How Colonial Education and Christian Religion Redefined the Uromi Community

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Abstract

The ability to respond intelligently to situations is a function of the quality and relevance of education acquired. The African continent is considered as underdeveloped in the international system because of its low level of socio-political and economic development. Why is the continent having this nature of challenges? Various factors may be accountable; however, there is the contention that the nature of colonial education and religion represent one of the gravest uncomplimentary variables to functional education in Africa. Using comparative historical analysis between pre-colonial and colonial practices, the paper argues and supports the view that colonialism distorted the African pre-colonial educational and religious system. The paper concludes that the African continent may continue to remain in this backward position of underdevelopment until there is an intelligent blend between indigenous and western values in order to re-create a functional system relevant to the African communities.

Introduction

The 21st century is witnessing a lot of technological and innovative development necessary for modern civilization. The ability and capacity to respond to natural challenges threatening humanity is a function of relevant education and religious practices. The low level of political culture in Africa is also a reflection of the level of literacy in the continent. Africa’s disjointed development is disturbing to sane communities. How can Africa possibly get out of the woods? An attempt to suggest answers to the question would take us to the debate on the impact of the past on the present. From a historical perspective, the nature of colonial education and religion are structurally responsible for the appalling degree of Africa’s developmental challenges in the 21st century. We have had reasons to argue elsewhere that colonialism structurally deformed Africa’s developmental paradigms and thus created the incapacity of the continent to re-invent itself in line with modern civilizing technique.¹ For the purpose of this paper, there is need to situate the discourse within the context of an African community. The Uromi community in the Esan region of Edo state, Nigeria shall be our case study. This is without prejudice to other African communities that
experienced colonial presence, however, the Uromi colonial situation represents one out of the colonial experiences in other parts of Africa. The Esan (misspelled as Ishan) region is located on the east of Benin City, while Uromi is situated in the north-east of Esan. All accounts of Uromi traditions of origin can be reduced to two; the Benin and non Benin sources. Butcher, Egharevba and Ojiefoh argues that the Uromi people migrated from Benin, while the non Benin source believe that the early founders of Uromi were migrants from outside the Benin axis as argued by Webster, Omorleghe, and Bradbury. Generally, the two sources represent the continuous debate on the traditions of origin of most African communities. However, with time, the Uromi people were able to develop an educational and religious system that served the needs of the pre colonial community.

**Pre Colonial Educational and Religious System**

Education is often understood as the acquisition of skills by the individual in order to improve his/her cognitive perspective for personal and societal development. By that definition, it follows that every society among human civilization must have developed its own system of transmitting skills to its citizens. There are three means by which skills can be acquired. Through the informal (otherwise called indigenous or traditional education), non-formal and formal methods.

The informal channel of gaining education simply refers to the various kinds of knowledge acquired in the process of daily interaction. It is called informal because it is not structured along lines of obtaining certificate at the end of the training. According to Anyanwu, informal education involves training that takes place casually, and without formal planning. Thus at various times, in bed, while eating, while greeting, while singing and dancing, the child is constantly taught the essentials of living. Informal acquisition of knowledge can also take place in canteens, places of worships, markets, from the news and paint media and from any medium that can convey information. Informal or indigenous education is considered by Anibueze as a life-long activities through which individuals learn in the process and cultivate cultural values of all kinds such as language, skills, etc. relevant to their immediate environment. It is this structure of informal education that made Nzeneri to define it as an incidental or chance process of getting information that could be translated into knowledge.

From all perspectives, informal education is the knowledge gained from all forms of social, political, economic and spiritual engagement directed at developing one's traditional
environment. The non-formal education is the process of acquiring skills and knowledge through a training programme or apprenticeships. It is a specialized out of class room kind of teaching where trainees learn through observation and imitation. Vocational entrepreneurship falls within the non-formal educational sector. Examples of non-formal vocational activity are persons going through any form of training such as auto mechanic, carpentry, weaving, mason, herbal medicine, etc. There is a close relationship between the informal and non-formal method of gaining knowledge. Both are out of class room activities, non-structured, non-certificated and not strictly compartmentalized. In pre-colonial Africa, the informal and non-formal approaches were the channel of dissemination of knowledge. The function of those medium, were primarily to teach individuals the cultural relationship between the material and immaterial as it affected human existence. The mode of informal and non-formal educational transmission of knowledge expressed itself in economic, social and political engagement shrouded in the mystery of spirituality.

