ỊGWEBỤIKE AND RELIGIOUS CHANGE

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Abstract
The two world religions that invaded the African continent have no doubt influenced African world view in all aspects. Again the response given by African continent has been interpreted in several ways by many authors. This paper advocated that Ịgwebụike as a key principle to this interpretation can give us a good explanation of what happened years ago and what is still going on. With African solidarity and complementarity, explanation on religious change or conversion will be comprehensive. Then African traditional religion will also be among the world religions. Ịgwebụike as a key principle of explanation will also account or explainfully the reasons behind the mushrooming of independent churches or the rise of penticostalism in Africa. By way of quick understanding, the paper tends to explain the historical approach of religious change as explained by Fisher (Historical approach) and socio-structural approach by Ifeka-Moller.
Keywords: Igwebuike, Philosophy, Interpretation, Religious, Change, Africa, Nigeria

Introduction
Efforts have been made and on-going by many researchers or authors with each person suggesting his or her own model(s) or principle(s) in trying to explain the religious change that took place or still in a process in Africa. The need for this interpretation becomes so necessary at this time, Africa as continent is fast developing in all areas of life through globalization and modernization, which at the same time are blowing up like wild wind all over the world. Again, the earlier scholars who dealt into the explanation of religious change in Africa as we are going to examine them, did not understand what it is to be African, or features of African traditional religion. All interpretation was based on their own ideology not mainly on African cosmological ideas. This quickly reminds us of what Achebe (1958) said:

> Does the white man understand our custom about lands? Asked *Okonkwọ*, "How can he when he does not even speak our tongue?" responded *Oberik*a, and then he continued, "But he says our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad." (p.124).

Commenting on the above, Kanu (2015) said "the West was ignorant of the language and custom of the local people, but yet they arrived at conclusions" (p. 27). This is very tragic in any research work, and definitely it will lead to false conclusions about any findings. There is the need to study or interpret again the religious change that took place in Africa to see if some crises in Africa regarding religious crisis can be resolved. As we noted above, false interpretation of religious change in Africa has breed a lot of false views among the African people, the current religious and leadership crisis bedeviling African continent can be resolved through understanding and re-interpretation of religious change in Africa. It is true that African traditional religion was exposed to Christian and Islamic faith, with non religious factors, the traditional religion in the face of all these factors declined rapidly. Hence different interpretations and explanations arose from different authors. With this, different questions arose whether religious change in Africa, a real conversion to Christianity or to Islam, or is religious change in Africa a question of adhesions as Nock (cited by Metuh, 1987) will put it. And finally is religious change in Africa a product of mixed religion, that is, African traditional religion mixed with Christianity or African traditional religion mixed with Islam which is in vogue in Africa today. Most of modern scholars believed that what took place or is going on now is mixing of elements of traditional religion with the two world religions, which in turn give births to penticostalism and Aladura churches. In this write-up, we are going to examine or take a survey of various explanations, done by different authors on religious change in Africa. We are going to examine different factors mentioned by some authors. One thing common to most of the authors we are going to examine is that all seem to believe that conversion or religious change in Africa is a multi-causal phenomenon. According to Metuh (1987):

> One needs only to take stock of the different factors mentioned by all the authors, to discover that an impressive list would emerge. Trimingham mentions the following factors: the crumbling of the structures of traditional religions, and the need for a universalist religion in place of the village religion. Horton mentions the rationalization of traditional beliefs in response to modernization. Fisher lists the following factors: literacy, conquest, migration, and the activities of devout clerics. Ịfeka-moller suggests: a desire for "white power", deprivation, denominational rivalry, education, literacy and knowledge of the Bible.(p. 23).

To these factors of religious change in Africa one can add a host of others. But these factors enumerated by different authors as they see it from their own personal point of view does not completely explain the religious change that took

place in Africa. Hence this paper, is proposing *Igwebuike* as a key to explanation of religious change in Africa, whose principles according to Kanu (2015) lies or is based on the African sense of communality and complementality which is at the root of African religious thought and an ontological quality of African man. To be an African and have an understanding of this above, it will help one to possess the key to explanation of African traditional religious change, which necessarily must be done by an African or Africans themselves. There is need for us Africans to explain what took place in African soil, many years ago in the name of religious change, because we know our world view (African world view) better than any stranger who can't even hear or understand us. Also by principle of communality and complementality of *Ịgwebụike*, Africans would be able to come up with different experience of religious change that took place in their locality or community, when summed up, it will give a better explanation of religious change that took place in Africa than one researcher or foreigner being in one area or community to write about a religious change in vast continent like Africa. *Igwebuike* as a key principle to understand or explain religious change in Africa will account for the process of Christian and Islamic conversion which has varied from one part of community or country to another over past years. According to Roland and Crowder (cited by Metuh, 1987).

