

# Christianity and national development: The Nigeria experience

**Author:**George Asadu<sup>1,2</sup> **Affiliations:**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria, Tshwane, South Africa

**Research Project Registration:****Project Leader:** E. van Eck**Project Number:** 2400030**Description:**

George Asadu is participating in the research project 'Africa Platform for NT Scholars', directed by Prof. Dr Ernest van Eck, Department of New Testament and Related Literature, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria.

**Corresponding author:**

George Asadu,  
george.asadu@unn.edu.ng

**Dates:**

Received: 13 Sept. 2020

Accepted: 22 Feb. 2021

Published: 29 Apr. 2021

**How to cite this article:**

Asadu, G., 2021, 'Christianity and national development: The Nigeria experience', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77(1), a6307. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i1.6307>

**Copyright:**

© 2021. The Authors.  
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

**Read online:**

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

This study gave a historical account of the contributions of Christianity to the overall development of Nigeria. From the inception of Christianity in Nigeria, it has been inculcating in its adherents' uncompromised moral values, respect for human life and dignity through adequate education and social tasks. Unfortunately, social critics have constantly but erroneously, underestimated the contributions made by Christian missionary work in Nigeria. Therefore, this research was an attempt to specifically show that Christianity is genuine; it has made great strides in the areas of education, agriculture, healthcare and rural development. Its contribution to national development will be portrayed in this work. Christianity was committed to upholding social justice, equality and people's welfare, all of which helped a country achieve national development. The purpose of enumerating the contributions of Christianity was to correct the bad impressions which the social critics might have generated. This was also to buttress that nation building was part of the agenda in missionary work in Nigeria. To achieve this aim, a historical approach was used. The findings made clear the fact that Christianity is one popular institution that has greatly influenced many Nigerians positively. Hence, most Nigerians were in love with Christian mission.

**Contribution:** This work corrected the negative impressions which social critics might have generated about Christianity. It buttressed that nation building remained the prime agenda in missionary work in the entire universe. Christianity's continuous contribution to Nigeria cannot be overemphasised; it is a peaceful religion.

**Keywords:** Christianity; development; experience; nation; Nigeria.

## Introduction

Christianity is one of the largest religions in the world. It is a religious movement entrenched on the life and teaching of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to regulate human behaviour in this life with much emphasis on life after death. Besides, Christianity is an agent of transformation. A critical study of Christianity shows that its influential powers are quite irresistible. It has not penetrated any human society or institution without making a remarkable impact (Asadu 2015). Only through Christianity, the Popes of the medieval period were very prominent in the governance of Europe at their time.

Christianity began in Nigeria through the activities of various evangelical bodies from Europe, whose amazing feat of missionary endeavours became fruitful in the 19th century. It has penetrated every strata of the Nigerian society, exerting a huge influence across the board, with all the churches either increasing their number through evangelism or reducing barbarianism through the ministration of the word of God. It is quite amazing how Christianity is soaring effortlessly above some of the other socio-religious institutions in Nigeria. However, social critics are yet to come to terms with the achievements of Christianity in Nigeria; rather than eulogising Christianity, they are asking to what extent Christianity has enhanced the socio-economic development today.

In recent times, Christianity has come under serious criticisms by those who are ignorant of its activities and great contributions in nation building. All emphasis has been on the failure of the church: that the Church has totally lost focus and has become materialistic. Church leaders who visit government houses to advise the leaders are criticised by those who think otherwise, without first ascertaining the reason for such visits. Other social critics have followed suit, with some of the articles being written these days hardly finding good things about the Church. This is a

**Note:** Special Collection: Africa Platform for NT Scholars, sub-edited by Ernest van Eck (University of Pretoria).

deliberate effort to portray Christianity as one of the religions that constitute problems to Nigeria and whose activities should, therefore, be curtailed.

Agha (2004:120) expressed his concern over this issue when he writes: 'It is surprising that people have constantly but erroneously underestimated the contributions made by Christian missionary work in Nigeria in the development of the nation'. For instance, Professor Ali Mazuri (1979), a Muslim, wrote a paper titled, 'Churches and Multinationals in the spread of Modern Education', where amongst other claims, he erroneously made a contradicting statement that the missionary schools created a 'techno-cultural gap'.

This study is an effort to prove that Christianity is real; it has made enormous achievements that are very important in every layer of the Nigerian society. It has continued to help in the general growth of Nigeria, as will be portrayed in this work. The purpose of enumerating the contributions of the church is to correct the bad impressions which Ali Mazuri's paper might have generated and to buttress that the nation building retains the prime agenda in missionary work in the entire universe and in Nigeria in particular.

The choice for this topic borders on the fact that in this hostile world, Christianity has remained as a hope for the hopeless. It spreads itself into every activity of man, thus instilling morality and ushering in peace to troubled souls. Christian missionaries are currently working in different parts of Nigeria, with the ultimate aim of bettering the life of the citizens. Christianity is a peaceful religion. Nobody is forced to become a member; rather, it appeals to or, in some cases persuades one to conversion with words of advice.