Among the people of Uromi, children were informally thought the act of learning, cloth manufacture, craft making, trading and other forms of economic enterprise by observation. Knowledge acquired through that process was channelled to improve the recipient skills and also to sustain communal development. For example, boys especially, follow their parents to the farms as escort and carriers, but at a certain stage of the boys development, they were expected to participate in farming activities. Though the act of buying and selling is an economic activity, it goes with its own social-spiritual components. In pre-colonial Uromi, the market centre was one of the places where various forms of activities took place such as exchange of pleasantries and information. Commercial activities were also spiritualised to the extent that it was believed the gods of the land would destroy those who stole from the market, so traders had the confidence to leave their merchandise unprotected without any fear of theft. That kind of commercial spirituality helped to maintain some level of morality in the community. Through festivals and ceremonies, communal history was re-enacted thus passing relevant information and knowledge that created in the minds of recipients the character of patriotism. Gender relations also played a prominent role in the Uromi indigenous and non-formal education. While the boys were mostly concerned with the traditionally male-dominated vocation such as farming, and non-formal aspect of hunting, fishing, herbal medicine, construction and security. The female took to domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning and as care provider and also into
the non-formal vocation of craft making, trading and cloth manufacture. The stratification of job schedule enabled the people to organise labour for communal development.

It should be stated that the structure of informal and non-formal education in Uromi had some of the following features. The teachers were mainly elders localized within the community, the teaching methodology was verbal, dogmatic and with doses of spirituality. The use of riddles, parables and wise sayings were also adopted as part of the teaching methodology. For example, in order to inculcate some level of moral values, it was believed in Uromi that whistling at night would attract evil forces into the community. Though the stated example is illogical, but it served to reduce noise making and distraction at night. The nature of knowledge impacted at all levels of development was targeted at developing the self, immediate household and larger community, which made the young to be accountable to his kinsmen.

In the aspect of religion, it is generally accepted that Africans are religious as enshrined in their cultural practices. The African believe in the existence and potency of a supreme God, the source of power, life and death, therefore God-worship was a sacred matter. The Uromi people were religious as observed in their socio-economic and political engagements. The people’s religious belief system could be categorized into three. They were ancestral, nature and hero worship. Ancestral worship was regarded as the second most important spiritual authority that must be revered in the hierarchy of spiritual forces after God. The ancestors were worshiped for some of the following reasons, to seek for all kinds of political, social and economic favours, intercede on behalf of the living, especially in trying or challenging moments, to serve as witness in covenant making, permit the celebration of family or community ceremonies and festivals, and to reward or punish individuals or community actions.

Nature worship was practiced because of the belief that every natural object or feature had its own spiritual properties that must be properly understood. That understanding enabled the people to have the knowledge on how best to ritually honour it. For example, earth worship was mandatory for all to appreciate the spirit of fertility. Farmers were mostly involved in the practice so that their crops could produce good harvest. Though, some villages such as Egbele, Idumoza and Efandion were renowned custodian of earth shrines, all villages in Uromi were involved in the worship. Another example could be observed in the reverence accorded to some plants, such as the Ukhine (Neubodia leavis) and palm tree.
These plants were believed to be the earliest plants created by the supreme God. They were planted to symbolize ownership and security. Other natural phenomenon also enjoyed some measure of spiritual dedication, such as the sun and moon believed to be the gods of the day and might. The presence of the Onokun shrine in Uromi symbolized the belief in the existence of water goddess capable of enriching the living with wealth, children and other necessities of life. Hero worship was encouraged to remember and celebrate those believed to have contributed to the sustenance of the community, so were deified and venerated. It was believed that (as ancestors) deified beings had their relevance to the wellbeing of the living. Most villages in Uromi had their deities such as Agba Nojie at Eguarre, Ojiade of Idumoza, Osabhe of Awo, Ojobhoti of Efandion, Ohie of Ebhoiyi, Oghu of Ivue, Oigha of Ukoni, Aredo of Uwalor, and Ozolo of Ubierumunn Oke.

