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Globalization, Imperialism and Christianity: The Nigerian Perspective (Pp 75-89)

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Abstract

There appears to be very close link between globalization and imperialism. Both seem to have domineering character. Globalization could be likened to a new wave of imperialism as it could be adjudged the process by which the so called superior powers of the West dominate and influence developing countries like Nigeria. They are expansionist in nature. Christianity has the same expansionist features as globalization and imperialism. The imperialist nature of globalization could be assessed from the expansionist activities of Christianity that equally originates from the West. This paper is an attempt to discuss globalization, imperialism and Christianity as expansionist realities from the Nigerian perspective. Information is gathered from content analyses of the concepts of globalization, imperialism and Christianity and simple observation of what Nigeria experiences with regard to Christianity. It is

observed that much of what Christianity favours are materials from the West. The paper concludes that Christianity more than ever before rides on the crest of globalization to further imperialism. It suggests that Christianity in the twenty-first century should be more inculturated than hanging on the apron strings of the West especially with regard to religious wares.

Introduction

Globalization, according to Enuka (2006), is a continuation of imperialism which drags Christian religion into their expansionist and domineering characters. These expansionist and domineering characters are obvious in Nigeria Socio-political, economic and religious affairs.

Christian religion in Nigeria favours much of the materials from the west. In the catholic church in Nigeria, for instance, Latin language is still regarded as superior language for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist even when most or almost all the catholic churches in the west no longer use Latin language for the celebration of the Eucharist, and even when not up to or 5% of the congregation in the Nigerian church understand the meaning of the Latin language. Styles and material of liturgical wares and sacred materials are still borrowed from the west. This is not among Catholic Church alone but even among other Christian denominations. Priests in mainline churches (Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and even Presbyterian churches) most often use liturgical wares borrowed from the west. Pastors of Pentecostal and African indigenous churches feel more comfortable to dress on suit and some other western dresses.

Musical instruments which Nigerian Christian churches use most often are those that depict western imperialism. The indigenous Nigerian musical instruments seem to have been abandoned, or replaced by the western musical instrument known as “Gospel Band”. There are many other elements of imperialist domination which modern globalization manifest in Christian religion in Nigeria. It has been argued that Christianity more than ever before rides on the crest of globalization to further imperialism.

The problem under our study is the fact that even in the twenty-first century Nigeria; globalization has carried imperial elements which it spreads through Christian religion in Nigeria. Ukwuegbu (2008) argues that globalization jeopardizes the healthy tension between the universal and the particular both in culture and economy. In other words, how does the Nigerian Christianity define herself by not being dominated by the western imperialism and globalization? This study seeks to discover a way for independence and self-

reliance of Nigerian Christian religion. The study is an attempt at providing a background and focus for the Nigerian Christian inculturation theology. We are going to concentrate on Christian churches in Nigeria as we study the effects of imperialism and globalization on these churches. The approaches we are adopting here are historical, sociological and theological approaches. We are going to study the meanings of imperialism, globalization and Christianity in order to understand their expansionist tendencies from Nigerian perspective.

This paper is of the view that imperialism, globalization and Christianity have expansionist character. But imperialism and globalization have the other elements of domination and dependence of nations and cultures in-themselves which they infest on Christianity as their avenue for spreading their policies. Christianity in the twenty-first century Nigeria need to divest herself of the influences of imperialism and globalization in order to remain authentically Nigerian.

Imperialism

Imperialism is from the Latin verb “*impero*” meaning “to rule”, “to give orders to”, “ruling power” or “command”. It is the policy of extending a country’s power and influence in the world through political relations or military force. This is the policy whereby powerful nations extend their powers and influence all over the world. In the past centuries, they did this by acquiring colonies. The principal elements of imperialism are domination and dependence. The powerful nations dominate the weaker ones, and the weaker ones become dependent on the powerful nations. Imperialism according to Offiong (1980) has its basic element as “the formation of local and international monopolies backed by high tariff barriers in the metropolitan societies” (p.58). Rodney (1972) analyzing Marxist stages of societal evolution from hunt-gathering society to communalism, to slavery, then to feudalism, then capitalism and finally socialism, places the origin of denomination and dependence in human society within the stage of slavery. For him, slavery stage was “caused by the extension of domineering elements within the family and by some groups being physically overwhelmed by others” (p. 6).

