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The Role of Indigenous Churches in the Development and Growth of Christianity in Africa: The Contribution of Assemblies of God, Nigeria

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Abstract:

Mission's Indigenization remains the best option for the development and growth of Christianity in Africa. A paradigm shift is currently taking place in the development and growth of Christianity in Africa today. A study of Assemblies of God, Nigeria's eighty-year missionary work in Nigeria (1934-2014) reveals enormous contributions by an indigenous church to the development and growth of Christianity in Africa. The study established from this indigenous Church denomination in Africa that using indigenous method of church planting and development, training of pastors and church project financing approach changes rapidly the development and growth of Christianity. The 2013 statistical report of the Assemblies of God, Nigeria shows the Church in Nigeria has 105 Districts, 14,367 local churches, 15,061 active pastors, 4,837,035 adherents, 506 primary schools, 75 secondary schools, 11 Theological Schools, 1 University, and 10 hospitals/clinics and 24 Home and 8 Foreign Missionary fields in Africa and Europe. Pastors of the church are ministering to churches they planted within and outside Africa. This research work adopts a combination of descriptive/historical/ phenomenological approach. The researcher visited Assemblies of God churches in different zones of Nigeria, interviewed people who gave him different publications of the Church in their zones. Top leaders of local Churches and Districts of the zones were interviewed. The findings show Assemblies of God, Nigeria's indigenization approach is unique and has greatly enhanced church evangelism and growth in Africa. Missions' indigenization of Assemblies of God, Nigeria, is recommended to all Churches in Africa and can also apply to any church in other continents of the world.

Keywords: Indigenous churches, foreign mission churches, denomination, evangelization, missionary mandate, growth and development of Christianity, missionary outreaches

1. Introduction

Today we are seeing dramatic change in the growth and development of Christianity in Africa. Missionary activity is changing in Africa, Larry D. Pate believed; spiritual power is shifting toward the non-Western world, especially in the missionary movement arising among the churches in Africa (229). There has been a dramatic growth in missionary activities among indigenous African pastors, C. Peter Wagner, estimated growth of African missionaries from 1980 to 1990 to be 19,097, the rate of growth of missionary activities in Africa especially among the indigenous African churches promises to redraw the picture of the global missionary movement (229-232).

Africans like Matthew O. Ezeigbo, George Alioha, Gabriel O. Oyakhilome, EhurieWogu, Clifford O. Onuoha, the Asoyes, who pioneered with more than ten thousand indigenous Assemblies of God Church pastors, missionaries and evangelists and other tens of thousands of pastors and missionaries from other indigenous African churches like the Deeper Life Bible Church, the Living Faith World Outreach (Winners' Chapel), the Redeemed Christian Church of God, etc. ministering in Nigeria and other parts of the world as pioneer pastors, Seminary teachers, missionaries, and itinerant evangelists are making enormous contributing to the growth and development of Christianity in Africa.

The study is limited to principles and methods adopted by this denomination in evangelization and missionary outreaches that led to outstanding contribution in the growth and development of Christianity in Africa. It provides bases for improving the performance of indigenous and other foreign mission churches in the growth and development of Christianity in Africa. Brief synopses of the history of Christianity in Africa, West Africa and Nigeria will be considered. It highlights early Christian missionary effort in Africa, the limitations and hindrances to this effort, mission indigenization principles and methods that encouraged growth and development of Christianity in Africa.

2. A Synopsis of History of Christianity

The Church was inaugurated in the New Testament on the Day of Pentecost (Acts of the Apostles 2:1-11). Paul Ajah describes the day of Pentecost as the day doors of world evangelization and missionary activities were thrown open for people to come to Jesus Christ by faith through repentance to receive salvation (18 -19). On that day, there was a clear witnessing in Jerusalem calling people to repentance. The church at this point was ready to reach out beyond Jerusalem in fulfilment of the Lord's instruction in Acts of the Apostles (1:8). The Church needed to expand from Jerusalem to Judea and

Samaria and to the utmost parts of the earth. It is believed among church historians that the church made remarkable achievement in the evangelization of the known world probably many of the Jewish pilgrims who were in Jerusalem and witnessed the Pentecost event may have listened and believed the message of the Gospel preached by Peter and possibly took this message of salvation in Jesus' name to their native lands.