The Uromi pre-colonial religion had its political, social and economic impact. Politically, it empowered traditional authorities to perform their duties because elders were also the custodians of socio-economic and spiritual laws. That advantaged position of the elders made them to be revered; therefore, there was the morbid fear of offending traditional authorities. The awe also served as an instrument of control to direct all activities in the community. Pre-colonial religion also created in the people, the comradeship of oneness because the people believed and shared in the worship of an understood spiritual being. That made the individual to operate within its communal rights and privileges, knowing that an individual behaviour could attract blesses or curses from the gods of the community. In the light of the above, worship in pre-colonial Uromi was not individualistic but communal, in other words, salvation was not personal but communal. Informal and non-formal education and religious worship served the societal needs of the people of Uromi until the coming of the Europeans as colonizers and missionaries. The colonial authorities and Christian missionaries introduced western type education with its own methodology. Western education and religion came with a philosophy that fundamentally challenged and weakened the structure of Uromi pre-colonial cultural practices. As soon as the structure was attacked, people began to question some cultural norms hitherto accepted as normal. Therefore, western practices produced new sets of generation with ideas and values not completely compatible with the indigenous values in Uromi.
Establishment of Colonial Educational and Religious Structures

Colonial rule and Christianity introduced western type or formal education into Uromi. Formal education refers to the practice whereby the acquisition of knowledge is highly structured and segmented over a period of time. It involves a process of certification at the end of the training process.\(^{21}\) The structure of formal education is fundamentally different from the informal and non-formal method. While the informal and non-formal system is communal oriented, the formal is individualistic and self-centred oriented. That means formal education is the fractionalization of knowledge with a structured syllabus taught within the walls of a class room. The primary objective of western or formal education in colonial Uromi and other parts of Africa was to train middle manpower to serve in the colonial administration as clerk and interpreters. Western education was also needed by the Christian organizations to train Bible teachers and catechist.

The impact of western education and Christianity on the people of Africa must be intellectually differentiated from their manifestation. The contemporary mode of dressing, philosophy of education, less attention to cultural activities, languages, religious worship and the seemingly level of disobedience among the youth are often discussed as impact of western ideas.\(^{22}\) Really they are not, rather, they are manifestation of the impact of western ideas. The true impact of colonial western education and Christianity can be located in the thought process of the people. The people’s psychology changed because of the mode of transmission of colonial education and their observation that Christianity demystified superstitious cultural belief. In the case of Uromi, the impact of western ideology challenged the people culture and way of life. It questioned the reverence and total obedience to the traditional political authority, modified the system of judiciary, re-defined marriage practices, minimized the relevance of ancestral worship and formalized the impact of western education. For the purpose of analysis, the impact of colonial education shall be discussed before that of Christianity.

Goals of Colonial Education

The synergy between colonial propagation of education and Christian evangelistic education was born out of co-incidence. Crowder has noted that "a great part of the education services provided by the colonial powers were in fact provided by the missionaries, who obviously benefited by the presence of a colonial administration from the point of view of security"\(^{23}\) In some parts of Nigeria, Christian education had been established before the
imposition of colonial rule. For example, in the western part of Nigeria, Christian evangelism had gotten its place among the people of Abeokuta by the 1840s before British colonial rule.\textsuperscript{24}

The case of Esan is quite different. Colonial rule had imposed itself in the region by 1900 before the presence of the Roman Catholic Faith that entered Ubiaja (one of the Esan towns) in 1908 and Uromi in 1909.\textsuperscript{25} However the colonial authority was the pioneer of western education with the establishment of the first primary school at Irrua (one of the Esan towns) in 1905 and in 1906 a government primary school was also built in Uromi.\textsuperscript{26} In the same 1906, the Roman Catholic Mission had established its own primary school, St. Anthony's at Ukoni-Uromi.\textsuperscript{27} Those were the two formal prominent educational centres of learning in colonial Uromi before further development of primary education in the region. However, by 1910, a government primary school was established at Ewu (one of the Esan towns) and in 1913, Ekpoma and Opoji (both are in Esan) had their own primary schools.\textsuperscript{28} The impact of primary education was profound in Esan, especially in Uromi. The 1915 quarterly report on the Ishan Division of June 30th indicate that Uromi had the highest percentage of average pupils' attendance and the highest number of students' enrolment as shown in the table below.\textsuperscript{29}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of school</th>
<th>Average Attendance</th>
<th>No. on Roll</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uromi</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrua</td>
<td>43.29</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opogi (Opoji)</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opomo (Ekpoma)</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewu</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Even in 1932, Butcher in his intelligence report on Uromi observed the impact of western education in the community. He comments that

