



RESEARCH ARTICLE

CHRISTIANITY AT THE CROSSROADS: EXAMINING THE STATE OF CHRISTIANITY IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES IN IGBOLAND

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ABSTRACT

Although Christianity has not been in Igboland for too long, not up to two centuries since its arrival in the land, yet the religion has made huge impacts and spread widely into the nooks and crannies of the land and society. Christianity arrived Igboland in the mid-nineteenth century through the instrumentality of the missionaries of the various Christian denominations. Since then, it has transformed from being a religion at the fringes to an all-pervading phenomenon in Igboland and Igbo society. From the stage of initial hesitation and reluctance to the exciting stage of acceptance and spread, the new religion has gained wide acceptance by the indigenous Igbo people who were erstwhile engrossed in their traditional religious practices. The people seemed to have been suddenly woken to embrace the new religion with open arms, leading to the flooding of the whole land with the various forms and descriptions of the Church and its denominations throughout the landscape. However, presently, even though Christianity still seems to be at high points in the Land, some developments may prompt one to infer or conclude that the religion is now at the crossroads in Igboland. Such developments as cultural revivalism, syncretism, revert to traditional religious practices, ritualism, desertion of the churches by the youths and adults alike, the rise and drift to new age religions and the headlong pursuit for wealth, materialism, worldliness and the spread of secularism, and even the threat of Islamization and Islamic terrorism may all be signs that Christianity may be at the crossroads in Igboland at the present times. This paper therefore investigates the present scenario with the aim of examining the way forward for Christianity in Igboland. The historical and analytical methods are employed in this investigation.

Keywords: Christianity, church, crossroads, Igboland, contemporary time.

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INTRODUCTION

Christianity came into Igboland with a bang in the mid nineteenth century. Until that coming, the Igbo society could be said to have been somehow preserved and insulated from foreign and outside cultural influences except of course the destabilizing influence of the obnoxious slave trade perpetrated by the Western nations. If nothing else, Igboland was untouched by the rampaging Islamic religious jihad which had affected other parts of Africa including parts of the present-day Nigeria. Even the earlier Christian missions to West Africa by the Portuguese Catholic Mission which reached Benin and Warri did not also get to Igboland. According to Adiele (1996), “The Portuguese reached Benin in 1472 and soon after Warri. With the Church-State policy in vogue in Portugal, both politico-ecclesial interests were inextricably linked.” Adiele went on to observe that:

After the failure of the Benin and Warri missions about one and a half centuries elapsed before renewed missionary activity started again in Nigeria. If the Benin and Warri attempts have survived, one would have expected Christianity to spread to the Eastern states (Igboland) within few years of existence. Since the foundation was shaky, there was no way it could reach out across the River Niger. This was a regrettable opportunity Christianity missed to reach out to the East. Consequently, the area had to wait for an opportune moment that is at God’s own time (1996:5).

Thus Igboland remained untouched and unaffected by outside religious and cultural influences until the mid-nineteenth century and well after the Church Reformation in Europe which had splintered the One, Holy Catholic Church into several denominations. Adiele (1996, p.7) thus further observed that, “Incidentally, the undivided Church did not reach East of the River Niger (i.e Igboland) – a geographical area which later became the Eastern States.” He further noted that the area was bound to be evangelized by what the Roman Catholics refer to as “separated brethren.” The Roman Catholics only came later on to Igboland quite a while after the ‘Protestants’.

So then, after all the initial delays, Christianity finally came into Igboland from the mid-nineteenth century and then further stayed at the point of entry for some time before finally making a breakthrough and moving into the nooks and crannies of Igboland and making the area one of the most evangelized areas of the world presently. How was this feat achieved? Also, what is the current state of Christianity in Igboland? These are the issues that this paper intends to investigate.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Christianity Arrives Igboland in the mid-nineteenth Century

After the initial delays occasioned by various militating factors, Christianity finally arrived Igboland in the mid-nineteenth century. Several factors also worked together to bring about the Christian missionary evangelization of Igboland in particular and Nigeria and in fact the West African subregion from the nineteenth century after the initial delays. According to Adiele (1996, p.9):

Despite the initial negative approach toward evangelism, the Europeans later developed keen interest toward the winning of African souls. Many observers are at a loss why West Africa received so much attention from the Europeans. Scholars have proffered various theories to justify the change of heart.



