

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD CHURCH IN IGBOLAND, 1970-2016: A THEMATIC X-RAY

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Abstract

Assembles of God church provides a particularly intriguing context for a study of the church in Igboland. The purpose of the study is to find out why the Assemblies of God Mission (AGM) is no longer waxing strong vis-à-vis during its emergence. Findings showed that there are a lot of bickering and bigotries among the pastors and the lay. The crave for materialism is seriously affecting the spiritual life of the church. Methods of approach are historical and descriptive coupled with primary and secondary sources.

Introduction

The missionaries of the Europeans had settled down for the task of “civilizing” the indigenes, a process of westernization usually mistaken for Christianity, abandoning the pneumatic values of the *Kerygma*. It was this negligence that agitated the minds of Harris, Braide and American Evangelicals to launch aggressive evangelism in the early twentieth century. The legend Augustus Ehurien Nwogu of Old Umuahia in Abia State was a product of this early 20th century church development. The crisis thus generated in him led to his reconversion from Niger Delta Pastorate (NDP) to the Faith Tabernacle Congregation (FTC). He later separated from the FTC to form the Church of Jesus Christ (CJC), which shortly became Assemblies of God Mission in Igboland (Ndubuisi, 1997). The main objectives of this study is to discuss the effects of bickery, materialism, lukewarm attitude towards mission and evangelism, and how they have created unnecessary rivalry, hatred, envy, spiritual barrenness and administrative bankruptcy. The methods of approach are historical and descriptive coupled with primary and secondary sources.

Keywords-Mission, evangelism, weakness, theme, charity, Igboland, and development and expansion

The Igbo: A sketchy ethnography

Igboland is located between latitude 5 and 7 degrees north of the Equator, and longitude 6 and 8 degrees east the Greenwich (Nwaezeigwe, 2007). As the

dominant culture group in the east, they inhabit the five states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The Igbo occupy the south – eastern and a part of the south – western territories as well as the mainland section of the present Rivers State of Nigeria. They are among the single large ethnic groups in Nigeria. The River Niger, before it enters the Atlantic Ocean through its network of tributaries which characterize its Delta, divides the Igbo country into two unequal parts, with the greater portion lying in South-Eastern Nigeria. The other triangular portion lies west of the Niger, now Delta State. The Igbo land area falls also within five main vegetation belts namely, mangrove forest, freshwater, swamp forest, rain forest, derived Savanna, and Guinea Savanna. Nwabara (1977) and Nwafor (1973) argue that the Igbo are a compendium of paradoxes, but their greater asset is a copious supply of versatile common-sense and the unique capacity for improvisation.

As regards their religion, occupation, and politics, African traditional religion, agriculture and *umunna* pattern of democracy constitute their way of life. Much stress is laid on healing and purification from different kinds of contamination in the society. Hatred, dissension and frustrations within a group can bring about sickness (Haselbarth, 1976). *Okò nwanta onu, ojukwara chi ya ajuju?* (Before anyone blames someone of misfortune, he should first inquire from the person's guardian spirit). This proverb and similar ones in Igbo cosmology justify the fact that sometimes, individuals are not responsible for their poverty in any aspect whether economic, political, and physical and the like. Some people are poor because of the activities of their guardian spirits or deities in charge of their societies or even as a result of forefathers' sins (cf. Amos 5; Gen. 3; Jer. 17:1; Jn 9:1-5 etc). Igbo people are industrious and they hate laziness. An Igbo proverb, "Onye kwe Chi ya kwe" (When a person agrees to do something his guardian spirit agrees too) illuminates how Igbo man disposes himself in his everyday activities to avoid this kind of poverty (2Thess.3:6-10).

Traditional Igbo social welfare includes:

First, those intended for the physical security of the community against external aggression, encroachment, wild animals' impetuous physical and natural events, witchcraft and angry deities and spirits. Since the basic aim was to avoid and to counter forces constituting grave physical danger to the community and its citizens, instrumental actions undertaken usually involved constant surveillance by responsible age-grades, the local vigilante and hunters; engagement in feuds, reprisals and wars; placation of deities, spirits and

supernatural forces; ablution from desecration of collective taboos; safeguarding and maintenance of community shrines and holy places and the sustenance of oracles, diviners and priests.

Second, services aimed at continuously securing and maintaining community-owned essential means of production and distribution for purposes of socializing members into age-sex based division of labour; to periodize farming activities and to intersperse market and farm days judiciously; to provide security for and encouragement of specialized craftsmen and other occupational groups of weavers, blacksmiths, potters, carvers, bonesetters, midwives, hunters, diviners, priests, rainmakers and herbalists; to replenish arable lands through shifting cultivation and fallowing; to maintain community springs and farm roads, to propitiate ala (earth goddess), Fijioke, Amadioha, and other notable deities and ancestor spirits; to collectively, maintain yam barns, and to proscribe stealing and destruction of farm tools and crops.

Third, other miscellaneous areas of Community Development (CD) or welfare services guaranteeing the material satisfaction of the socio-economic needs of the citizens include provision of food, clothing and shelter for all thus avoiding the ravages of hunger, famine and general sacrifices. It includes also the provision for the needy and the poor-orphans, old people, the sick and the infirm, the widowed among others. There are also routine gifts of farm products, frequent organization of social occasions such as marriage, birth, naming, title taking, wrestling, new yam and other ceremonies and festivities. This reflects also the cultural identity of the people which is preserved through prescribed community values, norms and traditions, specific rites and ceremonies and other relevant oral traditions.

