



Pentecostalism and rural development in Ikwerreland, Niger Delta, Nigeria

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Abstract

The coming of the church in Ikwerreland in the closing years of 19th century and growth of Pentecostalism in the 1930s marked a change in the drive by the people to add value to their culture, as rural development in most cases reflects the response of local people to the changes in their social environment. The concept and development of Pentecostalism, as well as rural development provide the platform for our discussion. This paper examined the contributions of Pentecostal churches to the development of rural communities in Ikwerreland, Niger Delta, Nigeria. Again, it investigated the effect of rural development projects of Pentecostal churches in Ikwerreland. Applying descriptive method, the research revealed that Pentecostal churches has demonstrated commitment in the development of rural communities in Ikwerreland in terms of education, infrastructure, healthcare, agriculture, social, welfare and evangelism. The contributions of Omega Power Ministry (OPM) are unparalleled with their emphasis on free education and other social action services. However, significant impact is yet to be noticed in road maintenance, power supply and security. The paper therefore, recommended that while the present efforts of Pentecostal churches in Ikwerreland are sustained, the security of lives and properties in the area should not be neglected.

Keywords: pentecostalism, church, rural, development and community

1. Introduction

The change from pre-missionary to the Christian period in terms of community development in Ikwerreland was not radical and sudden. Nevertheless, the missionaries did usher in a lot of changes including the desire for European and exotic luxuries. Consequently, the rural inhabitants desired new changes because it was their wish to improve the quality of village life. Better education and health services were required and amenities such as improved water supply and agriculture. None of these could however be met without a sound educational base, which the missionaries represented. This explains why many people in Ikwerreland see development as an education process, which must be given first and last attention.

The Christianization of Ikwerreland was started in 1895. Like in most Niger Delta communities, the church did not begin until natives took the initiative. These indigenous lay evangelists (agents) were supported by Kalabari Christian traders and evangelists as well as other missionaries (Onu, 2018) ^[17]. Ikwerreland that has today become urban areas in varying degrees has numberless Christian missions such as Established, Charismatic, Indigenous or African Instituted and Pentecostal as well as various Sects and Movements.

Concept and Development of Pentecostalism

Pentecostalism comes from Pentecost which is a Greek word "*Pentecostos*" meaning "fifty". The Pentecost is a Jewish feast day known as Shabuoth. Pentecost occurs in the month of Sivan (May/June), 50 days after Passover, and celebrates the end of the grain harvest. It was called the "Feast of weeks" (Ex. 34:22, Dent. 16:10) or the "Feast of harvest" (Exod. 23:16). The Pentecost is one of the three occasions in the year in which male Israelites are to appear before the Lord (Deut. 16:16, 2 Chron. 8:13). The Pentecost feast has been there before the New Testament (NT) time. In the NT, the Pentecost was the day the Holy Spirit descended

on the disciples of Jesus Christ after his ascension. The Holy Spirit came with new life, power and blessing on the Church (Acts 2:1-13). Peter saw the event as the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel. The Pentecost event in Acts chapter 2 has brought to completion the redemptive act of Good Friday and Easter and also the beginning of the harvest of the nations.

Pentecostalism is the worldwide movement in and outside the main stream Christianity that emphasises the belief that Christians in every age by living a life of holiness and prayers may receive the baptism in the Spirit and the same Charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit as did the first Christians on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Kurian, 2005, p.540) ^[12]. It encompasses the movements of Pentecostals. According to Hollenwenger;

Pentecostalism is a general term used to describe the groups and sects which have traditionally placed emphasis on the speaking and receiving of certain gifts of the spirit as speaking in tongues, prophesying and healing as a sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1972, p. xvii).