One outstanding reason among others which elicited great interest in taking the gospel to other parts of the world including West Africa of which Igboland is inclusive was the evangelical revival which broke out in Britain and the rest of Europe and also the 'Great Awakening' in America in the 18th and 19th centuries. According to Dimobika (2014, pp. 40-41, citing other sources):

The Evangelical Revival in Britain that occurred from the late 18th to the 19th century was ... an off-shoot of the Pietism which had occurred in Germany and continental Europe earlier in the century, and is also linked to the 'Great Awakening' which was also taking place in the American colonies about the same time (Bosch 1991). Three factors converged to effect a spiritual change in the English-speaking world, a change that was to have a profound influence on missionary developments to the present day.

These revivals therefore subsequently gave birth to the formation of Missionary Societies which then embarked on missions to various parts of the world of which Africa in general and Igboland in particular are inclusive. In all, three attempts were made to bring Christianity into the Niger area (Igboland inclusive) by the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) of the Church of England from 1841 to 1857. The first attempt was the 1841 Niger Expedition and Civilizing Mission proposed by Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton, who was a member of the anti-slavery movement in London (Dimobika 2014, p.55). Part of his proposal was that in that Expedition and Niger Mission, missionaries and teachers in addition to their missionary work, should take the ploughs and hoes into the land and make agriculture flourish, in an attempt to replace the proscribed slave trade with legitimate trade. But the mission was a failure because of the death of many Europeans in the team who fall ill as a result of malaria disease developed from mosquito bites which led to the cancellation of the mission.

The next missionary attempt to Igboland was in 1853 after some influential Igbo settlers in Sierra Leone petitioned the local CMS committee suggesting that it takes advantage of the mail boat to extend Christianity to the Niger – “as it had done to the Yoruba country” (J. F. A. Ajayi in Adiele 1996, p.14). As a result of this petition, in 1853, the CMS directed the Rev. Edward Jones, the Principal of Fourah Bay College to lead an expedition into Igboland. But again at the end of the investigative mission, the team did not reach the Niger Valley as directed but stopped at Fernanda Po. The reason for not reaching Igboland this time again according to the Rev. Jones was that, from his interview with the Naval Officers who had good knowledge of the Niger, they convinced him that it was not possible for them to ascend the River Niger to Aboh by mail boat. A steamer was a better alternative. They were rather directed to Calabar where they met a good number of Igbo people who were originally meant for the slave market but abandoned following the prohibition of the Slave trade (Adiele 1996, p.14). Finally it was in the 1857 Niger expedition that the desired ambition of establishing the Niger Mission was achieved and attained. Adiele (1996) opined thus:

“The Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther who joined the expedition from Sierra Leone led the CMS team... In this expedition, Crowther was given a definite instruction by the CMS to found the Niger Mission unlike in the 1841 and 1854 expeditions. The team landed at Onitsha on Monday, July 27, 1857” (Adiele (1996:14)).

This thus officially marked the beginning of the Christian missionary activities in Igboland. However, it was not only the CMS that entered Eastern Nigeria for missionary activities during the period. The Church of Scotland Mission had earlier established its mission in Calabar in 1846 through the Rev.



Hope Waddel and his team and they also made efforts to extend their mission to other areas like Bonny, though it was the CMS that finally established at Bonny. Babalola (1988, p.119) referring to the activities of the Church of Scotland Presbyterian Mission, noted that after the exploratory journey to Calabar coast, a mission was opened at Ikotana, and under the influence of James Luke, another station was opened at Uwana. Then after 12 years service at Calabar, Mary Slessor, who championed the stoppage of the killing of twins, found her way to this area. She had her first base at Itu in 1888. From there she continued her mission and campaign to other areas, working to stop certain barbaric practices among the people of Aro, like the practice of “Trial by Ordeal,” (Babalola 1988, p.119).