Assemblies of God Church: Its origin

In this subheading, we shall first examine the emergence of the name Assemblies of God in United States of America and later that of Igboland Nigeria.

Origin of the Assemblies of God, United States of America

Before we progress further, it is of interest to know about the origin of the Assemblies of God United States of America (USA) which the Church of Jesus Christ was affiliated with. Onwuhaa (2011) avers, "The Assemblies of God, USA originated from the three stages of the religious revolutionary movements in the USA, Holiness movement, Pentecostal movement and the birth of the Assemblies

of God, United States of America” (p.61). In decades of the nineteenth century, many groups had broken away from Methodist Church in USA with the aim of proclaiming the second blessing experience that follows conversion. All these groups that separated from the Methodist Church, motivated by the desire to live life of holiness and condemn the moral vices in the church came to be known and referred to as the holiness movements (Okpara, 2014). The holiness movements are two brand types: the Wesleyan Holiness Movement and the Keswick Holiness Movement. The Wesleyan Holiness Movement believed and professed that a person who had been converted or justified might undergo another spiritual experience called second blessing or sanctification through which the Holy Spirit enables him to live a sinless, perfect and holy Christian life. On the other hand, the Keswick believed in salvation, sanctification and a third blessing, this is called baptism for service. This movement was formed in 1905 in an alliance made up of Salvation Army, Missionary Alliance and the Church of the Nazarene. They all pulled out from the Methodist Church.

Theologically, both Wesleyan and Keswick Holiness Movements believed and taught the Armenian doctrine of salvation. Armenian doctrine of salvation teaches that everyone who believes in Christ can be saved and that although man cannot be saved without the grace of God, yet God’s grace is not irresistible. This means that man has to exercise his free will as to whether or not to accept the grace of God.

Onwuhaa (2011) comments also that modern Pentecostal originated in the USA from the Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansa, USA at the turn of the twentieth century. The Pentecostal believes did not think of establishing a Pentecostal branch of the church. Rather, their aim was to be agents of reform within the existing denominations. But such vision or dream failed to be actualized. Rather the Pentecostal message was greatly opposed and attacked. Pastors and missionaries who accepted the message forfeited their rights. Even some Holiness group like Methodist and the Salvation Army denounced and criticized the movement. They ascribed it to Satan.

After the Pentecostals had left their conventional churches, some leaders emerged within the followership. They included Charles Fox Parham, Florence Lewis from Ford of the Apostolic Faith. The Pentecostal movements were led by a group of gifted individuals within specific regions. There was no national organizations. There was no national organization to coordinate the activities of

these many groups that had spring in different parts of the USA. Such lack of coordination occasioned the unhealthy developments like spreading of fake doctrines by the groups and no financial accountability. There was a general heterogeneous mass doctrinal differences.

Having observed all these anomalies among the leaders of the Pentecostal groups because of lack of central or national coordination, some leaders thought of law to hold a convention of Pentecostal believers and churches of God in Christ which was held in 12th April, 1914 at Hot Springs Arkansas. The aim of the convention included among other things the establishment of doctrinal unity among the Pentecostals. By the end of the convention, they opted to adopt a mixture of congregational and Presbyterian system of church administration. By this system, each local church or congregation was made to be self-governing or autonomous while maintaining fellowship with other local churches and yet a national governing body of presbyters was formed to coordinate the congregations. Historically, this council marked the beginning or birth of the Assemblies of God. Each local church or congregation adopted Assemblies of God as its official name, while all the churches or congregations collectively were assemblies of God. Later in 1969, all the local churches in the USA adopted Assemblies of God as general official church name.

Assemblies of God Church, Igboland

The launching of AGM on the Igbo soil dates officially from 1939. But it was a chain of earlier developments that led to that fateful event. First, Augustus Nwogu (a former lay reader and pupil teacher of NDP) had left the Old Umuahia and St. Silas Primary School (Anglican) where he had taught for some years, for the clerical job in the Nigerian Dockyard (Nigerian Ports Authority, NPA) at Port Harcourt. There, then, he experienced spiritual crisis which led him to the Faith Tabernacle Congregation (FTC) in 1930. But in 1931 he returned to Old Umuahia and introduced this "Scriptural holiness" or "holiness Christianity" to his people. George Nnoromchi Alioha, his former steward, became Nwogu's first convert. In turn Alioha won other male and female followers including James Nwoji, Abel Nwoji, Will Woko, G.O. Akwarandu, Augustus Asonye, Edna Nwabuko, Sussana, Evelyn Ezuruka, Ufomadu, Titi N. Umechuruba and Echemgbako Gbaruko. Since there was no FTC in Old Umuahia, Nwogu's converts were sent to the Afara congregation under the leadership of E.T. Epele and B. Epele while they stayed in the mud worship house on the land donated by Abel Nwoji in Old Umuahia for their mid-week activities.