> … in some areas, such as Buganda (Uganda), entire population accepted the new faith quickly; in others, such as most of the traditionally pastorist areas, there were only a handful of converts. In come areas, such as most of southern Africa, the chiefs were the first to be converted, in others, such as the Akan kingdoms of Ghana, they were the last; in some areas mainly women have become Christians, in others both sexes. (p. 24).

Ịgwebụike as a key principle of explanation will also account or explainfully the reasons behind the mushrooming of independent churches or the rise of penticostalism in Africa. By way of quick understanding, the paper tends to explain the historical approach of religious change as explained by Fisher (Historical approach) and socio-structural approach by Ifeka-Moller.

Historical Approach
Fisher (cited by Metuh, 1987), based his religious change in Africa more on the socio-cultural causes. He listed the following factors as the causes of religious change in Africa: literacy, conquest, migration and activities of devout clerics. Fisher's historical approach on religious change in Africa was a reaction to Horton' intellectualist interpretation of religious change in Africa. For Horton (cited by Metuh, 1987) argued that the drift into the mission churches was not

simply a passive exercise. It involves some measure of rethinking and adaptation of African traditional beliefs to the realities of the resultant socio-structural changes. Or put in another way, Horton thesis or explanation is that conversion from African traditional religion to Christianity or Islam is due to the developing structures of traditional African world view responding to the features of world religions or modern civilization. Fisher (cited by Metuh, 1987) is arguing that "the history of Islam in Africa, covering a period of almost a millennium, displays a pattern of religious change which suggests that other explanations are necessary" (p.16). He divided the stages in conversion roughly into quarantine, mixing, and reform. The quarantine stage represents the new comers to new faith which came into a community or society. Here orthodoxy or the teaching of new religion is relatively secured because there are no new converts yet. But with the increasing numbers of community people coming to the new faith, the local people also bring along with them elements of their traditional beliefs, thus a mixing stage occurs. This is seen when Nwoye the first son of Okonkwor in Things Fall Apart by Achebe (1958) decided to join the new faith in Mbanta:

> But there was a young lad who had been captivated. His name was Nwoye, Okonkwọ's first son. It was not the mad logic of the trinity that captivated him. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow… Nwoye did not fully understand. But he was happy to leave his father. He would return later to his mother and his brothers and sisters and convert them to the new faith. (p. 118-122).

From the above quotation, we see that the new convert (Nwoye) joined the new religion with his traditional beliefs which is already in him. The mixing stage will continue for a period of decades, then comes a stage of reform which sweeps away the mixing stage and restores the orthodoxy of the quarantine stage.

Fisher makes a distinction between conversion and adhesion. For conversion according to Fisher (cited by Metuh, 1987) means a deliberate turning from an earlier piety to another. While adhesion allows a believer to adopt new forms of worship as useful supplements to his former beliefs. The adhesion is much seen in practice now among the contemporally African people, where elements of new religion Christianity and Islam are being combined with African traditional religion. Through this way, Fisher come to the conclusion of about first and second conversions. The first conversion involves a change of religious cult while the second conversion is change from mixing stage to fervency. The relationship between literacy and religious change has been emphasized by Fisher (cited by Metuh, 1987) who argued that literacy in Africa also served as an effective means

of preserving the orthodox teachings which are imbibed from the stages of conversion. The reform movement takes the form of revivalism to preserve the product of mixed religion either of Christian or Islamic religion. A jihad or revivalism not only reforms but also makes a new converts through the dissolution of structures of traditional religion. From the above one can see that conquest has been a factor in religious change that took place in Africa and that religious change is a continuous process. As we can notice again that the conversion or religious change that started in Africa years past is still on, in different ways. Hence there are many stages of conversion and types of conversion. These can be adhesion without conversion, and conversion which involves exchange of faith for another faith. Adhesion is much practiced in African soil today with regards to religious change. This is why Obiefuna (1985) cried out that Christianity in Igboland is skin deep Christianity because Christians have their one leg in traditional religion and the other in Christian religion. Not minding that Christianity has stayed for century in Igboland and made some impacts. He said:

> Christianity has made an impact among our people. There is no gainsaying it. Thousands come to our churches. Many also avail themselves of the sacraments. But times without number the remark reaches us that our Christians are worshiping "idol", false gods. They swear on idol. They erect shrines in their homes, in their compounds. They hide fetishes in their shades, in the market place, and in their workshops. Catechists, seminarians on apostolic work in the towns and village are sturned at the degree of idol worship and superstitious practices that still exist among a people that are mostly baptized Catholics. (p. 5-6).