Christianity in Africa has a long history. Its roots can be traced to the very time of the apostles. African countries, Egypt and Libya, were part of the nations represented at the inaugural launching of the church. Africa, as Buar noted, has always been involved in the programme of God for worldwide evangelism and missionary service. Not only that these nations were there during the inaugural launching of the church, believers took the gospel to all the corners of the earth. Philip was the first missionary evangelist that ministered to an African. Luke made a graphic description of the encounter in Acts of the Apostles (8:26-35).

The passage shows that the gospel came to Africa by divine design; God through the angel directed Philip to be involved in African missions. It was clearly shown that Africa was very willing to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ for it was not Philip that gave the eunuch the Bible, what Philip gave him was the hermeneutical key to scriptural understanding of the salvation in Jesus Christ. Africa from the beginning of Christian history is not calling foreign missionaries to preach the gospel to her as foreigner to the reality of the gospel truth, but for an explanation of the gospel message in the context of African cultural and social environment. Early Christian history revealed this to be the problem of African Christianity which has recently begun to be addressed hence the growth of Christianity in Africa especially Nigeria (Onwuka. 122-124)

The church has been flourishing on the northern shore of African continent for six hundred years before Islam was born. According to John Baur, Egypt and North Africa were the pillars of the universal church. When Carthage, the last Christian stronghold in northern Africa fell to the Arab assault 697, there arose in the same year King Mecurios in Nubia who built up a Christian kingdom that reached from Aswan to the Blue Nile. When that kingdom succumbed to Turkish-Islamic attacks in 1270, there was a rebirth of the nine-hundred-year-old Ethiopian Church (17-18). John Baur further observed that this flourishing Christian culture on the mountains of Ethiopia, similar to that of medieval Europe, until much of it was destroyed by an Islamic Jihad which began in 1527. Afonso, King of the Kongo, before this time, was already carrying the touch of the Christian faith and was reputed to be the first Christian ruler south of the Sahara.

Portuguese explorers were the first Christians to bear witness to Christ in western Africa. Portuguese main aim was to spread Roman Catholic brand of Christianity along West African coast but the importance they attached to commerce as a source of support to missionary work made it difficult for them to separate the two. Missionary activities were jointly sponsored by the church and the state in the newly discovered lands. This gave the state opportunity to assert undue influence on ecclesiastical appointments and revenues of the missionary field. Portugal was the first to send missionaries to West Africa through the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1701. Benin, Warri, and Elmina in West Africa, the Island of Sao Tome and Angola outside West Africa were the first areas that received Portuguese missionaries. Portugal maintained a nationalistic missionary and trade monopoly of West Africa in line with her political and economic interest. Conversion, in this context, implies adoption of a particular pattern of daily life without considering the worldview of Africans (Kwasi.1-3).

The first Europeans arrived on the coast of West Africa at the end of the 15th cent., but for the most part they were involved in the slave trade rather than in evangelization. In the 19th cent., there was sustained missionary activity by Churches of every denomination. Anglicans, Methodists, and Baptists were active in Sierra Leone and, with Presbyterians, in Nigeria, while Methodists also set up missions in Ghana, Gambia, and Dahomey. The Roman Catholic Church enjoyed a favoured position in the Congo, and Roman Catholic missions were established in almost every part of West Africa. In French territory, Evangelicals were active.