The Methodist mission entered from Western Nigeria through the missionary effort of Thomas Birch Freeman, the English son of a ‘Negro’ father and a European mother who was originally stationed at Gold Coast (Ghana). He was prompted to become ordained by the appalling death rate of the Western missionaries on the Gold Coast and he was the first to respond to the appeal of the Creoles in Abeokuta, establishing missions in Badagry and Abeokuta. Babalola (1988, p.122) pointed out that in 1893, a mission station was opened at Archibong on the Akwayafeo river and in close cooperation with the Scottish mission. Next, a station was opened at Obio Utan at the request of its chief who had already started a school there. The station soon became a valuable base for the expansion of mission inland, between the Qua Ibo and Scottish mission area (Babalola, 1988, p.122). The Methodist mission from there expanded into many areas of Igboland.

The Roman Catholic Mission also first arrived in Western Nigeria through the visit of Father Borghero from Dahomey to Abeokuta and Lagos in 1860 and again in 1862 where they started some form of missionary work with some returnee ex-slaves from Brazil who at some time in their history had been baptised in the Roman Catholic Church. In 1868, Father Pierre Bouche arrived as the first resident priest of the Roman Catholic Mission in Nigeria at Lagos. “By 1885”, according to Babalola (1988, p.125), “this Church had gone further inland, thanks to Father Lutz who worked around Onitsha.” On the Roman Catholic Mission in Igboland, the achievement of Fr. Joseph Shanahan, an Irish priest who later became a bishop was said to be spectacular. Babalola (p.127) observed that the Roman Catholic mission in Eastern Nigeria received encouragement and support from Samuel Crowther through whose kindness the mission was founded in Onitsha in 1886. “But,” said Babalola, “the Roman Catholic missionary work was overshadowed by that of the Anglican until 1902, when the mission began to make impact on the people at the arrival of Father Shanahan there,” (p.127).

Thus, all the mentioned Missions having arrived the various entry points of Igboland then, the stage was set for intense missionary activities by the various missionary groups into Igboland. But as stated earlier, some initial delay and lull were experienced. Anyabuikwe (1988: pp.26-27) adduced some reasons for these initial delays. According to him:

For nearly a century, Christianity operated within the Niger and Niger Delta peripheries; many reasons have been contemplated for the delay in penetrating the interior. The shortage of fund, personnel, equipment and utilities were possible. Other reasons were ecological and the harsh climate conditions leading to high rate of European mortality. But the insecurity of life and property might be seen to have a large share of the blame. The ‘Almighty’ Traditional Religion and Culture appeared to have abhorred the planting of the alien Christian religion.

Thus, insecurity and the resistance mounted by the Traditional Religion and its practitioners among other contributory factors were adduced as reasons for the delay in the advance of Christianity from



its point of entry into the interior of Igboland. But it was only after the Aro Expedition of 1901 and the so-called “programme of pacification of the interior” by the West African Frontier Force (W.A.F.F.), that the Christian movement made an appreciable advance. Anyabuike (1996, p.27) noted that, with the establishment of military units, platoons and regiments to pacify the villages, the populace became sobered and ready to accept the alien culture and religion.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed historical and analytical methods of investigation. Historical method utilized in this study is a qualitative method which involves the use of mainly secondary sources like information from published materials such as journal articles, internet materials, textbooks and magazines. The analytical method was utilized which involves the use of existing information and facts to evaluate and understand the causes, relationships, and underlying principles behind phenomena. With regards to this paper which is on Christianity at the crossroad in Igboland, that examined the state of Christianity in contemporary times in Igboland, the historical method was first utilized to gather information on how Christianity initially made its way into Igboland, and the initial hindrances and bottlenecks encountered, and how they were overcome, leading to the state of the proliferation of Christianity into the nooks and crannies of the land.