In 1934, Nwogu came again from Port Harcourt and taught the Old Umuahia group the doctrine of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Subsequently Nwogu's converts engaged Afara FTC leadership on the issue. The latter objected insisting that the age of the Holy Spirit baptism had past, and advised the Old Umuahia enthusiasts to pedal soft or in defiance might run mental. Following the ensuing deadlock Nwogu severing relations with FTC thence he named his group "Church of Jesus Christ" (CJC) in 1934 with another branch at Port Harcourt. Meanwhile, Augustus Asonye was appointed the pastor in charge of the home branch at Uzuahia. Soon, Port Harcourt sent for Asonye; he arrived and learnt about the fulfillment of the people's expectation; some members of the Port Harcourt branch had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. Asonye was later accompanied home by Evangelist Anyafulu, to minister to the old Umuahia believers. Anyafulu's trip was successful as he was yet speaking many people were baptized in the Holy Spirit (Ndubuisi, 1991).

Now, fired not merely by youthful zeal, but by the feeling that Christ might come the next day and by the conviction that theirs was genuine Pentecostal experience, they invaded and saturated with the gospel all the nook and cranny of Old Umuahia preaching their dragnet beyond into the neighbouring towns in the Olokoro community-including Amakama lying a stone throw behind Old Umuahia. Hindered by the problem of scarce means of transportation, they trekked kilometers on evangelistic outreach to as far as Uzuakoli, passing through Okaiuga, Umunemeze, Alaike, Ugwumkpa, Amaeghuato, Amaohoro and Amaediaba. In the south, they moved like harmattan wind into Ngor Okpala and Ngwaland. From Port Harcourt, they opened church stations along the rail road down to Enugu, and then went up to Kano through Kafanchan, Jos, and Kaduna. Asonye and his convert Gabriel O. Oyakhilome crossed the Niger Westwards and planted CJC in Ishan.

In 1939, W.L. Shirer and his wife visited Nigeria, from his base in Gold Coast (Ghana). He had been invited by an Ikot Ekpene-based group of Christians (Apostolic Church) in Ibibioland. The latter was soliciting union of fellowship with Shirer's American AGM. The missionaries' first port of call was Port Harcourt where they spotted CJC in a worship session. Subsequently, the leadership of the Church led by Nwogu and Alioha discussed terms of union with their visitors. Amid protests by members both at Port Harcourt and at home, the leaders signed away the identity of CJC and it answered the Igboland

Division of Assemblies of God Mission (IDAGM). Aloha became the first Assistant Supervisor, with Shirer at the helm of affairs.

The Shirers completed their pilot project after one year and returned to their missionary post in Ghana. In 1940, E.L. Phillips arrived in Port Harcourt in company of his wife and son Donald. All efforts by Philips to secure land space to establish his headquarters and Bible school in Port Harcourt were thwarted by the British officers who were allegedly protecting their country's Anglican (CMS) from the ongoing missionaries' scramble for sphere of influence in Igboland. Then, Phillips resorted to Old Umuahia where he started a miniature Bible school in the mud church building on the land donated by Abel Nwoji. Later, he transferred the school to the present site situated behind Afoibeji market on a high land nearly surrounded by valley, a feature that has earned it the popular name "Holy Hill". More missionaries from America joined Phillips to train the natives in theology and in the art and science of soul winning, on the Holy Hill.

It is interesting to state here that before the USA church responded to Church of Jesus Christ request, a South African organization had indicated interest in the young old Umuahia group. To that end, a visit of the organization's representative to the brethren was promised. In anticipation to the visit the Old Umuahia group built a parsonage, but the visit by South African group failed. The failure of the South African visitors to show up thus dampened their hope of establishing a foreign link they needed to help in putting together complex organizational strategies which their group demanded.

The foreign missions division of the AGM, USA sent W.Llyod Shirer to visit and evaluate the beliefs and activities of the two Christian groups at Ikot Ekpene and Old Umuahia. As a resident missionary in Gold Coast (Ghana) he arrived in Nigeria through in June, 1939. From Port Harcourt, he travelled first to meet with the Ikot Ekpene group. According to Kalu (2010), in 1939 William Llyod Shirer facilitated the affiliation exercise between the CJC and the Assemblies of God headquarters of the mission USA.

On mutual understanding, the name of the Old Umuahia group which had spread to a greater part of the then Igboland in 1934 was changed from CJC to Assemblies of God Mission in the year 1939. Consequently, the Ikot Ekpene group adopted also the same name. The two groups became a district made up of Igboland Division, and Annag and Ibibio Division respectively. The two

groups were merged as one Nigerian Mission field of the Assemblies of God, USA. At that point, when the two bodies were merged as one mission field, the foreign missionary became the district superintendent, while G.M. Alioha and Udom Akpan became Assistant District superintendents in their respective divisions.

AGM: Its Administrative Structure

In 1992, the administrative structure was expanded to allow for four General officers, the General Superintendent, the Assistant General Superintendent, the General Secretary and General Treasurer. The ministries in AGM are responsible to the four General officers. From 1992, additional arms were created which include media, education and corporate ministries. In all, the administrative structure presently showers four national officers, eight departments instead of the former five, their auxiliaries and support units. These auxiliaries and agencies include the Royal Rangers, the young singles, the missionaries, social ministry, Casor, children education among others. These auxiliaries are run by coordinator appointed to oversee each administrative organ he has the responsibility of giving regular reports to a Board set to handle the affairs of the departments. It is the Board that represents the departments and gives report to the Executive Committee. With the four national officers who see the day to day running of the whole administration of the national secretariat, the Executive Committee performs its usual role of taking major decisions affecting both the national staff and the entire General Council. The sixteen-man executive committee seeks and protects the general interest of everyone within the national church.

