds that morally repugnant behaviour should be instantly condemned. The concept of a perpetual fiery hell or retribution for all sins in the afterlife is strange in the town. The sick and elderly who value fire for its ability to provide heat express their joy and yearning for the unending fires of hell. They question whether heaven is an insurance firm when it comes to rewards there.⁸ Through its assertion that these gods don't exist or have any power, Christianity leaves people with doubts, bewilderment, and a mental void, having shattered their sense of belief in and fear of the wrath of the gods and their ancestors.

Accordingly, it has led to doubt and unbelief. An Urhobo man attends communion while also believing in the power of traditional magic; he winds up the rosary and the traditional ebo, charm, in the same handkerchief, because of the uncertainty and instability that the contract with Christianity has brought into the belief system. By getting themselves baptized as Christians, enrolling their kids in school, and purchasing and learning to drive a car, Urhobos embrace modernity. However, they maintain that the car is more than just a mechanical tool; it is also a

force whose control rightfully belongs to the god of iron, whose symbols and charms they thus display on the vehicle.

While some Urhobo practices and beliefs have been abandoned or changed as a result of the impact of Christianity, other practices and beliefs have been preserved at one level of the community while new alternatives have been embraced on a higher level. To put it another way, Christian influence on Urhobo culture has been selective rather than systematic or successful. Thus, the European ideal of monogamous marriage accepted by the Christianized elite coexists side by side under the law with the institution of polygamy among the urban and rural masses, even though human sacrifice, the slave trade, and the killing of twins have been abandoned and old and new ideas have been amalgamated in the sphere of religion. This situation with one foot in tradition and the other in Christianity creates a significant conundrum for both tradition and Christianity.

The sometimes diametrically opposed stance that Christianity and tradition take on certain problems often portends doom and tragedy for the entire belief system. Christianity insists on eliminating the pagan components in order to transform Olorogun into a social title because it recognizes that title-taking is fundamentally linked to or accompanied by pagan religious activities. As a result, that venerable organization that has served as a living example of ideals like solidarity, justice, and truth has come dangerously close to dying. Currently, dry materialism is trying to dismantle civilization like a dry cough. The predominance of law and order in traditional society was caused by an Olorogun titled man's previous agreement with his ancestors and his understanding of the unfailing sanction from the divinities and ancestors.¹⁰ As a result of the elimination of this beneficial method of social control, numerous acts of armed robbery, bribery, corruption, theft of public funds, sexual immorality, murder cases, indiscipline in the

classroom, and even desecration of sacred sites have been committed. Christian initiatives that eliminated the genocidal practice of twin killing and other offensive religious rituals deserve praise and adulation. However, it cannot be denied that Christians have, in their fervour for religion, taken on some undesirable cultural positions. Etaghene commented that the Church frequently assumed the position of cultural arbiter, and Urhobo's ancestral beliefs were associated with the devil. Christians act as though the African and European worlds were created by two different gods, which is a natural conclusion. The assumption among Christian missionaries was that Africa or the African continent was created by an imperfect god, and that they were the sole perfect creations of a perfect God. If an almighty God created the entire universe, of which Urhobo is a part, then each element of the universe possesses virtues and vices that were approved by the creator."

The greatest notable influence on the Urhobo people's economic structure in the 19th century was arguably the outlawing of the transatlantic slave trade. The official treaties with the local chiefs and the missionaries' operations on the banks of the Niger are known to have been the first steps towards putting an end to the slave trade. The British traders, officials, and local rulers all took on new initiatives and developed new partnerships in an effort to successfully end the slave trade. The abolition also prompted Urhoboland to switch to legal trade, particularly in palm oil. This served as the foundation for Urhoboland's rise to commercial prominence, which is now regarded favourably throughout all of Nigeria. There is no question that the elimination of the slave trade and the expansion of the missionary movement were the two most significant elements in the Urhobo nation's shift in economic standing. New men had opportunities to develop as a result of the economic system upheaval, which presented challenges to the existing commercial establishments and their rulers. The oil trade took over the slave trade's place as it

