

## **RELIGIOUS IMPACTS OF THE FOUR SELECTED CHURCHES ON THE CULTURAL PRACTICES OF THE PEOPLE OF IGA-OKPAYA, BENUE STATE**

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### **Abstract**

*Religion is a very vital and highly well-known factor in the life of many people especially the people of Iga-Okpaya, Benue State. Apart from creating more space for the people of Iga-Okpaya to maintain close relationships and participate actively in religious activities, as well as punitive sanctions in their lives and society. The paper makes a critical assessment of the Impacts, challenges, and prospects of the Four Selected Churches on the traditional beliefs and practices of Iga-Okpaya, Benue State. It also examines the objects of worship, burial rites, marriage price, sacrifices, taking, and calling of the spirit home and culture of Iga-Okpaya before the advent of the Four Selected Churches. This study is motivated by the values and positive impacts and prospects made towards religious beliefs and practices of the people indeed, much attention has not been given to studying this aspect of the people of Iga-Okpaya, Benue State, hence, this study aims to provide an appraisal on the activities and mission of the selected four churches in Iga-Okpaya. The methodology used in this study was historical-comparative and oral interview approaches. This is achieved through structural interviews and existing related literature. Findings from this paper show that the four selected Churches impacted the beliefs and practices of the people so much that Iga-Okpaya people have turned from their old beliefs and practices to accept the new religion which is the Christian Faith. Prospects also are recorded in Iga-Okpaya, Benue State. Many people of Iga-Okpaya gave their lives to the Christian way of life and abandoned their traditional way of life due to the impacts and progress of four selected churches in Iga-Okpaya, Benue State. Later, challenges are overcome due to the acceptance of the Christian Mission by the Chief and title holders of Iga-Okpaya, Benue State. The study concludes that the old way of life gives way to a new way of life which is the Christian Mission by witnessing many converts in Iga-Okpaya, Benue State.*

**Keywords:** Impacts, Challenges, Prospects, beliefs and practices.

## **Introduction**

The paper investigates the Religious impacts, challenges, and prospects of the four selected churches in Iga-Okpaya, Benue State. The four selected churches brought the Christian Mission to Iga-Okpaya in 1928 and spread to the other parts of Iga-Okpaya like Olete, Ologbeche, Oloko, Okpokwu, and Ochekele. Probably with a deceptive motive. Idoko John (15) supports the researcher as he asserts that missionaries came to Iga-Okpaya, Benue State as a deception for acculturation and domination over the traditional beliefs and practices of Iga-Okpaya. They thought that the people were nonentities and did not have knowledge about the supreme God and that their approach to Him in worship was not acceptable. Ada Ugah asserts that when the missionaries came to Iga-Okpaya, they used their eye of prejudice and condemnation to see the traditional religion of the people and passed their vote of no acceptance of the religion of the people.

One of the approaches the missionaries adopted to make their religion accepted by Iga-Okpaya was to convert the chief and title holders which in turn convinced their subjects to accept the Christian Mission. Today, the mission brought by the four selected churches in Iga-Okpaya, Benue State has converted many sons and daughters of Iga-Okpaya. John Idoko remarks that the rapid growth of the Church is because of its expressive theology, miracles, healing, deliverance, and mode of evangelism among other things. However, the churches also believe that the growth is due to the working of the Holy Spirit that inspires them and not human efforts (25). Despite the tremendous impact of the Christian mission in Iga-Okpaya, Benue State, the paper highlighted the challenges and prospects encountered by the missionaries when they arrived at Iga-Okpaya communities and promoted moral decadence through the process of engaging people to search for meaning, value, and aim in life. Impact on religious beliefs and practice of the people of Iga-Okpaya, Benue State.

### **Impacts**

The four selected churches that brought the Christian faith to Iga-Okpaya, Benue State made a great impact on the religion of the people, especially in the areas like culture, sacrifice, ritual, ancestral worship, system and worship, social development, etc case of culture, Omaji Onah defines Culture as the totality of life a people and their differing attitude, beliefs, languages, dress, music and a host of features which comprise a way of life. It is seen as the way of life of a people in a given society and Shared learned behavior in doing everything they think, do, and have as members of the society (26).

it means culture can distinguish a people or society because it includes their language, painting, singing, dancing, dressing, and outlook on the world. Ada Ugah cited Omaji Onah that the culture of a people can be defined as the “Total of the behavior of the people whereby they satisfy their biological, social needs and adapt themselves to their environment (45). Culture is devoid of a single definition because it is dynamic and not static. The cultural values of Iga-Okpaya differ from that of the Western World. When the missionaries arrived at Iga-Okpaya, Benue State, there

was a clash of cultural values. The value system of Iga-Okpaya culture was strange to that of the Christian cultural values. The missionaries came with an alarming degree of racial prejudice and felt superior to the people of Iga-Okpaya and subsequently attempted to superimpose the church values on that of *Iga-Okpaya* as observed by Ada Ameh when interviewed by the researcher at Ologbeche (Ada Ameh – Personal Interview).