The Bible is regarded as God's word and worked through the spirit on the minds of the people who wrote the Bible. The message of Bible was given by God to men. AGM believers believe in the one true and living God. God the trinity, I am, the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the divine nature of Christ, the humanity of Christ, the fall of man, the church, eschatology, sanctification, the millennia reign of Christ among others.

Leadership Chronicles

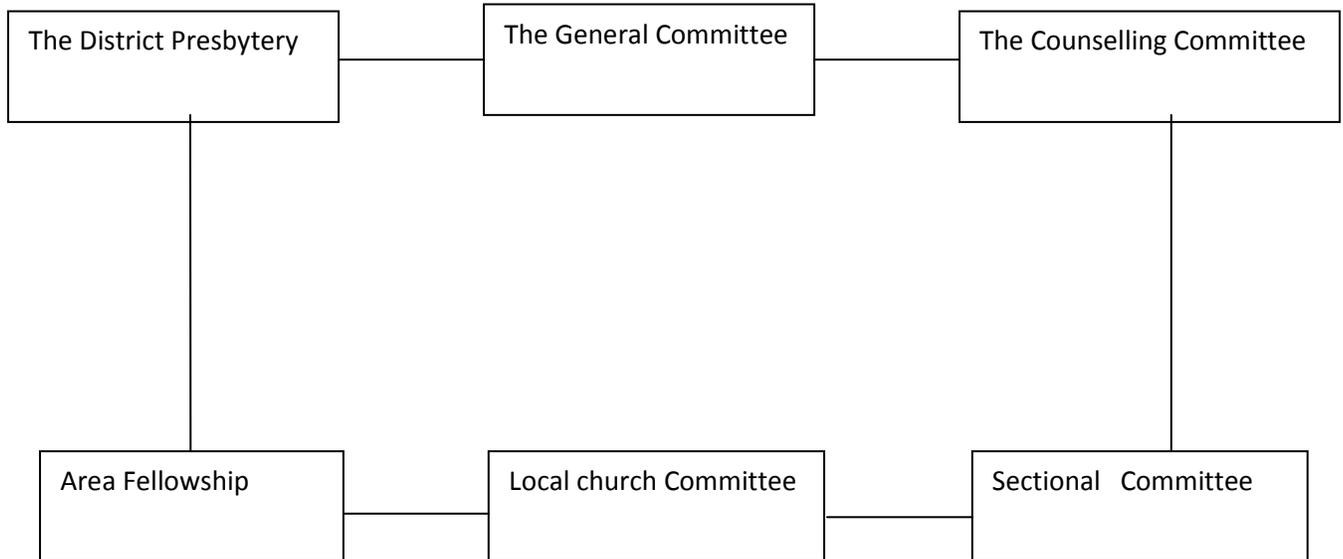
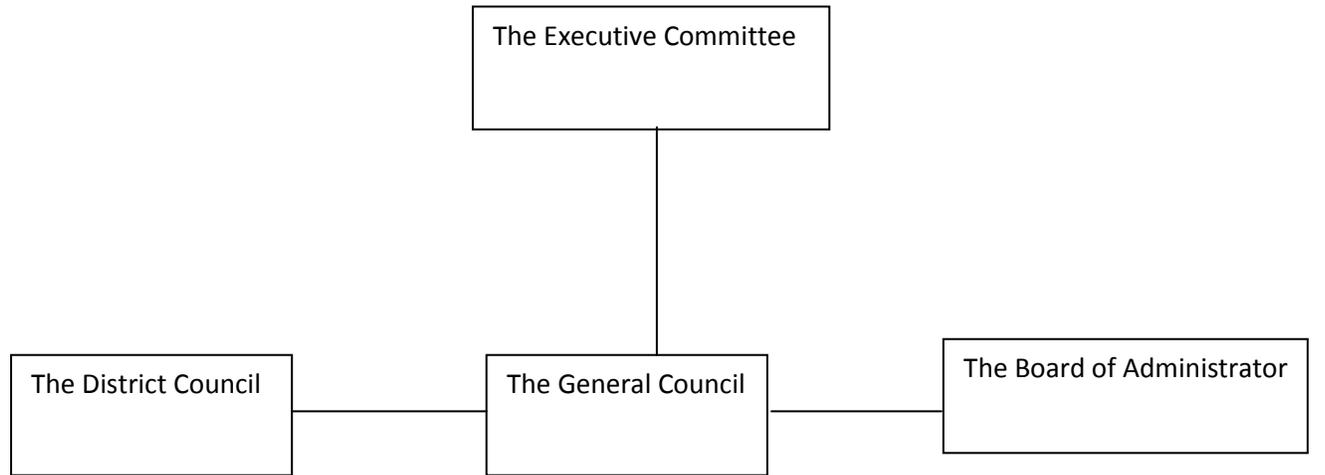
- 1) Elder Augustine-----Iwe Nwogu - 1934-1939-Church of Jesus Christ
- 2) Rev William Liloyd Shirer (District superintendent) 1939-1940 AGM