Fukuyama (1992) locates the origin of domination and dependence in human society in the ontological nature of humans. He describes it as the “desire for recognition”. He cites the German philosopher, F. Hegel, as describing this desire for recognition as what informed the initial drive between two

primordial combatants to seek to make the other recognize their worth by staking their lives in a mortal battle. When the natural fear of death leads one combatant to submit, the relationship of master and slave is born. Fukuyama sees this “desire for recognition” as the law or driving force behind all human history.

Imperialism with its elements of domination and dependence has ancient origin. In that ancient period, imperialism was marked by conquest of poor nations by the superior powers. For instance, Rao (2006) states that ancient Egypt reached the heights of great power and glory (1550 – 1070Bc) by her conquests which include Nubian in the South, Babylonia in east and some parts of Asia. Later, between 1792 – 1750 BC Babylonians conquered the whole of Mesopotamia. The conquest of Ancient Greece led by Alexander the Great at about 300Bc changed the course of world history through its unification of Western and Eastern cultures, thus, developing what is called Greek-Oriental or Hellenistic culture. The major characteristic of these conquests is the spread of mono-culture all over the world. The emergence of the great Roman Empire at about 40BC led to the saying “all roads lead to Rome”. Rome became the nerve centre of all trade and commerce in the Mediterranean World. But even though Rome conquered Greece, Greek culture was dominant even in Rome.

However, the rise of modern imperialism in 19th century came with the acquisition of colonies in Africa and Asia by the West. Colonial imperialism brought both positive and negative effects to Africa and to Nigeria in particular. Nigeria got Western education, religion and civilization. But the adverse effect is pictured in Achebe (1958) when he states that the cord that held Africans together was broken and things fell apart. The new brand of economy that came with imperialism spread hunger and diseases. Christianity and Islam staked their hold on Nigerian culture and tradition stifling the traditional elements of pride and prestige of Nigerians. This affected almost all aspects of Nigerian life: dress, music, language, food, education and most importantly, religion.

Globalization

Dukor (2008) sees globalization as both economic and cultural with side effect of “enculturation of developing nations who are at the receiving ends of western technology and economic aids, and economic aids, and by implication, the western social and cultural values” (p. 16). Globalization according to Schaefer cited in Ekiyor (2007) is the worldwide integration of

government policies, cultures, social movements and financial markets through trade and the exchange of ideas.

It has been described as a modern means of western expansionism or extension of frontiers towards the developing world. According to Enuka (2007), some scholars view globalization as a stage of imperialism. It is an attempt at American and European cultural as well as economic and political hegemony. Globalization is a new form of imperialism which carries with it the character of domination and dependence.

According to Alozi (2005), the deregulation which globalization preaches has spelt down for many developing nations. For instance, the Ghanaian cedes which did exchange for one U.S. dollar to the cedes now exchanges for about four thousand cedes for a U.S. dollar. The Nigerian naira has moved from 0.6 for the dollar to 127 naira for the dollar. Alozi laments that the developing countries simply do not have the expertise, technology and political will to salvage their national currencies.

Ali (2007) states that globalization is the spread of lifestyle and ideas which has reduced the world to a global village and intensities consciousness of man's environment including culture, civilization, knowledge, production and distribution of goods and services. For him, it is an epistemology that owes its origin to Europe and America from where it was extended to other parts of the world. In fact, it is argued that the principles of globalization push the world economy ahead if national boundaries are opened to the world market mechanisms of demand and supply. But this principle, according to Ali, favours only the technologically advanced countries and destroys the economy of the less developed countries. He sees globalization as imperialism in disguise and as a means of marginalization of the less developed economies.

Udoette (2004:24) made a study of the positive and negative sides of globalization and concluded thus:

In fact, far from nurturing the basic human values that make for sane and fulfilled life, globalization is already helping to corrode the same cultural and social values of third world countries. In exchange for these values, the typical Euro-American values, diseases and problems are becoming increasingly globalized in the third world countries. This

means that there is need to inject sanity and give direction to globalization if it is to be positive and useful to all.

In this regard, Wang and Jando (2008:121) see globalization as leading to identity crisis and cultural alienation for the developing nations. Bamgbose (2008) passes the same verdict when he writes: “the fact therefore remains that the western world still keeps on spreading their numerous ideas that will continue to overshadow the entire world”.

Ekiyor (2007:51) states: “Globalization has aided and abetted the movement of the multinational corporations, its products and vices to every corner of the earth”. But Nwanna (2007) argues that in the true sense of globalization, it is an idea of seeing the entire world as one community which is interconnected in several ways such as trade, electronic communication system, arts, culture and religion without having some nations in the centre and others at the periphery. In the same vein, Nnedum and Ezeokana (2008) argue that globalization in-itself is neither good nor evil, but the globalization of Western capitalism as well as its attendant ethnocentrism is the worst form of all versions of post-modern slavery.