The emphasis of Pentecostalism is in "experience and spirituality" as it includes different forms of 'spiritual gifts movements'. The six key things are; Holy Spirit baptism as an experience different from conversion and evidence by speaking in tongues or *glossolalia* (Acts 2:1-13), inspiration of the Bible, salvation by conversion and revival, instantaneous sanctification, divine healing, and claim to be restoration Christianity. Like in the early church, the meetings of the Pentecostals are characterized by outbursts of ecstatic enthusiasm featuring healing, speaking in tongues, interpretation of prophecies, and all kinds of miracles (Ayegboyin and Ishola, 2013: 7). Powell (2002, p.960-961) ^[21]. considered the Pentecostals as the "modern Christians who believe in the possibility of receiving the same experience of the Holy Spirit as the Apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4)". The Pentecostals have the

tendency to see their movement as reflecting the same kind of spiritual power and teachings that were found in the Apostolic Age of the early church. Pentecostals are people of great zeal for the word of God and fervent prayer with strong faith, but their too much emotionalism and craze for numbers have made them offensive to the conservatives.

Though it is popularly believed that the phenomenon of Pentecostalism is a product of 1900s, the rise of the movement dates back to many years before. Several revival and holiness movements within Christianity have appeared with 'different names and shades of expressions.' The modern and classical Pentecostalism of the 20th century was started in the United States of America as an out-growth of the Holiness movement. Towards the end of the 19th century Reformation (Protestant) Christians prayed for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for moral, social reforms and world evangelization.

In 1900, Charles Fox Parham, a holiness preacher and former Methodist pastor (he resigned in 1895) who was influenced by Irving Edward, established Bethel Bible School at Topeka Kansas. On January 1, 1901, Charles laid hands on one of his students- Miss Agnes Ozman to receive the power of the Holy Spirit, and she spoke in tongues. Others joined including the school Principal, Charles himself spoke in tongues three days later. This marked what Charles Parham called the 'Apostolic Faith Movement'. The foundation Secretary of Assemblies of God, J. Rosewell Flower said, Ozman's experience of the Topeka Pentecost was the "touch felt round the world", an event which "made the Pentecostal Movement of the Twentieth century" (Hunt, 2008, p.541) ^[11].

Pentecostalism achieved a worldwide attention in 1906 through the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles led by the African-American preacher William Joseph Seymour. He enrolled with another black American-Lucky Farrar in Charles Parham New Bible School opened at Houston, Texas in 1905. Seymour had the experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and patterned with Parham to pastor a black holiness church in Los-Angeles in the home of Richard Asberry. Later, the two disagreed, and Parham returned back to Kansas. While Seymour and Farrar were at the house of one Lee for a dinner on April 9, 1906, suddenly by the command of the Holy Spirit, Seymour and Farrar laid hands on their host-Lee, and "he suddenly fell off his chair to the ground as if dead and suddenly, burst in tongues". Others in the house also had same experience which lasted for three days and nights, and attracted many people to the church. On 16th April, 1906 a dilapidated warehouse was rented at 312 Azusa Street to accommodate the increasing number of worshippers. The incident in Azusa Street was published by Los-Angeles Times on April 18, 1906, as a "weird babbles of tongues amid wild scene" in mission (Nnodim-Onyebugu, 2007, p.21-22) ^[16]. This became the starting point of modern Pentecostalism. In addition to classical Pentecostalism, there are neo-Pentecostalism or Charismatic movements.

Concept of Rural development

Rural development is a comprehensive term that essentially focuses on action for the development of areas outside the mainstream urban economic system. It is the process of improving living standards of people of low population residing in the rural communities. Rural development is defined as the process of improving the quality of life and

economic well-being of rural area residents, often relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas (Moseley, 2003, p.5). It is the process whereby local groups are assisted by the government to clarify and express their infrastructural, educational and social needs and objectives, and to take collective action in an attempt to meet them. Rural development is closely related to 'community development', the latter being an indispensable means of achieving the former, as both urban and rural areas are classified to be 'community' regardless of where they are located and their settlement pattern.

Rural development is concerned with the improvement as well as transformation of social, economic, mental, institutional and environmental conditions of the low-income rural dwellers through the mobilization and institutional resources, as to enhance their capabilities to cope with tasks of life and the demands of modern times. It aims at finding ways to improve rural lives with participation of rural people themselves, so as to meet the required needs of rural communities (Pellissery, 2012) ^[20]. The objective is how to improve the total quality of life of the rural population by way of quality, ability and accessibility to infrastructure, poverty reduction, employment creation, economic empowerment, enhancing the political consciousness and participation of the people in the political process as well as inculcating in the people a sense of self-reliance in the management of their own affairs and resources. Hence, it is characterized by its emphasis on locally produced economic development strategies. Again, changes in networks of production globally and increased urbanization have naturally changed the character of rural communities.