there is a considerable educated and Christian community in Uromi. There is a government school at Uromi itself,\textsuperscript{30} and there is a Roman Catholic Mission School at Ukoni. The influence of these is considerable and must increase. The people are eager for education and are on the whole distinctly intelligent.\textsuperscript{30}
The eagerness for education among the people of Uromi was taken into consideration when the Ag. Director of Education, western region proposed a massive expansion of primary school education. The region proposed that by January 1955, about five hundred thousand children (500,000.00) should be in school. The memo was forwarded by the Benin Provincial Resident to the various Divisions. The District Officer, Ishan Division responded promptly and sent a list of distribution of schools in his proposal. A summary of the distribution in the whole of the Ishan Division indicates that Uromi had the highest in the various levels of allocation. The table below indicates the statistical distribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>No. of Class I intake in 1955</th>
<th>Addition to Existing Schools</th>
<th>New Schools on New Sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amahor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebelle</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egoro</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekekkenlen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekpoma</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekpon</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eme</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewatto</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewohimi</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewossa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewu</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idoa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igueben</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrua</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogwa</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohordua</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okalo</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okhuesan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oria</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opoji</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8
List of Esan towns, source: ID 814/2 Primary Schools: Matters Regarding, June 2, 1954.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Literacy</th>
<th>Dogmatism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ozigholo/Illushi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubiaja</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udo</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ugbegun</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ugboha</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uguna</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ujiogba</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukhun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urohi</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uromi</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall impact of the massive development of education in the Ishan Division, especially in Uromi District ultimately weakened pre-colonial informal educational sector. The consequence of a weakened structure affected the role of elders as teachers, introduced literacy, bridged gender relations, destroyed the relevance of dogmatism and spirituality in informal education, systematized educational philosophy and fast tracked the change of leadership from traditional elites to western educated trained elites. The first structural impact of western education was that the mode of teaching was altered. Elders who were the core of knowledge dissemination before colonial rule began to lose relevance as children had alternative source of information. Thus, that affected the influence of elders in culturally moulding young generations to appreciate traditional norms in the society. As a result of the structural defect, the fear and relevance accorded to elders was also affected. Children were then bold to ask questions and even argue with elders. Traditionally, the Uromi custom forbids the young to question the opinion or decisions of elders as any form of altercation was regarded as disobedience.

Closely related with the structure of elders was the mentality of dogmatism in accepting most information passed by the elders. Such dogmatic philosophy affected the extent to which the scope of knowledge was disseminated. Whatever the elders said was accepted as finale. Most people did not bother to investigate the authenticity of such information. For example, it was believed that children who pick meat from the bowl when eating with elders might likely steal. Such belief is still common in the Uromi Community,
even when it is illogical, unlike western education that is built around the philosophy of logically deducible requirement. Western education affected the pre-colonial dogmatic and spiritual approach to teaching in Uromi.

Pre-colonial educational sector depended on verbal communication to transmit information and knowledge. Therefore, absentee students lost the privilege of directly benefiting from the teaching of elders. However, western education transformed the educational sector from illiterate to literate society. The power of books made it possible for more children to be directly and indirectly influenced by what they read. Since the focal point of colonial and Christian education was to train low level workers to compliment administrative staff. It was therefore expedient for literacy to be enforced. In fact, illiteracy had no place in the scheme of things in the colonial economy. With that realization, the non-literate in the community were ostracized in terms of appreciation of the workings of colonialism.