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 3) Rev Rex Jackson -----
AGM | 1941-1957 |
| 4) Rev H.D. Penington----- | 1958-1961 |
| 5) Rev M.O. Ezigbo Assistant District Superintendent
1961 | 1958- |
| 6) Rev M.O. Ezigbo 1 st Nigeria - General Superintendent | 1961-1969 |
| 7) Rev G.O. Oyakhilome Assistant Superintendent | 1961-1969 |
| 8) Rev G.O. Oyakhilome (General Overseer) | 1961-1969 |
| 9) Rev M.O. Ezigbo (General Overseer) | 1982-1988 |
| 10) Rev Dr. C.O. Osueke (General Overseer) | 1988-2010 |
| 11) Rev Prof Paul Emeka (General Overseer)
till date | Nov. 2010- |
| 12) Rev Dr. Chidi Okorafor (Factional leader)
2014-till date | October |

Administrative structure of Assemblies of God Church in Igboland

The AGM is autonomous with its headquarters at Enugu, and is to operate in cooperation with the world-wide Assemblies of God fellowship. In this case, the AGM has the General Council, the Executive Committee, the General Committee, and the Board of administration, District Council, District Presbytery, Counselling Committee, Area fellowship and Sectional Committee.

The Organogram of the Assemblies of God Church



Besides these groups and other agencies through which the programme of the national church are carried out, there are auxiliary organs operating under the Board of administration. They are carefully fashioned to carry out certain essential functions of each department under which they operate.

The general council holds all the arms of the National Church together while the General Committee comprises all the Executive council members whose duty is to appraise the progress of work and make input on the administration of the church. The board of administration is made up of the four General Council officers otherwise known as executive officers. The officers who work full time in the National Secretariat include the General Superintendent, the Assistant General Superintendent, the General Secretary, and the General Treasurer. This group headed by the General Superintendent oversees the functions of the entire organization on daily basis. The Presbytery is made up of seven members. It is next to the administration structure of the General Council. It has the District Superintendent as head of administration, the Assistant District Superintendent, the District Secretary, the District Treasurer and three elected pastors.

Culturally, the polity of AGM in Igboland follows the sub-cultural or geographical pattern of Igboland in naming the districts in which the mission has been organized for administrative purposes. For example, Anioma area is located in western Igboland sub-cultural area with her headquarters at Agbor. Western Igboland district whose administrative seat is at Onitsha is in northwestern culture area. Northern Igboland sub-cultural area is situated in a northern Igboland district and is being administered from Enugu. The central Igboland has her headquarters at Owerri in the central culture area of Igboland; again, southern Igboland district administratively seated in Aba is invariably located in the southern sub-cultural area. Furthermore, eastern Igboland district in the eastern Igboland sub-cultural area has its headquarters at Uzuakoli. In the same vein, and finally, northern Igboland is in the northeastern sub-cultural area, with her administration quartered in Abakaliki (Ndubuisi, 1997).

AGM-A thematic survey

School-In the recent past, when people spoke of missions, they usually had in mind the mission schools (Baur, 2005). Equally for many, perhaps too many missionaries, the schools were the most important institutions. For the historian, schools could well be used as the barometer of Igbo development. The bush

schools were and remained entrench the work of the missions, and they were generally run at a very low cost. These such schools were below standard, and that too many pupils forget the three Rs faster than they learnt them.

All investments in schools seemed to be well justified; for it looked as if Igboland became Christian community to the extent that its children went to school. Concretely speaking 80-90% of all Christians many have been converted in these schools. Regarding professional training the record is a chequered one. For the other missions, there were enough teacher training colleges and nursing schools, and the secondary schools provided the necessary training for clerks. But professional training in the strict sense was quite inadequate: There were a good number of domestic science schools for girls, relatively fewer technical schools for boys, and hardly any agricultural school.

The building up of the Christian Medical Service

The medical services clearly occupied a second place in missionary activity. Education was considered a direct response to Christ's commission, "Go and teach all nations"; healing diseases seemed to have been an activity used mostly to support Christ's own teaching mission. But just as nobody would dare to deny that the healing Christ was not primarily moved by genuine compassion, we have to admit the same for those who come, in his name, to teach and to heal (Baur, 2005).

Jesus Christ stated that he had come "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind" (Luke 4: 18 NIV). He went about healing the diseases of the people and sent the disciples with power to cure diseases (Luke 9:11). When the early church began its ministry, healing was an integral part of that ministry (Acts 3). Moved by compassion, the church has responded to the need and promoted medical missions, including clinics, dispensaries, hospitals, and medical schools (Falk, 1997). Many missionaries served with their box of medicine, as David Livingstone had done. They realized, however, that a more concentrated effort was needed in order to make an impact on the medical needs. The AGM stresses also on faith clinic or faith hospital. That is healing. It is its belief that through prayers, every manner of illness will be cured.