nearly stopped existing entirely. The latter attracted many young men because it needed less money and didn't require a complex organizational structure like the oracle systems connected to earlier commerce.¹² The cornerstone for the free-spirited nature of the people of the new Urhoboland was this new economic structure, which allowed for unrestricted involvement by all. The effects of this change on Urhobo society were fairly extensive. The Urhobos began to believe that the white man's money speaks, giving raw cash a new value. The truth is that in the past, individuals earned money and gathered wealth in order to get married, build big yam barns, and purchase membership in esteemed titles and secret societies because these were the sources of status and prestige. But with the new evolution, money started to have value for its own sake and to communicate status even when it wasn't used to traditionally buy status. However, Many Urhobo people converted as a result of the success of the Westerners in trade. This suggests that the introduction of Christianity had an impact on the Urhobo people, both negatively and positively. Due to the entrance of Christian missionaries, trade in Urhoboland has dramatically increased, which has altered how the Urhobo see money. Before the arrival of the West, Urhobo society placed a high priority on sharing and borrowing, with little regard for the necessity of money. The Urhobo community is losing value in the ideals of friendship and brotherhood as a result of the growth in trade that has been observed. The pursuit of power and wealth has given rise to a new kind of greed in Urhoboland. Through the advent of Western trade, a competition where people compete to achieve the greatest financial success possible has been developed within the Urhoboland.

In conclusion, depending on the perspective used, the influence of Christianity on the Urhobo community and society can be viewed as both positive and harmful. The values, customs, and beliefs of the Urhobo have mostly been destroyed by Christianity from a social and cultural

perspective. A fair set of new rules have taken the place of Urhobo oracles, an efficient legal system for Churches, and many devoted followers of the Urhobo gods. However, the introduction of Western trading methods and foreign goods was very profitable for the Urhobo people from a purely economic perspective.

1. Onu B. O, Pentecostalism and Rural Development in Ikwerreland, Niger Delta, Nigeria, International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development,2020,7(7),5-10.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Arawore O. O., History of the church in Urhoboland, Warri: Soliq prints Asama,2010, pp.45-47.
- 5.Ibid.
6. Erivwo S. U, A history of Christianity in Nigeria; The Urhobo, the Isoko and the Itsekiri ,Ibadan:Daystar Press,1979,pp.190-193
7. Ryder A. F. C, Missionary Activities in the Kingdom of Warm to the Early Nineteenth Century, Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, 1960,2(1),67-70.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
- 10.Ayandele E. A., The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis, London: Longman, 1966,pp 90-91.
- 11.Ibid.
- 12.Ibid.
- 13.Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Christianity has made significant and multifaceted contributions to the development of the Urhobo people, both culturally and socio-economically. Over the years, this religion has become deeply intertwined with the Urhobo way of life, leaving an indelible mark on their history and progress. Several key contributions stand out. Christianity played a pivotal role in introducing formal education and literacy to the Urhobo people. Missionary schools and churches served as centres of learning, providing the Urhobo with valuable knowledge and skills. As a result, the Urhobo people have produced a cadre of educated individuals who have made substantial contributions to various sectors. Christian missions also brought modern healthcare facilities and practices to the Urhobo region. Mission hospitals and clinics helped improve public health, reduce mortality rates, and raise the overall standard of living among the Urhobo people.

Christianity promoted social development by advocating for values such as charity, compassion, and equality. Christian organizations often engaged in community development projects, including the construction of schools, hospitals, and clean water sources, which benefited the Urhobo people. While Christianity introduced new beliefs and practices, it also encouraged the preservation of traditional Urhobo culture. Many Urhobo communities have successfully integrated Christian values with their traditional beliefs, resulting in a unique cultural blend that reflects their history and identity.

Christianity has been a source of inspiration for social justice movements within the Urhobo community. It has encouraged the advocacy for the rights of marginalized groups, including women and the economically disadvantaged, leading to increased awareness and improved conditions for these groups.