Ada Ugah gave the reason why there were conflicts or clashes between the two cultures when he noted that missionaries' had been directed towards drawing converts away from the socio-religious life of the people to what the missionaries thought was the people, civilized and Christian expression of the new faith. However, despite their attacks on the traditional religion and culture of *Iga-Okpaya*, the people are not passive hence, the initial relationship between the two cultures was best described as a conflict or clash (26).

Ekwo Ada opined that despite the cultural conflicts between the white man and the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, the white man got the upper hand through the converts. The Chief, title holders, men, and women were converted to the Christian faith and because of that, they did not see anything good in their culture and religion. The converts did not want to follow their religion again rather they wanted to be like the white man, dressing like them, dancing like them. Everything in the culture was condemned. They even helped the white men to refer to their religion as idol worshiping, pagan, and evil (24).

Today, many sons and daughter of *Iga-Okpaya* deserted their religion and joined the Christian way of life hence, marked a turning point in the cultural and religious setting of the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State. In *Iga-Okpaya*, there are many denominations, schools, and hospitals built by missionaries as a result of the missionaries' activities in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State.

### **Sacrifice and Ritual**

Before the arrival of the Church Mission, sacrifice was a vital and relevant aspect of the religious practice of the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State. The materials used for Sacrifice were goats, chickens, and cows. In the case of a cow, it was used anytime an elderly member or title holder of the village died.

Otache Adanu observes during the oral interview with the researcher that the sacrifice was in two forms:

1. Sacrifice during the festival of land (*Ejeaje*)
2. Sacrifice during the ancestral festival (*Ejealekwu*)

The two sacrifices are done simultaneously in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State. The chief will give a date to perform both sacrifices. He goes further by giving aim and objectives in performing the two sacrifices by saying that the main aim of the two sacrifices is to protect and have a bountiful harvest while the objectives of the *Ejeaje* festival are:

- that no strange raffle will hit anybody during hunting,

- that there will be plenty of animals to be killed during hunting.

The objective of *Ejealekwu* festival:

- to avoid any kind of calamity that will come to the people,
- to bring rainfall so that good harvest will come,
- to stop any external or internal war that will come to the village
- to make their wives to be fruitful
- to pacify the living dead so that they will continue to intercede on their behalf in the land of the spirit (Otache Adanu – Personal Interview).

Both sacrifices are very important and relevant in the life of *Iga-Okpaya*. They do it with joy and happiness. On the day of celebration of these two sacrifices, nobody is allowed to go to the farm to work. It is believed that anybody who goes to do any kind of work on the farm, does something evil or malicious will happen to such person.

Ekwo pointed out during the oral interview that the third day of these festivals is a special day for the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State because the chief will invite all sons, daughters, government officials, and well-wishers to attend the occasion. The chief will come out with the beating of the official drum (*Ukpo*) and the staff of the office (*Okwute*) will be in his hand to bless the whole community. It is also believed that the following day, rain will fall in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State, and its environs which marks the success of the two sacrifices (Ekwo – Personal Interview).

Adole Chinua opines that when the missionaries came to *Iga-Okpaya* and saw these sacrifices, they were worried beyond description and hence began to preach against them. They used the people who were converted to the Christian faith to fight the sacrifices and made them see these festivals as evil and superstitious. That they should disbelieve them (25).

The missionaries made the people believe that the only true sacrifice was done by Jesus and no other sacrifice should be done again. So they should not kill cows, goats, or any other animal as a sacrifice to appease God. Today in *Iga-Okpaya*, one hardly sees people for traditional sacrifice to idols. The missionaries made them see that only through Jesus that God be pleased to protect, guide, and bring rain to the land. That God has the power to stop both external and internal wars that are trying to come to the land. Finally, the people see the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as the final sacrifice God needed.

### **Ancestral Worship**

When the ancestors depart this world, they become spirit beings. It is believed that they watch over the affairs of the living and have their code of conduct to guide the living. They are our fathers and elders in the spirit who represent our interests there. We owe them a kind of recognition and reverence, otherwise, if we neglect them, we will find things difficult as said by Omale Adanu when interviewed by the researcher (Omale Adanu – Personal Interview).

That is how the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State conceive their ancestors and attach much importance to them. The way to enhance cordiality between the living and the living-dead is the pouring of libation. Libation may be offered with food and drink for it is believed that the ancestors lived the same kind of life they lived when they were on earth.

The people revered the ancestors who in turn solicit for their welfare in the spirit world. They set standards of morality and behavior for the living members of the society. Adegahi Ichapi said during the oral interview by the researcher that the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State have a festival (*Ejealekwu*) for their ancestors. This *Ejealekwu* is highly respected by the people of *Iga-Okpaya* because it is believed that ancestors bring peace, prosperity, and unity, and above all, they stand as a defender and provider of any good thing that comes to the community. It is also believed that it brings rain and bountiful harvest to the society. During the festival, goats, chicken, bush meat, and fish are used as offerings to the ancestors. *Iga-Okpaya* does not use cows and sheep as offerings to the ancestors.

