

MISSIONARY STRATEGIES OF BISHOP EPHRAIM IKEAKOR OF AMICHI DIOCESE, ANAMBRA STATE: A PARADIGM FOR ANGLICAN EXPANSIONISM IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Anglican Mission in Nigeria was notable for its holistic evangelism (undertaking the spiritual and social uplift of the people). Such holistic approach to evangelism was made manifest in their educational and medical approach to evangelism which in turn led to influx of Nigerians into the church and eventually culminated in social-economic and political development of Nigeria. However, it has been observed that in most Dioceses of the Anglican Church in Nigeria today, such holistic evangelism appears to be in sharp decline. Attention appears to be geared more towards infrastructural development of the church and the ultimate welfare of the hierarchy of the church at the expense of social and economic welfare of the members. This is fast resulting to members drifting away from the Anglican Church to the new generation churches whose policies and evangelical approaches appear to appeal more to the welfare of the people. Nevertheless, the life and ministry of Ephraim Okechukwu Ikeakor, the Evangelical Anglican Bishop of Amichi Diocese, has shown considerable interest in the social responsibility of the church, not just to the members of the church but also for the communities within the ecclesiastical circle of the Diocese. This study was therefore, conceived to examine the evangelistic arm of the Anglican Diocese of Amichi, as it concerns its expansion or numerical growth and strategies for soul winning/conversion to its membership. It is believed that a study of such pragmatic approach to evangelism can inspire so many other Diocese of the Anglican Communion towards more human centred evangelical approaches. The research method adopted in this study was historical and phenomenological method of the qualitative research, which enabled the researcher to find out the philosophy behind Bishop Ikeakor's evangelical success and the rapid growth of Amichi Diocese. Data collected were analyzed to reach a logical conclusion that a project for evangelism geared towards the social responsibility of the church to its followers as is seen in the life and ministry of Ephraim Okechukwu Ikeakor of Amichi Diocese is a follow up of the evangelistic ideas of the pioneers of the Church missionary society to Nigeria and which if adopted by other Anglican Dioceses in Nigeria, could address the issue of Anglican members moving away to the new generation churches and revamp their commitment to the growth and spread of Anglicanism in Nigeria.

Introduction

The Anglican Diocese of Amichi was inaugurated on the 13th day of January, 2009. The Diocese came as a new Diocese out of the Diocese of Nnewi, Province on the Niger. The Pioneer Bishop, Rt. Rev'd Ephraim Okechukwu Ikeakor was formerly elected on 2008 and was enthroned on 11th day of January, 2009. The Pioneer Bishop encountered some challenges which could be likened to the challenges faced by the CMS pioneer missionaries to Nigeria in the 19th century. However, the early missionaries adopted certain approaches for their evangelistic campaigns such as School approach, Hospitals, medical approach, agricultural approach, community development approach and so on. All these approaches were employed by the early missionaries to encourage the evangelistic drive. Although they were faced with setbacks such as lack of man power and materials that made the initial mission to concentrate in Onitsha, yet the mission achieved a lot.

So many primary and secondary schools were established. Hospital and health centres were built to take care of the deteriorating health of the people. According to Dike (1996) funds were raised through the efforts of Rev. Henry Robinson and Rev. F.N. Ede to aid mission work. That pioneer missionary enterprise yielded a lot of fruits as so many converts were made and lives were affected positively. Some of the schools and hospitals were with affordable fees and sometimes free education or scholarships were granted. So many crops were introduced by missionaries and people were taught on fruitful ways for both annual and perennial crop production. The pioneer Missionaries helped to develop rural roads, sourced for clean water, educated the people on the health hazard of unhygienic life style and so on. However, it is worrisome that the generousities of the early missionaries in providing these aids are not followed by most of the Anglican dioceses in Nigeria today. The Dioceses where these facilities are found have not made them affordable to the wholesome benefit of the host communities. Schools for instance owned by the churches appear to be the exclusive reserve of the rich people's children. Even most clergy cannot afford to train their wards in church owned colleges and universities. It is in search for a solution to this problem and a follow up of the strategies of the pioneer missionaries that propelled Bishop Ephraim Ikeakor into a pragmatic approach to evangelism as is seen in Amich diocese today. It is indeed a great privilege for the Church to have such evangelical person as Rt. Rev'd Ephraim Ikeakor whose evangelistic impact spans across the length and breadth of

Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion. The need arises for a written exposure of this great strategy. This study is geared towards getting other bishops and pastors to copy from Bishop Ikeakor so as to awaken the slumbering situation of the present Anglican church in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

For a better understanding of the success of the pragmatic approach to evangelism by Bishop Ephraim Ikeakor, Donald McGavran Church Growth Theory will be employed.

Dr. Donald McGavran in the 1930s, was a missionary in India, McGavran formed several hypotheses that with time proved to be the foundation stones of what was to become a modern Church Growth movement theory.

To McGavran, evangelism was an input term, which means that the last should be evangelized (gospelized) and when that was done, they would be baptized and brought into the Church (As a result, the Church grew). To McGavran, growth is the output of evangelism. As time passed Church Growth theory evolved into three definitions first it is described as growth in numbers - an increase in attendance offerings, baptism, or membership. Hence the initial concern of Church Growth was with observable countable repeatable phenomena that could be measured. The second meaning to the term comes to be church planting. To McGavran, the answer to Matthew 28:19 commission was to plant churches in every group of people believing that the new group in an effort to grow will evangelize their own people in their culture hence the phrase cross cultural evangelism.

Third definition which is scientific defines church Growth as a discipline that takes its place under systematic theology - Bible based ministry that was data driven in strategy. This theory seeks to discover those principles that were most successful and effective in evangelizing new people groups. It applied the scientific method of research that was used by all disciplines to determine principle and methods of evangelism.

It developed further when Peter C. Wagner became the spokesman for church Growth. By 1980, academic leaders including seminary and college professors, spearheaded the Church Growth movement when they became involved in

research, the basic understanding of church Growth was expanded through these academic pioneers: George Hunter, John Vanghan, Kent Hunter et cetera.

By the turn of 1988, diversity of paradigm shift in this theory took place and they included signs and wonders (power evangelism) through Peter Wagner. Second and third generation abandoned much of McGavran's Biblical and theological correctness critics leveled against church Growth movement.

Shallow, gimmicky that elevates pragmatism and methodology over theology. Being influenced more by modernity than the scripture. However, there is an obvious need to state here that McGavran theory of church growth is global in focus which is solidly evangelical and conservative, it holds to a conversion-oriented approach to evangelism which rely much on contextualization but never relegating these to prominence over the biblical record.

He further opines that problem in mission are serious issues that affect the entire body of Christ. Healthy mission makes the whole body vibrant and alive. He asserts that mission can be a same culture of a cross-cultural endeavor. Furthermore he observed that Jesus did not create a church and then give it mission as one of its tasks, but the sending comes prior to the church. That is to say mission gives birth to the church and is its mother. He posits that "the very essence or nature of the church is mission. If the church ceases to be missionary, it has not simply failed in its tasks, but has actually ceased being the church. It becomes only a religiously oriented social organization.

The Coming of Anglican Church to Igboland

Slave trade was abolished in British Empire in 1833. Slaves captured by European slave dealers were freed and sent to free town in Sierra Leone. The slaves having lived with the Westerners have accepted Christianity. Towards the end of the 19th century, some of the freed slaves began to trace their ways back home. And those who returned home between 1839 and 1845 with the aid of foreign missionary pastors under the (CMS) established Christianity in various parts of what later became Nigeria including Igboland. Success followed the efforts of the pioneer missionaries. CMS churches were firmly established in several important towns such as Abeokuta (1846), Lagos (1851), Ibadan (1853), Oyo (1856), Onitsha (1857). Next branches of the CMS churches were formed in South-southern Nigeria, the Chief centers being Bonny and Brass. The effect of works done by Bishop Ajayi Crowder, assisted by an Igbo recaptive, the Rev. J.C. Taylor, in parts of Southern Nigeria can still be seen today. They worked with

