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Article

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### AN INVESTIGATION ON MODERN TRENDS IN CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM IN OWERRI, IMO STATE

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#### Abstract

This paper studied the modern trends of Christian evangelism in Owerri, Imo State. It was aimed at understanding the contemporary approaches adopted by the Christian missions to enhance evangelism and how these approaches have been religiously applied by the churches. The work which adopted the historical, sociological, phenomenological, and comparative investigation method, discussed the etymology, types, imperatives, characteristics, aims, enhancing factors, trends and modern trends of Christian evangelism in Owerri. The paper upheld two dimensions: the fact that modern technology in communication is the fastest means of evangelization in terms of reaching out, and social services rendered by the church to the communities and individuals by way of provision of amenities is the heartbeat of Christian evangelism in practical terms. The paper also found out that with the dynamism evolved in the new method, the gospel has reached out more rapidly and directly through the use of fliers, crusades, conventions, leadership trainings, home and market prayer cells, televangelism and the use of mass media. The paper therefore recommended that in evangelism emphasis should be laid on salvation of souls than on prosperity which is the order of the day for modern preachers. Also the resource persons in Christian evangelism should keep a close watch on their life style.

**Keywords:** Christian Evangelism, Modern Trends, Pentecostalism, Religious Practice, Owerri.

#### Introduction

While some erudite scholars like Dike (1992), Ekechi (1996) and Nwosu (1985) have discussed extensively on the activities of the Christian missions (denomination) in Igboland, a survey of recent Christian evangelism clearly reveals that scholars have taken little or no account of current styles, in the prosecution of evangelism in Owerri

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Municipal area of Imo state. Each enthusiastic Christian group tend to engage assiduously in a competitive methods to increase its adherents so as to outnumber the others. The level of improvement which the modern trend brought in widening the horizon of Christianity can only be determined when they are studied within their particular context (Anyabuike, 2004). The modern trends which include the use of mass media have done a lot more in the propagation of the gospel than the early missionary methods. In the last three decades, several areas in Owerri, Imo state, have witnessed a great increase in the establishment of various types of churches and ministries (Inyama, 2007). The establishment of these churches at various sections of the town has also witnessed the introduction of new methods of evangelism such as crusades, outreaches, leadership training/seminars, conventions, vigils and house to house witnessing/voice work. The atmosphere is charged with competitive spirit in the name of evangelism more especially in the evenings. The electronic media for example has been literally hijacked by the religious groups. These churches, Okorocha (2008) opine, have become real customers to the radio houses. The sponsored Christian religious programs come in various shades and colors with regard to activities. These include claims and counter-claims of miraculous deeds. The effect of this competition has increased and diversified the new trends employed to make converts. Human ingenuity has been let loose in a bid to invent the best, fastest and if possible instant means of converting everybody that comes within the circumference of the technique. Establishment of churches has incretive venture in the cities. This is why it has become necessary to look at the new trends in the methods of evangelism, to examine, and determine their accuracy and effectiveness.

#### **Brief Background of Owerri: Study Location**

The town is situated in the centre of Igboland, while Igboland is at the centre of eastern Nigeria. Thus, Ogbu Kalu (1996, p177) called it the heart of the heart land. This is why Imo state adopted the pseudonym "Eastern Heartland" (Inyama 2007, p5). It is the axe of the Igbo race in Nigeria and the greatest of Igbo attributes. It is one of the areas claiming autochthonous myths of origin. Missionary enterprise in Igboland appears to have had the impact in Owerri, which currently has the largest concentration and the least Islamic influence in Nigeria. Basden (1966, p306), according to Inyama (2007, p6) had taken interest in finding out why the Igbo rejected Islam. Enquiries by various scholars on diaries of missionaries, commissioners, traders and intelligent natives have not given any details of Igbos forsaking paganism for Mohammedianism. This observation has not uttered much, interactions in habitation notwithstanding. The reason, according Okorocha (1987, p213) was that "the effect of Islam on the Lifestyle and business of those who profess it did not impress them". In the catholic sphere, Owerri Diocesan votaries are known as "Black Irish" expatiating on this fact, Kalu (1996) citing Omenka, who notes that in Owerri Vicariate, for instance, there were only 59 priests for 224,456 Catholics in 1949, a ratio of 1 priest to 3,788 souls. By 1960, there were 430,000 Catholics in Owerri Diocese. The priest ratio of 1:4,388 was one of the highest outside Latin America. By projection, we can estimate the literacy level of Owerri then was up to 90% while its Christian population is up to 98% (Inyama, 2007, p6). Owerri is the melting pot of the dynamics of the change and the effects of Christianity in Igboland. The importance of this statement Inyama, argued "will be more appreciated when one realizes that Igboland in the east has the greatest concentration of Christians in Nigeria and Owerri, the Igbo Heartland, has the highest population density". Archdeacon Dennis, the first Church Missionary Society (CMS) teacher to visit Owerri in April 1905 said on his return.