Then, utilizing analytical method, the contemporary state of Christianity in the land was examined from the point of developing realities such as - cultural revivalism, syncretism, revert to traditional practices, ritualism, desertion of the churches by both the youths and adults alike, the rise and drift to new age religions etc. This is with the aim to determine whether Christianity has surely reached or is at the point of reaching the crossroads in its existence in Igboland.

DISCOURSES

The Spread of Christianity in Igboland

As the various missionary bodies have now entered Igboland viz-a-vis Eastern Nigeria through various fronts, the stage was now set for the missionary evangelization of the whole area by the various groups. Regarding the manner of missionary activities, Udo in Kalu (1980, p.159) observed that in the period before European political imperialism gathered momentum in Africa, Christian missions in the area that later became Eastern Nigeria were founded by clergymen of African descent – Sierra Leonians and Jamaicans – but headed by European Missionaries accustomed to the tropics. After the Berlin Conference of 1884-5, at which the European powers laid down certain rules for the partition of Africa, missionaries became more actively involved in imperial expansion. Udo (1980, p.160) went ahead to point out in this regard that:

“The seven main mission bodies in Eastern Nigeria imposed their various systems of religious teaching and beliefs upon the people... In due course Eastern Nigeria was dissected into several denominational units which were in some cases hostile to one another, and each of which discredited the work of the other. The results were as devastating as those of the other imperialistic agents” (Udo (1980: 60).

The various missionary bodies that carried out the partitioning of Eastern Nigeria into mission spheres of influences (known as districts) as enumerated by Udo in Ogbu Kalu (1980, p.160), were – The



Church Missionary Society (Anglican); the Niger Delta Pastorate (also Anglican); the United Free Church of Scotland; the Qua Iboe Mission (Protestant non-denominational), and the Primitive Methodist mission. But it was noted that the French Holy Ghost Fathers (Roman Catholics), who founded a mission at Onitsha in 1885, and the Lutheran Church of North America refused to recognise the mission boundaries and established churches and schools in any town or village that welcomed them.

The missionary borders continued to expand in Igboland especially with the adoption of the school apostolate and the use of Western education as a missionary and evangelistic strategy by the mission bodies. According to Kalu (1980, p.342), “Schools were used as a means of evangelization, rivalry, civilizing project, legitimization of colonial industrial policy, vertical expansion into rural areas and domestication of Christian values.” Igbo people in particular and Eastern Nigeria in general readily accepted the school apostolate and Western education baggage as a fitting accompaniment of the Christian mission. Accordingly, Kalu (1980) posited thus:, pp. 342-343):

Communities would build the school and house for a teacher, carry the luggage, and even put a deposit toward the salary. Missionaries wrote home requesting for more personnel because of village delegations’ demand for schools. Either the war’s experiences opened people’s eyes to the power of White technology or the onslaught of the years in traditional mores finally took its toll or the new patterns of exploitation weakened primary resistance, but a mass movement to Christianity occurred (Kalu (1980: 342-343).

So a mass movement to Christianity occurred in Igboland as stated above. Kalu also opined that the explosion of Christianity in contemporary Africa (Igboland inclusive) occurred after the missionary period, but it is rooted in the charismatic agency that started in the inter-war years. Thus Christianity gradually spread into the various nooks and crannies of Igboland, spurred by various forces which included the missionary agencies and their adopted strategies, as well as the charismatic and Pentecostal winds and waves that came blowing through the area from the 1970s to the present day.

The Proliferation of the Christian Church in Igboland

The word “proliferate,” according to the Oxford Modern English Dictionary, means to reproduce; to increase rapidly in number. Thus, proliferation of churches, according to *academia.edu* means “Multiplicity of Christian religious groups with each founder claiming divine origin of his or her ministry”, (accessed on 02/10/2023). Scholars and lay people alike agree that Nigeria in general and Igboland in particular have witnessed the proliferation of the Christian churches in immense proportions. Balogun, expressing his opinion on this in *academia.edu*, points out that the Nigerian geo-political landscape is dotted with the presence of various Christian Churches and ministries to the chagrin of even onlookers (accessed on 02/10/2023).