Apart from Egypt and the Mediterranean coast, Christianity had by the 4th century penetrated to Nubia and Ethiopia, but it did not spread further south until the era of Portuguese expansion in the late 15th cent. In the 16th and 17th centuries, it penetrated into the Congo kingdom and took root in the Portuguese colony of Angola, but at the end of the 18th century, Christianity was restricted to a few coastal areas. A new era began with the settlements of Black Christians from Nova Scotia in Sierra Leone in 1787 and the missionary advance inland from Cape Town beginning with the arrival there of J. T. van der Kemp in 1799. New missionary societies (the London Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society, the Holy Ghost Fathers, the White Fathers, etc.) began work in many parts of Africa, though, apart from the extreme south and the Horn, the interior was hardly touched before the last quarter of the 19th century. The missions founded in 1875 on Lake Malawi and in 1877 in Uganda mark a new beginning. In the next 30 years, with the political 'Scramble for Africa', missions were established almost everywhere and Churches grew (Onwuka. 3-4)

The influence of Europe on West Africa during the 18th century was twofold. On the one hand, Africans were captured and sold into slavery from the 500,000 slaves transported to America to the four million sent to the Portuguese colony of Brazil, black Africans were treated as sub-human. On the other hand, the evangelistic outreach to local Africans during this same period showed a concern for the Great Commission. Unfortunately, missionary attitudes during this and later periods demonstrate that Europeans had little expectation that Africans would be able to wrestle with theological concepts or lead their own people and churches. Racial prejudice was rampant, as borne out in mission texts from even the 20th century. Shortly after William Carey began his mission work in 1792, Protestant missionaries arrived in Sierra Leone in 1795. Due to their considerable health issues, the mission closed in 1797. Work was re-established there in 1804 by German missionaries. From Sierra Leone, missions to other West African countries were later initiated. The establishment of Liberia for freed American slaves brought about evangelistic work in 1822. The Gold Coast had its first Protestant mission established by the Moravians in 1828. Wesleyan Methodists began Nigerian missions in 1842, in part due to the effectiveness of their missions in Sierra Leone. The North German Mission began evangelistic outreach in Togoland (now

simply Togo) in 1847, and before 1860 Dahomey (Benin) received mission workers. Africa's western most coastal nation, Senegal, first received Protestant missionaries in 1862; Catholic missions in the 19th century.

Black missionaries and indigenous workers also became involved in Christian ministry. Freed slaves took the message of salvation through Christ to Ghana and Liberia. Negro missionaries from the West Indies sought to introduce the gospel in less foreign forms. These missionaries were often no more successful than their European counterparts. More significant was the rise of indigenous leaders and teachers among the West Africans themselves. An early example of a remarkable African was Philip Quaque, a young man from the Gold Coast sent by missionary Thomas Thompson to England for education. Quaque later became the first West African to be ordained by the Church of England in 1765. He returned home and spent more than 50 years serving his own people for Christ. At the same time, the establishment of the formalized Christian education for indigenous Africans was one of the greatest advancements in the 19th century. The Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone was founded in 1827, and Samuel Ajayi Crowder was the first student enrolled. He provided wisdom and leadership in later years as an African bishop of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in the region along the Niger River. Because of Crowder's insistence, the Fourah Bay College later became an institution of higher learning in 1875. Crowder's rise to the position of bishop was, in part, due to the vision of Henry Venn. As leader of the CMS in 1841, Venn proposed that missionaries should have an end goal of establishing churches, thus working themselves out of a job – what he called the “euthanasia of mission.” His vision was for local missions to become indigenous churches that were self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing. By his instigation, the “native church pastorate” was begun in 1870. Entrenched European missionaries questioned both the practical and biblical grounds for such a proposal that would make missionaries irrelevant. They also undermined the ministries of qualified Africans, which made an indelible mark on missionary-national leadership into the 20th century. Because of the intertwining of missionary work and a culture of imperialism, many indigenous peoples held Christian faith in suspicion or contempt. Protestant missionaries found only moderate success in reaching West Africa.

From the 1890s African Christians in some countries began to reject missionary control and some aspects of missionary teaching and to form independent Churches. The mainstream churches mostly moved from White missionary to indigenous Black leadership about the time of the political independence of the countries concerned. Since then (c.1960) the growth of all the Churches has been prodigious.

