

Conflict and Consensus of Interest Between Christianity and Obollo Traditional Practices

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ABSTRACT

The history of Obollo people in the South-eastern Nigeria can hardly be complete without the impact of Christianity on both the lives and cultural practices of the Obollo people. The interaction between the two cultures (Christianity and Traditional religion) is traced to twentieth century from when both received shocks reciprocally, arising from the interplay of the people's religious adherence to their sacrosanct traditional and cultural practices, and the resilience of Christianity at the face of this insistence. The Obollos of the Southeastern Nigeria viewed Christianity as an alien religion and that which came to displace their time-tested cultural practices handed down to them ancestrally. Consequently, the Obollos who later converted to Christianity did so with half-hearted acceptance. This is manifested in their loose Christian living which carries with it to date, respect for some sections of traditional practices inimical to the Christian faith. This situation has developed a contradictory situation resulting to clash and conflicts of interests that have defined the people's time and town today. The paper examines the conflict between traditional religion and Christian practices in Obollo, which has defined social interactions albeit negatively among the adherents of the two religions in Obollo. The study adopts content analysis and thematic approach of data collection, collected data from both primary and secondary sources – oral interviews and books, brochures respectively. It concludes with useful recommendations on ways for more harmonious relationship between Christianity and Obollo cultural practices.

INTRODUCTION

A cursory look at the features of Obollo pre-colonial history provides some undoubted evidence of continuity, with intermittent interruptions in human activities. However, a continuum exists in the culture of Obollo people, as Obollo religious and cultural patterns were well enough, formed to constitute the primary base of survival and co-existence. Religion, worship, ritual, art and other ways of life had been established which were, distinctively structured for Obollo culturally.

The European arrival in Obollo marked the most important turning point in the history and way of life of Obollo people. Modern Obollo began with the era of the European incursion spear-headed by Christianity and missionary activities.¹ Christianity remained totally alien to the people, 'offering salvation' to the select few who would desert their homestead, their ancestral norms and other practices. This was dramatised by the confidence, ignorance and arrogance with which the Obollo Christian converts defied traditional tenets and sought the

face of God through Christ. According to C. O. Tagbo Ugwu:

*Christianity is a missionary religion holding that Christ's message as intended for the whole world is not just for a particular area or people. In Mark 16:15f, Jesus is quoted as saying "Go ye into the world and preach the gospel to the creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved".*²

The above citation marks a turning point in the people's civilisation through Christianity. In other words, good virtues and moral lessons preached in Christian teachings have had positive effects in reforming the Obollo man to deal with his fellow cordially. Jesus left believers examples to follow as far as religion and certain cultural values are concerned. An example could be cited on the payment of tax. This was one of the finance sourcing cultures during the earthly ministry of Jesus, in which he said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things which are God's".³ Nonetheless, as to Obollo traditional religious beliefs, ideas, norms and values,

cultural practices and worship, they perceived the universe as a three-tier structure: the sky above (Elu Igwe), the solid earth (Ala), and the under-world (Ala Muo); all of which is inhabitable. There is also the Supreme Being, known by various names in Igbo sub-cultural zones such as; Chukwu, Chineke, Olisebuluwa (Oseburuwa), Obasi di n'elu and the very principal divinities such as Anyanwu, Igwe, Ezechitoke, Ugwuanyiagama, Amadioha; all dwell in the high heavens. The earth is the abode of men, also the Earth deity (Ala), some minor deities, patron spirits, nature spirits and cosmic forces.⁴ The ancestors (Nna), numerous other spirits and nature forces, some malevolent, live in the under-world, which the Obollo man believes that there is an intense and continual relationship of various aspects of spiritual being from one plane to another.

As could be expected, inter-connected with indigenous religious belief and practices of the Obollo people were time-tested customs handed-down from their ancestors. Some of these customs included: the cleansing of the town of desecration, the institution of slavery, human sacrifice, killing of twins and albinos, taking of oaths and trial by ordeal, first and second burial for the dead, long mourning period for widows and widowers, the practice of polygamy, birth and death rituals and the wrath of the ancestors for marital infidelity.⁵ The Obollo society had their traditional piety and religion which though often disrupted, continued to survive.

In times of crises and inexplicable difficulties, many Christians in Obollo and traditional adherents readily sought redress in traditional divination, sacrifices and medicines. They did not fold their arms for ugly situations to become worse, without running to the medicine man in time of sickness; to their gods for appeasement and sacrifices for taboos and abominations, and to diviners/ soothsayers in bizarre circumstances. Put succinctly, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* exposed the core of the Igbo traditional culture and religious worship, using Okonkwo's medicine house and shrine where he kept the wooden symbols of his personal god and of his ancestral spirits.⁶

This paper, therefore, attempts to underscore the level of acceptability of the new religion and its integration with the Obollo traditional practices as a result of their contact, which had often witnessed significant influences and alterations. The paper is divided into sections and subtitles. This include the geographical location and origin of Obollo, socio-cultural practices in the

area, advent of Christianity, conflict between Christianity and the Obollo culture, and integrating aspects of Christian Values to some of the Obollo traditional practices. Hence, this work concludes with a few recommendations for more harmonious relationships among Christians and traditional adherents.