I came back feeling that Owerri is an excellent centre for missionary work and that the language spoken there resembles the language of Bonny rather than Onitsha. We gathered that the language of Owerri is the language of District... The country is more densely populated, more thickly than in Onitsha strict Towns are closer together... My impression is that the Igbo people of Owerri speak as pure a form of language as any in the country (Ekechi 1972, p208).

In his two works on Owerri (1972 & 1989) Ekechi indicated that Dennis comment generated a lot of enthusiasm among the CMS hierarchy in Onitsha. However, Ifeka Moller (1974) did a study of conversion in Eastern Nigeria, and attributed rapid conversion in Owerri in a short period of contact with Christianity to two factors:

- i. Rapid social change and a growing frustration among the inhabitants at failure to reap rewards promised by acceptance of these radical changes.
- ii. Inter-denominal rivalry and education (Metu 1986, p265).

### **History of the Post-War Owerri**

It can be observed that the present political state of Nigeria dramatically came into being when the large areas known as East, West, North and Southern regions were reduced to smaller political units called states. The former Eastern Nigeria was divided and Imo state was carved out from it in 1976. The emergence of Imo state earned Owerri the capital of Imo state, the position of a cosmopolitan city and also marked her urbanization. Before this time, 1976, the major streets of Owerri town were Douglas, Wetheral, Rotobi and Royce. The span of the town in those days was the Owerre Nshi Ise. The creation of Imo state attracted the federal presence and other industrial activities to Owerri which brought along with it the influx of people of all works of life. The over population of the city of Owerri has given rise to a radius of about thirty kilometers. These include areas, like Obinze, Avu, Umuguma, Irete, Orogwe, Ogbaku, Nekede, Naza, Agalaba, Awaka, Emii, Orji, Obulubi, Akwakuma, Ubomiri, Ohii and Ihiagwa. Owerri is however, bounded on the north by Mbaitoli, south by Ngor Okpala, east by Ohaji-Egbema and west by Ikeduru LGAs. Christianity is the predominant religion in Owerri. There are Christian churches of various kinds. These churches are engaged in Christian evangelism of one form or the other which are in consonance with their doctrines. There is hardly any street in Owerri that does not host at least six churches. Some of these churches are located in makeshift houses, uncompleted buildings, warehouses, hotels, public building, and schools while the bigger churches have permanent structures. At the time of this study, the numbers of churches that line-up in some major roads in Owerri include:

- |                        |             |
|------------------------|-------------|
| i. Wetheral Road       | 35 churches |
| ii. School Road        | 16 churches |
| iii. Douglas Road      | 25 churches |
| iv. Royce Road         | 20 churches |
| v. Tetlow Road         | 17 churches |
| vi. Ikenegbu Road      | 19 churches |
| vii. Okigwe Road       | 21 churches |
| viii. Mbaise Road      | 15 churches |
| ix. Christ Church Road | 10 churches |
| x. MCC Uratta Road     | 24 churches |

The amazing thing is that two or three of these churches are located in the same building. Also, virtually all the primary and post primary schools in Owerri are used as churches or fellowship centers. Some of them play hosts to three or four churches. Christianity in Owerri urban city, according to Inyama (2007) can be categorized into four groups for an understanding as follows- Mainline Churches, Pentecostal Churches, the Aladura Churches and African independent Churches.