3. Indigenization Policies of 19th Century Missionary Model

The 19th century missionary movement followed what can generally be described as a society model that is, missionary organizations consisting of volunteers. This missionary model adopted different principles of indigenization policies. We will examine these policies and their direct impact on indigenous African Christian involvement in evangelization and missions.

3.1. William Carey's Indigenization Policy

Carey's significance in mission history is related to his involvement in the historic foundation of the Baptist Missionary Society. Turaki summarized Carey's five basic principles of mission work to include: Preach the gospel as far widespread as possible and by every possible method make the Bible available in the vernacular of the people; plant a church within the culture; study the cultural background of the people (acculturation and contextualization of the message) and training of indigenous church leaders (481-482).

These missionary principles of indigenization influenced and or were adopted by other missionary societies of this period. This protestant archetype, Samuel M. Onwuka said, became the model for mission and was quickly followed by the formation of many Missionary Societies (64-65). Rather than depending on the authority of the institutional church and its official ministers, individual Christians feel obliged to the Great Commission mandate to band themselves together for a common cause for the advancement of the gospel of Christ. Another important characteristic of this mission model was that, at least in the beginning, the missionary societies were not denominationally exclusive or confessional.

3.2. Henry Venn/Rufus Anderson Principles of Indigenization

Henry Venn was the secretary of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). He worked in Nigeria 1841-1872. Like Rufus Anderson, he provided the theology of mission that states that the objective of mission is the calling into existence of self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating churches, and that the “euthanasia” of a mission takes place when the missionary is able to resign all pastoral work into the hands of the indigenous ministry and congregation.

Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson's theory of indigenization has deep respect and trust for indigenous peoples. They represented the shifting role of mission and church in exerting Christian influence on public policy. Henry Venn was part of the movement that worked through the British government to pass legislation to abolish the slave trade. Henry Venn also stressed the importance of education for political, social and economic development, and tried to initiate alternative economic endeavours that would undermine the slavery business (Turaki. 482-483).

3.3. Samuel a Jayi Crowder's Principle of indigenization

He is a remarkable representative of non-Western peoples in mission and is considered the foremost church leader in nineteenth century Africa. Crowder was a Nigerian slave rescued from a Portuguese slave ship by a British Squadron and brought to freedom in Sierra Leone. Samuel Onwuka quoting Roger P. Schroeder said, a Clapham philanthropist purchased land in Sierra Leone as a Province of freedom, and housed eleven hundred African people who had become Christians as plantation slaves, as soldiers in the British army, or later as farmers in Nova Scotia. Crowder and

other freed slaves came to this Christian community which eventually supplied African missionaries to the rest of West Africa.

Crowder himself went as a missionary to the Yoruba land and later led an all- African group of missionaries to the Niger delta; where he eventually presided as bishop. LarninSanneh saw Crowder as the champion for the "Africanization" of Christianity through both his acknowledgment of the richness of African culture and his role in the antislavery movement in 1841 (66-67).

3.4. David Livingstone Principles of Indigenization

He was a famous explorer and "opened up" the interior of Africa which he described as the prerequisite for the evangelization of African people. David Livingstone developed the principle of the "Bible and the plough" or commerce and Christianity. He was quoted as saying "We ought to encourage the Africans to cultivate for market as the most effectual means next to the gospel for their elevation. I want to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity" (Turaki, 482.).

David Livingstone added to the concept of the "bible and the plough" "education and medicine." This concept "commerce and Christianity" led to the founding of John Holt Company and the United Trading Company (UTC) which are well known in Nigeria today for their commercial activities with no missionary association.

David Livingstone believed the trilogy of Christianity, commerce and civilization would pave the way for a prosperous, free and nonviolent life for Africans. Livingstone saw the importance of Africans taking on the responsibility of evangelization.