The above citation depicts adhesion Fisher talked about, which is being seen among Africans today. Though he was highly accused of not accounting for cases of difficult conversion. Historical approach of Fisher was so taken up with the second type of conversion, (that is change of affiliation with conviction) that he forgot the first stage which is practiced more in Africa. Nonetheless the historical approach underscore the importance of factors internal to religion which made conversion possible. Some factors responsible for religious change in Africa served the purpose of keeping aglow the light of new faith especially at mixing stage. Since historical approach of Fisher did not address the issue of how Africans adopt Islam or Christianity in the first place, before making or turning it into fervency or reformed orthorodoxy, it cannot be said to be fully a good model or key to the interpretation of religious change in Africa. Again his research was

more on Islamic encounter with Africans while we have two major world religions that came to Africa.

Socio-structural Approach (Deprivation Theory)

Ifeka-moller is the proponent of deprivation theory which is also based on reaction against Horton's intellectualist interpretation of religious change in Africa. Ifeka-Moller (cited by Metuh, 1987) thus explains "conversion as either a change of affiliation from cult (traditional religion) to church, or from orthodox Christianity to spiritualist church (Aladura)" (p. 18). And this religious change or conversion took place through socio-structural factors rather than through intellectual approach as proposed by Horton. Again she proposes that/socio-structural factors are the most fruitful field of research rather than ideas. She argues that:

> For if a cosmology is embedded in a social order, as were indigenous cosmologies in East Nigeria, and as Aladura belief is today, then we can only appreciate the extent to which ideas have shaped such new religious forms as Aladura churches if we focus on changes in the social order. (p. 18).

From the above, religious change or conversion can only take place through socio-structural order. Just like Fisher, Ifeka-moller listed these factors to be responsible for religious change: a desire for white power, deprivation, denominational rivalry, education, literacy and knowledge of the Bible.

Unlike Fisher, Ifeka-moller in her deprivation theory accounted or explained not only for cases of easy conversions or religious change but also for cases of resistance to conversion. In her studies and analysis, she identifies the Onitsha-Awka cultural area of Igboland as a case of poor response to religious change (Christianity) in spite of a strong exposure to missionary activities, modernization, she compared it with Calabar and Owerri cultural areas which have had less exposure to missionary activities, urbanization or development during the same time with Onitsha-Awka cultural areas. Calabar and Owerri areas recorded conversion on a high scale to Christianity and the Aladura church. Even today, the high rate of Christianity at Owerri-Calabar axis still persists. Ifeka-moller (cited by Metuh, 1987) said that:

> Factors which account for massive conversions in Owerri and Calabar areas include rapid social change, and a growing frustration among the inhabitants at the failure to reap the rewards promised by an acceptance of radical changes. They turned to Christianity which promised a new kind

of power, identified with the power of the white man, which people could use to discover the secret of this technological superiority. Factors which encouraged a change to Aladura Christianity include frustration at the "exclusion from sources of secular power, scarce material resources and hence, dependence upon alternative kinds of power, and the evident strength of old social forms and associated beliefs systems." (p. 18).

Education and denominational rivalry she includes as secondary causes of conversion to Christianity. Denominational rivalry found among churches comes from the fact that each denomination tries to outwit the other both in missionary activities and charitably works shown to the people. The slow rate of conversion seen in Onitsha is because Onitsha has been exposed to modernization and other Western values years before the coming of the Europeans or the missionaries. Hence, their contact with white men gave them exposure to civilization and an advantage over people from other areas in securing well-paid jobs. This means that religious change in Onitsha areas did not bring disruption of traditional society nor the frustration arising from unfulfilled expectation as claimed by Timingham and Horton, (cited by Metuh, 1987).

Deprivation theory of Ifeka-moller though tried to account for low and high rate of conversion in certain areas but many scholars were of the view that deprivation suffered in the Calabar-Owerri cultural areas was not the cause of massive conversion in those areas. For Onitsha has a high rate of literacy and low rate of conversion, but we know that most missionaries used education to convert many traditional people. This implies that Christianity is not taken as alternative to success but a means to success to modern world. Hence there is no real conversion among the people. Just like Fisher, Ifeka-moller carried out her observation within eastern part of Nigeria which is only a part of Nigeria and can not be used to generalize what happened in other parts of Africa.