Christianity

Christianity is the religion founded by Jesus Christ. Christians are the followers of Christ and they generally believe that Christ is the son of God while some like Catholics believe that Christ is God. Rahner (2004:200) states: “Christianity as the historical and yet universal religion of all nations is only fully itself when it is in actual fact the universal church, i.e., when it has a tangible and historical reality among all nations and civilizations”.

Christianity, like imperialism and globalization has expansionist character, but unlike imperialism and globalization it has no character of domination and dependence, this is because Christianity preaches, as its key element, detachment from the world. Domination and dependence elements that sometimes accompany Christianity are elements of imperialism and globalization which use Christianity as an avenue to spread their policy of domination and dependence.

During the period of ancient imperialism, around the first three centuries AD, Christianity and imperialism were moving on parallel line and even contrary to each other. According to Rao (2006), it was a period when the Roman Empire dominated the world or the Mediterranean world. Roman government was hostile to Christians. The Christians refused to worship the Roman

Emperor as God and disliked almost all Roman policies. When fire broke out in Rome, Emperor Nero blamed the Christians for it. Thousands of Christians were thrown into the arena where they were killed by the hungry lions. But when Roman Empire began to decay, Christianity gathered more adherents and spread to all parts of the Roman Empire and Asia Minor. It was the Edict of Milan (313AD), by Emperor Constantine, which made Christianity a legal religion in Roman Empire and propelled its spread all over the world. It was at this time, according to Bokenkotter (2005), that Christianity acquired many Roman (Pagan) cultural elements which spread with Christianity all over the world as Christian culture. These pagan cultures include some processes of liturgical celebrations, gestures and postures including liturgical wares especially as they exist in the mainline churches. According to Rao, after the fall of Rome, many Romans who became Christians turned to the Church to save them from the danger of foreign invasions. Today, Christianity can be seen under different Churches denominations claiming one-third of the world population as its adherents.

The point we are making here is that Christianity in-itself has no character of bringing nations or cultures to dominate them and make them dependent. But Christianity has in it-self the character of expansionism. Domination and dependence that sometimes emerge from Christianity, especially with regard to cultures, are mechanisms of imperialism and globalization which their protagonists, the west, inject into Christianity as missionary activities go on. Such influence of imperialism which is made manifest in modern globalization are seen in many cultural alienations which spread through Christianity in Nigeria.

Influence of Imperialism and Globalization on Nigeria Christianity

Christianity emerged in Nigeria with the emergence of imperialism which exists today under the guise of globalization. Imperialism which is furthered by globalization spread its idea and policy in Nigeria through Christianity, and even Islam. Imperialist influence which affected Christianity in Nigeria has both positive and negative sides.

Positive influence of imperialism and globalization in Nigeria through the machinery of Christianity include:

1. The spread of the gospel message of Christianity itself. It was the missionary activity which came to Nigeria through the imperial powers that brought Christianity to Nigeria. Urry (2010) estimates that 40% of Nigeria is Christians. Most popular Christianity in

Nigeria includes Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, African Independent Churches like Aladura, Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's witnesses.

2. Western Education remains another positive factor which Christianity aided in Nigeria with the support of imperial powers.
3. Christianity aided the spread of western medicine also known as the orthodox medicine. This was facilitated with western idea that traditional medicine is fetish. However, the emergence of western medicine helped Nigerians to cure some strange ailments and diseases.
4. Christianity aided the abolishing of the killing of twins. Tonukari (2010) argues that it was the influence of Christianity which led to the abolishing of the ancient human sacrifice, the killing of twins, child-kidnapping and the local slave trade.
5. Christianity, with her preaching of equality of all humans before God elevated the dignity of women in Nigerian society. Before the emergence of Christianity, women were looked upon as men's property, but Christianity maintains that all are equal and important before God. It changed Nigerian idea of marriage from polygamy to monogamy, though polygamy still exists.
6. Christianity expounded the idea of morality as universal in the sense that crimes like murder is always evil no matter where it is committed. The traditional practice of seeing one who goes to another village to cut human head and bring it to his community as brave man, was destroyed by Christian principle of universality of morality.