OVERVIEW OF GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND ORIGIN OF OBOLLO

Obollo lays extreme North of Enugu State. It is bounded on the East by Ikem, Mbu and Neke, all in the present Isi-Uzo Local Government Area, in the West; it is bounded by Enugu Ezike and Amalla. In the Southern hemisphere, it is bounded by Ogbodu-Aba, Ezimo, Igugu and Iheaka. Now housing the Headquarters of Udenu Local Government Area, Enugu North Senatorial Zone, Southeast Nigeria; Obollo is found at about 14–16 kilo meters north of the University town, Nsukka. The place lies between the latitude 06o52 North, and therefore referred to as Nsukka–Okigwe cuesta by geographers.⁷ The community is densely populated by indigenes and non indigenes to the tune of about 150,000 people⁸. Obollo is located along old Onitsha–Oturkpo Road, Nsukka–Eha Amufu Road, Eke–Idoma Road, and Enugu–Makurdi federal highway.

For the tradition of origin, it was claimed that Olenyi Dedu Obe, the progenitor of Obollo was a distant trader who traded within his town Umujora, Idah and neighbouring villages. He traveled on foot to Onicha market. According to oral accounts, Olenyi lost his travelling horse at Ama-ebo, where he usually rested while on business trip. In the bush, he killed an elephant as he was searching for his horse.⁹ This may have led to his settlement in Ulo n'Obollo, otherwise known as Ama-ebo, where all other parts of Obollo started dispersing to their present places. This is currently, a location in between "Welcome to Obollo" sign-post and the junction harbouring the military check-point along Enugu – Makurdi Road.

To support the tradition of Obollo migration from Abakaliki to Idah and later to the present place, oral history/ speculation also traces a man whose name was Nnam Dedu Obe, who moved from Abakaliki through Eha-Amufu and settled at a place now known as Ikem.¹⁰ From available evidence, it was believed that Olenyi left his father and brothers at Ikem for Idah. He finally settled at Ama-ebo now Ulo n'Obollo after his encounter with the elephant. Olenyi had five sons namely Ezejo, Amutenyi, Ohulo, Ugbabe and Iheakpu.

SOCIO-CULTURAL TRADITION IN OBOLLO BEFORE THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY

Obollo had a very deep socio-cultural history which was sustained even after the coming of Christianity. However, few relics of her cultural practices encountered tremendous changes and/or outright extinction as a result of the Christian gospel. Some of them included marriage rites and divorce/ marital infidelity, birth and death rituals/ transfer of ancestral authority, festival and masking tradition.

MARRIAGE RITES AND DIVORCE/ MARITAL INFIDELITY

Marriage Institution in Obollo existed in various forms depending on the capacity and nature of the contract. Marriages were contracted by laying down wine, pawn and proxy, and direct approach. The common practice was marriage by laying down wine or betrothal. In this form of marriage, the parents of the male were said to contract and/or finance marriage on behalf of their son who was yet an infant or adolescent or lived abroad. This meant the observance of a little gathering of the two families in a rite called *Idonye mmanya n'uju*, ironically meaning pouring little wine into an earthen ware.¹¹ Marriage by proxy was the very form of marriage which was first initiated by the parents, either of the male or female. This type of marriage was aimed at harnessing inter-family relationship which sometimes led to servitude. When one found oneself in a derogatory situation capable of reducing oneself to nothing, one could deposit one's child in marriage as collateral to free oneself from the shackles of such miserable situation. In Obollo before Christianity, human beings were taken as the greatest asset, in that a man could mortgage one of his daughters.¹²

On the other hand, divorce in Obollo was rare as most couples grew up in the culture and tradition of the people. However, cases of divorce in Obollo were mostly recorded for marital infidelity. Other causes of divorce were the need for a male child and barrenness or infertility. The situation was that as soon as the woman was taken home by the husband, she accepted the conditions specified for marital fidelity irrespective of her origin and place of domicile.¹³ Some of these rules and abominations were, having sex or sexual advances/ overture with another person, abusing the other partner on the private part, giving or receiving tangible gift(s) from another man without one's husband's consent, allowing

another person (including your children) to make use of your matrimonial bed or wrapper with another 'bed mate', allowing one to see one's nudity, conspiring against one's husband or wife with another one, among others.¹⁴ Men-folk claimed that they were exempted to some extent from observing some of these rules, because they could marry two or more wives.