The Ikwerre

The geo-political entity called Ikwerre constitutes a major ethnic group in Rivers State of Niger Delta, Nigeria. The name refers to both the people and their language who also refer to themselves as Iwhuruohna (proper natives). They are found in four Local Government Areas of Rivers State, namely; Port Harcourt City, Ikwerre, Obio/Akpor and Emohua. The area is the largest upland community in Rivers State and is made up of several kingdoms, clans, towns and villages constituting a distinct cultural area. Ejizu (1986, p. xvi) regards cultural area as a geographical delimitation of an area that possess more or less the same dominant features and significant cultural traits, complex and pattern.

Ikwerreland stretches from Rebisi (Port Harcourt City) through Obio and Akpor in the South East to the International Airport communities of Omagwa, Ipo, Isiokpo, Omademe, Ozuaha and Igwuruta in the East. It extends to Ubima, Omuanwa, Omudioga, Egbeda, Ubimini, Apani and Omerelu in the North, being the boundary towns between Rivers State and Imo State. It runs through to Elele-Alimini, Rumuekpe, Itu, Akpabu and Rundle in the West and down to Ogbakiri, Emohua and Uvuawhu coastal communities in the South.

Pentecostalism and Educational Development in Ikwerreland

A major contribution of Pentecostal church to rural development in Ikwerreland is in the area of education. Western education was introduced to Nigeria by the Christian missionaries in the 19th century. It was one of the strategies adopted by the early missionaries to get converts

into Christianity. In fact, Onu (2018, p.115) ^[17]. noted that education was Bishop Crowther's principal method of evangelization. Crowther believed that the paramount duty of the missionary was to attract people to the mission and the doctrinal refinements would follow. He made the school his most effective organ and very much depended on it more than any other missionary in securing local support. He always introduced the mission into new places by making leaders to be interested in the idea of having a school of their own. It was his usual practice to ask the senior missionary at each station to give his foremost attention to the school. In 1874, he (Crowther) said; education cannot but and enlighten the idea of those who are brought under its influence, especially where all the elementary school books are extracts from the Holy Scripture inculcating all virtues and condemning all vices, and vividly pointing out the folly and superstition of idolatrous worship (Ajayi, 1965, p. 19 citing Crowther, CMS CA3/04).

The Roman Catholic mission also used education as a strong means of conversion in Nigeria. According to Dedua (1999), perceiving the evangelistic potentials of education in the emerging colonial order, Fr. Legune made it the Prefecture's chief instrument for evangelism. It can be said that the need and quest for western education is the major motivating factor in the acceptance of the church in Ikwerreland. As Onu stated;

When western education started in the Niger Delta coastal communities through the missionary agencies, some Ikwerre families sent their children across to be educated. In the process of acquiring western education, they became converted to the Christian faith. Most of these converts returned home and started witnessing the love of God in Christ Jesus with passion to their kith and kin. They sowed the seed of the gospel and established Christian worship stations in some villages, towns, clans and kingdoms (2018, 154).

The Pentecostal churches such as Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Deeper Life Bible Church, and Omega Power Ministry among others have followed the path of the mainline churches by establishing educational institutions such as nursery, primary, and secondary schools in Ikwerreland. In educational system, "primary school education is the foundation stone of all forms of education". The Deeper Life High School at Rumuokparali and Redeemers School at Rumuapara are among such schools. Though the Pentecostal churches do not have any University in Ikwerreland, their universities established within the country-Redeemer's University by the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Covenant University by the Living Faith Church, Benson Idahosa University by the Church of God Mission among others are made open to all.