### **Etymology of Christian Evangelism**

Evangelism is from the Greek, concept "euangelismos" meaning "a preaching of, a zealous effort to spread the gospel, as in revival meeting". It also means "any zealous effort in propagandizing for a cause" (Webster's 1978, p434). It also entails "proclaiming the gospel". Although in the New Testament the word "evangelism" is not found however, euangelion" meaning "Gospel" and related words abound, and the idea of proclamation of the gospel and winning of converts to the Christian faith is present. It is a truism that evangelism has been fundamental to the Church's mission in the world. However, the word "evangelism" is variously understood, interpreted and defined by scholars and other users depending on what one wishes to achieve by it. Evangelism can be defined as the zealous proclamation of the good news about Jesus Christ, urging men and women to repent of their sins and put their faith in Jesus as their only saviour and to make Him the Lord of their life. The crux of evangelism is helping a person to come face to face with the Good News. It is an aspect of a religion which present the basic teaching or doctrine of such religion to non-members of the given religion, with a view of converting them. In the light of the above, Akinwale (1998, p81), therefore, defined the Christian evangelism as "the act of presenting the gospel to the lost with the sole aim to bring them to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ".

From the text in Isaiah 61, which Jesus declared in the New Testament, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk. 4:18-19) (RSV).

It is clear that in evangelism, there is a direct link between proclamation and demonstration. Jesus did not only speak words to the people of his time and day, he healed infirmity and fed them with bread and fish. To be precise, he provided for them. Taylor (1994, p6) averred, "True evangelism as in the New Testament is a rescue operation. The evangelist is not just a sales man of goods that he likes or considers beneficial, he is a life boatman who knows that without his effort and saving power of the gospel, they will be engulfed..." Evangelism is therefore a holistic activity, which involves saying and doing, preaching and teaching. This is the act of evangelism. The Christian evangelism should address itself to the total salvation of man, that is to mean proclamation must go hand in glove with the spiritual and material care of individual, alongside efforts of realizing a just and fair society. It is the presentation of the good news of God in Jesus Christ, so that men (and women) are brought, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to put their trust in God, accept Jesus Christ as their savior from guilt and power of sin; follow and serve him as their Lord in the fellowship of the church and in the vocations of the common life.

### **The Imperatives of the Christian Evangelism**

The Christian evangelism has a divine imperative, which is generally known as the great commission given by Jesus Christ as recorded in the gospel according to Matthew:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go there and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age. (Matt. 28:18-20) (RSV).

From the above, the following imperatives can be deduced:

- i. The Authority to evangelize;
- ii. The Order to go;
- iii. The Purpose - make disciples of all nations- no limits.
- iv. To Baptize- bringing people to the fold
- v. To Teach
- vi. The Assurance: I am with you always to the close of age.

From a critical view point, this divine imperative must include social as well as evangelical responsibility. The principal is that total involvement by the Christian.

### **Characteristics of Evangelism**

Bowen (1996, pp116-117) preferred that evangelism must have the following characteristics:

- i. **Proclamation:** The evangelist listens to God and announces the message of what God has done in the context of hearers.
- ii. **Presence:** The evangelist must listen to the agenda of the people being evangelized and relate the message to them.
- iii. **Persuasion:** Listeners should be persuaded to respond by believing in Christ and joining the church.
- iv. **Power:** Evangelism should expect clear signs from God in people's lives.

According to Bowen, "these may include physical healing, brotherly love or any other change, which the Holy Spirit gives". In his own assertion, Okorochoa (1999, pp8-12) highlighted five points which are:

- i. **Proclamation:** This involves announcing the good news.
- ii. **Demonstration:** Those who claim to believe in Jesus must learn to behave like Christ and in this way show good news.
- iii. **Anticipation:** People should be taught to live in anticipation of the full realization of God's plan for them at the end time.
- iv. **Participation:** All God's children are required to participate in God's mission and in the ethical behavior he has laid out in all aspects of private and public life.
- v. **Preservation:** Evangelism should include some sort of experience of the characteristics of the here and now, if not the description would be entirely completely boring and confusing.