Thus from the initial period of the delay of the arrival of Christianity into Igboland, to the next stage of continuing delay in the spread of Christianity into the interior of Igboland after its arrival at the points of entry, it seemed then that the prospect for progress and advancement of the religion in the area was bleak as it were. However, from the period of the pacification of Igboland by the British colonial military forces from 1901/02, the great advance and spread of Christianity in the area began. This was further fuelled by the scrambled for spheres of influence by the various missionary bodies



that carried out their missionary activities in the area. Moreover, the indigenous people of the area also, at a point started accepting the whole missionary baggage, especially with their flare for the schools and Western education and other social and health services which the missionaries brought along, like the establishment of hospitals and maternities among others. There was therefore a mass movement to Christianity as pointed out earlier, which led to the establishment of both churches and schools in almost all rural communities in almost all the nooks and crannies of Igboland.

Further developments in African Christianity especially the arrival of the charismatic and Pentecostal brands into Igboland also led to the further growth of Christianity in the land. Thus, from the rising of independent and indigenous churches, then to the stage of the splintering of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches and ministries, Christianity in Igboland entered the stage and phase of proliferation of churches in the land. Duruji, S., Oparah C., & Ugwulebo, K. (2017, p.7), brought the scenario of the proliferation of churches down to Owerri in 2017 when they described the situation thus:

There is hardly any street in Owerri that does not host at least six churches. Some of these churches are located in makeshift houses, uncompleted buildings, warehouses, hotels, public buildings and schools, while the bigger churches have permanent structures...The amazing thing is that two or three churches are located in the same building. Also, virtually all the primary and post primary schools in Owerri are used as churches or fellowship centres. Some of them play host to three or four churches.

They went on to point out from their study the number of churches that lined up in some of the major roads in Owerri at the time of the study. For instance, Wetheral Road had 26 churches, School Road had 16, Douglas Road had 20 churches, Okigwe Road had 21 while MCC Uratta had 22 churches, among others. This study was conducted in 2017 and so, surely the number should have increased much more since then. And it should be pointed out that the situation in Owerri is a microcosm of the scenario in all the other cities in Igboland like Aba, Umuahia, Onitsha, Awka, Enugu, Nnewi, Orlu, Okigwe, Abakaliki and others. It should also further be pointed out that the situation is not limited to the cities and urban areas alone but also extends to the rural areas. Most rural communities also have witnessed the presence of a good number of the churches.

The reasons for the proliferation of churches and the multiplication and mushrooming of the ministries in Igboland also stem from the establishment of Bible schools and theological colleges and Seminaries in the land. Many after graduating from the Bible Colleges and Seminaries, claim divine call to establish their separate churches and ministries while others that had minor or major misunderstandings with their leaders and superiors, also go ahead to break away from their parent bodies and form their separatist groups thus littering the whole area with all forms and descriptions of churches and ministries. Some also have taken the establishment of churches and ministries as a form of business and money-making ventures.

Christianity at the Crossroads in Igboland

When an issue or subject matter is said to be at the crossroads, it means that the issue has reached a critical stage of its existence or development. So, could it be rightly said that Christianity is now at a critical stage of its existence or development in Igboland?



Thus far we have examined the various phases that Christianity has passed since its entry into Igboland in the mid- nineteenth century. After the somewhat late arrival not up to two centuries ago, and the initial delays, then the great advance of Christianity into the Land began. That was after the ‘pacification’ of Igboland by the Colonial military forces, which included the destruction of the ‘Long Juju’ of Arochukwu, then the missionaries had to move into the hinterland under the protection of the Colonial forces. The speedy spread of Christianity into the interior parts of Igboland was further hastened both by the scramble for spheres of influence by the various missionary bodies and also through the acceptance of the various incentives offered by the missionary bodies which included the establishment of schools and offering of Western education, establishment of hospitals and maternities for health services among others. The indigenous people readily accepted these incentives along with the Christian gospel message and so Christianity spread further into the interior.

