



A Critical Examination of Socio-Religious Interaction between Christianity and Ibibio Culture of Akwa Ibom State

Abstract

The Ibibio people of Akwa Ibom State possess a rich cultural heritage embodied in their traditional religious beliefs, and culture while their indigenous worldview centred on Abasi Ibom, ancestral veneration and belief in spirits. With the advent of Christianity in Ibibioland in the 19th century, through the activities of early missionaries, a dynamics of process of cultural encounter, conflict, accommodation as well as transformation were initiated. This study underscored the socio-religious interaction between Christianity and Ibibio culture of Akwa Ibom State. This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative with historical designs. Data was gathered through in-depth interview and participant observation approaches. The finding revealed how Christianity has influenced and reshaped core aspects of Ibibio socio-cultural life, and on the other hand, how Ibibio culture has influenced the practice of Christianity in the area. Thus, Christian presence in Ibibioland has led to decline in certain practices considered incompatible with her doctrine but has not totally eradicated Ibibio culture. The study concluded that the interaction is not of total conflict but of continuous negotiation which prove certain elements of inculturation and syncretism resulting in Africanized Christianity. It is strongly recommended that a balanced inculturation approach that preserves positive Ibibio cultural values such as traditional language, arts, music, among others be maintained while promoting Christian moral principles for sustainable development of Ibibioland.

Keywords: Christianity, Socio-religious Interaction, Ibibio Culture, Inculturation, Akwa Ibom State

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Introduction

Christianity, which was introduced to the Ibibio people in the year 1846, did not meet the people in a religious vacuum. Rather, it met the people in their traditional religious background and cultural beliefs and practices of divinations, consulting oracles, sacrifices to gods, witchcraft, and superstition. These practices have

continued to exist and exert influence on Ibibio people despite the numerous Christian groups and denominations operating in the area whose teachings and doctrines are directly against aspects of the cultural beliefs and practices.

Many Ibibio people, even professed Christians still patronise their indigenous religious traditions, especially

in time of crisis where they assume that prayer alone cannot solve all things, thus regressing to their traditional concept of *Abasi unyanya anyanya idem* – “Help yourself as God is saving or helping you”. To many Ibibio Christians, this means that though becoming registered members of Christian churches, in your private life, you can still practice your traditional religion or revert to it during crisis situation. The influence of Ibibio religious traditions is still very strong in their being, despite their conversion to Christianity and their membership in diverse Christian Churches. Presently, the socio-religious interaction between Ibibio culture and Christianity presents a serious challenge to the Ibibio Christians. Hence, the question is; what is the possibility of expressing authentic Christian faith within the Ibibio cultural context?

Concept Clarifications

i. Syncretism

Syncretism is the combination of different forms of religious belief or practice, or the amalgamation of different religions (Tienou, 1990). It occurs when ideas, practices, and other entire worldviews are imported into a Christian frame of reference.

ii. Inculturation

Inculturation is the presentation and re-expression of the gospel in forms and terms proper to a particular culture and not the juxtaposition or compromise with the cultures of the place which invariably may lead to syncretism (Anthony, 2012).

It refers to the incarnation of the Christian message in a particular cultural context in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the church and remarking it so as to bring a new creation.

iii. Ibibio (African) Christians

Phaswana (2000) observes that there is being developed an interpretation of Christianity and specifically for Christian Theology that one may describe as African. Actually, the point is that an African is becoming a Christian within his or her social and religious milieu. An African Christian therefore balances the African traditional values with the Christian beliefs and practices. Hence, Ibibio Christian(s) refers to an individual or group of African persons who do not see any contradiction in syncretising that is, holding a mixture of both African and Christian beliefs and practices at the same time in their daily religious observance. Accordingly, he or she is living a ‘Christian life’ in and from Africa cultural and traditional background, and equally interacting with African religion in all its facets in his or her daily life.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this paper is based on “Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory” advocated by Lev S. Vygotsky. The theory emphasized the influence of culture, environs, and people on the individual in physical, spiritual, emotional, mental, and psychological

being (McLeod, 2007). Thus, the way the individual communicates, understands, relates and cope with one another is influenced. Basically, Vygotsky's theory suggests that development depends on interaction with people and the tools that the culture provides to help people form their own view of the world. Thus, there are three ways a cultural tool can be passed from one individual to another. The first one is imitative learning where one person tries to imitate or copy another. The second way is by instructed learning which involves remembering the instructions of the teacher and then using these instructions to regulate self. The final way is through collaborative learning which involves a group of peers who strive to understand each other and work together to learn (Gallagher, 1999).