BIRTH/ DEATH RITUALS AND TRANSFER OF ANCESTRAL AUTHORITY

Birth ritual in Obollo was a traditional practice of accepting and dedicating a child into the family in which he was born. When a child was born, probably with the assistance of a local midwife, the news was spread by the application of powder, locally called *Odo*, on the right cheek for a male and on the left for female.¹⁵ In addition to this, a traditional song for birth by a team of women announced the arrival of the new baby. The child was hitherto fed with warm water till after a breast milk test. The test was infection-free test, where the breast milk was pressed into the mother's palm and a live ant would be put into the milk in which case, if the movement of the ant was impeded, it meant the milk was unsafe for the child to suck. Therefore, the services of a traditional medicine man were needed for breast cleansing.¹⁶ On the eightieth day, the practice of *ichiyi nwa oji n'eka* and *isa nwa onu* took place in a rite called *ntu-nwa*. This practice involved burial of the placenta and cleansing of the baby's mouth with four leaves of bitter leaf. Wordings of moral virtues, challenges of live and other directives for survival as may be wished by the parents were placed to the child as modalities for his survival/ endeavour in life. It was also the day for circumcision in case of a male child.¹⁷

On the other hand, death ritual was the last respect one paid the deceased, and as such prepared for one's own burial – *Mbosi madu kwara madu bee O kwara onwe yee*. If somebody died in Obollo, information and messages *Ozi onwu*, were carried in accordance with some laid down procedural rules. The sad news first went to the immediate relatives, then to *Ozioko* or *Ogaa* (messenger), latter to the *Onyishi* before the entire people or kindred. At each level, a specific rite was observed and must concur with the traditional norms.¹⁸

After internment, the entire kinsmen converged for *izu onwu* the next day at the *Onyishi's* compound. It was this gathering that decided whether the funeral would take place immediately or not. They also decided whether the *Umuada* would honour the deceased for

eight days as specified by their custom. On the eightieth day, the widow was accompanied by the *inyom ji* to observe the ritual of *ichie eka n'oku* warming hands on a char-coal fire, which signified her preparedness to continue cooking. On the *izu esaa* seven market days or month's mind, the widow was dressed in black or white regalia by her husband's relatives.¹⁹

However, items for *ikwa onwu* funeral rites included horse, cow, goat, fowl, and dog for *ndi oyimaa* the ghosts, kola nuts and other food items. Specified quantities of each of these items were presented proportionally at the appropriate place and time within the kindred. Abuse of these set-criteria attracted the wrath of ancestral gods for violating the rules of the ancestral fathers, the *Nna*.²⁰ For instance, if a man who had not killed cow(s) for the late father or mother took a share of beef from the cow meant for another man's funeral, he squarely faced the wraths of the ancestors. Their culture also forbade such person's contact with funeral cow or any item concerning it.

On the transfer of ancestral authority, *Onyishi Obollo* was a living representative of the ancestors being the eldest man in the town. He mediated between the living and dead, and like biblical Moses, held the symbol of traditional commandment, *arua* or *Nna* handed-down from ancestral fathers.²¹

Festival and Masking Tradition

Festivals in Obollo were celebrated to mark certain epochs. It was classified into five significant periods namely *Olenyi Day*, *Isi ji*, *Onwa eno*, *Onwa esaa* and *Omabe* festivals. *Olenyi Day* was a day set-aside by descendants of *Olenyi Dedu Obe* to commemorate the existence of their progenitor. According to an oral testimony, *Olenyi Day* had been celebrated at a date specified by *Oha Obollo*. Until the recent times, the festival was re-shaped by indigenous scholars to hold every 27th December.²² *Olenyi day* celebration had been a rotational activity between *Obollo-Afo*, *Obollo-Etiti* and *Obollo-Eke*. It featured masquerade display and other recreational activities.

ADVENT/ GROWTH OF CHRISTIANITY IN OBOLLO

The wave of Christian missionary evangelism moved in tandem with colonial incursion of the diverse areas of *Igboland*. The Colonial administrative detachment of *Obollo District* from *Awka*, *Nkpologwu*, and later *Okpoga* to *Udi Division* in the period, 1906–1919 paved way for Christianity into the interior.²⁴

Therefore, the early Christian missionary activities in Obollo could be traced to these colonial districts.

With successful expedition of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in the Niger Province in 1857, the Church made contacts with the towns in the hinterland of Obollo to further spread the gospel of Christ. Between 1910 and 1914, with the help of Chief *Onyeama of Eke*, Warrant Chief of *Udi Division*, Chief *Ohabuenyi Ugwu Ebonyi* was able to bring the missionaries to Obollo. They could not immediately establish the Church in the area due to allocation of land dispute and internal political tussle, however repeated the visit between 1920 and 1944.²⁵ In 1946, the Church settled at *Iheakpu Obollo Afo* community. Although with violent resistance of the people, they were able to secure a parcel of land at *Nkpo, Iheakpu Obollo Afo*. The missionaries erected nine thatch houses which were subsequently set ablaze owing to internal oppositions.²⁶ After this bizarre incidence, the missionaries left *Iheakpu* for other parts of Obollo such as *Obollo Afo municipal*, *Obollo Etiti*, *Obollo Eke* and *Umuitodo Nkwo*. It is from these areas that the C.M.S. dispersed to other parts of Obollo except few places like *Ibenda*.