Subsequent developments mentioned earlier also led to the rapid growth and spread of Christianity in Igboland and consequently resulted to the proliferation of Christian Churches in Igboland. This resulted to the establishment of all forms of churches, ministries and prayer houses in all the nooks and crannies in the land, including the conversion of lockup stores, uncompleted buildings, warehouses, hotels, public buildings and schools to worship places, churches and prayer houses. Along with these developments occurred various abuses and even criminalities attributes to some so-called ‘pastors’ and ‘men of God’ who may rather be wolves in sheep’s clothing, and which resulted from the proliferations. The rate of the proliferation of the Christian church in Igboland at a point may have caused some to think that Christianity have totally taken firm roots in Igboland and that the Traditional Religion and culture may finally be collapsing and may finally lead to what one of the African writers termed “The Demise of the African gods,” (Ugwu, C. O. T. 2014).

However, that was not to be, as presently, there is what is known as cultural revival in Igboland. Even at the height of the predominance of Christianity in the land, a huge percentage of Igbo people in particular and Africans in general were described as still having very strong attachment to their traditional religious beliefs and practices in addition to their new found faith. Mitchel (1977, p.81) an American Sociologist who conducted in-depth research on traditional religions of Africans described the scenario of Africans and their new found faiths (ie both Christianity and Islam), pointing out that:

“Since it is “fashionable” in many parts of Africa today to publicly count oneself as a Muslim or Christian there are doubtless many more millions of Africans who are in reality far more involved in the primal religion than in their professed Muslim or Christian faith. Thus the primal religions are still very much alive, at least for the present” (Mitchel, 1977:81).

Ugwu (2014, p.11) referring to the above stated observation, noted that this is a pointer to the overt but apparently covert existence of syncretism among African peoples with a weightier tilt and slant towards African indigenous religions. Ugwu therefore concludes that:

“The persistence of this belief is quite considerable even among the educated. Some seek the assistance of sacred specialists (medicine men) in times of crisis such as during promotion, in search of a life partner etc. In all, Africans are seriously attached to their religion and even in the next century will find it extremely difficult to sever relationship with it in almost every circumstance” (Ugwu, 2014:11).



This observation by Ugwu, of the persistence of Africans including the Igbo people in their traditional beliefs and practices and strong attachment to their traditional religion in addition to their professed Christian beliefs is getting more endemic in the present times. In fact, it is observed that, especially in the rural areas, there is a very strong drift away from Christianity back into traditional religion especially by the men folk including the youths. The researcher observed to his chagrin that most of the men in the area where this research was conducted, that is, Uburuahiara Egwedu in Njaba LGA have stopped going to Church while many of them have now taken the traditional title of ‘dibia,’ that is traditional medicine-men and others answer herbalists. Many now boldly answer ‘traditionalists’ and they also attend their meetings in large numbers and insist that they have renounced their Christian faith.

There is an overall mass revival of various traditional and cultural festivals in Igboland including such cultural performances as the *okonko*, *owu*, *igba mmanwu*, *iri ji*, *iwa akwa*, etc, and many of both the young and old take more interest in them than in the church festivals and activities. In fact many events and incidents happening in Igboland presently, including people’s attitude to the Church generally show that the church is getting to the point of being at the crossroads in Igboland presently. Even in the social media people tend to blame the church for whatever is not going well in the society.

When the corrupt government officials are not performing their duties well and not providing the necessary social amenities, the church is blamed for aiding and abating the corrupt government officials. The Church is castigated as a White man’s religion which aided the Europeans and others in subjugating the Africans and the Blacks generally in previous centuries especially during the Slave Trade. Many now want to turn their backs on the Church and go about their private businesses on Sundays without observing the injunction of keeping the Lord’s Day. Others now see the Church as being too demanding on people in terms of their money and resources without offering much to them in return.