Conversely, evangelism must be done while sharing a meal, relaxing, travelling in a bus, train or airplane, in the market, school or club. People being evangelized must realize current situation and take decision to come out of it. They must hear about their lost condition before they can appreciate the favor of God (Ozodo,1998, p: 111).

### **Motives and Factor that Enhances Christian Evangelism**

Evangelism according to Green (1970, p286-309), are motivation by three important factors - Sense of Gratitude, Sense of Responsibility and Sense of Concern. Also, these motivations can be enhanced effectively by following factors:

- i. Making the message relevant to the culture context of the people being evangelized

- ii. Making the message simple
- iii. The message must be interesting and attractive
- iv. The message must be in the language of the people, i.e. enculturation must be of value.

According to Nwankiti (1992, p24), the church in pursuance of its task of evangelism must pray in the language the people understands and applicable to their needs.

### **Aims of Christian Evangelism**

Christian evangelism is not for idling away of time. Therefore, the aims and functions of evangelism include the following:

- i. **Conversion:** Through evangelism non Christians may become Christians. Conversion, however, is the work of the Holy Spirit, but He uses human instrument through evangelism to effect conversion in people's mind and heart.
- ii. **Salvation:** The Greek word "soteria" which is translated "salvation" refers to recovery to health from the disease of sin as well as release from captivity of sin (Adeleye 1995, p119). When the gospel is preached and hearers respond positively to it and believe it, salvation is wrought for them. The belief of Christianity is that there is no salvation outside Christ and it is a well known fact that evangelism is all about presenting Christ to the people.
- iii. **Church Planting:** Evangelism is also done to plant new churches. Nwankiti (1992, p156) observed that, "evangelism is at heart of Christian Mission to foster the multiplication of local congregations in every human community. Throughout the ages, churches have sprung up in practically every country as a result of the partnership in obedience to our Lord on the part of ordained and lay members of the church". Its worth to note that church planting cannot be successful without effective Christian evangelism.
- iv. **Church Growth:** Iwuagwu (1998, p34) noted "...we see evangelism as our strongest strategy for growth". He highlighted the four dimensions of church growth thus: (a) The old members should grow up in active faith, (b) The evangelistic audience will need to grow together, developing a sense of community where ministry is shared (c) Evangelism should persuade the church to be out and serving in community and social concerns, (d) Evangelism should help the church grow. It has to bring people to personal faith in Christ and into responsible church members.
- v. **Healing/Exorcism:** Are also aim of Christian evangelism. In evangelism, healing helps to demonstrate the power and influence of God.
- vi. **Strengthening Believers:** Christian evangelism can be said to be the major process of making Christian believers stronger in faith. Thus, Paul admonished the Colossian church. "so then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness" (Col 2:6).

Iwuagwu, (1998, p146) also observed that "the Christian church had all through the centuries considered the teaching of doctrine very crucial in the life of the church". Without teaching, believers cannot be strengthened in faith, and drawn into closer and sincere fellowship with one another.

### **Trends in Evangelism in Owerri**

Every part of Owerri has witnessed the influx of various church denominations and sects and ministries. The establishment of these churches also came with new methods employed in doing evangelism. The new methods and approaches are almost replacing the old methods or missionary approaches of evangelism. This paper, for clarity, highlights the methods and pattern of missionary evangelism which is in vogue before the influx of new generation

churches into Owerri. It is worthwhile to note that during the period of missionaries, the only existing churches were the mainline churches, the Aladura churches and a few Pentecostal churches. These churches then were satisfied with these approaches because there were more or less no competitions.

### **Missionary Methods of Evangelism**

Available literature revealed the strategic devices or methods which the missionaries used in Owerri, like other parts of Igboland. Such methods as Court Alliance, The pulpit/open Air Service, indigenization and training programs, use of education and welfare institutions, medical facilities and life preservation centers, Drag-Net Approach, Funding, Co-operation and Church Union, Staff development, Christian Stewardship, Social Services, Youth work and staff personnel. Ekechi (1972,p78), Kalu (1986,p103), Adiele (1990,p141), Nwosu (1997, p28), Iwuagwu (2002, p8), Urukpa (1996,p124), Nwankiti (1998, p13) and Okorochoa (2000, p83). The churches apart from using the above missionary patterns of evangelism which were inherited from the early missionaries and the indigenous agents, adopted several other methods which can be termed in this paper as having originated from them or devised by their ingenuity such as the House-to-House evangelism, Early morning preaching or "morning cry", open air preaching, corporate life style, love caring, hospital visitation, counseling, mission through post office, tracks, media evangelism, radio television and other prints. Reid (1970, p170), Iwuagwu (1998, pp138,156-157), Kalu (1990) and Inyama (2007, p77).