Economic Assistance: Charity and Development

As things, the essential direct answer to the problem of underdevelopment and power was that of Christian charity. If there was Christ's great commission to

evangelize, there was also his new commandment of fraternal love and his own identification with “the least of my brothers” (John 13:34, Matthew 25:40). Charity, of course, was a much more delicate activity than medical work, which too should be regarded as an expression of fraternal love. There was the danger of creating what in China was called “Rice Christians” or “beggars”: The motive of conversion being material help rather than internal acceptance of the faith. Yet, should all material charitable work have been omitted on account of this danger? The fact is that many early missionaries are still remembered by their Christians with great affection for their deeds of charity AGM inclusive. The church of Jesus Christ has considered faith healing in respect of the sick, widows, orphans, the aged, and helping other similar needy as an integral part of its redemptive ministry.

Pattern of indigenous response

Independency is a societal reaction to mission arising out of climate of opinion in which Christian missions were believed to be illegitimately mounting an attack against African traditional society and in particular its basic unit, the family (Barrett, 1970). The traditional factors involved in the issue include the concept of polygamy, the ancestral cult, the earth goddess, the traditional African family coupled with colonial factors. This is inevitable because the world in which we all live is changing and our society will not be exceptional to the rules. It is believed in some quarters that AGM did deadly blows to some of the Igbo beliefs and practices as Achebe (1958) opined,

How do you think we can fight, our own brothers have turned against us. The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peacefully with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our own brothers and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (p.125).

This quotation depicts the activities of the past. People felt that the AGM and their kinds were kidding, and with time, they would fizzle away. The influence and effect of this Pentecostal church in our society is enormous to both the foreign missionary work and Igbo traditional religion by dominant, modern and dynamic Pentecostal practices. Because of the activities of this mission to the Igbo beliefs and practices, pluralistic pattern of marriage, social values, customs and

rituals, masquerade cults, traditional dances and so on were either totally destroyed or ignored. Because of all these activities by the mission, they attracted much opposition to themselves. All this became hurdles that they must scale through in order to excel.

But the truth of the matter is that the Assemblies of God Church is only against those customs and values which they claimed are idolatrous in nature and the ones that do not enhance human values. The AGM considered those ones to be nothing more than pagan values and superstitions, which play no positive part in traditional Igbo culture. The Igbo religion featured belief in the Supreme Being called variously "*Chukwu*", "*Obasi Bi N'elu*" or "*Olisebuluwa*" among others. They believed also in the lesser deities and ancestral spirits, the latter being linked with living members of the Igbo society by elders seen as the custodians of morality and social order. The higher powers in the hierarchy were approached through the lesser ones. Sacrifices were offered by devouts for forgiveness of offences and for benevolence in form of health, wealth children and general fortune. Forces in native were also tapped and computed into charms, amulets and medicines for personal benefits and security.

With regard to oath-taking and divination, AGM is against some of what it termed evil beliefs and methods of social control as divination, traditional oath taking, consultation of oracles and use of Ofor and masquerades for any purpose. The Bible injunction they applied in condemning the oath-taking is in Matthew 5:33-37 which says,

Again you have heard that it was said to the men of old, "you shall not swear falsely, but you shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn". But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king...let what you say be simply "Yes" or "No", anything more than this comes from evil.

The AGM believers believe in the authority of the Bible- "*sola scriptura*". Other beliefs and practices AGM condemns include the concept of reincarnation, *osu* caste system (those dedicated to deity), ancestor veneration, divorce, polygamy among others.

AGM: Its pattern of expansion

From their individual house to house evangelism, as well as the open air out reaches from place to place, many people got converted. The AGM had its origin in the widespread desire in the hearts of men and women for a closer walk with God and a better understanding of the word of God. Although the group at the early stage passed through the tutelage of a foreign mission, yet that did not influence their doctrinal beliefs and life style or liturgy.

Whenever the response was limited, or the workers expected few converts, individuals accepted the Christian faith and formed a group from the society. This group later metamorphosed into small elite society separated from the people. Wherever this unfortunate situation continued, the Christians became a misunderstood minority group in the society and the people as a whole were not evangelized. Another tendency has been for the first believers, overwhelmed by the joy they found in the Christian faith, to witness to their people and bring about a movement toward Christianity that resulted in the conversion of most of them. Whenever this movement has been guided effectively, the Christian faith has spread from community to community, and group after group of believers has been formed (Falk, 1997).

Music is a part of everyday life in Africa vis-à-vis Igboland. Christian songs, especially those composed by African song-writers in keeping with the rhythmic style and the pentatonic scale of most African music, have enriched the services and greatly enhanced the diffusion of the gospel. The gospel has been transmitted in song by Christians sitting around the evening campfires. The many choirs and musical groups, singing to the beat of drums, have greatly influenced the people.

AGM: Its theology of mission and evangelism

Evangelism is the reproductive process by which Christian expands and fills the earth (Hunter, 1983). Church growth teaches comprehensive evangelism. Evangelism is beneficial, not only to the eternal growth of the congregation, but to its internal growth. The AGM claim to give oracles, faith-healing and perform miracles. The prophets and evangelists among them give visions and their interpretations. They based their argument on acts 2:17-18 cf. Joel 2:28-29;

And it shall come to pass afterword, which I will pour
out my spirit on all flesh, your sons and your daughters
shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and

your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in these days, I will pour out my spirit.

With this firm belief, the AGM reduced the activities of the medicine men in Igboland.