In fact, Obollo had its other contact with Christianity through *Ifite Ogwari*, this time with the Roman Catholic Missionaries (R.C.M.) in 1910 and through *Uvuru* in 1912. An account shows that Chief *Atama Nwamba* brought the Church to *Eha Alumona* in June 1919, from where it gained access into recesses of Obollo through the influence of Chief *Ohabuenyi Ugwu Ebonyi*.²⁷

By the year 1920, Obollo had become the headquarters of the Zonal Catholic Mission though yet under *Eke Parish*. During this period, *Rev. Fr. Davey* visited *Obollo Eke* and initiated the building of Churches which were simultaneously used for worship and elementary education.²⁸ The institution of schools meant the existence of Catholic Churches and therefore a permanent score for conversion and evangelisation of the people.

In the 1930s, *Rev. Fr. James Mellet* visited Obollo from the then *Nsukka Parish*, with the zeal for gospel vanguard in the area. He was succeeded by *Rev. Fr. Joseph Horgan*, under which Obollo Catholic community was detached from *Eke Parish* and placed under 'new' *Nsukka Parish*.²⁹ More Parishes were created within *Nsukka Colonial Division* including *St. Martin De Porres Parish Obollo Eke* in 1948, *Aku*

Parish in 1952, Enugwu Ezike Parish in 1956, Isi-Enu Parish in 1960, Umulokpa Parish in 1961 and Ibagwa Nkwo Parish in 1965. Obollo Afo, Eha Alumona, Amala, Igugu, Ezimo, Imilike, Umundu, Ogbodu Aba, Mbu, Neke, Eha Amufu, Umuero – Eze, Eha-Ndiagu, Orba, and Obollo Eke itself comprised Obollo Eke Parish.³⁰

Between 1951 and 1969, successive Catholic Missionaries arrived at the area including Rev. Fr. Folly (1955 – 1958) who built the Preliminary Teachers' College (P.T.C.) later Teachers' Training College (T.T.C.) now St. Patrick's College, Obollo Eke. It was after this period in 1970, that the first indigenous priest Rev. Fr. Bartholomew Nnaji, from Iheakpu took over as Parish Priest.³¹

Moreover, Jehova Witness Missionaries entered Obollo Eke in 1962 led by Evangelist Abraham from the present Isi-Uzo L.G.A of Enugu State. Ugwueke Rowland was one of the pioneer members. He donated a parcel of land behind his compound at Umuokpe for a temporary Kingdom Hall. It was from there that the Church relocated to a place along Obollo Eke- Ikem road, where they were able to erect a permanent Kingdom Hall.³² The Church also had a place for Bible Class at Ogbele Road, Obollo Afo and elsewhere at Obollo Etititi.

The Christ Apostolic Church was founded in Nsukka in 1960 and gained entry into Obollo in the early 1970s. It was Evangelist Kingsley Ogbodo that led the delegation to 'Oha Obollo' to appeal for a piece of land for Church station. Their request was not approved and they resorted to Ogrute Enugu Ezike.³³ In a crusade organised by the Church missionaries, Mr. Simon Idoko, a visually impaired individual regained his sight. The miracle was said to have drawn converts from Obollo, one of which offered the Church a place of worship at Ogwu, Obollo Afo.³⁴

Holy Band Praying Church, Odozi Obodo entered the area in the 1970s. It was introduced by a woman popularly called Nwanyi Ufuma from Ufuma in Orumba North L.G.A. in the present Anambra State. The Church was located near a hill Ugwu Alleluia, adjacent to Odobido Obollo Eke junction.³⁵ As the name implies, their mode of veneration and worship always went with band drum-beat and shouts of Alleluia. They had members across Obollo especially women.

Others were Aladura Churches – Sabbath, and Cherubim and Seraphine Churches led by Late Daniel Odo and Anslem Omame of Umuero and Ajama Ibenda, respectively. They entered

Obollo in the late 1970s and early 1990s. The former with few converts was located at Old Police Post along Uwani Eha – Utukpa Ada Road; while the latter hired an apartment at Anthony Ugwu's (Nigro) compound in Ibenda.³⁶ With the influx of these missionary Churches in Obollo, various Churches sprang-up across the area.