Christianity has also played a role in economic development by promoting ethical business practices and entrepreneurship among the Urhobo people. Many successful Urhobo individuals and businesses have been influenced by Christian values of honesty, integrity, and hard work. Christianity has contributed to peace and conflict resolution in the Urhobo region. It has often served as a mediator in disputes and conflicts, promoting reconciliation and unity among the people. Through Christianity, the Urhobo people have been able to establish connections with the global community. Missionary work and church affiliations have facilitated international collaborations, fostering a broader perspective and opportunities for Urhobo individuals and communities. Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge that the relationship between Christianity and the Urhobo people has not been without challenges and complexities.

There have been instances of cultural clashes, tensions between traditional practices and Christian doctrines, and debates over the extent of Western influence on Urhobo society. However, these challenges have also spurred discussions, reflections, and adaptations within the Urhobo community, contributing to its ongoing cultural and religious dynamism. As the Urhobo people move forward, they carry with them the legacy of Christianity, which has played a central role in shaping their identity, values, and aspirations. This legacy serves as a bridge between their rich cultural heritage and the opportunities and challenges of the modern world. It has empowered them to engage in national and global dialogues, advocate for their rights, and participate in the wider discourse on social, economic, and environmental issues.

In conclusion, the contributions of Christianity to the development of the Urhobo people are profound and multifaceted. While it has introduced new elements to their society, it has also integrated seamlessly with their culture, facilitating progress in education, healthcare, social justice, and more. As the Urhobo people continue to navigate the complex interplay between

tradition and modernity, Christianity remains an integral part of their identity and development, shaping their future while honouring their past.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

SECONDARY SOURCES

BOOKS

Ajayi J. F, Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite, New Elite. Essex: Longman, 1981.

Arawore O.O, History of the church in Urhoboland, Warri: Soliq prints Asama, 2010.

Arawore O. O, History of the church in Urhoboland, Warri: Soliq prints, 2020.

Atanda J. A, Baptist Churches in Nigeria 1850-1950, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1988.

Awolalu J.O and Dopemu P.A, West African Traditional Religion, Ibadan; Onibonje Press, 1979.

Ayandele E. A, The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis, London: Longman, 1966.

Erivwo S. U, A history of Christianity in Nigeria; The Urhobo, the Isoko and the Itsekiri, Ibadan: daystar press, 1979.

Erivwo S. U, A history of Christianity in Nigeria; The Urhobo, the Isoko and the Itsekiri, Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1979.

Erivwo S.U, Urhobo Traditional Religion, Lagos: Urhobo Historical Society, 2005.

Idamarhare A.O, Amoroghene Religious movement in Urhoboland, University of Ibadan Press, 1976.

Nabofa M.Y, Adam: The Evangelist, Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1992.

Nabofa N.Y, Igbe Religion in Urhoboland, University of Ibadan Press, 1973.

Ojo M. A, Pentecostal-Charismatic movements in modern Africa, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2012.

Okologbo E, A History of Christianity in Nigeria: The Ndosumili and the Ukwuani,Ibadan:Daystar Press,1984.

Okome O,History of the Urhobo nation,Ughelli:Joe Irimi press,2004.

Okpoku K. A, West African Traditional Religion, Accra: F.E.B. International Private Limited,1978.

Onu B. O,The Anglican Heritage, Saint Peter's Rumuepirikom Deanery at 50 and Contemporary Issues: A Book of Readings,Biz pages, Lagos,2015

JOURNALS

Awolalu J. O, Sin and its Removal in African Traditional Religion, Journal of the American Academy of Religion,1976.

Banwune U.O and OKobia F. N, Rethinking totemism among the Urhobo Traditional Religions, Continental Journal of Arts and Humanities, 2011.

Nabofa M.Y.and Ben O. Elugbe, Epha: An Urhobo System of Divination and Its Esoteric Language, Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies,1,1981.

Onu B. O, Pentecostalism and Rural Development in Ikwerreland, Niger Delta, Nigeria, International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development, 7(7),2020.

Ryder A. F. C, Missionary Activities in the Kingdom of Warvi to the Early Nineteenth Century, Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria,1960.

UNPUBLISHED WORKS

Onokpite F. A, Proliferation of churches in Ughelli town, B. Th project. Theological College of Northern Nigeria 2014.

Onokpite F.A, The Activities of the Anglican Fasting and Prayer Society in Urhoboland (1990-2017),BA Dissertation,Department of Religious and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt, 2019.