Aligned with this theory we understand that Christianity as a religion is a cultural institution which cannot exist in a cultural vacuum and cannot as well be culturally uniform. It cannot be introduced into a strange culture without first understanding the said culture, rooted, vested in it, and being ready to make use of it for the Gospel's sake. It is seen that the cultural growth of a person depends to a large extent on the social interactions with the societal norms, values and the wisdom of the elders or mature people as agent of communication that impact knowledge. Gallagher (1999) posits that social interaction leads to continuous step-by-step changes in people's thought and behaviour.

In view of this, the adoption of socio-cultural theory as the suitable theoretical framework to appraise the interactions between Christianity and Ibibio culture is very important in this study. Therefore, this theory demonstrates that sociologically Christianity though itself is a religion, needs some aspects of Ibibio culture for its survival in the area.

Brief History of Ibibio People

Ibibio is used and represented here as both a language, and as an ethnic group found in Akwa Ibom State, the modern South-south geographical zone of Nigeria. According to Udoh (2008), the Ibibio land lies to the South-Eastern corner of Nigeria, roughly between latitude $4^{\circ} 25^1$ and $5^{\circ} 30^1$ North and longitudes $7^{\circ} 30^1$ and $8^{\circ} 30^1$ East. He furthers that the Ibibio, to the South is bounded by the Bight of Bonny, Abia State forms its northern boundary. To the West, the Rivers and shares a common boundary with the Ijaws, while Cross River State lies in its Eastern boundary and shares a common boundary with the western Cameroon.

It is observed that the name Ibibio originally was a generic name for *okop usem Ibibio* - people who understand and speak Ibibio language clearly. Historically, this was applied to Annang, Ekid, Oron, and Central Ibibio, even the Efik; it was never applied in exclusive sense of today to designate solely the Central Ibibio. These various historical ethnic groups who have been known by this generic name 'Ibibio' share common origin,

customs, traditions, as well as language (Abasiattai, 1991a). Therefore, Ibibio is the name by which the people are called, and the language which they speak, and it is by this name that they are known today. This means that the term “Ibibio” is unique to the people, for it is used both for their language and identity (Lot, 2023).

Understanding Culture

Contextually, Culture remains the total way of life of the people which includes art, music, dance, religion, beliefs and practices, and everything that contributes to the survival of a man on earth. It is a mark of identity which consist both the material and immaterial aspects of the people in a given society. To understand it fully, Bediako (1988) maintains that culture is taken to mean the way of thinking and behaviour shared by a substantial social grouping which gives them identity in relation to others. It therefore seen that culture is a phenomenon of identity that marks out a people and makes them different from others. This means that every human must be culturally patterned in one way or the other for his acceptability into the given society. Perhaps this may be one of the reasons anthropologists, according to Etuk (2002) says that ‘each culture is as good as another for it must contain within it those features which guarantee the survival of its people and function efficiently’. Thus, the uniqueness, personality, and individuality of a people are affirmed in its culture. It is therefore understood, that no culture is universal, rather, it is assimilated by a given group

of people in a particular area. In its widest usage, culture means the totality of a people’s way of life, using language as a most important ingredient and as an aspect where culture is identified, and a vehicle through which it is spread.

The Ibibio people however, are deeply embedded in their culture. This cultural behaviour had made them very artistic and celebrative in a special way. This artistic and dramatic way of life does interpret and preserve the religious beliefs and practices of the Ibibio people. For instance, in the pre-Christian days among the Ibibio, the people built *nwommo* - a monument for the inhabitation of the soul of an ancestor, and *iso ekpo-ete* and *iso ekpo-eka* shrines for paternal and maternal parents. These were well decorated traditionally with libation poured with sacrifices on a fixed date. These were the expressions of faith in an afterlife as well as veneration of ancestorship, portraying socio-religious responsibility of the Ibibio people. The Ibibio cultural practices are also expressed in their oral expression, sculpture, carving, weaving, music and dance. These are made to depict certain aspects of life of the people. The Ibibio language and its use of proverbs (*mme nke*) are vital aspects of the culture. Their musical rhythms and movements in dance give richness to their culture. These cultural imports have educated and provided easy way of understanding the socio-religious interaction between Christianity and the Ibibio culture (Etuk, 2002).