3.5. Roland Allan Principle of Indigenization

He talked about the dynamic function of the Holy Spirit in the national church; Rollan Allan shares the same conviction with Apostle Paul. He stated that, Paul withheld no gift from them which might enable them to dispense with his presence; he gave as a right to the spirit- bearing body the power which duly belongs to a spirit-bearing body (Turaki.483).

These indigenous principles brought a turnaround in the growth and development of Christianity in Africa. From the report of the centennial global trend of Christianity and advance of the gospel from the Edinburg Conference of 1910 to the Lausanne Conference of 2010 in Cape Town, South Africa, Uchechukwu Ama says global Christianity grew from 612 million in 1910 to 2.3 billion in 2010.

There are, what Ama called, mega trends in global harvest that the Church is faced with. These trends include the shifting of the centre of gravity of missionary activities and structures from the Western to Non-Western world which, he said, explains why the last Lausanne Conference was hosted in Africa, a new concept of "unreached people groups" that prompted the Church to redirect its human, material and capital resources in the critical fields. The global harvest in Africa began from the historic past and it is intrinsically connected with the Holy Spirit (35, 36).

4. Contribution of Indigenous African to the Growth and Development of Christianity

The study selected Assemblies of God church which had its origin in Nigeria before foreign affiliation. The Church of Jesus Christ transmuted into Assemblies of God church, Nigeria as a result of their affiliation with the Assemblies of God, U.S.A. in early 19th century. The study chooses this church as a representative sample of other indigenous churches that affiliated with foreign church or missions' organisation. Indigenous church, in the context of this study, is the church that fits into Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson's description of an indigenous church as stated earlier. They maintained that the "objective of mission is the calling into existence of self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating churches, and that the "euthanasia" of a mission takes place when the missionary is able to resign all pastoral work into the hands of the indigenous ministry and congregation".

The Assemblies of God, Nigeria is selected as an indigenous Church because their affiliation with the Assemblies of God, USA has not reduced their autonomy. The Nigerian Assemblies of God remains self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. This National Church carries her individual missions to the entire world as the Holy Spirit leads her.

5. Assemblies of God, Nigeria in Historical Perspective

The Church of Jesus Christ in Nigeria that started in Old Umuahia, Abia State between the years 1931-1934 metamorphosed to Assemblies of God Mission, Nigeria after affiliating with the Assemblies of God, USA. This was the foremost indigenous Pentecostal group in Nigeria. The Church of Jesus Christ has no human founder rather it is made up of people with the same conviction and experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit as described in the Acts of the Apostles 2:4.

The Assemblies of God Church, as a Pentecostal movement, does not owe her origin to any outstanding personality or religious leader but to the spontaneous revival appearing in various parts of the world (Akpan, 2-9). Akpan meant in the above statement that real Pentecostal churches do not have human founders but Holy Spirit raises spokesman like Peter on the Day of Pentecost to explain the meaning of the event. Even outstanding leaders of Pentecostal movements are themselves product of the movement. Believers express such radical faith in the Word of God that they attract serious persecution to themselves from both relations and other compromising Christians who describe them as religious extremists.

The teachings of the Assemblies of God Mission oppose all forms of corruption, wickedness, discrimination, and all cultural practices that are oppose to the teaching of God's Word. Many of their members and ministers do not live in affluence but a life of contentment and sacrifice. They see themselves as pilgrims on earth with the ultimate expectation of

the eminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ whom they believe will take them to heaven to spend eternity there. They see people without Christ as lost and see themselves as God's messengers sent to rescue the perishing souls. Preaching the Gospel of Christ and winning souls for the kingdom of God are treated as the supreme assignment by both members and ministers (Assemblies of God. 9-17).

Rev. Everest L. Philips, a missionary, was the first Superintendent and Rev. George Alioha, an indigenous minister, was the first Assistant Superintendent. In March, 1961, Assemblies of God Mission had her first indigenous Superintendent, Rev. Matthew O. Ezeigbo. The Nigerian Assemblies of God Mission became autonomous in 1964 and was upgraded to General Council, Assemblies of God, Nigeria. The election conducted in that Council Meeting brought Rev. M.O. Ezeigbo as the first General Superintendent of Assemblies of God, Nigeria in 1964, Rev. G.O. Oyakhilome, Assistant General Superintendent, Rev. W.U. Woko, General Secretary, and Rev. G.O. Akwarandu General Treasurer.