The Esan Community was highly patriarchal. Political, social, spiritual and economic activities were stratified on gender lines. Women in pre-colonial Uromi had limited powers and privileges in comparison with their male counterpart. For example, women were not prominent in political issues, determine social norms or be involved in male dominated economic activities such as hunting. In pre-colonial Uromi, women were not culturally allowed to posses landed properties, but colonial rule through western education empowered women. Therefore, western education reduced the role of gender relations in the community as women could own landed properties and even went to court to protect their properties. The case between Mrs. Cecilia Ebherame and Mr. Ezele Masade is a good example to demonstrate the impact of western education on gender relations. Cecilia Ebherame sued Masade Ezele to the native court, claiming £100 as damages to her undeveloped land and building. Mrs. Cecilia claimed that she bought the land from Ezele at 15 shillings and other additional charges which amounted to £1 and 2 shillings.\textsuperscript{34} Although Mrs. Cecilia Ebherame lost the case,\textsuperscript{35} but the effrontery to go to court was novel compare to the pre-colonial situation when women were denied the privilege or rights to own such property. Rodney has argued that African women lost their \textit{social, religious, constitutional and political privileges and rights\textsuperscript{36} under colonial rule. While it is true that colonial rule affected the status of women, it must be stated that it would seem that Esan women enjoyed some measure of respect and rights under colonial rule than in the pre-colonial era. We have already
demonstrated that the introduction of the Ishan Civil Code by the colonial authorities in the Ishan Division was meant to liberate women from the shackles of patriarchy. Unfortunately, the exercise of those rights and privileges by Esan women badly affected the sacredness of the family system.\textsuperscript{37}

Western education also de-spiritualized the philosophy of pre-colonial education. Phenomenon not understood by the community was often ascribed to spiritual forces in operation. It was a common totemic belief in Ukoni that anyone who ate cricket in the community would spiritually get his nose cut off. Most children grew up with that belief without any attempt to demystify it. However, such belief has gradually been weakened because of the new methodology of western education that demystified the transmission of knowledge. Western education introduced a systematic approach to training. School curriculum was designed in such a manner that complete knowledge on any particular subject was based on examination and promotion. In order to access the level of proficiency, students were expected to graduate from one level to another. Such curriculum limited students' scope of knowledge as they were restricted to studying core subjects that could make them passable to only read and write. This was in contract to the pre-colonial structure where students were taught to have a high level of understanding of the workings of their environment. For example, the informal sector allowed students to learn by observation, thereby making it possible for them to learn farming, building construction, hunting etc, all at the same time. That made students to be culturally relevant to their immediate community.

The colonial systematic approach eventually led to cultural isolation for most of the students that attended schools outside their immediate environment. Just as it happened in Uromi, it also happened in most parts of Africa that experienced colonial western education. Rodney quoted the frustration of Dr. Kofi Busia on the impact of systemic approach of western education on African students. Busia is quoted to have said

\begin{quote}

at the end of my first year at secondary school (Mfantsipim, Cape Coast, Ghana), I went home to Wenchi for the Christmas vocation \ldots I became painfully aware of my isolation. I understood our community far less than the boys of my own age who had never been to school.\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

It is the systematic method in western education that eventually weakened the cultural and communal approach to issues by emerging educated elite. There are no doubts that western education introduced new values and practices into Uromi and African communities. Educational training was transformed so that students were taught within the walls of class
rooms. According to Martins Ezehinoria, universal ideas were exposed to students, especially through the study of geography as students were taught developments in other climes. Mr. Ezehinoria also commented that the second subject that fascinated students was the study of history because of the manner the subject was handled, which made it attractive to students. The use of prescribed school uniforms was also an attraction to western education. It made students look unique in the community. In fact, the use of school uniforms properly defined the formality of colonial education. Although students were initially reluctant to wear school uniforms as it was alien to them, but with time, the presence of school uniforms became the signature for the educated.

**Goals of Christian Evangelism**

Christianity pre-dated the establishment of colonial rule in Nigeria but had no footing in Uromi or the whole of Esan until eight years into the establishment of colonial rule in the Ishan Division. That was with the appointment of Rev. Fr. Clement Baunworth in 1908 at Ubiaja. The Uromi experience began with the colonial permission of Rev. Fr. Corbeau a.k.a *Ifada kolobo*, representing the Catholic Faith to establish a Catholic Mission at Eguarre-Uromi in 1909. Available information accounts that Fr. Corbeau warmed his way to the hearts of most Uromi indigenes with humble appreciation and participation in their ways of life, such as dietary, language, visitation, and other social etiquette except in traditional religious worship.