## Christianity

According to the *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary* 6th edition, 'Christianity is the religion that is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and the belief that He was the son of God'. Pfeiffer (ed. 1975) expanded this by saying that:

Christianity is the religion founded by Jesus Christ. Following his ascension, the apostles in the power of the Holy Spirit preached in his name. They taught that he was God's son, the messiah; they gathered a community of believers and they exhorted all to a holy life. (p. 338)

There are both continuity and discontinuity of Christianity with the religion of the Old Testament. The life and teachings of Jesus, upon which Christianity is founded, are the culmination and fulfilment of the Old Testament. The adherents of Christianity are called Christians and their place of worship and indeed Christians themselves are called the Church, which refers to the assembly of the believers in God through Christ; people are believed to have been called out from darkness, thoroughly washed in the blood of the lamb. According to Arinze (1982):

The church is a society in which religion shows itself as practically organized. Our Saviour Jesus Christ made man, established the

church as the concrete way in which we are to exercise religion. The Christian is a follower of Christ and a member of the church. His religion has much to say to him about his orientation of his whole life, and therefore, certainly about politics and his involvement in it. (p. 7)

## National development

Development, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1995), means, 'to grow or cause something to grow gradually'. Growth is a process that is defined by the increase that occurs over time in the life of an object, in amount, size, strength or its extremities. National development is an essential principle that encompasses all facets of a nation's life. Thus, a nation's economy, culture, politics and spirituality will certainly determine its degree of growth. Moreover, the individual growth of its people is paramount because it is the individual who constitutes a country. General growth is, thus, equal to the advancement of the nation in its entirety. Corroborating this fact, Rodney (2005) states that:

Development in human society is a mere-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Some of these are virtually moral categories and are difficult to evaluate depending as they do on the age in which one lives, one's class origins, and one's personal code of what is right and what is wrong. However what is indisputable is that the achievement of any of these aspects of personal development is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole ... (p. 1)

A development programme in the traditional setting focuses strongly on human benefits, a way of life clearly marked by the compassion of the members of the society. Therefore, welfare programmes for every member of the society were provided. The problem with Nigeria is misconception of national development and this has thrown Nigeria into socio-economic cum political crisis. It is so bad that even with the recent records of economic growth in the country, the common man in the street received no benefit.

Although development can be structural and functional, it can also be physical such as high-rise buildings, factories, institutional buildings, etcetera; it can also be mental such as when education is given priority over structural development (Mama 2001):

The purpose of social development is man. Social development as a discipline teaches its students the benefits that will accrue to the society when man himself is developed first instead of inanimate structures which for long time had been erroneously mistaken for development. (p. 17)

Development must start from the man and then the infrastructure. Achimugu (2000) opines that a nation's prosperity is measured not on the wealth of its income, nor on the power of its army, nor on the elegance of its environment, but on its citizens who are educated and religious and work for their country growth.

Obviously, nations without moral agency that can inculcate in its citizens' moral values cannot attain this overall

development. There is no gainsaying the fact that Christianity has the capacity to instil in its converts strong moral values, regard for human life and integrity through religious education. Many institutions of learning and hospitals were built by Christian missionaries. Christian leaders are also active in fostering the rule of law, equity and the overall well-being of the people, which is to help a country achieve national development. For emphasis, Uka (2008:40) remarked that, 'Educating and enlightening our children and adherents to be more loving and tolerant of other people and other religion is a duty religious leaders have to perform'.

Being aware of this fact, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan whilst speaking with some of the Bishops of African Church led by the Primate, Most Rev. Emmanuel Udofia, at the Aso Rock, on 6 June 2014, acknowledged that there was a bond between the secular state and the ecclesiastical state, resulting in a rather fruitful synergy, but he regretted that the separation of the two bodies had led in modern times to the deterioration of moral problems in the society. The President expressed his dissatisfaction that moral religious education was relegated to the background when it was supposed to be at the forefront of national development. He concluded that developing a community conducive to human interaction was more important than providing physical infrastructure (Onani & Anule 2014).

Jonathan's appreciation of the import of Christianity is an attestation to the fact that Church does impact the nation's life. It is highly commended. However, his laments on the Church's slumber to its national duty call for a critical appraisal of the church/government relationship in recent times. At a time in history, the government saw the Church as a rival group and forcefully took over the mission schools from the church.

Some missions have reacted to it, for instance, the resolution of the Presbyterian Synod of 26 July 1984, is that the government takeover of schools from missions is responsible for the moral decadence and falling standard of education in schools. In addition, the Catholic Bishops East Central State of Nigeria 1971 did not mince words in pointing out that the near-crisis situation in the public schools is traceable to the Government's attempt to elbow God and religion out of the school system.

It would not be exaggeration to say that without the close collaboration of Church and Government in the past, Nigeria would have charted a different course of development and maybe would have had a slower rate of development. Christianity through different religious groups has played a crucial role in the national development of Nigeria. Ever before the conception of Nigeria, Christian missionaries had established their mission in some of the areas that were later amalgamated to become one Nigeria.

