

Chapter 7

Historic–Phenomenological Evaluation of the Christian Experience in the Threshold of Human Development in Nigeria: Experience From Ibesikpo Asutan in Akwa Ibom State

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ABSTRACT

Evolving discourses within the sphere of Christian experience and social development reveals that social transformation in the society cannot be separated from spiritual transformation. Religion as a social phenomenon has therefore become an acknowledged and strategic dimension in the development thinking and practice in contemporary society. But despite apparent contributions of religion to the development of many societies such as Nigeria, the role of religion, especially Christianity, has not been given due recognition in the history and development of a number of societies such as Ibesikpo Asutan of Akwa Ibom State. This study therefore examines the religious experience of the people towards development between 1912 when Christianity arrived and 2019. The method adopted for this work is the phenomenological and descriptive designs. Findings reveal that besides the consciousness of the transcendent and the question of God's existence, Christian missions in Ibesikpo Asutan have contributed immensely toward the development of the area.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a growing interest in the public arena about the contribution of religion toward 'public goods' which has deepened the primacy lent to the church as a dominant force in human development. Over the years, Christianity has exerted great impact on the development of Nigerian society including Ibesikpo Asutan in Akwa Ibom State. Mission Churches have also been involved in the transformation and development of their various areas of operation. Evidence abounds that before, during and after colonization; Christianity has been involved in the making of the new elite and the development of Nigerian society through education, vocation training centres, and medical services among others (Ajayi, 1965 & Ayandele, 1966). It is a well known fact that majority of leaders in Nigeria today in politics, medicine, law, civil service, and media owe their humble beginning to education in mission schools. There is no gainsaying that the primary concern of development is the improvement of the well-being of people. Raising living standards and improving education, health and equality of opportunity are also among the essential components of development which Nigerians benefited immensely from Christianity. Thus, Christianity is the bedrock upon which Nigerians, including the people of Ibesikpo Asutan get their individual and community lives transformed.

The objective of this paper therefore is that, beyond a contribution to the body of knowledge, the researcher wishes to do for Ibesikpo Asutan in Akwa Ibom State what Onah (2010) has done for Uyo Metropolis' Christianity and Omotoye (1996) for Ilorin Metropolis' Christianity. The researcher equally reasons that if this study is not embarked upon, the vital phenomenological as well as historical facts of Christianity and development in this area could be lost as many pioneer Christians, community leaders, ministers, and church leaders who were eye witnesses of some of the events have died and those remaining are becoming weaker each passing day. Therefore, this paper seeks to undertake this task before it becomes too late. The work takes off from 1912 because it was the year Christianity first entered Ibesikpo Asutan according to Amankpa (1976:8) and ends in 2019 because the year 2020 had not ended when this study was carried out.

Ibesikpo Asutan in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Ibesikpo Asutan is one of the thirty-one Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, in South South Nigeria. It is made up of two Clans namely Ibesikpo and Asutan Clans. Ibesikpo Asutan comprises of forty three villages. According to 1991 census, Ibesikpo Asutan has a population of about 137,127. It is part of Ibibio which is the main ethnic group that is the largest in the State. The main activity for the survival and development of Ibesikpo Asutan are farming and trading. In the words of Edet

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