certain policies. The policies were developed as an ideology in which Africans would work or take over from the Europeans in propagating the gospel of Jesus Christ in their own lands. Ekechi (1972) maintained that each of the policies was in a bid to achieve a self ideology and an indigenous ministry. They were concerned on how the church in African can be fully managed and controlled by the Africans themselves. This according to Spitzer (2013) began with enlightenment brought to Igboland by Crowther and other Christian missionaries. The then CMS secretary, Henry Venn believed that Africans could lead when they are trained and that Africans could lead Africans, he vehemently opposed any effort to discredit the Africans as an inferior human being and incapable of leadership, Omali (2012) noted that in coining these policies. Venn believed that the European missions in Africa would ultimately eliminate themselves to build a native church that enjoyed self governing, self supporting and self propagating status.

The CMS led by Crowther believed a healthy native church required local leaders. The leadership of Crowther eagerly promoted Henry Venn's four-part mission strategy: (1) evangelize the native population (2) train leaders (3) establish the native pastorate, and (4) move on to virgin lands. Once Crowther established a native pastorate according to this strategy, it successfully created many self-sufficient local churches that were the local believers. All this helped to establish a distinctly African, orthodox Christianity. According to Okafor (2016). Colonialists, was not the only factor that led to the philosophical down turn among British missionaries. Crowther believed his own country men were capable of leading themselves. His role in producing a native church led the then CMS secretary, Henry Venn, who saw him as capable of actualizing the vision of self governing, self supporting and self propagating African churches. In 1857, Venn sent him to open a new mission on the Niger. Together with J.C. Taylor, Simon Jonas and other indigenous missionaries with him from Sierra Leone, they sustained the Igbo mission. Crowther, oversaw J.C. Taylor's ground breaking work in Igbo land and directed the evangelization of the Niger Delta and it yielded some positive results at such centers as Bonny. Taylor, an Igbo ex-slave and a convert from Sierra Leone, was given the responsibility of establishing the first mission in Igboland. It fulfilled Crowther's expectations and fervently expressed prayers: "May this be the beginning of a rapid overspread of Christianity in the countries on the banks of the Niger, and in the heart of Africa, through native agents" (Nweze, 2014). The Revd. Taylor was very instrumental to most of the successes of the CMS in the Niger mission. He was busy teaching,

preaching, visiting, building, healing, settling quarrels, studying the language and writing journals. Nwokoye (2016) added that J.C. Taylor was helped in his pastoral work by Simon Jonas, the catechist. One of Taylor's most important tasks was to open schools. He achieved that by the establishment of Mr. Romaine School at Onitsha which extended to the neighbouring towns.

Okeke (2006) listed the Igbo ordained men in the CMS church by 1931 which was the result of Taylor's achievements in his missionary activities as the leader of the Onitsha mission. Crowther, Taylor, Simon Jonas and the host of CMS church really achieved their objectives in establishing an Igbo church that is self reliant, self propagating and self governing.

From Onitsha, the Igbo mission spread to other parts of Igboland including the hinterlands and suburbs. The system, in addition to being an evangelistic factor, brought a lot of social and economic development to Igboland. These included among other things: education, enhanced human health via scientific medicare, legitimate trade and agriculture and infrastructural facilities.

Bishop Ephraim Ikeakor and the Anglican Diocese of Amichi

The Anglican Diocese of Amichi is the 144th Diocese of the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion. It was inaugurated on Monday 13th January, 2009 with the enthronement of her pioneer Bishop, the Rt. Rev'd Ephraim Okechukwu Ikeakor. The episcopacy of Bishop Ikeakor has brought about a tremendous transformation to all the communities making up the Diocese. The physical development is fuelled by a spiritually vibrant and effervescent episcopacy and is consolidated with the underlining legal and administrative framework.

The chief instrument in this regard is the Diocesan constitution which was approved by the Church of Nigeria in record time. The document has since been in use. The constitution of the Diocese of Amichi surely lays the framework for the smooth administrative machinery of the Diocese. However, it does not say everything in particular details. To cover for the gaps in worship, life and conduct of members, the Diocese at various times and different circumstances has come up with policies and guidelines to order the life of worshippers as well as respond to social issues confronting her in her life of witness.