Conceptually, the Ibibio culture is a world of ideals, arts and science which the people create for themselves. It provides the framework within which human life becomes meaningful based on standards of morality, shapes human's personality, and it is everything that is encapsulated in a people's way of life. It helps humans in a community to express themselves, questions issues, and make progress positively in life.

African/Ibibio Worldview

The worldview of the people general is religious in all aspects. To a large extent, worldview is a picture of the universe that man creates for himself. It involves a re-linking of nature, man and history to the supernatural. In Ibibio worldview, man is always at the centre, and surrounded by other beings. There is a spiritual view of life and almost everything is given a spiritual or religious interpretation. The activity which man carries out in his life shows the level of his interaction with his nature, cultural pattern, religious beliefs and philosophy (Lot, 2023).

Olumbe (2008) submits that worldview depends on the community to which a person belongs and grows up in, and on what is learned from family. Actually, religion dictates and shapes the worldview of a person. Conversely, religion is at the core of a person's worldview, it is essentially a manifestation of the underlying religious beliefs. Thus, an individual's worldview is reinforced through repetition of familiar religious actions and is generally

taken for granted until one encounters a different worldview which forces them to analyse why they do or perceive things in a certain way.

A worldview is the framework of most basic beliefs that shapes our view of the world. It is a blueprint, or a map for reality: first, it helps to explain and interpret life and the world; and second, it is the starting point to view life, take decisions and actions, and the assumptions upon which we build our lives. Worldview helps in cultural interpretation of human surroundings, give improved meaning which allows us express ourselves in language, religion, art, notion of right or wrong explanation of the meaning of life – these constitute parts of the cultural systems of a society.

Practically in Ibibio sociological worldview, anything that would bring peace, joy and prosperity not only to the individual, but also to the community is accepted, while those things that would bring curses, sadness, sickness, death, calamity, disgrace or disrespect to the individual or the community are simply avoided and rejected, same is passed to the next generation.

The Concept of Ibibio Traditional Religion

It is difficult in tracing the origin of Ibibio Traditional Religion, that is when and who founded the religion. To accounts for the genesis of the African Traditional Religion, Kagema (2015) states that the existence of creatures implies a Creator of order, an Orderer, and of harmony, a Harmoniser.

Observably, Ibibio Traditional Religion is as old as the first man on the Ibibio land. The religion originated by the people, from their experiences and quest for the unknown. Actually, the Ibibio's reflection on their experiences in lives led them to reverence and display (sometimes shallow) fear for God.

It is equally noticeable that the African cosmology is basically religious and the title, African traditional religion shows that this religion had been practiced long before the introduction of other religions (such as Christianity, Islam and others) into the continent (Kibicho, 2010). Despite the coming of these new religions, the level of patronage enjoyed by indigenous belief systems and practices covertly and overtly proves that African traditional religion is still a living religion (Nkonge and Gechuko, 2014). Obviously, Opoku (1993) observes that though this religion is not the only religion of the people of Africa, and in some parts of Africa the religion is no longer directly and regularly practiced; the religion does continue to the modern times in different ways and forms where it greatly influences the lives of the African people as a whole and Ibibio in particular.

The foremost principle in the Ibibio traditional religious belief system is the belief in two planes or worlds of existence; the physical and the spiritual. According to Abasiattai (1991c) the Ibibio conceive the universe as comprising the visible, material universe, and the invisible universe which is under the control of the

Abasi Ibom (Supreme Deity) and divinities - *mme ndem*. Thus, both universes mingled and are subject to the *Abasi Ibom*. The ancestral or spiritual world (*obio ekpo*) is the abode of the ancestors or the living dead (*ekpo mkpa* or *mme ikaan*), the invisible, while the physical world - *aderibod*, is that of the living. These two planes or world must coexist in harmony with people to carry out their religious obligations judiciously (Lot, 2023).

The Advent of Christianity in Ibibioland

In the 19th century, the white explorers and missionaries introduced Christianity into the then South-Eastern Nigeria which serves as the springboard from where Christian religion spread to the surrounding communities including Ibibioland. According to Abasiattai (1991b), Christianity was introduced into Ibibio land by different missionaries, at diverse locations and at different times. Presbyterian Mission (or The United Free Church of Scotland) was led by Rev. Hope M. Waddell to Calabar in 1846 through the appeal made by the Kings of Calabar to the British Government in 1842 in anticipation of utilising the missionaries' skills to develop Efik land, but they later realised that Christianity has subverted Efik government and religion.