The civil war divided the Church into Biafra and Nigeria sides, Rev. G.O. Oyakhilome the Assistant General Superintendent began to manage the Church in Nigeria as General Superintendent. Rev. G.O. Oyakhilome was elected General Superintendent in March, 1971 and became the Second General Superintendent of Assemblies of God, Nigeria, until his retirement 1982.

Rev. Matthew O. Ezeigbo was re-elected General Superintendent after the retirement of Rev. G.O. Oyakhilome. When Rev. Ezeigbo retired in 1988, Rev. Charles O. Osueke was elected General Superintendent and he led the church for twenty two and half years 1988-2010. After his retirement, Rev. Paul Emeka was elected General Superintendent but Rev. Osueke who never wanted to retire after attaining the mandatory seventy year retirement age has led the Church into a perennial crisis against the constitutional provision of the church.

The Assemblies of God method of church administration, as a Pentecostal church, is a representative theocracy. In this type of church administration, the Holy Spirit appoints leaders to the church through Holy Spirit filled ordained ministers and church delegates representing the congregation. The nominations and elections were through secret ballots. Every ordained minister is a candidate for any office in the church. Nobody campaigns or canvasses for vote the Holy Spirit reveals people's gifts through the gift of grace manifested in the ministry of the person. If one campaigns or canvasses for votes the election of the person is annul by the council. The Holy Spirit is given the place to handle every aspect of the church leadership. The missionaries treated the church both as an organism (Body of Christ) and as an organization (Fellowship of the believers)

The General Council of Assemblies of God consists of all members and ministers and when in session is the highest decision making organ of the church. From among them representatives are chosen and delegated to elect leaders for a term of office. The following bodies are elected to handle the administration of the church at different levels, the General Committee, the Executive Committee, the Board of Administration, District Presbytery, Counselling Committee, the Sectional Committee, and the local Church Committee. The General Council of Assemblies of God in session appoints a constitutional committee and ratifies every article in the constitution. The constitution guides the leadership of the church at all levels of the administration of the church.

The church, Assemblies of God, Nigeria, *at all levels of leadership gives priority place to gospel evangelisation and church planting. Fulfilling the "Great Commission Mandate" (Matt. 28:18, Mark 16:15-20) is the most important task of the church. To achieve grassroots evangelisation, the leadership of the church at all levels created departments for effective involvement of all believers in evangelisation, missionary work and Christian development.*

The following are the evangelistic arms of the General Council of Assemblies of God, Nigeria. The Sunday school and Children Education provide Christian education and development for all believers on Sundays. The church has over 15,000 Sunday schools and more than 400, 000 indigenous lay people and pastors who have been trained to handle these schools. Today, more than 100 Church denominations in Nigeria have adopted the Assemblies of God Sunday school model in their denominations and Churches. 30 African countries are using this Sunday school model as their missions and evangelism strategy (Aja and Oti. 3). Men's Ministries Department consists of born-again indigenous married African men who come together to promote and to advance the kingdom of God by mobilizing men to find their place in Church ministries while the Royal Rangers is the Para-military arm created to evangelize boys and girls that have military inclination for Christ (Obi. 1-5). Women's and Girls' Ministries Department consists of indigenous born again mature Christian women. The ministry handles new female converts – women and girls – facing severe persecutions as a result of their faith in Jesus Christ. The primary goal of the department is to mobilize indigenous women and young girls in the church towards church planting, pastors' care, and care for indigent and less privilege people in the church and society (Assemblies of God. 61-66). Teens Solution Ministries Department consists of Teenage Youths (from 13 to 19 years of age) created to curb the deteriorating moral and constant retrogressive decadence in our society, church, and homes by providing solution to their spiritual, moral, and social needs (Assemblies of God. 19-22). Christ's Ambassadors consist of all vibrant indigenous Assemblies of God Christians (young and old) who see themselves as Christ's Ambassadors on earth obligated to reconcile people with God through evangelism (2Corinthians 5:18-20). Youths' Ministries Department consists of unmarried young boys and girls between the ages of 19 to 35 years. The Department inspires and equips the youth scripturally to face the challenges of the contemporary world by providing an atmosphere of healthy interaction amongst the young people where they can naturally and intelligently express themselves thus enhancing their spiritual, social and academic well-being.