This is partly the subject of this study. An attempt is hereby made to collate these various policy statements into one handy document that can be referenced. One in which all the policies and guidelines of the Diocese may be found without necessarily scavenging through a gamut of documents that may not be

comprehensive and readily comprehensible. This is why a deliberate attempt has been made not just to produce it as a volume but to also include the basic background that will enhance understanding.

According to A. Umeakuana (personal communication, 10/07/2019), the Bishop is an Evangelist, a tele-evangelist, a teacher, and a dynamic Apostle of the 21st Century. He went further to explain that the great preacher traveled far and near preaching the gospel both local and internationally presenting papers and seminars. The aforementioned notwithstanding Ikeakor has his own peculiar evangelistic style aimed at populating God's kingdom and depopulating hell. The evangelistic style can best be described as programs oriented. He opined that the programs are heavenly conscious and rich in spirituality. Bible based with fervent prayers. The Bishop teaches the members on how to pray on their own and develop a steady prayer life-style in other to receive all round victory in life. He does not support people being prayer collectors but should learn to pray on their own. The bill boards, handbills, posters and advert banners leading to the programs are super packaged and the theme well designed. He does not often go into fund raising in his programs, he seem to be more interested in teaching his congregation the pure and undiluted truth of the word of God. Most importantly the programs are designed as inter-denominational programs. Speaking on the spiritual effects of Bishop Ikeakor's radio/television programs, P. Ukachukwu (personal communication, 10/07/2019), states that the undiluted word of God transmitted through the air is quite a relief to people who could not have the opportunity to attend the programs at Cathedral Church of St. Andrew's Amichi. For each of the gospel outreaches, it is believed that unction of the Holy Spirit is made available to hungry souls of God's word. Sinners are drawn back to God, sick persons healed, backsliders restored and many miracles occurs through these transmissions. Ukachukwu went further to state that the pragmatic approach of the Bishop to Biblical standard is unequivocal to any other standard in gospel preaching as he speaks from indebt knowledge of the scriptures. The delivery of the word of God is well articulated and very suitable to the present technological age bedeviled with perdition, spiritual violation of God's order and rebellion in a society where consciousness of avoidance of sin is completely lost.

He concluded by saying the impact of Bishop Ikeakor's gospel out reaches' is felt among all people without Church denominational boundary. It is also noticed that Bishop Ikeakor involves commerce and community development such as community road maintenance amongst his strategies.

Evangelical Strategies of Bishop Ephraim Ikeakor of Amichi Diocese

The Bishop of Anglican Diocese of Amichi, Rt. Rev'd Ephraim Okechukwu Ikeakor, in the first synod of the Diocese held on 12th - 14th June, 2009 at St. Stephen's Church, Osumenyi, Nnewi South, Anambra State, Nigeria, unveiled the missionary strategies or made his mission statements thus: that the new Diocese of under his leadership shall do evangelism through four cardinal points. He said "We wish to have a Diocese that preaches a holistic gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ through:

- Education
- Agriculture
- Health care
- Community Development.

Education: Through the Educational strategy, schools such as the Holy Child Convent, Amichi, Master's Vessel Seminary Osumenyi, College of Nursing Sciences, Amichi are put in place. Both the Convent, the Seminary and College of Nursing are open to the general public and persons from different denominations. They have not only turned out to be the best but forms evangelistic magnets. Students trained are also given spiritual direction.

Agriculture: The Diocese developed a large farm at Utuh where people go to buy chickens, fish, eggs, bitter leaf, melon, garden eggs and some other products. There is also a piggery at Ezinifite. Agricultural research is gradually taken place in this farm.

Health Care: The Anglican Diocese of Amichi hospital commonly called 'Diocesan hospital' is geared towards provision of health care to the whole Nnewi South and beyond. It is gradually developing into a reference and a teaching hospital. It often hosts persons coming from America for free medical mission. Dr. Obichi free medical mission from United States of America has become an annual event. The Obichi and his team have been of many blessings to so many. The fruitfulness of Bishop Ikeakor,s health care as part of the mission strategies has brought relief to so many people and so many families.