### **Modern Trend in Christian Evangelism**

One of the modern trends prevalent in Christian evangelism includes communications through mass media. Mass media according to Asemah (2013, p102) are non-state actors that define themselves apart from the state and from all other societal acts. Mass media consist of everything from national newspapers to student magazines, global broadcasters, to community radio, websites and blogs to social networks. Communication is the exchange of ideas c feelings information by two or more individual by means d sounds, signs and symbols (Asemah 2013, p98) and (Izuogu 2013, p67). Mass communication by itself is a modern form of communication that is born out of technological revolutions. With mass media institutions as its vehicle of operation address thousands of people in different places at a given time. It has the capacity to reach out to an imaginable large audience scattered in various geographical locations at given period of time. Communication is said to be mass if its target is large number of people who cannot be communicated on face to face basis.

Mass communication, therefore, according to Opara (2013, p18) implies an interaction by means of mechanical and electrical gadgets (ICT) operated by the dictates of scientific laws and theories. Aja (2007, p18) described ICT as a tool for world evangelization, for social concern, change and ministries, for mass empowerment, for educational progress, for cyber-church, cyber para-fellowship organizations, for Human Rights Advocacy and Empowerment for general cross-fertilization of ideas and ideologies. However, there are two classifications of mass media - the electronic and the print media. The different missionary groups and churches in Owerri have adopted several methods of evangelism as their bids to make converts. The church has been affected by the global trend of communication. From the popularity of Bishop Benson Idahosa in the 70's and 80's to the present day Nigerian preachers-stars, every pastor wants to be on television. In most cases, we find the small churches with less than thirty members hanging satellite dishes on top of the entrance door instead of the traditional bell towers. In major cities like Owerri,

electronic mega churches have emerged alongside small electronic parachurches-ostensibly drawn by the high valance of financial profit. These churches have adopted the following strategies for evangelism.

### **Mass Evangelism**

Prior to the modern trends in Christian evangelism, the former process of house evangelism (one to one) had been limited only to the reachable, because evangelistic activities remained neighborhood affairs. This method in itself was good because there had not been any population explosion as it is today. The creation of several political states and urbanization, the influx of people into urban cities and environs necessitated that mass communication system should be introduced as to reach out to many people and places simultaneously. This by my thinking has brought about a more positive change that has quickened the pace of Christian change in the area of reaching out. Since the past three decades, the three local government areas that now constitute the geo-political areas referred to as Owerri in Imo state have witnessed the influx of various church denominations and ministries. These churches and their ministers as noted earlier either brought various new methods in doing evangelism or way of improving in the old methods.

### **The Electronic Media**

The electronic media is the type of mass media that operates through electro-magnetic impulses. Its vehicle is through electrical gadgets such as: radio, television, internet, and telephone (Opara, 2013, p20). Cheeseman (1997, p62) also asserted that "electronic media is the major means of evangelism in the world today". The print media is as old as mass media. It is the aspect of mass media that communicates to the public through mechanically printed and organized alphabets or typographies. The communication is effected through its finished products of a printed machine. Such products include newspapers, magazines, books, billboards, signposts, posters, handbills, banners etc. In Owerri, the following known electronic media exist:

- i. The Imo Broadcasting Co-operation, comprising of Imo Broadcasting Radio Station and the Imo Television Station, (IBC and (TV) otherwise known as Orient Radio and Television.
- ii. Radio Nigeria FM Station aka Heartland FM.
- iii. Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Channel 12.
- iv. HOT FM Station.