Ada Oche when interviewed said when missionaries especially the four selected churches arrived at the community they were not happy with the beliefs and practices of the people therefore, they attacked it by preaching against it. They told them that they needed not to worship ancestors but only God. Jesus has offered Himself for them and killing any animal to live is useless. He further said the people became converted and left their oral way to the new way of life and worship which is the Christian faith. In *Iga-Okpaya* today, only a few people still observe the ancestral festival. To them, the ancestral festival is evil and that ancestors cannot help them in times of difficulties except God the creator. Above all, the majority of the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State turn from ancestral festival (*Ejealekwu*) to embrace Christianity.

### **System and Objects of Worship**

The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics defined worship thus; “the term worship may be treated as comprising all modes of giving expression to the various feelings entertained towards the divine power—feelings is awe, obligation, deprecation, gratitude, hope, and others”. The phrase towards the divine power in the context of the above definition of worship presupposes that there has to be an object of worship.

Leaping the definition of worship means the object of reverence to whom or what do the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State reserve their reverence or worship. The people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State who prefer traditional religion have a supreme being called *Owoicho* to be their ultimate object of worship. The people worship him indirectly through the agency of other gods. These are regarded as intermediaries who serve the purpose of bridging the gap between the great God (*Owoicho*) and his people. The people made extensive use of symbols such as stones, trees, carved images, etc. in their worship (Personal Interview).

John Kingsley remarks that whatever happens in *Iga-Okpaya* land or to anyone, they will consult an oracle because they believe that such comes from *Owoicho*. They have to appeal to God through God to bring solutions. Whatever the oracle or priest of god tells them, they will accept and do it. These other gods can be categorized into minor gods, divinities, deities, and ancestors. They hold them high and listen to them more than any other thing. It means if there is any difficulty in childbirth or naming a child, the people must consult their God through the lesser gods (20).

Chewty opined that the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State do not worship material objects like stones, trees, and carved images but *Owoicho* through those objects. It means the people believe that *Owoicho* is so holy that an ordinary person cannot go to him directly but through the lesser gods who will talk to him on their behalf. He further says that the missionaries took the physical appearance for reality hence the clash or conflict of religion among the missionaries and traditionalists in the society (23).

Adole opines that once a person was converted, the next day the missionary went to his house to destroy his idols and objects of worship, most times burning all the objects that symbolize his former religion including powerful charms and shrines. Sometimes, it was the converts themselves who destroyed their charms and shrines to demonstrate their faith and zeal for the Christian faith (20).

It is noted that many *Iga-Okpaya* people are converted to the Christian Faith through their observation of the defeat of idols, and powerful charms. Therefore, some traditionalists are made to see that there is no power in such fetish things and as a result, many *Iga-Okpaya* people turned to the new religion and abandoned their old religion. Hence, they stopped worshiping God indirectly through the minor deities, rather they offered direct worship to the Christian God in their daily prayers, songs, etc.

Ochokwunu John held the view that in many cases, the shrine areas and the sacred places provided accommodation where Christians erected their church building. He went further by saying that most mission churches were situated in places that were formally dreaded for their religious sanctity and holiness in traditional religious terms, either as sacred grooves or evil forests where the bodies of those who died abominable deaths were buried. This singular action signifies an object of worship in the traditional religion of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State (Personal Interview). By that, the four selected churches have impacted the system and objects of worship in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State.

### **Social Development**

Ada Oche in his remark holds that the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State have been ranked as a place with wicked things that happen. They do not associate with strangers that come to their place. They will fight any stranger that comes to their place before they will welcome them. He continues by saying that because of

such attitude of the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, nobody wants to settle there. They are proud to do so and they live by that (Personal Interview).

The social advantage of the Christian Missionary enterprise in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State cannot be ignored in a study of this nature. The place like the entire Idoma land, is a place where the social cultural, and religious life are all fused so much so that political, social, and economic life before the advent of the Christian Mission are underpinned by a religion that worshiped a pantheon of gods and venerated the ancestors. The concession of this religion or the other, therefore, is merely a matter of exchanging new social ideologies for the old and also assuming a new form of social life in place of the old one.

Amedu opines that missionaries adopted the method of evangelism in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State by the introduction of Western education and this for sure gave the groundwork of social change and impact in *Iga-Okpaya*. That education has been responsible for the massive conversion of the people to Christianity and has also helped a great deal in transforming the old social order into a new social order in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State. Those who were drawn into the school in those days brought less trappings of their indigenous culture, and social order and had not much difficulty in becoming Christians (Personal Interview).