According to Agha (2004:120), 'the genesis of the different Christian missionaries in Nigeria varied from one

denomination to another. Their port of entry, growth and expansion differ significantly'. However, each of them had a clear purpose of their mission and was inclined to deal with any issues that could obstruct them from accomplishing it. Nineteenth century saw the establishment of sustainable missionary work by different missionary bodies which include Methodist Church 24 September 1842, Church Missionary Society (CMS) 1842, Presbyterian Church 10 April 1846, and Baptist Church 1850. Roman Catholic Mission was established in Lagos in 1860, whilst Qua Iboe Church came in 1887 and Sudan Interior Mission in 1893.

Nwadialo and Umeanolue (2012:19) posit that, 'The advancing frontiers of missionary enterprise created situations of new opportunities, both for the individuals and for the nation'. It has been observed that the missionaries have even more fundamentally changed the indigenous Igbo culture than either the government or the merchants have.

They achieved this by insisting that unless the Igbo radically changed their culture along the prescribed western paradigm, the Igbo and their neighbours could not truly become Christians or achieve salvation. They provided western education a highly enticing bait that the indigenous religions could not deliver (Afigbo 1999). Indeed, this so attracted the attention of the natives that they enrolled their children and wards in the schools. The knowledge of the fact that for the Igbo to acquire a power typical to the European's they must be educated was the reason they sent their wards and children to schools. Eventually, the Europeans' mystery was demythologised through scientific and technological studies offered in the schools; those who had imbibed the training became influential in politics, economy, religion and social life. This claim is evident in the modern Igbo society (Nwadialo & Umeanolue 2012).

In view of the above discussions, it is expedient to analyse the various ways by which the people and their environment were affected through Western education in Nigeria. Each of these missions established schools. Iwe (1974) was convinced that the establishment of schools was the major contributing factor to their success and hence, he writes:

Their success was in their struggle to understand Africans and to alleviate the sufferings and the injury they have suffered in the hand of the Europeans during the three and half centuries of unrestricted slave trading. They came to help end centuries of slave trade and slavery which had continued in many parts of the African interior, including the area that later became Nigeria. They also came to give to the Africans the secret of European power – Western education. At that time white missionaries were very few in Nigeria. Denominations that gave more had more converts. (p. 27)

Actually, without the use of schools as a veritable instrument of conversion, it would have been difficult to convert the natives. Agreeing with this, Anyabuikie (1996) quips that:

The European Catholic Christianity met a strong African indigenous culture and religion, which ironically tended on the one hand to be receptive of the alien religion, and on the other

hand, to retain the traditional setting. The effect of such a situation was an emergence of a syncretism religion which was neither a pure African Traditional Religion nor a purely Catholic religion. (p. 21)

The Christian missionaries embarked on conversion through education. This helped them to penetrate the people who they converted, trained and empowered to become trainers of others. Alagoa (1999:250) corroborated this fact by saying that, 'Western education had been identified as probably the most important motive for the acceptance of Christian missions'. At the initial stages of missionary work in Nigeria, the European missionaries offered rudimentary education. Adult converts were taught church doctrines and catechism. They were also trained to read the Bible and became only concerned with Church. Children were also sent to school from the kindergarten age. Nnadi (2004:112) asserts that 'the first attempt to establish school in Nigeria was in 1515 by the catholic missionaries in Oba's palace'. But it could not endure.

## Christianity and educational development

Prior to the time when Lagos became a British colony in 1861, Christian missionaries had worked in Yoruba land for barely two decades. They laid the foundation of primary and secondary education in Nigeria and painstakingly bore the financial burden of its overall development, which includes amongst other things the remuneration of teachers, provision of books and other writing materials, building of physical structures, etcetera. They did this for years without any assistance from the colonial administration. According to Fafunwa (1974), Mr. and Mrs. De Graft founded the first known school in Badagry and called it 'Infant Church Nursery'. Most of the 50 odd pupils were Sierra Leone emigrant children, although some of the local converts sent their children to school as well. The Reverend Annear and his wife were succeeded by Mr. and Mrs. De Graft in 1844.

Fafunwa (1974) went further to state that:

While Methodist should be credited with establishing the first school in Nigeria; it was the CMS Mission that was to make most important contribution to education in the early period. (p. 78)

Indeed, by then, the Church Mission Society had four schools in Lagos, including the grammar school that was opened in 1859. By 1873, there were a number of increases in the number of schools under the CMS. A Yoruba mission report cited in Onyeidu (2004) remarked that:

There were twenty one day schools in the country connected with CMS alone. In these schools there were twenty nine teachers engaged in educating 688 boys and 554 girls. Over 800 of these children are being educated in Lagos alone, and the entire expenses of this work have so far been thrown on the CMS. (p. 11)

The Church of Scotland Mission, based in Jamaica, West Indies, sponsored mission to Calabar in 1846, whilst the

Methodists and the CMS missionaries consolidated their missionary activities in and around Badagry and Abeokuta. Hope Waddell was the leader of the team. It has been observed that 'In Waddell's school at Creek Town in 1854 there were 210 names on the roll' (Fafunwa 1974:29).