Among the Pentecostal churches, the educational project of Omega Power Ministry (OPM) has a unique, different, distinct, extraordinary, radical approach to the norm and a sacrificial commitment to the service of God and humanity with emphasis on freeness. The church focuses on completely tuition free and high standard in a standard learning environment. Instead of ostentatiously aggrandizing wealth at the expense of church members and the society, the founder and General Overseer, Apostle Chibuzor Chinyere, who could be described as an unparalleled missionary, visionary, philanthropist, emancipator, mentor, motivator and empowered of hundreds

of thousands of men, women, youths and children throughout the African continent, Europe, and beyond took a step out of the usual and decided to touch lives in no small way through his Ministry (Asadu, 2019) ^[14]. Apostle Chinyere in his "noble mission of lifting the poor from poverty and giving hope to a generation stuck in illiteracy, ignorance and disease by running a totally free education system for indigent children and orphans" (Ndukwe, 2019) ^[14]. The OPM Free School is a project to basically help, train and cater for the orphans, children of widows and children from less privileged homes without cost.

The Free Schools are located at Isiokpo, Rukpokwu, Port Harcourt main city, and Borokiri. Others located outside Ikwerreland are at Eleme and Oyigbo in Rivers State, Ohanku in Abia State, Ikpe in Akwa Ibom State and Yenegoa in Bayelsa State. Another dimension to the free school project is the All Girls Technical College in Aluu (Port Harcourt), currently under construction. It is the first of its kind in Nigeria and indeed Africa, aimed at empowering the girl-child in contributing more to the growth of the family and the society. The free school project beyond providing free tuition, each and every child in both the nursery and primary school levels is entitled to 4 school uniforms each academic year, school sandals, books, pencils, biros and other writing materials needed for their seamless learning at no cost to the parents. The pupils are also fed once every school day as well as ferried to and from school in the OPM school buses, which also operate at no cost to the parents. The project still has free international excursions for pupils and students.

The infrastructure of the schools is built to taste and equipped with state-of-the-art facilities to give students a serene and conducive atmosphere for effective learning and total development of the child. Each of the classrooms is modern and beautifully patterned with a modern toilet attached to it. They are equipped with water dispensers, comfortable desks and chairs, marker boards, modern facilities and air conditioners which provides the children with a relaxed learning environment. There is also a sickbay that operates during school hours, and staffed with first aid attendants to provide basic first aid care to the students in the case of emergencies like injury and sickness. Each school have fully equipped laboratory with state-of-art technologies and equipment, a fully stocked library, a workshop and a standard computer room. The structures include a fully equipped playground, football pitch and basketball court for recreational activities. In manpower, the staff lists are hardworking Janitors that make sure that the environment is clean and healthy enough for the children.

The school teachers are God fearing, experienced and qualified, and takes the pupils on structured teachings thereby facilitating learning. In addition to the high academic standard, the school is also particular about the religious aspect of the children; hence, prayers, incessant preaching of the word of God and instilling the fear of God in the mind of the children are paramount. The free schools are funded and maintained by the church members' tithe and offering money, and donations. The OPM free school project cuts across ethnic, denominational and religious boundaries. The church is also involved in offering scholarship to indigent youths in secondary schools. One of the less privileged children, but very intelligent who had graduated from the Free Nursery and Primary School is currently attending the Federal Government College (FGC),

Port Harcourt under the sponsorship of the church. These schools are run by the educational ministries of the churches. The Christ Redeemers ministry of the RCCG for instance, handles the affairs of their schools following.

Pentecostalism and Infrastructural Development in Ikwerreland

An interesting aspect of rural development associated with Pentecostalism in Ikwerreland is infrastructural development epitomized with the erection of magnificent edifices for worship. There appears to be a competitive project among the churches in the construction of worship auditorium and administrative centres. The uniqueness of these infrastructural projects lies in the fact that they are distinct in feature as well as located in hitherto rural communities. The Deeper Life Bible Church State headquarters at Rumuodara, Redeemed Church of God at Mgbuoba, Souls Ablaze Church at Nkpolu-Rumuigbo, Greater Evangelism World Crusade at Rukpokwu, Salvation Ministry Finger of God edifice at Igwuruta, and Omega Power Ministry- Doctor Jesus City at Aluu to mention but a few are wonderful great developmental complexes. In addition to worship structures, the OPM for instance, is investing in the construction of Housing Estate in Rumuokwurusi, Rumuigbo and Aluu.