Edem (2012) opined that by 1885 when Britain declared Southern Nigeria a Protectorate, the Missionaries had already expanded inland along the Cross River and opened stations at Ikot Ana and Uwana in 1884 and 1887 respectively

all in Akwa Ibom State. From Calabar, Mary Slessor, a missionary explorer, opened up a mission station in Itu in 1903. With the advent of the mission in Itu, the vast Ibibio mainland lay opened for the missionary enterprise into the whole Ibibio land. Actually, the Primitive Methodist Mission was established in Oron in 1894, from where it spread to Adadia (Ibibio) in the present Uruan Local Government Area in 1907 (Edem, 2012).

Similarly, through the initiatives of certain Ibeno Chiefs, Rev. Samuel A. Bill brought Qua Iboe Mission to the area in 1887, and by 1906, Rev. Bill assisted by other missionaries and indigenous converts penetrated and extended their mission territories in the Ibibio land extensively. Afterward, The Church Missionary Society (CMS) at Ikot Abasi in 1902, Roman Catholic Mission in 1904 were established. Later, in 1930s, The Apostolic Church Nigeria, Assemblies of God Mission (now Assemblies of God, Nigeria) and others came on board. According to Edet (2024), the impact of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria in Akwa Ibom State started with her arrival in 1936. The Church started with sixteen congregations under the supervision of Rev. Dr. Henry Nau as the Pioneer Minister. The congregational system was adopted as her operational church governance. With this, the Church grew into several congregations within and outside Akwa Ibom State Through this missionary endeavour, mission schools were established in Eket 1889, Etinan in 1898, Ikot Ubo in 1904 among others.

Noah (1994) asserts that apart from building of schools and preaching the doctrine against the killing of twin children, the Qua Iboe Mission in 1916 established Mission Institute, Etinan which has played an extremely important role in the educational advancement of the Ibibio and the entire state.

The early missionaries saw themselves as social and religious reformers, who tried in their own way to achieve their mission goal, which was the conversion of Ibibio people into Christianity. It seems their approach and attitude did not produce a wholesome result. This is because most of the Ibibio people only know how to live within their traditional religious context which is the embodiment of their cultures (Abasiattai, 1991a). They were of the opinion that by condemning the Ibibio traditional religious beliefs and practices, social and political means of control, they would produce converts in the new faith; but this rather produced people with split personality - who could neither be totally African, and at the same time, not firmly rooted in Christianity.

According to Essien (2011), as the various forms of Christianity spread through Ibibioland, at a glance, one would think that Christianity has succeeded in uprooting the traditional religious practices of the people. But even in the 21st century, this is far from the truth. Rather, the religious movements that abound in the area have attempted to maintain the practices of the traditional religious system especially in the area of

witch-hunting, spiritual diagnoses of sickness and determining the causes of death and so on.

Udo (1983) maintained that the Europeans saw the shrines for the Ibibio minor deities and ancestors and learned that Ibibio believe that the deities and ancestors have souls in living animals. They condemned Ibibio traditional religion and categorized it as animism. They claimed that the Ibibio have no concept of the Supreme God who is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. Consequently, the Christian Missionaries made every effort to replace Ibibio traditional religion with Christianity, which they claimed to be monotheistic. Antia (2005) says Christianity preached against almost everything African. The new faith insisted on absolute devotion to the one and only God, whereas the authorities and the people of the land recognised and worshipped many deities.

Howbeit, the advent of Christianity in Ibibioland had meant the introduction of a Christian worldview, different from Ibibio traditional worldview. Admittedly, Christianity made tremendous impact in the area. It abolished slave trade and slavery, human sacrifices and killing of twins, introduced education, established hospitals and charity homes. It destroyed some level of superstition, increased human knowledge and brought about improved human welfare. Through education and Christian religion, it was possible for the Ibibio to re-shape their faith and worldview.