In Igboland, it was not until 1857 that the Rev J.C. Taylor started a school at Onitsha with 20 children brought to him by their parents and guardians. That development presented a good platform for the evangelisation of the area, which Taylor himself declared that it was the commencement of his missionary work. The church certainly 'used education to transmit new ideas and the school as its proselytizing ground' (Mgbemena 1996:401). In 1868, the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM), founded its first school in Lagos and in 1885, it registered its presence in Igboland. Under Fr. Shanahan who believed that schools could serve as best instrument for evangelisation of the society, schools were built near in every village under his jurisdiction. Thus, the missionaries made enormous financial sacrifices not only to convert but also to educate them without government assistance because in 1865, education received no assistance from Government. According to Osokoya (1989:60), 'It was only in the year 1872 that colonial masters made available the sum of 30 pounds to each mission society involved in education activities in Lagos'. Apart from primary schools, the missionaries established other training institutions for human development.

## Human capital development

Human capital development is one great contribution made by Christianity in the development of Nigeria. The missionaries concerned about the emancipation of the poor Africans who were the reason they established industrial schools, to train them on various skills. According to Nwankiti (1996):

The first industrial school was established in Abeokuta in 1851 ... the first students who were sent abroad by CMS went to study brick and tile making, navigation, horticulture and industrial management. (p. 39)

In the former Eastern Nigeria, such institution at Onitsha produced accountants and clerks in addition to carpenters and masons. About their products, Nwankiti (1996) quips:

Their imprint still abides with us. Before the Biafra war, Diocesan, Archdeaconry and District Offices were manned by people whose teachers were the fruits of these industrial institutions. Almost all the old churches in the former Diocese on the Niger were built by people trained by them. Pews, Pulpits, Lecterns, and Altar Rails etc. bore their 'trade mark'- solid, heavy, durable and attention to details. Mr. Stephen Emekekwe who taught Carpentry at the Denis Memorial Grammar School (DMGS) Onitsha in the forties was the last Manager of the Onitsha Industrial Mission as it was called. (p. 39)

The second type of school established by Christian missionaries was the ministerial school. In 1883, Crowther built ministerial schools at Kippo Hill, Lokoja and Asaba, in 1895, the purpose was to raise manpower for the mission and

the names of the beneficiaries of these training institutes are well spelt out by Azikiwe (1957 cited in Adiele 1996) in his centenary speech delivered at All Saints Cathedral, Onitsha, in 1957. Amongst other things, he stated:

To enable the mission to expand its valuable work, it selected in 1883 a group of young men for training at the Kikpo Hill training institution Lokoja and among the first batch of the would-be missionary worker were George N Anyaegbunam (later ordained a minister in the Holy Order). Henry Venn, Gbasiuzo Okosi (later Onowu Iyase), Theophilous B Akpam, Thomas D. Anyaegbunam, Ephraim I Agba, Mark Osai Romaine, James A. Onyejekwu. These men were like then seeds of the sower which fell on the fertile soil and enabled Christianity to flourish throughout the length and breadth of the area now embraced in the Niger diocese. (p. 331)

Asaba training institute also produced a handful of indigenes, amongst whom 'were Abel Ekpunobi (Obosi), D. Kemmer (Towun), Obodedom C Azikiwe (Waterside Onitsha) he was the father of Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, David Okagbue (Emmanuel School, Onitsha) and John Wright (Asaba)' (Onyeidu 2004:22). Jordan in Agha (2004) observed that:

The outstanding achievements of the S.M.A. activities were the training of the first Igbo indigenous Catholic priest in British West Africa, Father Paul Emecheta of Ezi. Men like Patrick Okolo, Charles Nduaguba, Willie Onuchukwu and Paul Anekwe obtained the highest teaching certificate the government could offer then. (p. 120)

The third type of school established by Christian missionaries was the grammar schools. Nwankiti (1996) writes:

The first of its kind was founded in Lagos in 1859 by the CMS. The Girl's Grammar School was followed in 1872. Other missions followed suit, the Methodist Boys' High School Lagos in 1876; St. Gregory's College in 1881, and Baptist High School Lagos in 1885. (p. 39)

In Igboland, the educational development programme was slow. However, Nwankiti (1996) noted that:

T.D. Anyaegbunam, set up a night school at Onitsha in 1893, in 1896 there were progressive schools in Obosi, Ogidi, Ogbunike. Only in 1925 DMGS was established by the CMS and Christ the King College (CKC) in 1933 by the RCM. (p. 39)

The Roman Catholic missionaries, which came almost three decades after the CMS in Igboland, took the mission education so seriously that a careful assessment in 1950s suggests that the RCM had remarkably outdistanced the Anglicans in the East of Niger (Enemueo 1996:340).