The churches have greatly utilized the services of these electronic houses in their execution of evangelism. It is not an overstatement to say that about seventy percent of the airtime of these media is used for Christian evangelistic programs. These programs have attracted the attention and the admiration of massive listeners and viewers and sponsors by as well as groups. These programs are usually preceded with super-abundance of advertisements which are relayed for months in the media houses. The fact remains that most of these advertisement are invitation to evangelistic outreaches and crusades. The prologue and epilog of the electronic media always include preaching of the gospel and prayers. This medium of evangelism has wide spread of an avenue used in Owerri to reach people in their offices, market stalls, sitting room and even their cars. However, Aju (1998, p45) is of the view that the electronic media should not broadcast any Christian programs that castigate other religious belief so as to avoid "the unintended impact of modern technology on mankind".

### **The Print Media and Literacy Evangelism**

The use of the print media in doing Christian evangelism is a new approach to evangelism in Owerri. The print media include: newspapers, magazines, newsletters, tracts and other literatures. These are used by the various Christian groups in Owerri to propagate the gospel, project their programs and activities and as well enlarging their clientele. The Roman Catholic Church in Owerri publishes a bi-monthly newspaper known as the "Leader". The Anglican Church has the Christian Voice which is published weekly. The newspapers not only disseminate information of current national issues but also run columns for sermons and articles that are evangelistic bent. There are also countless number of tracts circulating in Owerri each day. These are being given out daily by churches, though they are not published in Owerri. Owerri, as a literate society, which is predominantly inhabited by civil servants patronizes many Christian novels and devotional books that are in circulation in all her nook and crannies. The influence of these Christian books on the growth of Christianity in Owerri cannot be over emphasized.

### **Posters and Handbills**

A trip round Owerri and her environs reveals a sea of posters of various shades and sizes, with captivating color pasted on every available space on walls, electric and telegraphic poles as well as abandoned vehicles. These posters carry messages of invitation to evangelistic crusades, outreaches and prayer seminars or summits. The posters readily leave one with the impression that churches and Christian groups in Owerri are in competition over who will produce the most colorful poster given the sophistication that go with the production of these posters. The language of these posters and the ideas they express sometimes can be better described as imaginary. Their captions at times do not immediately convey to the average reader the evangelistic messages they intend carry. Some captions portray political meaning of self-aggrandizement. In order to attract people's attention, posters are usually placed in clusters on walls, billboards and even signposts. This practice has led to defacement of walls and roundabouts. This destroys the beauty of the city. The adhesive used in pasting do not easily peel off, therefore, even if the posters have been removed, the adhesives remain as ugly patches. Handbills are small in size than posters, but they carry the same message. Handbills are not usually pasted but are distributed to people especially during victory match or awareness campaign. Giving his assertion on the use of handbills in Christian evangelism, Okorochoa, (2000, p106) declared "You do not sit down to evangelize, you go into people and leaves with them a little material that will remind them of your presence when you have left".

### **Crusade**

Crusade originated from the crusaders who volunteered to fight the Muslims as to recover the Holy Land from Islam and retain its Christian law. The term crusade, today, is seen as the gathering of enthusiastic crowd seeking the face of the Lord God Almighty and also ready for regeneration (Duruji, Ugwulebo, and Akakuru, 2013, p270). The city of Owerri has witnessed very many enterprising crusade organized by various churches. The purpose of most crusades and conventions is to encapsulate the adherents and to make them become more faithful to God. Most crusades are characterized with Bible readings, Biblical expositions, fervent prayer sessions, testimonies, spiritual songs and as well as exorcism and healing.

### **Convention**

This has become an evangelistic movement which appeals to people of different needs. During conventions, the power and the presence of Christ is usually "revealed" as some

people receive healing and encouragement, others are refreshed through genuine and Christian friendship. In most cases, venues for modern conventions have become grounds for economic interest as people are allowed to also pursue their economic activities there. Variety of goods are displayed which include Christian literatures, vestments, optical materials, cooked and ready-made foods. Most of these articles are sold at reduced prices.