According to Anderson (2008), the early church was a community of the Holy Spirit, and the freedom of expression and spontaneity of its worship may not have been very different from that of many Pentecostal and charismatic churches today. Some of the characteristic features and ecstatic phenomena of Pentecostalism like prophecy, healing, prosperity gospel, and speaking in tongues were common. Speaking in tongues, prophecy and miraculous healings associated with AGM are among other 'spiritual gifts' or charismata mentioned several times in Acts.

It seems that the decline in the practice of spiritual gifts began quite early as the Montanist movement in the second century believed that the gifts of the Spirit had been restored to their former importance in their movement. Monasticism itself was originally a charismatic movement that reacted to what seemed to be cold orthodoxy, claiming the sympathies and probably the allegiance of the famous African theologian Tertullian (C.155-220). Speaking in tongues and prophecy were common among Montanus and his disciples and they believed in 'progressive revelation', so distasteful and destabilizing for the church seeking to establish itself and even so as it became increasingly identified with the heresy of Gnosticism and millennialist excesses.

For the AGM, there is the theology of the spirit (the baptism in the spirit), and mission and evangelism (that is, to engage themselves in the end-time harvest of souls that would accompany the preaching of the full-gospel throughout the world). Their efforts were grounded in the conviction that the Holy Spirit was the motivating power behind all such activity, and their spirit baptism had given them different languages of the world, as the first issue of the Azusa Street.

Most early AGM leaders and some of the most successful Pentecostal and Charismatic pastors in many parts of the world have been those with little or no theological education. AGM like any other Pentecostals rebut the theory that they prefer the oral theology that Jesus practiced and reject philosophical theology and the gymnastic of high and low critical methods (Kalu, 2008).

In addition to aggressive evangelism, one of the major factors that helped the AGM to grow rapidly is their Sunday school programme. To meet the spiritual needs of lay members in their denomination, the foreign missionaries started a Sunday school programme in the year 1942. These weekly lessons gave an in-depth understanding of the Bible to the students who were all enthusiastic about the study. The missionaries articulated a systematic programme of Bible study that spanned all books of the Bible, and with a well planned manual. The most doctrinal topics were treated in segmented quarterly format taught by teachers drawn from each local congregation.

To ensure full involvement of all members, students were organized into different classes on age levels. AGM has men ministry, women ministry, and mission and youth ministries.

AGM: Its weaknesses

The missionaries who were not themselves degree holders lacked the required professional skills and could neither run secular schools nor handle medicare programmes. Admittedly the home base policy allowed missionaries to sponsor such projects even by raising fund at home specifically for such educational purposes. But, how could they pursue such policies which would advance their “boys” (the native agents) above themselves. It was only after the civil war that most of the missionaries began to read for degrees and consequently stopped discouraging the indigenes from university education.

Another factor that militated against the pre-war missionization activities in Igboland was the retarding attitude of national leaders who usually monopolized the urban towns and refused a second local church to be opened in their “chiefdoms”. The adverse effects of the above reported national leaders’ attitude on AGM’s church planting and expansion in Igboland can hardly be captured in a few words, especially in a short piece such as this. But, suffice it to say here in a nutshell that such practice hindered the church growth.

The once peaceful members of one-fold family of the Assemblies of God Church had been torn apart following a leadership tussle that is presently bedeviling the church. Crisis of factionalization of the church had been lingering as two senior pastors, Professor Paul Emeka and Dr. Chidi Okoroafor had been at loggerheads, each laying claim to be the overall leader of the church, qualified to bear the designation “General Superintendent”. This leadership tussle over the stool of

the General Superintendent exploded into violence in one of its branches in Enugu.

The leadership tussles that erupted recently in the Assemblies of God Nigeria is now escalating and bringing down the Church, and the glory of God is of all things demeaning. It portrayed the contrast to the spiritual leadership of Elder Augustine Ehurie Iwe-Nwogu. The remote causes of the situation could be traced to such factors as:

- 1) Family Affinity/heritage mentality;
- 2) Constitutional matters;
- 3) Corruption; and
- 4) Mal-administration.

For the family affinity/heritage mentality, it was being alleged that the pastors of Umuahia extraction believe that since Augustine Ehurie Nwogu and most of the founding fathers were from Old Umuahia that it should be that leadership must continue to rotate within the family circle. The assertion may be alluded bearing in mind the construction of the family linkage to the founding fathers. Ogwuda (2015) noted that the drama started when Reverend Nathaniel Udeze stormed the Mount Street parish (in Enugu) with letters of posting and other court documents empowering him to be installed as the new Pastor of the Parish. But he was stoutly resisted along with his team of loyalists by the current resident pastor of the parish, Reverend Amaechi Agbo, who along with his loyalists, accused Udeze of being an “intruder”. The disagreement led to a free for all fight when Udeze insisted on taking over, since he had been officially posted there by the leadership of the church under Rev. Paul Emeka. Earlier, supporters of both warring pastors were found sharing different versions of the Sunday School manual which angered the supporters of the divide until the two pastors began a shouting match that eventually led to the free fro all fight. The fracas attracted the attention of the police who raced to the place and looked up the church. That was not the first time the members of the congregation would engage in such a show of shame. On December 3, 2014, hell was also let loose at the national headquarters of the church located in Enugu when the two warring factions engaged in a bloody clash that left no fewer than five persons seriously injured, while four cars packed at the premises were burnt beyond recognition. Members of the Okoroafor faction stormed the national secretariat in several buses and attempted to gain entry into the national secretariat but were prevented by Rev Emeka’s loyalists. Again, as a result of the leadership tussle, violence broke out

in one of the branches of the church in Saminaka, Lere Local Government Area, Kaduna State, about 140 kilometers east of Kaduna metropolis. Binnayat (2016) wrote that the fight left 20 members with injuries and two homes of resident pastors burnt.