Negative Influences

Sometimes, the popular notion is that Christianity came and destroyed the traditional culture of Nigerian people. But according to Tonukari (2010), "the assumptions that local culture and Christian values were polarized and conflicting and that Christian values dislodged their host counterparts can be maintained only with notable qualifications" (n. p.). Most of the negative influences came as a result of the fact that Christian religion which came from the imperial powers favours most of the materials from the west and therefore is in favour of elements of modern globalization. The Nigerian culture was adjudged as fetish and animistic unlike the western culture which

was looked upon as superior and refined. It was this mentality that guided the missionaries that came to spread Christian message in Nigeria. But Christianity in-itself has no such negative notion; rather she looks at all humans as image and likeness of God. Some of those negative influences include:

1. Loss of indigenous language. There was the assumption that the language of Christianity is a foreign language. In the Catholic Church, for instance, Latin language was known as the official language for liturgy. (Islam imbibed Arabic language). Many Nigerians would not imagine that Christ can speak any Nigerian indigenous language. There was a time when a movie was shown where Jesus was speaking Igbo language. Many who witnessed it degraded the movie as inauthentic arguing that Jesus Christ could not descend so low as to speak Igbo language.

Even today when many countries in Europe and America have abandoned the use of Latin language in liturgical celebration, many Nigerians still regard it as superior and even long that priests should always celebrate in Latin which none of them can understand or interpret.

2. With the influence of imperialism, Christianity discarded Nigerian indigenous names. Foreign names became synonymous with Christians names or baptismal names. It was viewed that names like Emeka or Amaka were too fetish to become baptismal names. Nigeria Christians were told to pick such foreign names like Aloysius, Boniface, Augustine as the only authentic names for Christian baptism. This was so to the extent that today, if one has no foreign name, the impression is that the person is not baptized. Globalizations has made it today that some Nigerians would join two foreign names with hyphen as their name and remove all traces of surname which is indigenous. Example is James-Williams Thomas. Such names are reflections of imperial elements which dominated Christian religion. Nigerians still answer such names even when many in the west do not have such.
3. Before the advent of Christianity, according to Tonukari (2010) traditional deities were powerful in their speedy response to violation of traditional moral code. But with the emergence of Christianity, those deities, according to Ayandele (1973), were

knocked out and they retreated. The Christian God is so meek and merciful that the old idea of speedy response began to fade away. Christianity began to preach confession both in private and to a priest as means of repentance and forgiveness when one violates those moral codes. Since the idea of speedy response became dislodged by the Christian principles, immortality has become the other of the day. Abortion, murder, adultery, fornication, embezzlement, bribery and corruption have increased in today's Nigerian society as they exist in the west. But while the west has strong legal system that controls them, our legal system lacks such strength.

4. Nigerian Christians have imbibed the Western dressing code in liturgical celebrations as synonymous with Christian religion itself. In the Catholic Church and in other mainline churches like Anglican, liturgical wares are made with western-like materials and styled in the western designs. Among the Pentecostals and African Independent churches, liturgical ware sometimes differ from that of the mainline churches but are still made and styled with the western materials and design. Pastors in those churches have the assumption that suit are liturgical wares for pastors. For a religious leader to put on Nigerian traditional dress while performing liturgical function in Christian churches would be viewed by many as madness and fetish. The same is also applicable to the other materials like vessels used in Christian churches for liturgical celebrations. Priests and pastors would favour gold or silver materials than local made vessels (oku) for liturgical celebrations even when they serve the same purpose. One priest told his parishioners that if a ciborium used for consecration is not gold then Christ is not in it.
5. Traditional medicine suffered the same fate with the traditional culture in the face of Christian religion. Traditional medicine was regarded as fetish in order that the imperial power through Christianity will bring in their own medicine. But it was only time which proved that western medicine is not sufficient to cure all traditional ailments and diseases.
6. Traditional musical instrument became discarded especially in modern Christianity with the wave of Pentecostalism. Globalization has even made it that the western type of musical instrument known

as *Gospel Band* has become the order of the day in many Christian churches in Nigeria today. The tradition wooden and metal gongs, for instance, seem to be fading away.