### **Market and House Prayer Cells**

A visit to the three markets in Owerri urban and city, (Ekeukwu Owerre) main market, new market, and the relief market, and the two mechanic villages (Orji and Nekede) will reveal the existence of prayer cells in every line. These prayer cells organize Christian worship sessions in the mornings spanning more than one and half hours. The liturgy of the prayer cells include opening prayer, praise worship, preaching and closing prayer. Also in the government offices and private sectors people are found in cells praying and asking for their creator's guide in their daily endeavors. The growing number of worshippers or participants in this exercise has in no small measure helped in creating in some traders, artisans and civil servants the awareness for living a transparent, honest and holy life. However, buyers, clients and people who have one business or the other to transact with those participating in the early morning prayer cells look at the prayer cells as nuisance in that they may not meet up with needs and get their problems solved as early as they need to because of the involvement of those that will attend to their needs in the prayer cell saga. Similar to the prayer cell, is the itinerant preachers. These preachers parade in the market places, busy roundabouts and junctions, streets, motor-parks armed with battery powered megaphones or small size generating set, popularly called "I better pass my neighbor" which they use in preaching the gospel, so any available space for them becomes a platform for preaching. The truth in this matter is that House Cell brings small group of people together and adds, to their understanding of what true brotherhood stands for.

### **Victory March**

This is relatively new in Owerri. It involves the movement of a large number of Christians through the streets of Owerri with megaphones announcing the gospel message. This is done by trekking or sometimes by the use of float in which case the letter is decorated with ribbons, banners and posters. During victory match, oncoming activities may be announced, leaflets containing detailed information of the activities are distributed etc. The victory march approach is a symbolic re-enactment of the Israelites marching round the city of Jericho (Josh. 6:12ff). In a well organized victory march, the participants wear identical T-shirts, Aprons or any other unique outfits, with the theme of their message conspicuously inscribed with grazing or reflecting materials. This arrangement makes victory march colourful and captivating. The likes of victory march are the Corpus Christi procession annual event of the Roman Catholic Christians and the Palm Sunday processions of the Anglican Church. During these procession and victory match, major streets of Douglas, Wetheral, Assumpta Avenue, Okigwe Road suffer heavy traffic jam. This makes movement from these streets, roads and their affiliates to be difficult for inhabitants and other road users. Despite that, these processions bring out the beauty and reality of the Christendom and a scenario that depicts that of Christ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. It is therefore pertinent to advice that Christian groups who intend to embark on this venture should do so in collaboration with the police and other law enforcement agencies to ensure adequate control of traffic.

### **Drama**

In this type of Christian evangelism, the gospel is acted out as a playlet, drama or cinema with the aim of transmitting the Christian faith. An unknown author who wrote in (1977-2022) state "The aim and purpose of Christian drama is that it can show the Christian faith in action in the lives of certain people, and so it opens doors in the human heart to let in the Holy Spirit". There are Christian films in home videos which are known to have aided the conversion of people to Christianity. In most evangelistic outreaches, a Christian film is shown and the audience is invited to make personal commitment to Jesus Christ. The brief Christian play lets and concert-show staged in local churches during festivities are known to appeal to the hearts of the congregation.

### **Songs and Music**

People in Owerri and all over are known to have been attracted to particular churches as a result of the songs and music played in such churches, Iwuagwu, (1998, p168) discovered that "...in evangelism, music as language of the soul, touches that part of the soul where words cannot reach". It's no gain saying that gospel music singers today in Owerri have become forces to reckon with in Christian evangelism. Traditional or missionary gospel songs have had impact on the lives of people and have contributed a great deal in converting many to Christianity. Amusan (1998, p98) is right in observing that "In the day to day activities of Nigerian, it is very hard to separate music or singing from their lives". Emotional worship is prominent among the people of Owerri. Therefore, in doing Christian evangelism through songs and music, many people are reached and the message is made simple to understand.

### **Other Strategies**

These are several other strategies in the trend of modern evangelism which time and space will not permit me to explain in this paper. Such strategies include Gospel Band, Social Services, the Widows and Dorcas Ministries, Prison Ministries, Medicare Ministries, Living Water (Mmiri Ndu) Project, and so on.