However, some people have criticised the education provided by the missionaries for being inferior. That notwithstanding, Agha (2004) inferred that no matter its inadequacy, it was better than the informal system of native education that existed prior to their arrival. He went further to assert that:

The most comprehensive college in the West Coast of Africa was the Hope Waddell Training Institute established in 1895 by the Scottish Presbyterian missionaries in Calabar under the leadership of H.M. Waddell. The school contained various parts

of Departments including primary and Secondary, Teacher Training, Carpentry, Engineering, Tailoring, and Printing Press. The school has since then produced many eminent scholars, politician, teachers, technicians, civil servants, leaders in the key posts throughout Nigeria. These people were instrumental to the development of Nigeria as a nation. (p. 120)

## Development of national languages in Nigeria

The use of African literature and languages was of primary importance in founding missions in Africa. The missionaries realised early that to establish an efficient Christian mission in Africa, the gospel should be preached in the language of the converts. Therefore, they began on time to develop the African languages, which they used to transmit Christianity and civilisation. Onyeidu (224:80) quips 'Interest in the study, teaching and translations of West African languages which had enriched the "world culture" of the people began in Sierra Leon'. Starting from 1804, when the CMS occupied Sierra Leon, it instructed its agents to learn the native language in order to facilitate evangelism in the area.

The study of Igbo language, according to Tasie (1996):

[W]as begun by John F. Schon, the German Philologists and missionary who for his linguistic achievements was in 1844 to receive the D.D. of Oxford; he had reduced Igbo to writing in 1841. (p. 82)

Besides, by 1866, Taylor, one of the foundation members of the CMS church at Onitsha, had completed his work on the Igbo Bible (New Testament) and was ready to be published in England. The Efik alphabets and languages were produced by the Presbyterian Mission in Calabar (Agha 2004).

Crowther concentrated on the Yoruba language and not only wrote a grammar of the language but also translated part of the Bible for their worship; thus, it was possible for the Yoruba mission to have a vernacular Bible as early as 1884. Bowen's interest in the development of the local language led him acquire a higher degree of proficiency in Yoruba language and he produced Yoruba dictionary and books. Rev. Schon blazed the trail in respect of the academic approach to the study of Hausa language, whilst Rev. Bargery was the first scholar to recognise tone as an essential feature of Hausa language. Rev. Banifield produced Nupe dictionary and completed the translation of the Bible to Nupe language in 1927, which was only published in 1947 (Ayadele 1966).

## Agricultural development

Amongst the three basic needs of man food comes first. Once there is life, there must be food to sustain it. Therefore, the fundamental of a holistic evangelism is the feeding of the soul as well as the body. This is the reason the missionaries took agriculture very seriously and educated the Africans on commercial farming. Mgbemena (1996) has it that:

At a wider and higher level, the church, knowing agriculture to be a way of life of a high percentage of the population of the

Eastern area early enough, showed concerned for it by including agricultural science in the primary school curriculum. In large important primary schools, the subject was taught by teachers trained, for the purpose. (p. 441)

Thus, Christianity shaped the life of the people of Nigeria to a reasonable degree. The missionaries came with their own varieties of crops, which proved to have a better quality than the ones in existence in the area. They started to teach people how to make use of artificial fertiliser to boost production. According to Onyiedu (2001:37), 'It was the missionary agents and the colonial masters that introduced different species of beautiful flowers, carpet grass, fruit trees and vegetables which we have taken for granted today'.

The missionaries also taught the people how to rear different types of animals and the best species amongst them. For example, the English fowl was better than the local fowl. In terms of the development of commercial agriculture and farm settlements in Nigeria, Agha (2004) remarked that:

[I]t was Fr. Borghero of the Roman Catholic Mission who was the first to establish a farm settlement along a nine-mile strip of farm land along the coast near Badagry in 1875. (p. 50)

## Medical services

Prior to the arrival of the missionaries, the health condition of the indigenous people was so poor that the death rate in Nigeria was alarming. There was no known cure for certain deadly diseases, which quickly went wild and caused a severe death toll amongst the population. Moreover, there was a complete lack of information about many of these diseases (Agha 2004:124). The infant mortality rate was a cause for alarm. Many of them died before the age of 2 years. On seeing how the natives were being badly exploited by their *Dibias* (native doctors), the missionaries began to demonstrate their concern early enough. One important contribution of the missionaries to the medical sector in those early days of its work in Nigeria was the quick discovery of quinine by the European missionaries for the treatment of malaria fever. Odinamadu (1992) asserted that:

... [F]or thirteen years after the failure of the 1841 expedition no other expedition was taken by the British until the carrier of the sickness that nicknamed Africa the 'Whiteman's grave' was pinpointed; the sickness it caused diagnosed and named Malaria, and the bark of CINCONA TREE was discovered and turned to quinine as an effective drug against it. This was discovered before the 1857 expedition of the Niger. (p. 36)

Admittedly, medical ministrations started early in the wake of the missionary enterprise in Nigeria. Achunike (2002:47) quips that, 'it began as a result of many sicknesses that were prevalent in those days- fever, dysentery, leprosy, sores and wounds. The patients were nursed within the church premises'. Subsequently, the Christian missionaries built hospitals in different places within the country. Achunike (2002) further asserted that:

[H]ospital was established first in Onitsha in 1893. Ironically, the Catholic mission began to backpedal, at the turn of the 20th century, and left the medical field exclusively to the CMS. (p. 47)

In 1896, the CMS opened a hospital at Dobinson, but later transferred it to a permanent site at Iyi-Enu Hospital in 1907. Other mission hospitals include Mary Slessor Hospital, established at Itu by the Church of Scotland Mission in September 1905. Another mission hospital was the Mary Slessor clinic, which was founded in September 1905 by the Presbyterian Church at Itu. Agha (2004) noted that:

[T]he same group started mission in Unwana on 25th October, 1888 and a mini-hospital was established in 1899 but it became defunct with the establishment of Uburu Hospital in 1913 which is now known as the Presbyterian Joint Hospital. The Methodist church built a hospital at Amachara in Umuahia in 1929. (p. 50)

In 1928, the CMS founded Wusasa Hospital in the North of Nigeria, and in 1951, Ile Abiye Hospital, after initial problems, found its permanent home at Ado Ekiti.

In the 1930s, the Roman Catholic Mission established a number of hospitals across the Igboland. At Anua, six dispensaries, four orphanages and St. Luke's Hospital were erected in 1933. Bishop Shanahan hospital in Nsukka and Mater Misericordiae Hospital in Afikpo were established in 1935. Ozigbo (1985) and (Falk 1997:19) quipped that Holy Rosary Maternity hospitals in Onitsha and the Mt. Carmel Hospital at Emekukwu were also established by the Catholic Missions in 1935.

Leper colonies were also established for the treatment of leprosy patients. Both the CMS and Presbyterian Mission opened a leper settlement at Itu in 1928 and another one at Uburu the same year (Macdonald 1963). In 1936, Oji River Leper Settlement was established by the CMS and in 1930 at Uzoakoli by the Methodist missionaries; there was also another leper colony at Garkida. Not only were the lepers healed, relieved and comforted in these settlements, but they were also trained in carpentry and wood work (Agha 2004).

## Christianity and politics

One of the purposes of the church in the world is to save Man and politics is all about the social welfare of the same Man. The man could be a Christian and a politician at the same time, belonging to one denomination and also having a political party of his choice. Therefore, the two related concerns in mind are religious understanding and political awareness. For him, it is difficult to distinguish faith and politics from each other and from his personal beliefs, emotions, opinions and action. In this context, it is difficult to distinguish religion and politics in the lives of people and in the organisation of societies (Ngbea 2012).

The true mark of a Christian is love for his neighbours, his race, colour and tongue notwithstanding. The Church expresses love of God towards man by involving itself in the

demonstration against the current needy condition of the human society. Hence, the church came out and began to impact the society through a display of love and patriotism.

## Christianity in a pluralistic society

The influence of Christianity in Nigeria is greatly felt by all and sundry. It brought to the people a positive and enduring change. However, the existence of other forms of religious beliefs in all nooks and crannies has given birth to ambivalence through religious interaction, and the result is mixed multitude, amongst those described by the Scriptures as 'chaff carried by the wind of all kinds of gospels'. This, however, brought a sad note into historical progression of Christianity as human elements came into play and resulted in heresy, poor level of spirituality, apostasy and religious brouhaha. Hence, religion across the world has been subjected to critical analysis; people have been asking questions as to whether or not Christianity, or religion at large, has made enough contributions to nation building to deserve all the honour.

In Nigeria, the economy has not been stable; the government has not met its targets as regards the provision of social amenities. Rather, it has been from one problem to another, ranging from political instability, insecurity, uneven distribution of wealth and unaffordable cost of medication. Some people have come up with religious programmes in the form of prayers and crusades to help out, but some of them have also been affected by the system and have again become problems to the society. That is what Ossia (2013) meant when he stated that:

Following the perceived inability of the government to create the desired panacea to the wide problems of Nigerians, the prosperity preachers, with their promise of wealth and health, have gained a great percentage of Nigerians as followers. (p. 8)

Of course, they cannot fold their hands whilst they languish in uncertainty. They have to apply religion which is their ultimate effort to succeed.

In such a situation, what is counted as success is the amount of wealth the pastor and his congregation could generate for themselves at the expense of their innocent followers. Hence, Akin-John (2010) has stated that:

[F]or too long a time, churches have not done anything tangible to affect and impact their host communities for Christ. They have merely existed, untouched and unperturbed by the plight of their host communities. (p. 14)

Was Akin-John trying to undermine the contributions of the church in national development? No, he was just being observant of the fact that some churches are in state of *anomie*.

Indeed, Christianity and religion, in general, is a useful instrument in Nigeria nowadays for exploiting both the economic and political ends. It has also become a symbol of support by which the disadvantaged show their resentment

to political order and perceived socio-economic decadence. A case in point is religious unrest, particularly amongst Muslim fundamentalists in the northern part of Nigeria. Bako linked the economic downturn with the proliferation of the new faith movement. Thus, the key source of religious bigotry, he points out, lies within the institutions and ties of society that produce social injustices, economic exploitation, inequality and political oppression and domination (Bako in Ter Haar & Ellis 2006).