Perception of Ibibio People towards the Early Christian Missionaries

Obviously, Christian missionary enterprise in the Ibibio was nurtured in the era of colonialism. Therefore, due to colonial factor, many of the converts to Christianity adopted a new identity based on the colonial-Christian order. The missionaries felt that the Ibibio never knew anything about God, nor acquired any acceptable cultural characteristic that has any relationship or bearing with Christianity. Therefore, they appeared to be hostile to Ibibio cultures and their religious beliefs and practices. May be, they did not see the compatibility between Ibibio religious traditions and Christianity. Therefore, they tried their best to uproot the Ibibio culture and religious traditions and to supplant them with imported Christianity which of course was clothed in Western cultures.

In 1945 when Christian enterprise reaches its peak in Ibibioland in 1945, the traditional religious beliefs and practices still maintained relevance. The people did not instantly and readily accept the Christian missionaries and their messages. The perception towards the missionaries was generally as a result of human behaviour that does not easily welcome change especially religious beliefs and practices which is part of their cultural heritage. Apparently, human beings as a whole cannot simply change his or her religious tradition except there are proofs beyond all reasonable doubts that the new religion has a better alternative than the old (Lot, 2023).

Uncompromisingly, the people greeted the missionaries with suspicion, unfriendliness, scepticism and resentment. Reasons responsible for these hostilities were the curiosity and fear in the minds of the Ibibio people due to the colour of skin of the white missionaries, differences in nationality, and religious perception. The people were struck with anxiety considering the missionaries to be either ghost or superhuman. The people even suspected and judged the missionaries to be enemies or spies who came to steal the rich cultural endowments or expose them to surrounding enemies. Some missionaries were attacked mercilessly and even murdered in the course of trying to evangelise the interior parts of the Ibibio society. These actions rendered the environment harsh for missionaries (Edem, 2012). The insensitivity was very obvious.

Moreover, Ibibio indigenes especially the Chiefs were skeptical about the education that was introduced by the missionaries. Therefore, mostly slaves, orphans and handicapped children were given out to school while the sons and daughters of the Chiefs were kept away to care after the traditional heritage. Most importantly, the missionaries condemned the divinities and deities of the land and prevented the Christian converts from ancestral veneration. Besides, sacred rivers, streams and ponds that were defied, were challenged by the new converts to Christianity. These sacrilegious behaviours were interpreted as serious offence to the divinities and

deities of the land. Hence, without the instrument of colonialism, and cataclysm of colonial conquests, Christian march through Akwa Ibom State as a whole and Ibibioland could not have been as smooth as it is today. However, some communities such as Itu were friendly and receptive, and some Chiefs even regarded the presence of the European Missionaries as blessing and prestige (Odey, 2010). Consequently, Western Christianity was transplanted into Ibibio traditional society, root and branch, in terms of doctrine, worship and polity without the necessary adaptations and modifications which the cultural context demanded (Odey, 2010).

Conceptualization of interactions between Christianity and Ibibio Culture

Christianity is a revolutionary and progressive faith. Christianity as a religion transcends all cultures from its beginning, and the Gospel message has not been tied to any cultural background. It is not a traditional religion to any people; no community claims it as its indigenous and natural religion or a national cult. The nature of Christianity automatically challenges as well as harmonizes any existing culture in any community it finds itself (Onunwa, 2008). This offers Christianity opportunity to embrace all cultures and every aspect of human life yet; it often offers a challenge and cannot compromise with any cultural and traditional elements that do not allow full expression of Christian faith. Jesus Christ called for a new way of life in which all social and cultural barriers

would be broken. Obviously, there are often tensions arising out of the opposition it poses to certain traditional and cultural values.

Historically, Christianity did not enter an empty world; the Roman (Empire) culture provided the nursery bed in which the early church was nurtured. Christianity therein built their basic theological and doctrinal formulations from the conceptions of the popular religions that existed before its birth (Onunwa, 2008). In other words, the cultural background and the basic traditional religious tenets of the Roman Empire helped and nurtured Christianity in its upbringing, the Greek cultural context and all her philosophical thoughts inclusive (Onunwa, 2008). Yet, Christianity had to select what seemed good and profitable to its own goal, survival, mission, and made use of them in order to make itself relevant and meaningful to the people.

Onunwa (2008) further observes that Christianity does a lot of things to any culture it meets. First it absorbs its positive and progressive aspects, refines, purifies and expresses itself through them. Finally, it throws away what it considers obstacles to human development, progress and fulfilment inherent in that cultural system. Mugambi (2013) maintains that Christianity cannot be expressed or communicated without a cultural medium. Thus, language as an aspect of culture is being used as a medium for the expression and communication of the Christian faith. The

people speak Ibibio language as their cultural identity, and Christianity is expressed and communicated only through this cultural medium. That is why for the traditional Ibibio Christians; as far as their culture is concern their daily rituals and religious practices become very cordial and inseparable partners.