### **The Result of the Modern Trends in Evangelism**

No one can dispute the fact that Christianity in Owerri area has made a tremendous impact and recorded an appreciable growth in the last three decades. The spirit of Oneness and understanding which is the hallmark in today's evangelistic approach has made the church more effective. Christians from every church denomination now feels free to associate and as well support any evangelistic outreach planned by other denominations. The team spirit has become possible under the auspices of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). Churches are found at every part of Owerri and there are frantic efforts to expand on daily basis. A survey carried out recently in Owerri, gives the statics of church structures in Owerri as follows:

- |                                        |                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| i. The Anglican Church                 | 45                                                                                                                                                                        |
| ii. The Roman Catholic Church          | 40                                                                                                                                                                        |
| iii. The Methodist Church of Nigeria   | 15                                                                                                                                                                        |
| iv. The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria | 10                                                                                                                                                                        |
| v. The Baptist Church of Nigeria       | 6                                                                                                                                                                         |
| vi. The Pentecostal Church             | has over 100 church congregation scattered all over towns in Owerri, most of these churches are located in unfinished buildings and most of them share the same building. |

## **Summary**

In this paper, efforts have been made to enumerate and analyze the modern trends involved in the execution of Christian evangelism and its effects on the Owerri people. The purpose of doing this investigation was to have an understanding of the past, within the context of the present situation of evangelism in Owerri. The findings revealed that despite the fact that Owerri is thickly populated by Christian churches of various shapes and nomenclatures, there is cordial relationship existing between them and other faiths. Apart from the indigenous villages "Owerre Nshi Ise", there are Housing Estates which are mainly inhabited by strangers and other satellite towns who have been infused into Owerri by urbanization such as Orji, Nkede, Egbu, Awka Obinze, Avu, Umugurna, Irete, Orogwe, Naza, Enni, Akwakuma, Ubomiri, Ohii, Umuoba-Uratta, Owala-Uratta to mention but a few. It should also be noted that evangelism in its entirety should be holistic and not restricted to proclamation of the message of salvation, but should also involve demonstration, it is the spreading of the gospel through personal life examples of the teaching of the gospel. The communication industry have contributed to the immense growth and development in the Christian evangelism in Owerri as its use have been appreciated by the various churches. The method of using communication media affected the growth of the churches in both positive and negative aspects. These two major aspects are the spiritual growth and numerical growth, which are vertical and horizontal respectively. Christian evangelism as the work portrays involves more than just preaching. The goodnews can also be spread through literature, drama, lifestyle, love, social action and others. The work therefore recommended the following as the way forward:

- i. In doing evangelism, more emphasis should be laid on salvation rather than on prosperity which is in vogue presently, especially among the generation churches. Emphasis on prosperity, otherwise known as "health and wealth theology" is the root of loose and hypocritical Christianity Eni (1994, p113) and Ekeanyanwu (1994, p24).
- ii. The resources of persons in Christian evangelism should keep a close watch on their lifestyle as well as their habits. It is disgusting to see a flamboyantly dressed preacher using most of the time allotted to preaching in adjusting and tending his dress. An immoral preacher cannot conscientiously engage in evangelism. The iconism of preaching vocation should be maintained by the preachers.
- iii. The outright condemnation of other Christians, churches or faith is completely not the rule of evangelism. This should be discouraged. It generates bad blood in the society. Christians are in the business of offering Christ to the world as the world's redeemer (Nwankiti, 1993, p160), hence preachers should desist from the practice of castigating other churches and faiths.
- iv. The Christian evangelism should follow the modern clamour for inculturation. The message must meet with the need of the people by being relevant to their cultural content, simply stated, interesting and attractive and must be in a language very familiar to the people.
- v. The evangelistic strategies of the church should be closely and honestly scrutinized to see whether they are relevant to the real life situation of the people being evangelized. This is necessary because, the church must learn to present the claims of Christ in a way that does not embarrass, does not manipulate and does not threaten friendship (Adiele, 1996, p98).

In conclusion, the life and health of any church depends its loyalty to the Great Commission and its ability to execute the mission through effective evangelism. It is imperative therefore,

that every church with the Great Commission vision should develop a corporate strategy for pursuing lost people in general and the unchurched in particular. The church should develop a unique strategy of evangelism to encourage and help people in their personal evangelism efforts.

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