Pentecostalism and Agricultural Development in Ikwerreland

The primary economic activity of most rural communities including Ikwerreland is farming, an activity carried out by males and females. Farming was basically subsistence as the family depended on the farm produce for food and the left over was sold to make some financial gains. Little wonder Ake (1981, p.1) agreed that the most fundamental need of man is the economic need. Man must eat before he can do anything else. He needs to survive before he can worship, pursue culture or achieve whatever he can. There is a conscious attempt at maximizing the farm-family's productive capacity towards the achievements of a satisfactory level of living.

In the field of Agriculture, the churches are introducing new farming techniques and crops. This is carried out first by teaching members who are also part of the community the need for hard work and principles of growing variety of cash crops-palm trees, oranges and pineapples, guava, mangos, etc which is helping to foster development. In some of the churches, garden plots are planted within the premises. Students of the church schools carry out pivotal farm project as part of their Agricultural assignment.

Pentecostalism and Empowerment in Ikwerreland

Empowerment is a derivative of the verb empower which is to give authority, power, warrant, commission, license, strength, support or confidence to a person to enable him do something or earn a living. Empowerment means encouraging or assisting somebody in the form of economic assistance or skill acquisition. It is the process whereby young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives in the community. The economic empowerment projects of the Pentecostals in Ikwerreland are multifaceted. It ranges from providing employment for the teeming youth, and adults alike through training as pastors, clerks and so on. A major social problem in the state is unemployment. Apart from providing employment for the locals through education and

printing press facilities, scholarships are also provided by the churches. Some sponsor football competitions and provide football viewing centres during major national, continental and international competitions.

The churches are also involved in the training of members through skill acquisition programmes, examination coaching for students, and youth empowerment. The OPM for instance, has established the following free empowerment project in Ikwerreland and beyond:

1. Free Computer Training Centre at Bundu Water front in Port Harcourt,
2. Free Computer Training Centre Elele Prisons in Ikwerre LGA,
3. Free Computer Training Centre Rumuji in Odegu, Emohua LGA.
4. Multi-Skill Acquisition Centres at Elekahia and Nkpogu in Port Harcourt LGA and Oginigba in Obio/Akpor LGA where Nigerians are trained free of charge in such fields as oil & gas, carpentry, tailoring, rig welding, driving, etc.

Pentecostalism and Welfare in Ikwerreland

The Pentecostals are soaring high in promoting the welfare of members and community people. They demonstrate the love of God to the widows, the poor and destitute by regularly providing food items-bags of rice, and even financial allowance for their support. They run free medical services at different times especially as part of their seasonal events. At the annual events of the churches-Easter and December retreats, participants are provided with free food and lodging as well as free transport. Some less privileged members are even provided with free shelter.

The OPM runs a Free Restaurant at Rumuagholu named after Leah Sharibu, one of the kidnapped Chibok girls still held in hostage by *Boko Haran* terrorist because she refused to renounce her faith in Christ. The church has constructed estates of self-contain, one- and two-bedroom flats at Aluu for numerous widows, flood victims and repentant commercial sex workers within and outside Ikwerreland. They have also opened free boutiques for converts in Port Harcourt.

The Pentecostal healing programmes are positively affecting the development of Ikwerre rural communities. Healing and miracles are central to the teaching of Pentecostals as stated earlier in this paper. They uphold the teaching that every believer is expected to enjoy good and robust health. In this regard, a lot of propaganda has been put in place to attract people to their revivals and crusades for divine healing. There are annual, monthly and quarterly special revival programmes with different catching captions to keep the faith of members and attract new ones. These programmes are carried within Ikwerreland as well as at the national headquarters of the churches.

Pentecostalism and Rural Evangelism in Ikwerreland

The need for rural evangelism cannot be ignored, as great percentage of Ikwerre people live in the rural areas. There is strong need to bring the message of the goodness of Jesus Christ to them as to make them disciples. The early missionaries and their indigenous counterparts, who spear headed the propagation of the gospel in Ikwerreland had the burden of the Great Commission in their hearts, which was translated into going out of their comfort zones to meet the natives in their rural condition. Rural evangelism entailed

warfare. It is an act of spiritual warfare while the gospel, the spiritual dynamite, is a weapon of war that smashes the pieces sin that Satan had established in the heart of men. Rural Christian evangelism is a spiritual battle, and the fight is against ignorance, prejudice and Satan. Unlike the guerrilla warfare where the fighter adopts a "hit and run" strategy, this one is a deliberately planned, organized and sustained warfare in which we attack, capture and occupy.