Fr. Corbeau’s attitude won converts to his religious way of viewing reality and that was how the first Catholic Church was established at Eguarre-Uromi (not 1908 as stated by Omorogie) but 1909 and another mission was opened at Ukoni in 1913. The Eguarre Parish began to dwindle in membership and participation in relations to the Ukoni Church which informed Fr. Corbeau to settle at Ukoni and from there administered the Eguarre Church. The spread of Christianity in Uromi under colonial rule, especially of the Roman Catholic Faith, can be divided into two stages in Uromi and the Esan region. These are the passive and active stages.

This is not the appropriate medium to discuss the rationale for evangelism in Africa, but it suffices to conclude that the primary objective of evangelism in the early history of Christianity in Uromi was to convert the people from paganism. To that extent, colonial authorities did not interfere with early missionary activities as long as they limited themselves within the confines of colonial regulations. The passiveness could be attributed to
the observation that Christianity tended to promote rebelliousness from educated Africans. Ajayi and Crowder notes that colonial authorities in Africa were more comfortable with illiterate Christians because they were thought to be generally loyal to the regimes. But the loyalty of Christians who sought western education ipso facto became suspect.\[47\]

However, between 1842 and 1892 some Christian missions had established themselves in some parts of the lower Niger. Such as the Baptist, Church Missionary Society, Presbyterians, Methodist and the Roman Catholic Mission that established itself at Asaba in Delta state of Nigeria in 1888.\[48\] It was from Asaba the Catholic Mission came into Uromi. Various reasons have been advanced for embracing Christianity by pre-Christian members of the Nigeria communities, especially south of the Niger. Kalu believes that the early African Christian converts embraced Christianity because of the belief for immediate material benefits.\[49\] Such benefits could be in Erivwo’s words, the expectation of miracles of healing, fertility, deliverance and freedom from restriction,\[50\] or Amadi’s euphoria of conversion and the related anticipation of messianic reward in paradise.\[51\]

Contrary to the above, the case of Uromi converts presents a fascinating scenario. Those Uromi converts remained as Christians for two major reasons: one, their contact with Christianity changed their character disposition to provoke situations from intolerance and irritation to accommodation. The character disposition or new behavior presented those converts as new breed of human species worthy of emulation.\[52\] Two, without doubt, as it happened in other places with new convert,\[53\] the communal perception that the wrath of the gods would descend on those who desecrated the tradition of the people seemed not to have scared those early converts. As Rodney has already observed that the motives for accepting Christianity often had nothing to do with the content of the religion.\[54\] In fact, it appeared that Christianity infused in those converts, boldness and invisibility as they went about their duties and in most times paid less value to some socio-political traditional beliefs that were considered sacred. It is the second factor that overwhelming drew more converts to Christianity in Uromi than the need for miracles.

However, it is important to note that the impact of Christian activities in Uromi could be categorised into two, the immediate and subsequent impacts. The immediate impact broke to shreds some traditional myth, especially the myth of the evil forest. According to Okuduwa, the forest, thickly wooded, cold and unreceptive was generally dreaded by the ordinary Esan person, especially at night. That it was difficult to visit the forest without some form of talisman because of the belief that Azen (witches) or evil forces operated at night.
mostly on top of trees, or people could by extinguished by Ihoholele (dwarf-like human beings) from the depth of the forests. The acceptance of the sacred Òvilô forest, and survival of the early European missionaries and converts in the Òvilô forest mystified most of the people, and that observation made some non-Christians to believe that Christianity came with a superior God in relation to their own gods. It has been speculated that the myth of the forest may have been created by herbalist and hunters in a bid to protect their propitiation and wild games from intruders. Perhaps that was why nothing happened to the missionaries and converted Christians when they inhabited the forest. Therefore, the desire to explore the powers of the new God of Christianity was irresistible, thus, in the process, more and more members of the Uromi community, especially in the village of Ukoni embraced the new Christian religion to the detriment of traditional religion.