A source from the Assemblies of God Church (Jerusalem), Saminaka, told Vanguard in Kaduna that the fight started from 8am and lasted till 2pm on the Sunday, which was later confirmed by Kaduna State Police Command. It could be recalled that on September 15, 2015, Governor Nasir el-Rufai had ordered the closure of the church including the Theological Seminary of Northern Nigeria Seminaka, Sharom Comprehensive College, AGC Evangelical Hospital Seminaka, saying it was to avoid a possible breakdown of law and order, as the two factions squabbled.

According to the source, a minority faction of the church sneaked into the premises on Sunday evening and slept overnight. The source said: "We came to worship around 8am. Not knowing that the other faction had prepared for war. We can into the premises and secured the gates. As soon as we had settled for church proceedings, about 20 members of other factions appeared. They were armed with knives, daggers, clubs, iron rods, and other weapons". The source further said that: "In no time, the attacked us, injuring many of us. Since we were not armed, we had to find ways to escape". The most frightening thing according to the source, was that the stones the other faction was throwing on them were also falling into Hausa Muslims' homes. If these Hausa Muslims had reacted, the problem would have been a terrible one. These Muslims came out and were laughing at them. It was really a disgrace. However, the Police Public relations Officer for Kaduna State Police Command, ASP Aliyu Usman, confirmed the story.

Nmah (2004) affirmed that, "In the contemporary society, leadership had been a controversial issue for those who do not understand the cost of being a leader" (p.213). He further stated that when honesty, transparency and accountability are sacrificed on the altar of 'power at all cost' there is bound to be conflict, which will have all the ingredients to turn violent. Nmah advised that the one body of Christ should be the ideal philosophy to be manifested among Christians. Christ himself prayed for unity among his disciples (Jn. 17:6-19) and the church (Jn.17:20-26).

Conclusion and recommendations

In sum, this research work presents Assemblies of God Church in Igboland, 1970-2016: a thematic x-ray on the level of origin, pattern of indigenous response, pattern of expansion, and theology of mission and evangelism. All the thematic survey reported AGM's strengths and weaknesses. This allows suggesting that AGM has a lot to do in order to recover its past glory. To know God is both to affirm certain propositions about him and to have a relationship with him, a relationship that centres on our trust, our obedience and our worship.

According to Lumberton and Minor-Evans (n. d.), "anyone wishing to manage a conflict should begin by looking closely at what is really happening" (p.409). When strong emotions are involved, people are often tempted to jump to conclusions before examining the interests of both sides and their own interests as well. By so doing, there are certain questions to be considered, namely: Who is involved? Or how many people are taking part in this conflict? Second, what is at stake? Or do all or both sides in the dispute agree on what is really at stake? If duties and responsibilities are at stake, does everyone agree on exactly what those issues are? Third, how important is time for the matter to rest? Does this dispute have to be settled right away? Does one side benefit from stalling? Time factor should be considered whether it will cool tempers on both sides, or if the passage of time will simply aggravate the issue. What relationship does this dispute have with other disputes between the individuals or groups involved? The conflict in AGM should be regarded as dysfunctional conflict rather than functional conflict since it can engender weaknesses in soul winning. As people with different backgrounds, points of view, values, needs and personalities interact, a variety of conflicts often develop (Nmah, 2004).

To Nmah (2008), the contents of conflict comprise the source, disagreement on items of contents, or rightness of ideas. The probable solution is to check another source to verify who is right. There should be equity that is, treating everyone with the same rules. The AGM has generally maintained the centrality of the historical Jesus as Lord and savior. The knowledge of the Christian faith of some of the members has been limited. Consequently, some discrepancy may exist between the doctrines accepted by the group and the practice of some believers. To Falk (1997), the future will reveal to what extent the AGM will serve as a movement of renewal and reform. The initial fellowship in, and the radiant witness of, AGM is an important contribution to Christianity in Africa. The members are often in a close relationship with their fellowmen and witness to

them in everyday situations of life. The members, like any other new religious movement often witness to their faith with a radiant joy and an assurance of conviction that testifies to their relationship with Christian and is very convincing.

In respect of its weaknesses, I recommend that the pastors should be less materialistic, and reduce also their rate of prosperity gospel. The church should engage itself in re-training its personnel in order to acquaint them with the new trend of soul winning propagated by spirit filled life. This will also curtail the rate of bickery and bigotry among the pastors and lay members. The church should look at things from the spiritual reality rather than from earthly reality.

Leadership today is often viewed in terms of the position and responsibilities one holds in an organization. The higher one is in the framework, the more important a leader is thought to be. Fernando (1985) opined that this is an important aspect of leadership, but maintain that when Christians look at leadership, they view it in terms of people rather than position. One of the most beautiful figures used in the scriptures to describe the relationships the leader has with his people is in terms of parenthood.

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