Community Development: Under this strategy, we see the microfinance Bank Amichi, Musure table water Unubi and carrying out of palliative measures on Amichi - Ekwulumili road. All these geared towards Community development granting employments and effecting people's life positively.

Lessons from Bishop Ikeakor's Evangelical Strategies for the growth of Anglicanism in Nigeria

So much can be credited to the strategies of Bishop Ikeakor's evangelistic strategies for growth of Anglicanism in Nigeria. Listed are certain qualities that led to his success:

1. **Understanding ones role as a servant:** He saw himself as first God's servant then servant of the people. Such quality is a lesson to the ministers of the gospel both in Anglican Communion and other Churches.
2. **Learn the culture of your list communities:** Learning and understanding the culture of the host communities enabled Ikeakor to direct the people in the ways of the Lord. Differentiating from real worship of God and idolatory.
3. **Learn to speak the language of the People:** Speaking in the language that the people can understand is a time quality. Every people understand specific language.
4. **Keeping sweet and honest Spirit:** Honestly of action and purpose is very necessary for evangelistic growth. This quality is seen in the life and ministry of Bishop Ikeakor as he exposes the truth of God's word.
5. **Adjust to a new environment:** Bishop Ikeakor quickly adjusts to any environment he finds himself. And this has actually assisted in ease of mission and evangelism.
6. **Identifying with the people:** The Bishop gladly answers 'Ephraim Amichi' speedy identification with the people is a key to meaningful success. When you identify with the people, the people identify with you.
7. **Affirming a Call to Serve:** A continual affirmation to render service is Ikeakor's steady and continuous practice. No affirmation without an attendant faith. It instills success and assurance of the same.
8. **Focus on assignment:** Bishop Ikeakor with a man of focus. He from the start of every activity or event stands against distraction and possible failure. He strongly believes on success story.
9. **Being accountable for decision and actions:** His readiness to take responsible of personal actions. And readiness to give account of his stewardship leads to quest for sincerity and honesty in his ministerial life. bishop Ikeakor preaches eternal and immediate work place accountability.
10. **Closeness to God:** A minister shall be deficient of everything necessary for God's service if is not close to God. Bishop Ikeakor is an advocate of firm relationship with God which can only come through close relationship

with God. His personal relationship with God has boasted his missionary endeavour.

11. **Charitability:** Care of the needy is part of evangelism. The Bishop organizes widow's party, takes care of the aged and the indigent. Pays school fees for so many poor children. These are the lessons from Bishop Ikeakor's evangelistic strategies for the growth of Anglicanism in Nigeria. It also must be stressed that he focused on God. Finally being in eternity with Christ. Urging every Christian to strive to finish strong. It is greatly believed that if Christians especially the Pastors shall take these acts to heart and practice success is rest assured in their evangelistic efforts.

All these are part of these things that makes writing a thesis on Bishop Ikeakor's missionary endeavour necessary.

Conclusion

The Rt. Rev'd Ephraim O. Ikeakor, the Bishop of Diocese of Amichi (Anglican Communion) is a teacher of God's word, and Evangelist, Youth Minister, Marriage Counsellor. He is also a Radio and Television Evangelist. He hosts the popular radio programme "In Touch with God" in six radio stations every week. He also hosts the "In Touch with God" programs in Anglican Cable Network Nigeria (ACNN) every Friday. Bishop Ephraim Ikeakor is a National and international Conference, Crusade, Seminar, Revival speaker for many years now.

Bishop Ephraim Okechukwu Ikeakor's missionary and evangelistic endeavour is bent on turning away obnoxious traditions, working assiduously for the salvation of human souls. Idolatry and paganism practices are of the same family being under the umbrella of sin. It is therefore recommended that other Bishops should adopt what Ikeakor is doing and possibly it should be adopted by Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion for effective spread of Anglicanism in Nigeria.

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