Prospects

According to Kalu (1986) the Nigerian cultures (or deities) only retreated, they were never “knocked out”. Despite the expansionist idea of imperialism, globalization and Christianity, and despite the domineering influence of imperialism and globalization, many traditional cultures of Nigerian society are still retained and some are today being reawakened by the consciousness of inculturation. This is to say that the Christian religion in Nigeria has some high prospects with regard to cultural revival which will help the society to extricate herself from the shackles of imperialism and globalization, and build authentic Nigerian Christianity. Some of the prospects are:

1. The recovery of the use of vernacular in Christian liturgical celebrations and in liturgical books and hymns. Today, many Christian churches can preach and celebrate the word of God in vernacular or the language of the people. Bible can now be read in indigenous languages other than English and Latin.
2. Traditional names can today be used as baptismal names in Christian baptism. Traditional names can now be accepted with respect without being branded as fetish and paganish. Okafor and Nwakaego which are Nigerian indigenous names, for instance, can today be used as baptismal names.
3. Traditional medicine has been recognized today as valuable in curing some ailments. Though some improvements are needed in traditional medicine, but the fact is that it has been recognized as valuable and not being branded as fetish and paganish.
4. A very bold step has been taken by African Christian theologians who in recent times have continued to explore avenues for proper inculturation of Christian gospel message into African or Nigerian cultures. Oguejiofor (1996) states that the decisive factor for the emergence of this theology is the desire of the African church to respond to the fundamental question: “who do you say that I am?” (Matt. 16:15). He recommends the discipline of Philosophy as *sine qua non* for the building of such response. Stinton (2004) sees the venture of African Christian theology as African Christians’

response to Jesus in ways that are meaningful and relevant to their own mentality and experience.

African Christian Theology is an exercise in African inculturation which, according to Madu (2004), is aimed at “traditionalizing the kernel of the Christian Kerygma” (p. 66). The “kernel” or “gem” of Christianity is what is necessary to be incarnated in Nigerian or African culture. The kernel of Christianity is the gospel message of salvation in Christ and the universality of human race created in the image and likeness of God. The other paraphernalia of Christianity like wares, language, vessels and the like are not kernel of Christianity and are therefore liable to be adapted to a particular cultural value. Sometimes such paraphernalia are meant for uniformity and order in the church. But where there is the danger of loss of identity or loss of root which is so vital to some cultures, the question of uniformity could be re-considered. The belief by some Nigerian scholars is that Christianity still rides on the crest of globalization to further imperialism. To this effect, inculturation especially of religious wares is paramount.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The central argument of this paper is that imperialism which exists today under the guise of globalization most often hide under the cloak of Christian religion to perpetrate identity crisis among Nigerians in particular and Africans in general. Imperialism, globalization and Christianity in-themselves have the character of expansionism. But whereas Christianity in-itself does not possess elements of domination and dependence, such elements are the distinguishing marks of imperialism and globalization. This is true from the fact that imperialism and globalization are western policies which are aimed at the west dominating the world and making many poor nations to be dependent on them.

In the ancient times imperialism and Christianity operated on parallel lines, but with the Edict of Milan (313AD) Christianity began to ride on the crest of imperialism since the imperial power used it to spread her policy. This phenomenon became worse with the emergence of colonialism in the 19th century. Today imperialism seems to have faded away, but it has resurrected under the guise of globalization, and Christianity has just changed uniform to ware the cloak of globalization. Nwaigbo (2008) has stated that globalization threatens the continuity and authenticity of local cultures.

The danger in all these is that both imperialism and globalization are distorting and disguising the kernel of Christianity. There is the need for

Christianity in non-western cultures like Nigeria to sieve the chaff from the kernel and to incarnate the kernel of Christianity in their cultures. This will help Nigerians to recover from identity crisis and regain their worth.

Recommendations

There is the need to divest Christianity in Nigeria and Africa in general of all elements of imperialism and globalization which they manifest in their characters of domination and dependence. Though Christianity has expansionist character like imperialism and globalization, but it is expansionism with no element of domination and dependence. Nwaigbo (2008) writes: "The church in contemporary Africa stands as a sign of hope to the humanity of Africa and helps Africa to see the Christian faith, belief, symbols, rituals and worship in the new light of incarnation of the second person of inculturation"(p. 39). Hence, there is the need for Nigerian Christians to look at the kernel of Christianity and try to see how it can fit into the Nigerian meaning and experience. Authentic Nigerian values need to be inculturated into Christian religion. These values include:

1. Traditional wares need to be inculturated in order to give Nigerian Christians sense of belonging and to overcome identity crisis.
2. Traditional vessels need to be inculturated in Christian liturgical celebrations.
3. There is the need to promote indigenous languages by their constant use in liturgical celebration, hymns and other Christian services. Traditional names need to replace foreign names as Christian names.
4. Traditional culture need to be studied in order to know which are valuable for inculturation and which ones are not.

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