CONFLICT BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND OBOLLO TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

As contained in Obollo traditional cultural heritage is the respect for dignity of man at whatever stage in his life. It is true there have been mistakes made by their ancestors on the individual's inviolable rights to life and property. However, most of these mistakes were not made out of malice. Rather, they were in response to felt obligations to certain rituals to appease the 'angry deity' and protect the society from desecration. This can be seen in the fact that there were no fundamental structures for protection of properties and enforcement of certain laws. It could be related to the reason their ancestors formidably prepared themselves against odd circumstances. Therefore, when Christianity came and was preaching; "If somebody slaps you on the right, turn the left side."³⁷ Obollo people saw it as against societal creed.

Often, Christianity preached to the people of Obollo, "Our Lord has warned and indeed, the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is doing a holy duty for God. They will do these things because they have never known either Father or myself".³⁸ By implication, those who killed twins felt they must wipe out an abomination of human race, while those who sacrificed human beings did so to satisfy the express wish of a divinity for a human victim. Therefore, ignorance and/or illiteracy contributed to the rivalries between the two religions. This has continued to sever the relationship between traditional religion and Christianity in Obollo.

Early Christian Missionary Rivalries with Traditional Religion/ Adherents, 1910-1940s

The two religions experienced reciprocal shocks as a result of conflicts that arose in the early period, 1910 - 1944. It is evident that the Christianity in Obollo was precipitous in western culture, western personnel, western philosophy and theology, western psychology and values, such as monogamy, western patterns of prayers and incantations, western names and

concepts of authority, among others. The people saw these trends as assimilation of their tradition and so did not welcome the new religion. They refused to donate land for Church building, in which cases, parcels of land meant for dangerous deities and evil forests were given out.³⁹

The traditional adherents regarded Christianity as something alien and opposed to indigenous religion. It was also said that those who were converted into the religion were Efulufu – efulere, people of worthless value. These converts were ‘invaluable’ groups in Obollo society who could be subjected to such derogatory position of a slave, capable of carrying the Whiteman in a basket as a means of transportation, through Ifite Ogwari, Nkpologwu, Adani, Nsukka and Eha Alumona to Obollo. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe said, “none of this converts was a man whose word was heeded in the assembly of the people, none of them was a man of title.”⁴⁰

However, people of good reputation in Obollo community that were converted to Christianity often witnessed violent oppositions, overt or covert punitive measures and sanctions from the immediate neighbours/family or the community as a whole. For example, a famous convert called Luke Alumona from Ibenda, after baptism in the new religion was molested by Akatakpa masquerade in 1943. He received several lashes of cane from the masquerade at Obollo Eke market square. According to Aaron Abo in an oral testimony; “the masquerade came all the way from Obollo Afo to confront traditional adherents who were baptised in the new religion. As the leader of the baptised team, Luke was flogged while coming back from the Church with his fellow converts. These converts included David Agu, and another David (from Imilike, resident at Ibenda), Richard Agu, Raymond Eze, Matthew Odugwu, among others. Obollo Christian Community fought against this to the extent that it was taken to the Obollo County Court at Obollo Afo in 1944.”⁴¹ Although, it was said there were no open confrontations between Christians and traditional adherents in the period, the premium determination of each side to survive was clear. Notwithstanding belief in the new faith, some of the new converts still had regard for African traditional religious worship. They still hid and preserved their shrines which were being taken away or destroyed by the Christian missionaries. Matters were worsened when parents could not appreciate the great value and importance of education which went hand-in-hand with

Christian religion. For them, education was regarded as a factor that could spoil a child, and deprive him the opportunity for farming.⁴²

However, the missionaries solved this problem by allowing the children to work for their parents in the morning and go for their studies in the afternoon. Moreover, the need for white collar jobs and other incentives made the people of Obollo not to jettison their mind on Christianity.

Recent Rivalries Between Christians and Traditional Adherents in Obollo, 1940s-2000s

In recent times, actors in the rivalries between Christians and traditional adherents could not be differentiated, especially after 1948. In Obollo, it is the same people that make up the traditional religious worshippers that constituted the Christians. The European missionaries have gone; leaving Christianity to impact on Obollo society both positively and negatively. This situation made a new trend of rivalry inevitable, constant and yet unresolved. It is believed that the nature of Obollo people’s traditional system speaks cultural of them, be it a Christian or traditional adherent. Issues bordering on this include funeral/death rites, polygamy, traditional authority, marital infidelity, and masquerading, socio-cultural positions, false prophesy, taboos, incantation or soothsaying, and so forth. All these are socio-religious and cultural issues that have pastoral implications.