However, the introduction of Western education, the Christian system of managing family life, community, and social orders in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State went a long way to show and reform the socio-religious impact of the four selected churches in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State was successful. Though the success was not total and absolute, the fact remained that the four selected church missions in *Iga-Okpaya* communities were in no way a failure.

### **Divinities and Deities**

The people of Africa conceive the world beyond as one full of spiritual beings. The people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State recognize the existence of such spiritual beings, divinities, and deities. They are regarded as being below the supreme being and are therefore usually regarded as “minor divinities” As Mbiti observed, “the spirits in general belong to the ontological mode of existence between god and mankind” (120).

This applies to the position that divinities and deities occupy in *Iga-Okpaya*, for the people hold a strong belief in God they acknowledge that there are other beings with spiritual intelligence above human beings but below the supreme being. They are gods with smaller ‘g’ and came into existence as a consequence of the supreme being. The people of *Iga-Okpaya*, believe that the divinities and deities are immensely powerful and act directly on man. Man, therefore, has to pay much attention to them. It is because of the immense power and attention paid to them by Africans as well as the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State, that some missionaries that came to *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State owing to lack of understanding and knowledge of these divinities and deities asserted that the Africans have no concept of the supreme being

as noted by Akogwu Akor during the oral interview conducted by the researcher at *Iga-Okpaya* (Personal Interview).

It is also believed that people conceive the deities as being instrumental to blessings that come to humankind. Almost all these conceivable benefits that man enjoys – natural order, good health, increase in offspring, crop fertility, from mystical forces, all these and others to mention but only a few reattributed to them. They inflict misfortune either on individuals or on the community as a whole especially when neglected.

Omaji asserted that divinities possess human beings and they make known their demand and needs either through the direct revelation to the possessed or through the agency of diviners. The people must satisfy their demands and needs or else, a chaotic situation will arise in the community or within the family that refuses to fulfill their demands and needs. They receive sacrifice and libation as a way of paying them homage, showing gratitude for their assistance to man, or soliciting their help in human endeavor and atoning for fault and offenses committed against them. Materials for offering range from certain farm products, native wine, kola nut, bush animals, etc. (46).

The people know too well that the divinities are only intermediaries hence they only call them small gods (*Ocho nenche*). The immense powers they exercise are believed to be given to them by the supreme being (*Owoicho*). All the sacrifices, offerings, and prayers with which they are associated ultimately to the supreme being the final recipient of all sacrifices made to sub-ordinate divinities (Personal Interview). Indeed, they occupy vital positions and play relevant roles in the traditional religion of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State. The people cannot do without as far as worship of the supreme being is concerned in their land.

When the missionaries especially the four selected churches arrived at *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State, they did not see any further reason for the people to approach God through the lesser gods as they conceived such an approach as fetish and idol worship. Indeed, they condemned such an approach. The native converts also consented to the notion of the missionaries to stop approaching the supreme being through divinities and deities.

Aboh narrates that the church mission that came to the community robbed us of our way and method of worshipping God through gods. They believe that God should not be approached through gods. The people do not like it but there is nothing they can do to accept the new religious way of worshipping God. That offering of goats, cock, bush animals, and chickens should be avoided because it possesses inimical to the worship of God. Above all, the Christian faith or new religion does not require the killing of animals of any kind to Almighty God before the offender must be set free. The Son of God, Jesus Christ is the only one that stands as a mediator between God and mankind (Personal Interview).

In *Iga-Okpaya* today, the approach of God (*Owoicho*) through the divinities and deities is no more. The people take to the Christian way of life by worshipping



God through only His Son, Jesus Christ as taught by missionaries who came to *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State.

### **Taking and Calling of the Spirit Home System**

The customs of taking from the farm, *Oje'gbeho*, and calling the dead-spirit home, *Ohigwu* are widely practiced by the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State. The methods of doing them are similar to one another which is why I put them in one head. The approaches to these traditions are different but the spirit behind them is the same. It is normally observed during the ancestral festival where sons and daughters of *Iga-Okpaya* in the diaspora will come home to celebrate the ancestral festival.

Omale says that it is believed that if one refuses to perform them, it will not be well with such a family. He goes on by saying that when one that has a big farm dies, the spirit of such a person should be taken home by the relation, or else such spirit will remain on the farm. Any man who dies of smallpox or an abnormal death, such a person will be buried in the bush and his/her spirit remains in the bush till such spirit is called home during the ancestral festival. He further says that after three days of the ancestral festival, the people will go to such person's farm with a goat and drum, when the goat is killed on his or her farm, they tell his/her spirit to come home so that their farm will yield well. A child will be carried on the shoulder and people will be shooting guns while coming home. When they arrive home, they will be drumming and dancing for some time and finally shoot guns and the activities will come to an end (Personal Interview).