In fact, for anyone to engage in rural Christian evangelism, he or she must be properly groomed by way of training and exposure to the fundamentals of the gospel. A proper foundation of basic Christian doctrine is appropriate so that one can effectively combat the trees of darkness that may tend to rise up during evangelism. Rural Christian evangelism puts the evangelist under spotlight of the forces of darkness and if such Christian is not fervent in prayers, sound in Scripture, he or she is doomed to fail. Therefore, to partake effectively in Christian rural evangelism converts are trained adequately by the church, and such trainings include: teaching on the authority, uniqueness and inspiration of the Bible, the Trinity, faith, salvation in Jesus Christ, and eternal life. The evangelist must be someone called by God and personally determined and committed to knowing His Word, to grow in walking with Him and to search the scriptures daily. For it was with the Scripture that Jesus defeated Satan.

A rural evangelism method that is yielding fruit in Ikwerreland is the exchange of pulpit. It is a very effective medium of communication the good news, as people tend to pay rapt attention to a new speaker even where the new preacher may not be better than old person. Exchange of pulpit approach allows for the interchanging of pastors of a denomination within a given period. These workers with their various levels of faith and gifts- healing, prosperity and deliverance use the opportunity to bless, encourage and edify the new congregation.

Impact of Pentecostalism and Rural Development in Ikwerreland

The wonderful structures of the Pentecostal churches in Ikwerreland have helped to develop various communities. Most of the infrastructures were established through collective efforts of church members organized in groups for the provision of sand, gravel, rocks and other buildings materials. There are multiple Pentecostal churches in some communities; some seem to have been planted indiscriminately. The reason behind this could be traceable to the vision of some of the church leaders which emphasises that a congregation should be is to establish within every five minutes working distance. The action has succeeded in developing the infrastructural condition in various Ikwerre communities.

The Pentecostal church schools and related projects have become a source employment to a reasonable number of people, especially youths. The natives and residents are counting gains from the projects. The establishment of church in an undeveloped area has encouraged some people to acquire properties in the affected areas thereby improving infrastructural development. The projects are helping to improve or reduce the poverty level in the communities. Money realized by natives through property (land) sales, and payment for skilled and unskilled services in course of project construction are improving the economic life of the people. Such income is used for family, education and

physical development. Some are invested in children education, attending to health challenges, reconstruction of existing structures, erecting new residential and commercial structures. Through the projects the Ikwerre environment is enhanced with possible effect of reduction of unhealthy environmental associated diseases.

The spirituality of both pastoral agents and members are developed through rural evangelism. Exchange of pulpit programme has proved to be effective means of building and promoting cooperation among church workers. Through the revival meetings, many ailments that defiled orthodox medicine had been healed by the help of the Holy Ghost. The social actions like installation of bore-hole for the supply of drinking water to the natives has improved the people's access to clean water and functioning sanitation thus, enabling the people to stay healthy. Better water management allows communities to sustain or even improve the quality of their water sources.

Conclusion

This paper examined the concept and development of Pentecostalism, a worldwide movement in and outside the main stream Christianity that emphasises the personal experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit by every Christians with the accompanying gifts as manifested on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem. Modern Pentecostalism is traced to the events of the 1900s in the USA. The contributions of Pentecostal churches in the development of Ikwerre rural communities were examined under educational, infrastructure, social, economic, agriculture and evangelism. The churches especially RCCG and OPM have demonstrated significant commitment in the development of rural communities in Ikwerreland through their preaching, systematic teachings, welfare services, and exemplary life style which is positively affecting the moral, educational, and infrastructural development of the communities. However, the churches will need to look at the areas of road maintenance, electricity, and security as to make a balance, without neglecting their current focus. The rural development social actions of the Pentecostal churches in Ikwerreland affirmed commitment to their mission of being the light of the world.

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