As soon as Christianity began to demythologize Esan myth, it created in the minds of Uromi Christians doubts about some cultural beliefs and practices. For example, Clement Ajegbelen Azeke, who was a traditional Uromi chief and later became a Christian was assaulted when he divorced his other wives except one and abstained from traditional religious practices. Azeke took the decision on his polygamous status, because the practice of polygamy, for instance, was condemned by those missionaries based on their understanding that Ò the Christian society must be built on Christian family life and that the ideal of the Christian family life can only be realized in monogamy. Azeke’s conviction not to participate in traditional paganistic activities was also based on the same Christian ideology that non-Christian rites were devil worship.

The Uromi traditional political institution also went through its own turbulent times as traditional palace chiefs began to renounce traditional worship for Christianity to the extent that Onojie (king) Okojie who had defended Uromi traditional values died as a baptized Roman Catholic Christian in 1944. It may sound contradictory, but by the time colonial rule was closing in Nigeria, most aspects of Uromi custom and tradition had been weakened by colonial education and Christian evangelism.

The introduction to Christianity into Uromi had its own backlash as adherents to Uromi traditional religion and ancestral veneration could not lay back to watch their society destroyed by alien and foreign persons in conjunction with Uromi citizens. The situation could be captured in the Psalmist expression that “those who rush to other gods bring many troubles on themselves. I will not take part in their sacrifices; I will not worship their gods.” Indeed, early converts to Christianity in Uromi brought troubles to themselves as they were
persecuted for treating some aspects of cultural practices with disdain. The case of Peter Akhabue is pathetic as he was violently attacked and left to die, yet survived the attack and continued with his new found faith. However, Mr. Agbemenlo Ambrose that lead the group that attacked Peter Akhabue later became a Catholic. Francis Osime, was the instrument used by Fr. Corbeau as interpreter to convert the people to Christianity and for that he was declared a personal non gratia in most villages of Uromi, especially at Ukoni. Even as late as 1936, Oyamiele of Ukoni who was a Roman Catholic was denied elevation to the Edion (seniority) status and prevented from speaking in the village council because he refused to perform the necessary rites required for his traditional elevation to a position of political (traditional) authority.

However, the Uromi colonial authority viewed the violence in the community as a result of the impact of Christianity and therefore decided to take urgent steps in curbing or restricting Christian activities. In a memorandum form the Commissioner of Lands in Lagos, Nigeria dated 4th June 1915, the Provinces and Divisions in the Southern Protectorate were instructed to be mindful of granting permission to mission to practice their religion. They were also to decide whether by allowing a mission to conduct its propaganda in a particular area, social disturbance is likely to arise. For this reason His Excellency directs that before obtaining from a native chief or community the temporary use of houses or land for the purpose of evangelizing or opening schools, the mission shall notify and obtain the consent of the Commissioner of the Province.

The implementation of that policy might have influenced why the Catholic establishment of mission centres were limited to Eguarre and Ukoni in the first three decades of Catholicism in Uromi. However, with time, circumstances had to compel the colonial authorities to change its position from passive to active encouragement of Christian evangelism.

From the late 1930s, Catholic Faithful began to experience some measure of government protection as they evangelized from village to village. It is difficult to believe that most Uromi Catholics understood the reason for the change of attitude by the colonial authorities towards their activities, but believed that the changes were made possible as a result of prayers and tolerance. As already mentioned, the encouragement of Christianity by the colonial authority was hoped would reduce belief in Uromi traditional practices with the new thinking of western education and Christianity. The colonial authorities was convinced that the remedy to reduce the influence of cultural practices on the people’s way of life was to
encourage the spread of Christianity under the guidance of Missionaries spirituality and the general dissemination of modern scientific and, particularly, medical knowledge.\textsuperscript{72} To that extent, Christian related activities were encouraged.

For example, in a correspondence dated 26th July 1948, the Roman Catholic Mission applied for lease of land to erect a mission hospital in Uromi. It took the District Officer less than four days to recommend for approval even when it was obvious that the Mission had acted before getting the approval as stated by the District Officer.\textsuperscript{73} In the correspondence sent by the District Officer to the Resident, Benin Province conveying the recommendation, he noted that the maternity centre and Medical Officers House are already in existence as at the time that the proposal was originally considered.\textsuperscript{74} In addition, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and Assemblies of God Church were encouraged to settle in Uromi and other parts of Esanland. It was that U-turn form passive to active involvement by colonial authority in patronizing Christian activities that created in the minds of early Christians that their prayers had been answered. When in actual fact, Christianity was considered by the colonial authorities as an instrument to control the thought process of the people.