As for the calling of spirits home, Agbalikwu says, the calling of the spirit home is a belief of *the Iga-Okpaya* people that anyone who dies of smallpox, leprosy, or deadly disease will be buried in the bush. On the day they want to call the spirit home, his/her relations will be gathered at the spot where such a person was buried in the bush. They will call the person's name three times. If they do not hear the voice, they will try again three times, his/her spirit will answer the call. The caller will call and say, please come home and we have come to welcome you home. The final answer to the caller will say, I am coming home now. As the people return home from the bush, they assume that his/her spirit follows them home (Personal Interview).

It is also believed that once it is done, the people will be satisfied and happy that their relations have returned from the farm and bush and settle finally with their relation and also join with other spirits in the spirit world.

Ugah asserted that the missionaries that came to *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State converted the people and made them see these traditional practices as idols and fetish. That anybody involved in the practice of this system of traditional way of life is not a Christian. And so the new converts preach against them. He further says that a Christian believes that once a person dies, such a person goes home there is nothing like a bad death. No spirit of a dead person goes to stay on the farm or settle in the bush (24).

It means God owns the spirit and the body will decay, the spirit goes to God. Today, the traditional practice of taking from the farm or taking spirit home from the bush is no more in existence in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State. Even their sons and daughters converted to Christianity vehemently kicked against these two traditional practices till today. In the church, any member that believes and practices this system of traditional way of life will be suspended hence the end of taking and calling spirit home.

### **Challenges Encountered by the Four Selected Churches Rivalry and co-operation among missionaries**

The presence of the four selected churches in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State implies a different understanding of the notion of Christian mission as the struggle to portray the superiority of her doctrines and approach over the other. The relationship between them in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State has not been good towards one another from the onset. They have been castigating one another to the extent that their worshippers are not good to one another.

Paul asserts that the rivalry even generated individual converts, especially school pupils and students at the close of school each day, they used to fight with one another when they crossed paths. They will abuse each other and later go ahead to curse each other's denomination and show how inferior everything is in another denomination. Above all, in many cases, the situation degenerated into open combat and bitter tragedy (30).

The rivalry is so much that the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State especially non-Christians are disappointed at the attitude displayed by the different denominations that brought Christianity to the community. It does not speak well of the Christian mission.

Udo comments on this attitude of castigation when he says that "each mission discredited the works of the other missions. It is not uncommon to hear, even from those who have never been to school and church remark that all schools, except those run by their mission, are of low quality (20).

Another case is the attitude of some of the church leaders toward the work of God in their hands. Some of them are charged with the issue of fornication, adultery, and rapping and are brought before the members for judgment instead of the leaders to judge members' cases, the opposite is the case with some of the church leaders.

Enegho opines that the current research reveals that many church leaders in Nigeria are no longer interested in the Great Commission that was commanded by Jesus Christ in Matthew 28. They are no longer interested in soul-winning, but now they are committing atrocities for the sake of power and position. A carnal man desires to be in charge of an organization even when it is not yet his turn, and he might not have the requirements to be in such a position (108).

Enegho also remarks that the church has become worldly and the world has become churchy. Hardly can you differentiate church worship from mere social

gatherings. The music and the dancing in the church are not different from those of the world. The wears and the styles of the clothes of so many Christians are not different from the unbelievers in the world. The church leaders in Nigeria are non-challenge to all these because they do not want to lose their members for the fear that this might hurt the tithes, donations, and offerings that are being given by those deceived people (110).

Indeed, the church members are being asked by the Apostle not to conform to the things of the world but to be transformed by the Word. But the lifestyle of some of the Christians not only leaders alone are conformed to the things of the world.

Ada Oko supported the idea of many pastors or leaders for turning the way of the Lord by narrating two short stories. One, he says that an evangelist came to *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State, and preached and many people became converted. On the last day of his stay, he said while preaching that, anybody who wants his enemies to die, such person should drop one thousand to five thousand on the altar, he will pray and their enemies will die now. The people came and dropped the money but after his prayer none of the enemies died, people later collected the money back. The second story is that one wants to become a leader by all means and goes to an oracle to assist him and let his rival lose interest in the post. The person contesting with him is the brother of the *juju* man he went to seeking for help. The *juju* man requested that he should mention the name of his enemy and he ended up mentioning the name of the *juju* man's brother. The *juju* man went back and told his brother the intention of his opponent, he was dismayed and reported him to church, telling them all his secrets and how he went all the way to involve a *juju* man in the affair of the church. Are these the kinds of things the Bible said should do to spread God's message?

Therefore, church leaders and members, irrespective of their church denomination, are expected to do everything possible to live above sin to give Christianity the needed credibility in society and also to have the moral justification in being vanguards in the area of instilling virtues not only to their church flock but also to secular leaders from accusation mentioned become light and fact of the world. Church leaders should be conscious of the instruction of Christ to go and witness and to bring more souls to the fold.