Missions Department is an agency of the Assemblies of God, Nigeria whose function is to mobilize and motivate missions-minded individuals (missionaries) to undertake a missionary adventure in located "Mission field" either within the country or outside of it. The Department has four designated mission fields, Foreign Missions field, Home Missions field, Social/Special mission field (Missions to Persons with disabilities and other hurting peoples in general, the prisoners,

the sick, the widows, orphans, the refugees, and Christ Ambassadors Students Out Reach (CASOR). This unit of missions aims at reaching out to students in institutions of higher learning.

The General Council of Assemblies of God, Nigeria in other to enhance her corporate evangelism programmes, created the Evangel Corporate Ministries as a department. The department is established to take the responsibility of articulating the various programmes and ministries of the Church at the national level and to provide necessary preparations that will enhance the corporate image of the church. These ministries and programmes of Assemblies of God, Nigeria are working towards using indigenous Christians to develop Christianity in Africa. These programmes are contextualized in African cultural and social background. Media Ministries Department has different divisions namely Press, Publications, Bookshops, Radio, Television, Digital Television, Public Relations and Resource Centres. The overall purpose of this department is to keep the church on the cutting edge of modern communication technology in fulfilling the Great Commission (Ben Okorafor. 2-4). The Evangel Television is viewed in more than 150 countries of the world. The gospel preached through this digital channel can reach large population of people at the same time. Viewers of this television broadcast are calling from different parts of Nigeria, Africa and other continents of the world to share the testimonies of their experiences of the gospel message.

Education Ministries Department provides nurture for the entire membership of the church through educational programmes in accordance with Ephesians 4:12-14. This is achieved through developing policy statutes, structures and services for the fulfilment of the church educational ministry. It monitors the effectiveness, progress, and seeks to fulfil the threefold mission of the Assemblies of God. The department handles all theological and general or secular education of the Church. Through these theological schools more than 35,000 indigenous gospel ministers have been trained and are preaching the gospel of Christ in Nigeria, Africa and other continents of the world. 2013 statistical report shows the Church in Nigeria has 506 primary schools, 75 secondary schools, and a university – Evangel University, Akaeze (Ikoni, 32). It is on record that more than 4 million Nigerians of all social classes have passed through these schools most of whom are working for the growth and development of Christianity in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large.

6. Conclusion

Christianity in Africa has gone through various metamorphoses from the time of the Apostles to the times of the empires, the missionaries, the colonial masters, mission organisations and societies. African Christianity has never remained the same in all these periods. Christianity in Africa suffered great set back until the 19th century because of poor training of early missionaries and none availability of well-trained indigenous Africans in mission work. Noticeable changes took place when many of the mission societies began to adopt different indigenous principles to contextualize the message of the gospel in African cultural context.

This work has shown that the involvement of indigenous Christians in mission work brought noticeable change in the development and expansion of Christianity in Africa.

The Assemblies of God, Nigeria as an indigenous church in Africa has shown in this work that when indigenous African Christians are involved in mission work that Christianity grew and developed. The Church has shown great dynamism as one can see in the roles departments, agencies, ministries, the corporate body, individuals and even foreign missionaries played to establish a dynamic, evangelizing and visionary indigenous Church in Africa.

African Christians can evangelize Africa and also make great contributions that will work for the expansion and development of Christianity in the world.

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