Christianity cannot afford to stand outside an existing culture; for it will permeate it, absorb it, purify it and propagate itself through the cultural context of such area for the good of the people. Christianity has the capacity and capability to incarnate itself in any culture as Christ did, "Word became Flesh, and lived among men" (John 1:14). It can speak to the people in their diverse languages and symbols, and penetrates to the innermost part of their cultures. Thus, no culture can imprison authentic Christianity nor claim the monopoly of it.

The emphasis on sexual abstinence outside of marriage and marital fidelity by The Apostolic Church doctrines is in harmony with the traditional culture of the Ibibio society, which also stresses the same values. The emphasis on spiritual forces behind events in the material world finds a strong parallel in the Ibibio traditional worldview, but using different ways to approach it.

In Ibibio land, it is observed that there is a pronounced opposition to certain aspects of cultural and traditional religious beliefs and practices. For instance, Christianity forbids her members from performing *uwa nkpo*

adiaha-owo; awa-oduongo, ye awa-adia - the traditional marital rites for the first daughter that involve obnoxious sacrificial rituals. The Christian members, who had already performed them, renounced their vows and those not yet performed refused to go through the rituals. Libation, *uduod ukod nno/nkood mme ikaan*, which is a common aspect in every traditional event in Ibibio tradition and culture, is opposed by the church as it emphasizes that prayer to God alone in the name of Jesus Christ. The effect of this, according to Parrat (1997), is to break down traditional influence on the people and society, and to create a new society with different cultural and integrative values.

Moreso, the idea of 'rendering unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things which are God', by the traditional Ibibio Christians when faced with life crises, is directly in opposition to Christian tenets. Equally, among the Ibibio people, it is observed that there is always a reversion to divination - *use nkpo*, and spiritual explanation for sudden occurrences in the physical world. The people speak of evil spirits and witches who use their powers for destructive purposes. Thus, it is possible for Ibibio person to belong to the world of church and Christianity strictly on Sundays, and turn to diviners and medicine-men to manage his affairs for the rest of the week and live his normal life (Etuk, 2002). Therefore, we see an Ibibio Christian living in two contrasting worlds, when things are pleasant, he will go to church and gives testimony, coming

back home he will pour libation to his ancestors; when facing life threatening situation, he will immediately consult diviners and medicine-men for solution without any further consideration.

The Church has it that God has the ultimate power, and everything happens at His command. The Church emphasizes that the power in the name of Jesus Christ is the only power to overcome all other spiritual forces. Deliverance from demonic attacks in the name of Jesus Christ forms a significant part of the doctrines of the Church. Thus, the fear of witchcraft and other spiritual forces have been significantly allayed through the demonstration of the reality of the power of God in many Christian Churches. Apparently, Christianity has transcended all human cultures and expresses itself through the culture of the local community it comes across.

Africa as a whole and Ibibio in particular is not strange to Christianity; it has been planted and rooted deeply in the Ibibio soil for a long time though with varied history. Je'adayibe (2012) asserts that what Africa as a whole is witnessing presently as a global shift to the African continent with the Christian growth is actually a return of Christianity to its historical antecedents that had marked its early growth and impact. However, the originality and peculiarity of the life of Christianity and of the mission was not compromised despite the immense influences from culture and tradition of the society where it existed. It is only the people, the nominal Christians, that

syncretised. The cultural influences did not cause the deviation from the basic Christian doctrines. This is to prove that Christianity had always known how to cope with challenging cultural global realities and to pick the variable elements from the existing cultures in order to propagate its message to the world. This is the basic features of Christianity from time immemorial (Onunwa, 2008). Therefore, among some Ibibio Christians, Christianity is understood as a social organisation wherein God and money can be seriously and conscientiously worshiped simultaneously. Some regarded Christianity as a religion where money is demanded as a symbol of membership, just as it is in any secular organisation (Sunday Ubong Akpan, personal communication on 2/8/2026).