Ịgwebụike as a Key to Interpretation of African Religious Changes

Many scholars or researchers have tried in many ways to interpret the religious change that took place in Africa, each from his/her own point of view. What they think that are the causes of religious change in Africa, of course most scholars divided them into religious and non religious factors. Again one notices that conversion or religious change itself meant different things to different scholars. A critical survey of the various explanations of religious change in Africa shows that conversion or religious change in Africa is a case of multi-causal phenomenon. That is why the need for *Ịgwebụike* as explanatory model is

employed here for interpretation of religious change in Africa. Mono causal factor cannot adequately explain conversion in Africa nor a single research by single author do justice to it. Though researches done already will help to be an off shoot towards getting an adequate explanation of religious change that took place in Africa. The above efforts already made by different authors Metuh (1987) avers that:

> One needs only to take stock of the different factors mentioned by all the authors, to discover that an impressive list would emerge. Trimingham mentions the following factors: the crumbling of the structures of traditional religions, and the need for a universalist religion in place of the village religion. Horton mentions the rationalization of traditional beliefs in response to modernization. Fisher lists the following factors; literacy, conquest, migration and the activities of devout clerics. Ifeka-moller suggests: a desire for "white power", deprivation denominational rivalry, education, literacy and knowledge of the Bible. To these one could add a host of others; intermarriage, family and kingship ties, social prestige and a desire not to be labeled as a "pagan" or as "primitive". (p. 23).

To avoid all these mono-causal explanation of conversion by one researcher or scholar, then comes the need to employ *Ịgwebụike* as a key or model of religious interpretation in Africa. This model of interpretation was advanced or proposed by Kanu (2015) which is based on the principle of African sense of communality and complementality, which is at the root or anchored on the ontological quality of African and African worldview. The African world view in relation to the above, Iroegbu (1994) described it as having common origin, common world view, common language, shared race, culture, colour and habits and even common historical experience and a common destiny.

In analyzing the concept of *Ịgwebụike* as the key principle in interpretation of religious change in Africa, Kanu (2015) avers that:

> Being in Igbo ontology is *ịdị*, that is to be. *Ịgwebuike* is the modality of being. It is an Igbo word which is a combination of three words. Thus, it can be understood as a word and as a sentence: as word, it is written thus *Ịgwebuike*, and as a sentence, it is written thus, *Ịgwe bụ ike* with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space.... *Ịgwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a large number or population. *Bụ* is a verb, which means is. *Ike* is a noun, which means strength or power. Put together, it means 'number is strength' or number is power', that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and

complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force. At this level no task is beyond their collective capability. (p. 67).

From the above concept of *Ịgwebuike* two things can be deducted, it presents being as a relational character, and ideologically, that to be is to live in solidarity and complementarity. To be means to be with others in community. Therefore the Africans emphasize community life as a living principle of which the basic ideology is community identity. That is why Mbiti (1969) wrote that "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 108). Therefore, according to Onwubuike (1991), the authentic African is known and identified in by and through his community" (p. 14). So in a community, the existence of others assures me of their solidarity and complementality without which I cannot be. Solidarity is such a vital value that individuals cannot but work and identify themselves with it. Life in the African community is also based on the philosophy of live and let live. Inter-personal relationship is realized by the interaction between individuals of different community.

It is from this relational character and solidarity found among Africans that it is possible to come together as a force or power to establish and describe a religious change that took place in Africa. With African togetherness and solidarity, each community would be able to tell their story of religious change. We understand our world view and can interpret our actions. Through it our language and culture are well known to us than the foreigners. The problems of vastness of Africa will be solved because each countries or communities in a place can validly present their history or story. Through this way details of each community will be known in terms of conversion that took place and better understanding will be gained. The short-comings encountered by scholars trying to explain or provide a comprehensive explanation of conversion which took place in complex cultural continent like Africa will be solved with *Ịgwebụike* as a key principle of interpretation in a religious change. The gods who are on retreat will come back in full force.

Conclusion
The two world religions that invaded the African continent have no doubt influenced African world view in all aspects. Again the response given by African continent has been interpreted in several ways by many authors. This paper advocated that *Ịgwebụike* as a key principle to this interpretation can give us a good explanation of what happened years ago and what is still going on. With African solidarity and complementarity, explanation on religious change or

conversion will be comprehensive. Then African traditional religion will also be among the world religions.

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