In Obollo, burial and funeral rites are universal realities for admittance into the spiritual realm. This pre-condition for ‘going home’ ilaru of the dead speaks of many elements of traditional religion, which conflicted with the Christian doctrines - particularly resurrection. The prevalent practices of using cows, the usoro and other items as entrées into the spirit world were often saddled with ambiguities. Questions have been asked as why cow at all, who presents, who receives (Christians or traditionalist or both) and how to handle Ochoru, the shares? The problem was multifarious especially where the deceased and those concerned were not of the same faith. For example, where the deceased was an Anglican, and those concerned were made up of other Christian faiths and traditionalists, who received and presided or moderated for the other? Under such circumstances, conflict arose as to which group should receive the cow, and how to handle the shares.⁴³ There were cases where each group (Christian faithful and traditionalists) demanded separate cow or else the funeral rites would be considered incomplete or unfulfilled. In a

situation where the bereaved could not meet their demands, they may be ostracized, fined or sanctioned.

Another area of rivalry between the two religions with regard to death rituals in Obollo was the practice of returning the body of a woman to her pre-marital home, *ivute onwu*. It involved the return of a plantain trunk in place of the deceased's body to her pre-marital home. Christian adherents have encountered challenges and quarrelled with traditionalists who practised such; in respect of their late mothers who were also traditionalists while their children were Christians.⁴⁴ Although this practice was said to be fading away as a result of Christianity, it lingered in some areas such as Ulo n'Umuitodo, Obu egu Amutenyi, and some parts of Ada Obollo Etiti.

Traditional authorities and positions were inherited in the family or community. As could be noted, in Obollo, there was the Onyishi (Ogbu ebo – killer of two great wild animals at family/kindred level) or the Onyishi (Esha–bearer of multitude of children at community level). At each level, he was the eldest man who stood to mediate between the dead ancestors and the living. He held the Ofo for the family/community.⁴⁵ Worthy of note, this position placed Christians who became the eldest at precarious condition of being unable to profess their faiths without interferences. This could have often led to conflict as Christians might not be able to combine some of the practices with their faiths. Therefore, the conflicts that arose from *igo arua*, worship of the ancestors were not strange.

However, some argue that the *arua* embodied historical legacies of the ancestors. It may be also true that the *arua* was a symbol immersed in traditional religious worship, but could be adulterated and should not be inherited by Christians without necessary purification. According to James Agu: "...when my elder brother Patrick died in 1991, Joseph inherited the traditional stool. However, when Joseph died a year later, the wife Louisa brought items she referred to as *arua*, I refused to receive or hold the items because I have neither seen nor known what it was. Our grandfather was a staunch Christian that had never become a traditionalist and as such he did not leave such transferable symbol of authority. I only went to church to thank God for assuming the position of the Nna in the family."⁴⁶

Refusal to accept the 'unknown items' made the woman in the above citation to protest to several

people in the kindred as well as the Parish Priest who suggested family re-union at Pilgrimage Center, Elele, Rivers State.⁴⁷

Masquerades in Obollo, on the other hand, were generally regarded as representatives of the spirit world. Some appeared in feasts and festivals to replicate the ancestors among the living. However, Christianity teaches that some of these ceremonies and masking traditions have superstitious and idolatrous dimensions. Hence, conflicts ensued for Christians who were in dilemma of how to celebrate a traditional feast with the elements that were not in agreement with gospel values.⁴⁸ There were records of cases in Obollo where Akatakpa masquerade confronted Christians on their way from Church services.

In the mid 1980s, during Rev. Fr. A. Nwaeze's tenure as Parish Priest in Obollo Eke, a team of youth masquerade molested and embarrassed Church members on Christmas carol at Uwani Eha. The Catholic community in Obollo Eke fought against this with late Augustine Agbo in the forefront.⁴⁹ Also, Rev. Fr. Brendan Obasi of the same Parish between 2006 and 2008, fought Akatakpa at Obollo Eke market square for refusing children from catechism class access to their destinations. Others included armed attack of some Pentecostal Churches in the area by robbers on masquerade.⁵⁰ However, cases of rivalries between the two religions characterised the Obollo society. Some occurred as a result of envy and jealousy, while others were blamed to illiteracy, ignorance or barbarism.

In 2008, a self-styled 'prophet' called 'Pastor' Anayo Johnson spent one month in Ibenda Obollo Eke on invitation by a gang of youths. Initially, elders of the community rejected their proposal to invite the man but were later compelled to accept by their furiousness. The irate youths in collaboration with a home-based 'prophet', Attaniesius Alumona, led the Pastor from house to house. They destroyed people's shrines and extorted money from various families to the tune of 1.5 Million Naira within one month. People who could not 'beat them' joined including Christians and traditional adherents. Few families including the family of the present researcher refused to pay money meant for the arrival of the self-styled prophet.⁵¹ The youths alleged that a good number of them have died within record time and for that Ibenda soil needed some 'cleansing of the ugly mess'. Under the canopy of some home and abroad based businessmen, whose identities are in the archives, they destroyed

many private properties, shrines, charms, places of worship, among other things.⁵²