Comfort Akpan Saviour (personal communication on 2/8/2026) noted that nowadays, most sermons that are preached in many churches actually make the members to feel that their regular payment of tithes, dues, and other offerings into the coffers of the church will not only bring untold blessings to them in the here and now, but will ensure them wealth when they get to heaven. It is therefore pertinent to see more of prosperity preaching in almost all the Christian churches than repentance and salvation messages by the ministers, and the members see the regular offering as a channel through which a person can reap rewards after death. A number of worshippers are made to believe that the cheque for the large donation they make to the Church is the treasure that is laid

up for them in heaven. This leads to the concept of heaven as a bank vault where church money is kept.

Emmanuel David (personal communication on 1/7/2026) noted that for others, Christianity is a religion by which professing Christians are permitted to partake in the Holy Communion as external identification. Obviously, for other Ibibio Christians, Christianity has meaning in terms of its pragmatic advantages and materials usefulness over non-Christians religions. According to Israel Effiong (personal communication on 12/7/2026), this is obvious because most Christians embraced Christianity because it helped them have less expensive funeral for their parents. For instance, some churches help in buying the coffin, while other members support financially during funeral ceremonies. Furthermore, according to Anietie Ekpo (personal communication 12/7/2026) some churches have some social groups in which members form themselves into, this includes: youth fellowship, women and men fellowships. Such groups always come together to support their individual member especially during social functions like marriages, child dedications, thanksgiving services, funerals, and so on. Moreover, Ekerete Arthur (personal communication on 2/8/2026) opines that in many Christian Churches bachelors and spinsters always find their marriage partners. Sometimes, they make contacts that would help them get more customers for their business, even to get some governmental and political appointments.

Conclusion

The paper noted that Christianity embraces all cultures including the Ibibio culture and every aspect of human life, and compliments aspects of Ibibio culture. Besides, it often offers a challenge and is stubbornly intolerant, and uncompromising to the cultural and traditional elements that do not accept its full expression. It has been able to speak to the people in their language and symbol, and penetrating the innermost part of their cultures. Notably, the Ibibio culture provided the nursery bed in which Christianity was nurtured in Ibibio of Akwa Ibom State.

Nevertheless, syncretistic practices among many Ibibio show that Ibibio traditional religion is still alive and active in the life and soul of the people. The resilience of the traditional religious beliefs and practices cannot obviously be denied. This is evidence because the people have re-explained many of their rituals, believing to give them new meaning and dimension. This exists as a subsidiary within or under the cloak of Christian practices. Thus, the Ibibio people who have been converted to Christianity are unable to extricate themselves from their traditional religious beliefs and practices. But this encounter with Christianity means that the worldview will never remain what it was.

Recommendations

Based on the interaction between Christianity and the Ibibio culture; the following are the recommendations:

- i. The Ibibio Christians must acquaint themselves with certain aspects of their culture and tradition such as language, arts, music, dance, because the Christian faith is to be effectively expressed and communicated only in culturally designed media.
- ii. The clergies must translate their understanding of the Christian faith into the cultural and traditional term familiar to their prospective converts, converting them appropriately to the faith without syncretising.
- iii. Trained and spiritually equipped biblical scholars should be called into the ministry, and those already in the ministry should be educated effectively to avoid syncretism.
- iv. The preaching and teaching about the power of God and His salvation should commence very early in one's life before and after conversion in water baptism.
- v. More concerted efforts should be geared towards preaching the undiluted message of salvation, and not heresy that is after materialism.
- vi. The Government should also make health facilities accessible and affordable and make the people aware of the importance of healthy living.

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ORAL INTERVIEW

S/N	NAME	AGE	STATUS	DATE
1.	Emmanuel David	60	Elder	1/7/2026
2.	Israel Effiong	35	Brother	12/7/2026
3.	Anietie Ekpo	39	Deacon	12/7/2026
4.	Ekerete Arthur	71	Elder	2/8/2026
5.	Sunday Ubong akpan	58	Elder	2/8/2026
6.	Comfort Akpambang	58	Deaconess	2/8/2026
7.	Saviour Akpan	51	Brother	2/8/2026
8.	Nse-Abasi S. Akpan	56	Pastor	12/8/2026
9.	EnobongOkonEtim	39	Chorister	12/8/206
10.	Enefiok E. Udo	62	Elder	12/8/2026
11.	Elizabeth Saturday Akpabong	38	Chorister	12/8/2026
12.	Christiana Enobong	33	Sunday School Teacher	1/9/2026
13.	Bassey Ekanem	42	Elder	1/9/2026
14.	Janet Okon	28	Member	1/9/2026

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