### **Poor Leadership**

Religion is seen to be the most effective way to control the mind, behavior, and attitude of the people. It plays a vital role in the lives of several people across the world. A leader of such religion should be righteous and be a light to shine for the people he leads but, sometimes opposite is the case in our day-to-day living.

That is why Mariam observes that hypocrisy has taken over most houses of God. They pretend to be what they are not, some go to the extent of consulting native

doctors, marine spirits for power, and all sorts of unimaginable things for selfish interest (98).

Indeed, some leaders have the ambition to be different to be distinguished from others. He is not concerned with what positively affects people's lives, rather, he is more concerned with creating an image of himself in their minds. This leadership style is not different from what takes place in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State. Some leaders will not plan anything with the elders of the church before carrying out their planned project.

Momo narrates his version of what he sees with some leaders by saying that some leaders have no method to lead and such actions make some members leave the church they lead. Some make decisions alone, even in matters regarding church finance, not taking correction and some speak with disrespect to members (Personal Interview).

Ige Abiodun opines that one should not go for dialogue with a conceived or biased mind. Each party should be open with one another and able to accept the opinion of one another for peace and mutual understanding to take place (20).

When some leaders are called to answer some questions or defend against accusations, they will make up their minds before going to such meetings. If the decision does not go the way they expected, they will leave the meeting with anger and insult the members of the meeting. Such attitudes of some leaders are posing challenges to the growth and development of the church mission in society. Unless the leaders return to the leadership style of Jesus Christ, the challenges will continue.

### **Culture of the People**

The cultural value of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State people differs from the Christian cultural values. Their culture is strange to that of the Christian faith hence the clashes of cultural values between the people of *Iga-Okpaya* and the Christian way of life. The four selected churches that came to *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State with an alarming degree of racial prejudice so felt superior and subsequently attempted to superimpose the Christian culture on that of the indigenous people of *Iga-Okpaya*.

Idowu asserted that "One or two things have happened to man's culture or religion in any given situation. Modification with adaptation or extinction (203). The traditional religion practiced by the people forms the basis of behavior that guides or moderates the conduct of an individual in society. It is enshrined in the minds of individuals and the principles of socialization transpired subsequent ones in a natural sequence. There is no way it will go into extinction.

The arrival of the church mission to *Iga-Okpaya* marked a turning point in the cultural set-up of new ideas that were foreign and strange to the social-cultural set-up. Initially, they saw that the social-religious, cultural, and political life of the people of *Iga-Okpaya* revolved around their religion hence, they attacked carved images, stones, and trees that are only pointing to reality.

That is why Kalu's writing on the situation noted that “missionaries soon discovered that religion, socio-cultural, political and economic structure before the gospel could flourish” (182).

In the same vein, William noted that “this central reason why there were conflicts and challenges between the two cultures – the Christian and the African – when he noted that church mission’s effort has been directed towards drawing converts away from traditional life to what the missionaries thought was the proper, civilized and Christian expression of the new faith” (737). The above was what the missionaries set out to do, hence the reason for the challenges and conflict between the two cultures.

Apart from the general, rather unsubstantiated notion that traditional religion was primitive, pagan, and fetish religion and therefore no longer relevant and important to the modern man, a notion which was prejudicially held by the missionaries, they went ahead to spot definite aspects of the religion that proved unintelligible to them Uga noted that “the above notion was also imparted into the new Christian converts that, the African religion and cultural Kingdom was divided against itself as Africans constituted the bulk of the religious and socio-cultural force disrupting the traditional life of their people”(90).

This is typically true of the four selected churches that came to *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State. Even the sons and daughters of *Iga-Okpaya* whom they converted also attacked the traditional religion and culture of their people. All those missionaries' attitudes and approaches to attack the cultural values and religion of the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State pose challenges and conflicts between the Christian mission and the traditional values of the people.

However, despite the missionary's attack on the cultural values of the people, the traditional religion of *Iga-Okpaya* was not passive, hence, the initial relationship between the two religions was best described as a challenge or conflict.

### **Intra and Inter-Church Disputes**

When the four selected churches (i.e Methodist Church, The Roman Catholic Church, Deeper Life Bible Church, and Cherubim and Seraphim Church) came to *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State in 1924, they spread the good news to the inhabitants and the people accepted with an open mind but within the church and another church, challenges started.

Okaula says, that every church member needs more members and in order to get them, one denomination and another denomination started challenging one another and gave funny names to one another. According to him, The Roman Catholic Church will say to Cherubim and Seraphim that they use native means to heal while Cherubim and Seraphim will say to the Methodist Church a run away from Anglican. Deeper Life Bible Church will say to the Roman Catholic Church that they worship images. These inner clashes or challenges affected the growth and expansion of the gospel in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State (Personal Interview).

Another challenge that the four selected churches in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State encountered was the misuse of church funds or appointment of leaders. The post of leadership and treasurer, some people want to be and if they are not chosen, they will leave the church and form another one.