Incidentally, the Church in Ibenda was not happy, especially when lives were threatened to the extent that their victims were starved under the sun from 7.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m daily. While people resisted their activities and actions, such as payment of money for the pastor's arrival, swearing to or making covenant with the pastor's bible, they used punitive measures. These measures invariably stopped further actions of the self-styled pastor, and ended some in jail between December 4, 2008 to January 7, 2009.⁵³ Notwithstanding violent threats, the Catholic Church in Nsukka Diocese and other parts of the state, including Enugu State Government and Mike Okiro led police headquarters, Abuja became interested. The activities of the 'prophet' were permanently stopped by the police at Ogwu Obollo Eke, home of the then Local Government Chairman, Mr. Fabian Ugwu.

Interestingly, this crisis in Obollo led to rivalries amongst Christian faithful with cross-conversion to various religious faiths from 2009 to 2010. It, however, led to the spread of Pentecostal Churches and growth of Anglican faith in Obollo. This could also be attributed to one of the reasons His Lordship, Rt. Rev. F. E. O. Okobo, Catholic Bishop of Nsukka Diocese, posted a resident priest to Ibenda, making it a new Parish in July 2011.⁵⁴

In the beginning, rivalries seemed insurmountable especially when the traditional adherents did not see justification in Christian values and vice versa. Perhaps, with dedication to duty, diligence and patience, and the triumph of western education, Christianity succeeded in Obollo at last.

INTEGRATING ASPECTS OF CHRISTIAN VALUES TO SOME OF THE OBOLLO TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

This section analyses the integrating aspects of Christian values to some traditional practices in form of consensus in resolving the conflict between the two religions.

An Analysis of Christian and Traditional Values in Obollo

St. Thomas Aquinas defines virtue or value as humility, self control, kindness, fidelity, faith and hope, above all love, claimed for the development of Christian character.⁵⁵ Value belongs to the side of law which tells man what he ought to do and often fails to accomplish.

Both Culture and Christianity acknowledge aspects of value as generosity, tolerance, love, patience, truth and rectitude, loyalty and obedience, chastity before marriage and respect. Generosity consists of liberty in spirit for giving. It is a Christian value that shares God's abundant gift to man. An example is demonstrated in the birth and mission of Jesus Christ, as seen in the statement "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that the World will be redeemed..."⁵⁶ Another place to show our generosity is to "love our neighbours as we love ourselves."⁵⁷ Tolerance calls for the acceptance of the right of individuals, to indulge in the practices which may be generally unacceptable by other members of the society. Christ shows the society examples to emulate in tolerating Matthew the Tax Collector and a 'sinner' and even visited Zachaeus. In continuation of His answer to the Scribe's question, Jesus said; "you must love ...yourself."⁵⁸ The Christian teaching about love of oneself and how Obollo man naturally loves himself helps him to embrace the giver of his life.

Francis A. Arinze has this to say about Obollo man's love for himself: "Life is the greatest thing that he wants. After all, does he not name his son, Ndubuisi (life goes first)? The Obollo people do not even want to speak of death. Onwu di iwe (death is wicked), they say"⁵⁹ This shows that the people of Obollo embraced peace and love, and condemned evil in the society.

On the other hand, since the earliest time, Obollo people had their traditional codes of conduct which were handed to them from one generation to another. As Okwueze rightly points out, moral values have the potent powers of making good environment for societal development in Obollo.⁶⁰ We can see that at any level of disobedience to God, humanity or the ancestors, the offender must be punished either by God, man, or the earth goddess. The basis of fact and quality of thinking were esteemed values in Obollo, for falsehood attracted punishment with death.

According to the Obollo traditional creed, what prolong life are nothing but truthfulness and uprightness, ikwu eka oto as indoctrinated in the Symbol of Ofo – Arua. Connotatively, morality does not ignore chastity and believe among the people that a faithful woman is discovered to be undefiled at marriage. For Obollo people, a girl who is defiled before marriage is a disgrace and as such will not receive matrimonial gifts.⁶¹ In Obollo, it is expected that every woman respects

her husband and vice versa, likewise the children. It is also in the same manner, respect for Ezechitoke, god the creator. Who are the children without their parents? Would they have existed without their parents? The adults assumed the same position before God, their creator.

AREAS OF INTEGRATION OF CHRISTIAN VALUES WITH OBOLLO TRADITION

Some of the units of integration are as follows:

Marriage

Although little conflict yet arise in Obollo today as to the conduct of Christian marriages and punishment for marital infidelity; there are improvements resulting to value integration. Marriage in Obollo now is consummated in the Church. A situation both families agree in after Church wedding, cohabitation and consummation take place. It is rarely traditional wedding first before church wedding, rather altogether the same day to ensure validity for consummation of marriage in accordance with the Christian value. Christianity forbids extra marital affairs since the union is for the two alone. The Obollo society believes that any act of adultery on both sides (male and female) is a sin against Almighty God, humanity, earth goddess and the ancestors.⁶² What differs between Christian and traditional perception of adultery is the mode of punishment and method of appeasement or atonement.