With these and other negative insinuations against the Church in Igboland and of course, the ever-increasing threat of Islamisation by the other militant neighbours, it is obvious that the church in Igboland is obviously at the crossroads in the present times. Corroborating this view, one of the Anglican Bishops in one of the Dioceses in Igboland, Ephraim Ikeakor by name, made a poignant statement in a WhatsApp message accessed on September 21, 2023, in which he pointed out that:

“... the Church is in a very critical and crucial state of its existence at a time like this. The Church even though full of people, and very noisy is dangerously losing her grounds of influence on the world as the light of the world” (Ikeakor, 2023).

In his observation, even though the bishop did not seem to be specifically and particularly referring to the Church in Igboland in his assessment of the Church as being in a critical situation, yet it is obvious that he was making his observation from his point of location which is Igboland. Also, it is being forewarned that if care is not taken, the Church in Igboland and also generally in the Global South might experience or suffer the same or similar fate like the Church in the West where secularism have taken over, leading to massive reduction in church membership and attendance and also subsequently leading to the conversion of church buildings to other uses. As ardent church members and ministers strongly hope and pray that such situations may never arise, yet proactive measures must be taken and put in place to avert such ugly developments.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has dealt with the issue of Christianity at the crossroads in Igboland. It traced in a concise form the issues leading to this state of affairs starting from the somewhat late arrival of Christianity into Igboland not up to two centuries ago, but marvelled at the great progress and advancement the religion achieved in the land since that arrival, to the extent of being widely proliferated in the area under consideration. Now however, there seem to appear some evidence in the horizon that Christianity may be reaching a point of being at the crossroads in Igboland. Such arising issues as cultural revivalism, syncretism, ritualism, revert to traditional religious practices, the rise and drift to new age religions and greater membership in cultism and occultic groups, the desertion of the churches by the youths and adults alike and the spread of secularism among other developments. All these combine to heighten the fear that the church may surely be at the crossroads in Igboland presently or in the nearest future. Coupled with these is the continuing threat of Islam and Islamic militancy which have vowed to dip the Coran into the Atlantic Ocean come what may.

To assuage these fears, the Church/Christian leaders of the various denominations need to rise to the occasion to reassert the relevance and integrity of the church and Christianity in contemporary times in order to regain the confidence of the teeming adherents to avert the looming danger ahead. Such necessary measures to be taken include:

- Re-establishing the social welfare packages and programmes of the church, such as medical and health services, and making the school and educational services of the church more affordable to the people.
- The churches should also establish skills acquisition, training and empowerment programs to equip the teeming youths and get them engaged and productive in the face of alarming unemployment situation in the land.
- The Church should de-emphasize strenuous monetary and financial demands on the members considering prevailing harsh economic realities and endeavour to establish money-yielding and financially viable projects to ensure sustenance in the financially challenging contemporary times.
- The Church should re-invigorate her teaching, visitation and prayer ministry so as to be able to meet the spiritual needs of her members and prevent them from drifting into new age religions and to other cultic, occultic and spiritualist or even traditionalist groups.
- The church ministry and leadership should rid itself of bad eggs, hirelings and wolves in sheep's clothing in order to avert the dangers of deception, suspicion and tarnishing the image of the church, which may lead to the desertion of the church by aggrieved persons.
- The church should work towards some form of unity in line with the prayer of Jesus Christ in John 17:21, "That they all may be one..." (KJV). The church should therefore minimize the division and splintering of churches into innumerable mushroom groups, thus casting doubts on the sincerity of intentions of the church and her leaders.
- In all, the integrity of the church should be maintained, the mission of the church should be sustained and strongly emphasized, and the caring nature and ministry of the church should be evident to all.



The selfless and sacrificial nature of the church as derived and exemplified in the Lord and Saviour of the Church, Jesus Christ should never be in doubt from the life and witness of contemporary bearers of the Christian banner. These will help to lift the church out of the present quagmire and redirect her from the crossroads that are presently starring her on the face in Igboland.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that no conflict of interest exist in this manuscript.

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