Ela says that some people impose themselves as leader or treasurer and when they misuse the church fund and are challenged by the members, they will run away from the church (Personal Interview). As long as the inter-church disputes get into the church and get rooted in the church, the challenges in the church will not come to an end. The worldly characteristics like scandals, gossip, hatred, and fatherism in the church, challenges will continue.

From all angles, the four selected churches in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State have a lot of challenges that they hardly overcome. The only way to bring the challenges to an end is to follow the suggestions made by Eche Ode who said that the church should go back to its original doctrine and a standard foundation laid by the owner of the church, Jesus Christ. That the church workers should be serious with their calling and the position they occupy in the church; and as long as this challenge and disputes in the church of God exist, the growth and expansion of the four selected churches will be guaranteed in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State.

### **Prospects of Christian Mission of the Four Selected Churches in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State.**

#### **Homicide**

The most common offense among the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State is murder. If a person commits murder, knowingly or unknowingly, such a person is believed to have defiled the land and is not allowed to stay in *Iga-Okpaya* to be seen by villagers. The case is no small matter and unlike other cases, it will be taken to the council of chiefs and title holders.

Oko remarks that the matter goes to the council for investigation by the members of the council to find out whether it is intentional or not. If it is not, the council will appeal to family concerns to keep their angle low since nobody is above mistake. But if it is intentional, such a person will be killed or banished from the village and the family of the offender will pay heavily to the victim's family whatever amount the council of elders which is headed by the chief agrees (Personal Interview).

Silas asserted that the coming of the four selected churches to the land of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State has modernized the system of punishment of the offenders. Instead of taking the offender to the council of chest and title holders, the offender is taken to the police station and finally to the court of law for more investigation. If found guilty, the court of law has the jurisdiction to give the final punishment and not the council of Chief, elders, and title holders. in punishing the offender, the law court can banish or sentence the offender to death or pay a fine to the family of the

victim. Indeed, the coming of the Church mission has brought prospect to the traditional way of handling the case of murder in Iga-Okpaya, Benue State.

### Marriage Rites

It is not just a private arrangement or relation in which members of the family are not only involved but take an active part. It is believed amongst the people of Iga-Okpaya that it is God's sacred duty that every normal person must perform, failure to it means the diminishing of mankind upon the earth as observed by Ekwo (27).

Odoaba states that the people express the importance of marriage by saying such as these; "the husband is the beauty of a woman, the husband is the crown of a woman, and also a woman is respected only if she is married". Some names that the people give to their children stretch the significance of marriage, *Ochefije* - Child is more than money, *Oyifioda* - Child is more than anything, *Onyawole* - a woman is home (personal interview).

The primary purpose of marriage by the people of Iga-Okpaya is to bear children build a family and extend life. There are rules embodied in the customs of the people of *Iga-Okpaya* that it is not allowed between two persons' parents, closed relations, and also very close to customary that parents have an overriding say in deciding whom their son or daughter will marry. The Choice of duty of parents, as noted by Anebi Salifu, interviewed (Personal Interview).

For the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, the consultation of the diviner says it will not be successful and fruitful, and such marriage will not continue. Apart from the parents, the diviner has the final say in marriage in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State. It has eight different stages of rite before full confirmations. The first rite is to enquire by the parents of the boy from the parents of the girl. The second stage is the consultation of the diviner to discover the minds of the ancestors, spirits, and gods. The third one is the deliberation on the bride price. The fourth is the traditional visit of the girl to the boy's home. The fifth is the return from the traditional visit with gifts home. Sixth is the special feast prepared for the girl's kinsmen by final deliberation of the marriage contract while the last stage which is the eighth is the traditional wedding which involves the girl's family accompanied by consultation of gods and diviner plays a very important role as observed by Omale (Personal Interview).

Chewty asserts that the coming of the four selected churches to *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State marks great progress in almost all their beliefs and practices of the traditional system. Indeed, because of great converts from the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State prospects are recorded in their land (37).

In *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State today, the idea of consulting the spirit, diviner, or gods before one gets husband and wife is no more. Even the parents will not decide on their children's marriage. The people concerned about marriage make decisions together and only inform their parents and pastors who will wed them. The

second stage of the marriage rite has been dropped and they attend a marriage counseling committee or prayer band to seek the take it to God.

### **Health Care**

Adamu notes that in the African context, lack of good health or distance can be classified into three categories, the natural or physical body system or mere injury caused by accident. The supernatural or mystical responsibilities to the ancestors and disharmony with fellow human beings. The combination of treatments of herbs and rituals, confessions, sacrifices, and special restoration of disharmony with God and divinities, spirits, and the entire environment (51).

Indeed, healing in African culture is a cooperative matter. It involves the totality of the person, the family, and the community. It has to do with the State of the total physical, and mental, maintenance of a good relationship and harmony with nature, divinity, spirits, gods, and factor human beings. Therefore, health involves the physical, psychological, spiritual, and environmental as noted by Silas (95).