Christianity requires that whoever commits adultery shall be punished, unless the person confesses and accepts the sacrament of penance.⁶³ Obollo society 'Penal Code' is rigid on this sphere. But with its encounter with Christian values, it is being modified to have a human face. It could be recalled that Jesus replied the Pharisees, if you have not sinned before, be the first to cast stone on the adulterous woman. Thus; "And the Scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; ...Master this woman was taken in adultery in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned: but, what sayest thou?"⁶⁴ The Obollo traditional piety justifies adulterous actions of the woman in proportion with that of the man.

Also, Obollo traditional position on the plight of the widows shows an in-depth integration of the societal norms with Christian values. In the past, a widow was obliged to mourn her husband for at least twelve months. With the intervention of

Christianity, the duration was changed to six months. Another aspect of social change has been seen in the practice of Ikuchu Nwanyi, betrothal of widow. This practice was said to be fading away in the area.

Festival and Masking Traditions

Christianity has began to appreciate the values in some of the cultures it condemned on arrival in Obollo community. Following integration, it recognises the values of feasts or festivals and masking tradition of the people. Christian fathers, mothers, boys and girls guilds from various groups now prepare themselves with cultural dance and masquerades for feasts and competition. The Church in Obollo now have Ulaga (a fierce, warrior masquerade with sword), so to say Ulaga bu muonwu ndi uka. Other traditional cultural dance groups are Akwunaechenyi, Ikorodo and others, which hitherto formed part of the Church's co-curricular/ pastoral activities. Some of the masquerades wore chaplets and carried other sacramental such as 'holy-water' to prevent attack from other masquerades during festivals or exhibitions.

Belief in the Saints and Ancestors

Since the advent of Christianity, no Christian or traditionalist in Obollo has ignored the sacredness of the saints and ancestors. According to Ugwu and Ugwueye, "the Igbos is in need of keeping and preserving the religion of their fore-fathers. They attach sentiments to traditional religion which they believed to be the religion of their ancestors".⁶⁵ The daily ritual of igo – oho ututu morning prayer with kola nut by the heads of the families in Obollo signified respect and belief in the ancestors. In recent times, virtually all Christians in Obollo recited chronicles of their fore-fathers while praying with kola nuts. They believed in the intercession of their ancestors.

In the same vein, the Angels and the Saints were believed to be ancestors. Most Christians called or prayed to God before the image of some of the Saints/ Arch Angels. Let us remember that Okonkwo in Achebe's Things Fall Apart is not an exception among the believers in ancestors. He never prayed without the image of his god, after sacrifices of pounded yam and palm wine, dedicating himself, his three wives and eight children to his god.⁶⁶ The Christian Church had different groups who prayed with images of their mediators as a means of effective communication to the almighty God.

Despite Christian teachings, converts still believe in what ancestors could do for them. Nonetheless, some Christians in the same manner as traditionalists, during child dedication, named their children after their great ancestors, and instructed them to emulate the path of life as replicated in an ‘ancestor-model.’

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From foregoing, this paper has taken into consideration, the traditional status-quo of the Obollo society before the advent of Christianity. The paper has argued that Christianity influenced the culture of Obollo people both negatively and positively. It as well traced the historical origin of the people of Obollo from the earliest times. Undoubtedly, it highlighted socio-cultural structures of Obollo and the rivalries encountered in the people’s interaction with Christianity. It has also examined the various points where Christianity and tradition of the people cordially embrace themselves.

Christianity and its entourage, western civilisation has made some remarkable impact on the place and lives of the people of Obollo community. Unfortunately, the very converts in Obollo do not really appreciate the efficacious effects of the new religion which have touched almost every part of human endeavour in Obollo. Some Christian converts are neither here nor there. This ambivalence towards the new religion has continued to mar the relationship between traditional adherents and christianity, and among the various Christian denominations in the area.

Christians and traditional adherents alike should be firm in which ever faith they profess. In the light of the above, certain rules be it traditional creeds, norms, values or Christian doctrines should be observed in the context of the relevant injunctions of the religion. This will tend to avoid interferences of the other religion or practices. Therefore, fanatics have to be mindful of the implications of their unruly propagations on the society which they are in. A better understanding of each religious injunction (Christian or Traditional) would offer peaceful cohesion among the adherents to the two disparate religions. Christians should take into consideration the homiletics and hermeneutics of the Christian teachings to avoid unnecessary disfigure of the message of Christ. Traditional adherents who have refused to be converted should remain firm in the practise of their indigenous religion to avoid further conflicts.

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