## Recommendations

Therefore, in view of the aforementioned, the following recommendations can be made.

Religious propagandists should emulate Christians and package their religion in a way that should be appealing to the people rather than using force. Every religious individual should guarantee that the right of another is not infringed by his liberty.

Because Christianity and Government are concerned with the total development of man and his society, it is expedient that both of them should partner to achieve success. Whereas Christian religious organisations are augmenting the government's efforts in providing social amenities, Government would do well to financially support them to execute their projects. Such partnerships will not only increase the speedy rate of social development but also enhance the quality of the developmental project that each group may want to execute.

Having observed that since the government's takeover of schools from its original owners, the standard of education has failed and quality of products from these schools has lowered, it is, therefore, important to recommend that to restore the standard of education nationwide, government should hand over mission schools to their original owners.

Moreover, the government should create a Ministry of Religious Affairs, just as there is a Ministry of Education. Reason is that education was introduced to the country by religious organisations, but the same organisation that brought in education has been so ruthlessly neglected. Through a ministry of religious affairs, religious doctrines of each religious group will be known, monitored and run jointly by the ministry.

In the early days of Christianity in Nigeria, it was not difficult for the church to acquire free land for their developmental projects. Today, things have changed, it is now hard to obtain free land. Based on this fact, the researcher recommends that the government should allot land to the Church for developmental projects, as this will enable Christianity to work for the maximum impartation in the life of Nigerian citizens.

On important occasions like Independence, Children's day and Armed Forces Remembrance day, leaders of this country

I meet the religious leaders, to pray for the nation and address the citizens. It is good to see them meet other times and regularly too to further discuss the progress of this country because Christianity exists for the benefit of Man and whereas each denomination has its own blue print for national development, it will be good to share with one another what each religious body has for the nation. Such a partnership will make for mutual understanding as crucial issues will be dialogued by the religious leaders and government official.

## Conclusion

Following the enormous contributions of Christianity in the areas of education, agriculture, health care, human capital development and economy, the researcher makes bold to say that Christianity is ideal. Its role in ensuring peace of mind and instilling morality has also proved that Christianity is genuine; it is one popular institution that has greatly influenced many Nigerians positively. Hence, most Nigerians are in love with Christian missionaries.

Therefore, caution should be taken when condemning religion. Whilst agreeing that, 'one's critics are his unpaid guardians' courtesy demands that criticism should be constructive, rather than destructive. Therefore no doubt the fact that there are counterfeits, but there are the originals as well. What is original Christianity should be highlighted more to get people abreast of the tenets of Christianity. The president's appreciation of the import of Church has countered the opinion of some people that religion is a destroyer of nations.

Government and indeed Nigerian citizens should understand that religion is innate in man and that it is the reason why there is no human society that is secular. What is important is to have good religious people who know that patriotism and love of the fatherland is a part of the religious virtue of piety. True piety means respect and devotion not only to God and parents but also to one's country. Christianity is ideal because its fundamental teaching is life in abundance. Thus, Christianity should be preserved and its adherents should encourage walking in the ways of their master Jesus Christ.

## Acknowledgements

### Competing interests

The author declares that no competing interest exists.

### Author's contributions

G.A. the sole author of this research article.

### Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

### Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

## References

- Achimugu, L., 2000, *The Agonies of the Nigerian teacher, friend or foes*, Baron Press Limited, Port-Harcourt.
- Achunike, H.C., 2002, *The dreams of heaven: A modern response to Christianity in north west north Igboland 1970–1990*, African-FEP Publishers Limited, Onitsha.
- Adiele, S.N., 1996, 'Ministerial training in the Anglican Communion in the eastern states 1904–1995', in S.N. Adiele (ed.), *The Niger mission: Origin growth and impact 1857–1999*, p. 70, Isaeco press Ltd., Aba.
- Afigbo, 1999, 'Igboland before 1800', in Ikiwe (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian history*, Heinemann, Ibadan.
- Agha, U.A., 2004, 'Christian missionary work and development of the Nigeria', in Okwueze (ed.), *Religion and societal development contemporary*, Merit International Publishers, Lagos.
- Akin-John, B., 2010, *Your church your community*, Life and Ministry Publications, Lagos.
- Alagoa, E., 1999, 'The eastern Niger delta and the hinterland in the 19th century', in Ikeme (ed.), *Ground work of Nigerian history*, Heinemann, Ibadan.
- Ali Mazuri, 1979, 'Church and multinationals in the spread of modern education', *Third World Quarterly* 1(1), 30–49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597908419404>
- Anyabuikie, D.E., 1996, 'The planting of Anglican Church in Nigeria 1857–1992', in Adiele (ed.), *The Niger mission origin, growth and impact 1857–1995*, ISAECO Press, Aba.
- Arinze, F.A., 1982, *The Christian and politics*, Tabansi Press Ltd., Onitsha.
- Arinze, F.A., 1999, *The world needs inter religious dialogue*, Lecture given at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 10 November 1999.
- Asadu, G.C., 2015, *Ibagwa-Aka Ozuzikoko in church history: Origen, growth and impact 1914–2014*, Great Ap Express publisher Ltd., Nsukka.
- Ayadele, E.A., 1966, *The missionary factor in northern Nigeria 1879–1918*, viewed from [https://www.jstor.org/stable/41856710?seq=20#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/41856710?seq=20#metadata_info_tab_contents).
- Azikiwe, N., 1957, 'Centenary speech: During the CMS Niger mission centenary celebrations', in Ross (ed.), *It is marvellous in our eyes*, CMS, Port-Harcourt.
- Enemu, E.O., 1996, 'What are we Anglicans doing', A lecture note presented to the teachers' week at Awka.
- Fafunwa, A.B., 1974, *History of education in Nigeria*, NPS Educational Publishers Limited, Ibadan.
- Falk, P. 1997, *The Hrowth of the Church in Africa*, Jos, CAPRO Media Services.
- Fowler, H.W., Fowler, F.G., Thompson, D., 1995, *The concise Oxford dictionary of Current English*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Iwe, S.N., 1974, *Christianity and culture in Africa*, University Publishing Company.
- Jordan, J.P., 1970, *Bishop Shanahan of southern Nigerian*, Sef, Elo Press Ltd, Dublin.
- MacDonald, A.B., 1983, *Can ghosts arise? The answer to Itu*, St. Andrew's Press, Edinburgh.
- Mama, S., 2001, 'Lecture note', Unpublished paper, Federal School of Social Work, Emene.
- Mgbemene, A.E.D., 1996, 'The effect of the Anglican Church in the life of the people in the eastern states of Nigeria', in S.N. Adiele (ed.), *The Niger mission: Origin, growth and impact 1857–1999*, p. 70, Isaeco press Ltd., Aba.
- Ngbea, G., 2012, 'Religion, politics and national development', *Nsukka Journal of Religion and Cultural Studies* 5, 102–116.
- Nnadi, F., 2004, 'Religion as a factor in social development', in Okwueze (ed.), *Religion and societal development contemporary Nigeria perspectives*, Merit International Publishers, Lagos.
- Nwadialo, R. & Umeanolue, 2012, 'Missionary factor in making of a modern Igbo nation, 1841–1940: A historical discourse in Chiegboka', *Journal of Religion and Human Relationships*, vol. 1. 4. p. 19
- Nwankiti, B.C., 1996, *The growth and development of the church of Nigeria*, Ihem Davis Press Ltd., Owerri.
- Odinamadu, 1992, *Christianity in Nigeria 1842–1992*, Light Magazine, Enugu.
- Onani, E. & Anule, E., 2014, 'Jonathan: Insurgency worse than Civil War, in New Telegraph news paper', pp. 1–2, [https://issuu.com/newtelegraphonline/docs/binder1\\_june\\_26\\_2014](https://issuu.com/newtelegraphonline/docs/binder1_june_26_2014)
- Onyiedu, S.O., 2001, *Christianity and Onitsha Primal Religion: The Anglican Contribution*, Magnet Business Enterprise, Enugu.



- Onyiedu, S.O., 2004, *Anglican church and the development of education in Igboland 1857–1920*, Magnet Business Enterprises, Enugu.
- Onyiedu S.O., 2001, *Christianity and Onitsha Prime Society: The Anglican Contribution*, Magnet Business Enterprise, Enugu.
- Osokoya, I.O., 1989, *History and police of Nigeria education in world perspective*, Abe Publishers, Port-Harcourt.
- Ossia, E.C., 2013, 'The delusion of prosperity preaching Nigeria', in *Logos Magazine a publication of the national association of students of religion and cultural studies*, vol. 3, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.Ozigbo, I.R.A., 1985, *Igbo Catholicism Onitsha connections 1907–1984*, Africa Fep Publishers, Onitsha.
- Pfeiffer (ed.), 2005, *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, Hendrickson Publishers Publishers, MA.
- Rodney, W., 2005, *Wow Europe underdeveloped Africa*, Panaf Publishers, Pretoria.
- Uka, E.M., 2008, 'Ethic, religion and communal conflict in Nigeria: Implication for security', in *Professor Anda Journal of Cultural Studies*, Maiden edn., vol. 1, Glorious Dawn, Umuahia.
- Urukpa, J.A., 1996, 'Anglican church and educational development in the eastern states of Nigeria 1857–1966', in Adiele, S.N. (ed.), *The Niger mission: Origin, growth and impact 1857–1995*, p. 70, Isaeco press Ltd., Aba.
- Tasie, G.M.O., 1996, 'John Christopher Taylor: A biographical note', in Adiele (ed.), *The Niger mission: Origin, growth and impact 1857–1995*, p. 70, Isaeco press Ltd., Aba.
- Ter Haar & Ellis, 2006, *The role of religion in national development in Nigeria*, viewed from <http://www.religiondevelopment.ni/documents/publication/the%20%20religion/%20in%20development%20-%20ter%20haar.pdf>.