**Conclusion**

The propagation of western education and encouragement of Christian evangelism was a deliberate colonial policy to integrate the Uromi people into European way of thinking. That was the most efficient strategy of generating the required manpower needed for colonial administration. Christianity was expected to re-define Uromi’s barbaric cultural practices. At the end of the day western education and Christianity were the two major forces that revolutionised the social strata of the community. It would seem that as Abdou Moumini has expressed that colonial education corrupted the thinking and sensibilities of the African and filled him with abnormal complexes.”\textsuperscript{75} From the emotional Africa perspective, Moumini should be right, but the reality is that the thought process of the colonized had to be brain washed in order to achieve colonial goals. The impact of Christianity was more immediate and profound than education. While it took some years for the impact of education to manifest, the effect of Christianity was electrifying. This was so, because it shattered superstitious belief and practices. Christianity raised doubts in the minds of some of the people of Uromi on the potency of their ancestral gods. The crisis that rocked the Uromi traditional settings as a result of Christian evangelism was not exclusive. It also affected all other Nigerian societies that experienced colonial rule. For example, missionary activities
divided traditional rulers into factions in Abeokuta, Ado, Badagry and Lagos into pro and anti Christianity. Also the Christian ideology of freedom and respect for human rights greatly revolutionized the thought process in the society as it consequently undermined the political authorities of the day as it happened in Brass, New Calabar and Bonny, even to the extent that Jaja of Opobo tried his best possible to eliminate the influence of Christianity in his domain. Jaja encouraged other potentates in the likes of Oko Jombo of Bonny and king George of Okrika to destroy missionary activities in their jurisdiction if they wanted to have peace. In the final summation, the impact of colonial education and Christianity redefined the Uromi people’s conception of education and religion in post colonial Uromi.
Endnotes:


9. Ibid.

10. Interview with Mr. Michael Obeto, 65, farmer, Ivue-Uromi, 15 October, 2010.


12. Patriarchal society like Uromi defined the place of women the society.


15. H.L.M., Butcher, Intelligence Report on Uromi, pp.243, 246 and 249.


17. This information was derived from the interaction with my paternal grand mother in 1984.


19. Ibid., pp.115-117.


22. C. G. Okojie, Esan Native Laws and Custom...p. 212.


27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.


31. Ishan Division (ID) 814/2: Primary School: Matters Regarding, memo from F.K. Buthen, Ag. Director of Education Western Region to all the Provinces in the region on *Introduction of Free, Compulsory Primary Education* dated 20th April 1954.

32. Ibid, memo from the Ishan Division DO to the Resident, Benin Province on *Primary School Expansion* dated 2nd June 1954.

33. Interview with Mr. Peter Ehiaibi, 65, retired civil servant, Benin, 12 April, 2010.

34. NAI: ID 215, Vol. III: Uromi Native Court: Matters Affecting

35. Ibid.


40. Ibid


42. Ibid.


53. For example, the acceptance of twin babies by Christian converts without any ancestral repercussion, unlike in the pre-Christian era when twins were considered abominable and were therefore murdered.
57. This hypothesis was reached because information about the sacred wonder of the forest was often related by traditional healers and hunters.
62. NAI: Benin Province (BP) 736: Memorandum from Colonial Secretary’s Office Southern Provinces, Enugu to the Resident, Benin Province on the subject on witchcraft dated 7th March, 1934. Colonial authorities were advised to encourage Christian doctrine to counter the belief in superstition.
65. Ibid., p.20.
66. Ibid., pp. 8 and 20.
67. Ibid., 19-20.
68. Intelligence Reports in Ishan Division of Benin Province, published by the National Archives of Nigeria, Ibadan, 1982, p. 206.
69. NAI: BP 148/1914: Instruction: Re Leases already held by Mission.
70. Interview with Late Joseph Obeto, a former Roman Catholic Catechist, Ukoni, 15/6/1995.
71. Ibid.
72. NAI: BP 736: memorandum from Sgd. E.S. Pombopton, Resident Benue Province on the subject *Witchcraft*.
74. Ibid.