The people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State have the same views and beliefs which provide solutions to different types of them. For diseases like delay in pregnancy, and stomach pain, the traditionalists consult the diviner or oracles.

Okwori explains that when a newborn Child is frequently sick, a diviner will be consulted to find out the cause of the sickness and he will finally provide a solution to such sickness (Personal Interview).

Now, there are great prospects on the side of health care in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State. The Methodist Church and the Roman Catholic out of the four selected Churches built hospitals, clinics, and maternities where all the sick persons go for treatment instead of going through traditional ways of healing. Since the introduction of Hospitals, Clinics, and Maternity, the rate of death of infants has been reduced.

Okopi says the advent of missionaries to *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State has introduced many methods of healing to the people such as fasting and prayer, drinking holy water, and laying of hands by the man of God. Apart from attending Hospitals, Clinics, and Maternity, the methods of fasting, prayer, drinking holy water, and laying hands on the sick person work. With those methods, many people refuse to attend the traditional ways of healing in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State (Personal Interview).

From the above observation, the four selected churches that came to *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State has great prospects in the land of *Iga-Okpaya* communities.

### **Conclusion**

Indeed, the four selected Churches (i.e Methodist Church, Roman Catholic Church, Deeper Life Bible Church, and Cherubim and Seraphim Church) have had great impacts, challenges, and prospects on the traditional beliefs and practices in *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State since they arrived in 1924 even though some are persisting till today. For instance, title taking, putting on black cloth, and cutting of



widow's hair when her husband dies. Paradoxically, even death is thought by the people of *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State to have external causes - natural and unnatural, the commonest cause believed to be magic, sorcery, witchcraft, and evil spirits as stated by Omale (Personal Interview).

Despite the great impact and prospects of missionaries in *Iga-Okpaya*, some believe in God and also charm powers. Ekwo asserted that they run to native doctors and diviners when confronted with difficulties. The situation is like that of the wheat and tares growing together awaiting the harvest day. However, the fact that the Christian Mission made a significant impact and prospects cannot be denied (26).

In *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State today, there are Hospitals, Clinics, Amenities, and even schools and good roads through and around the community. Finding out through gods, spirits, and diviner before marriage is no more in the place. Jungle justice is no more; rather the people approach the police station and court of law for cases.

Finally, the four selected Churches that came to *Iga-Okpaya*, Benue State have contributed positively to all aspects of social life, traditional beliefs, and practice of the people to the extent that the people say *Malachi yi Iga-Okpaya* - meaning wickedness of *Iga-Okpaya* are now saying *ebo yi Iga-Okpaya* - meaning peace in *Iga-Okpaya*, it is due to the four selected Churches that came to the community. The missionaries did great work that changed the political, economic, religious, and historical set of the people today.

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**Appendix 2: Table 1**  
**Oral Interview**

S/N	NAMES	AGE	PLACE	RELIGION	DATE
1	ADA AMEH	56	OL- OGBECHEIGA	TRADITION- ALIST	10/2/202 3
2	ADA- NUOTACHE	47	OL- OGBECHEIGA	TRADITION- ALIST	10/2/202 3
3	OMALE ADANU	54	OL- OGBECHEIGA	TRADITION- ALIST	16/2/202 3
4	ADA OCHE	38	OL- OGBECHEIGA	CHRISTIAN	2/3/2023
5	PETER OMALE	58	IGA OKPAYA	CHRISTIAN	10/3/202 3
6	OCHOKWUN U JOHN	61	OLOGBECHE	CHRISTIAN	18/3/202 3
7	AKOGWUA- KOR	51	OL- OGBECHEIGA	TRADITION- ALIST	15/3/202 3
8	ABO USMAN	53	OLOGBECHE	TRADITION- ALIST	26/4/202 3
9	OMALE ADA	63	OLETE IGA	TRADITION- ALIST	19/3/202 3
10	AGBALEKW U ABO	62	OLETE IGA	TRADITION- ALIST	28/3/202 3
11	ADA OKO	51	IGA-OKPAYA	CHRISTIAN	30/3/202 3

12	MOMOH ADA	40	<i>OLOGBECHE</i>	TRADITION- ALIST	30/3/202 3
13	ADA OKAULU	45	<i>OLETE IGA</i>	TRADITION- ALIST	24/2/202 3
14	ELA OKOPI	48	<i>OLOGBECHE</i>	CHRISTIAN	25/5/202 3
15	OKO ADOKO	56	<i>OL- OGBECHEIGA</i>	TRADITION- ALIST	15/2/202 3
16	OKWORI ADANU	47	<i>OLOGBECHE</i>	TRADITION- ALIST	22/6/202 3
17	OKOPI ADEGAHI	43	<i>OLETE</i>	TRADITION- ALIST	24/6/202 3
18	OMALE ADOKO	59	<i>OLOGBECHE</i>	CHRISTIAN	2/4/2023