



INFLUENCE OF EGGON POSITIVE CULTURAL PRACTICES ON EGGON CHRISTIANS IN NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Since the advent of Christianity in Eggon land, the church has been growing in leaps and bounds. However, there is cultural contrasts between Christianity and the African Traditional Religion (ATR). Most followers of ATR who accepted Christianity are at threshold, that is, neither here nor there and hence, they live a double life. This study was carried out to investigate the views of Christians on the influence of Eggon positive cultural practices on Eggon Christians in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The objective of the study was to investigate the level in which Eggon cultural practices have influenced the Eggon Christians in various church denominations positively despite the negative cultural influence in the state. The total population of the study comprised of Eggon Christians in the state that made up of two hundred thousand (200,000). Seven hundred and fifty (750) respondents were sampled randomly to represent the total population. Survey design was adopted for the study and two instruments were used for data collection: Questionnaire and interview. Descriptive data analysis was employed using frequency and simple percentage for demographic variable, mean scores for research question and ANOVA for testing the hypothesis. The finding revealed that, despite the negative cultural practices on Eggon Christians, they also have some positive cultural practices that should be upheld and promoted for the religious and moral growth of the church.

Key Words: Influence, Positive Cultural Practices, Eggon Christians



Introduction

Christianity came to Nasarawa State around 1920 through South African and Dutch Missionaries. They did not find it easy with the people of the state because the religion was seen as foreign and contrary to the practices of their culture. Among the early ethnic groups that accepted Christianity in Nasarawa state from the missionaries were the Eggon people. Both missionaries and early converts experienced stiff opposition and persecution in an attempt to prevent its acceptability and spread in Eggon land by both community leaders and parents of the converts (Emmanuel, 2016).

The missionaries did not relent in spreading the gospel despite the strong opposition they encountered. They started planting churches anywhere they reached and got converts. Among the denominations that were embraced by the people of Eggon during the mission works were: Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC), Baptist Church and Roman Catholic Church. These early churches planted by the missionaries were warmly embraced by the people of Eggon because they adopted the principles of establishing schools for free education, building of hospitals and provision of free medication, clothes and food to their converts. Similarly, they began to preach against killing of twins, casting away of people suffering from leprosy, chicken pox, small pox and a host of other diseases (Otije, 2020). That apart, the missionaries taught the converts virtues such as faithfulness, honesty, purity, peace, love, unity, hard work, justice, forgiveness, obedience, meekness, humility, impartiality, hospitality and spirit of

sharing and urged them to practice them. In view of that, adherents of Christianity in Eggon land were supposed to live in accordance with these virtues so as to make a difference with those who were yet to accept Christ. This is because the virtues promote practical Christian living and holistic service to God. The converts viewed these teachings as a welcome development and freedom from bondage on the cultural beliefs they firmly adhered. This paved room for easy acceptability of Christianity wherever the missionaries set their foot in Eggon land.

As a result of these sound teachings from the late 1980s to date, the proliferation of churches was highly witnessed in Eggon land. Among the denominations that sprang-up from the early established churches in Eggon soil are: Coccin Church, Apostolic Church, Assemblies of God's Church, Cherubim and Seraphim Church, Celestial Church of Christ, Deeper Life Bible Church, Living Faith Church, Grace of God Mission Church, Word of God International Church, God's Heir Mission Church, Christ Embassy Church, Redeemed Church of God, House- Hold of Love Church, The Chosen Church, Faith Redemption Church and many others.

Christianity that was strongly opposed became accepted and is found in most parts of the state and where by most other ethnic groups in the state coming from an animistic background want to be considered Christians today because of the spiritual values enjoyed by the Eggon believers. Though Christianity is now found in every nook and cranny of Eggon land which has brought the good news of Christ's salvific work to the people and equally redeemed the Eggon people from their traditional religion and beliefs, it was



not easy for the people to leave their old religion (traditional practices) for a new one (Christianity) due to cultural practices they so much cherished and up till now, they find it difficult to depart totally from. There are elements of such activities like polygamy, witchcraft, magic and traditional medicine, syncretism and a host of others whose impact affects Eggon Christians to render their holistic service to God in our churches today.

Hence, some Eggon Christians still find it difficult to drop these anti-Christian practices in their life time. This cultural inclination is interfering with the laid down doctrines of the church and thereby constitutes a barrier to their holistic service to God.

The missionaries did not relent in spreading the gospel despite the strong opposition they encountered. They planted a lot of churches anywhere they reached and got converts. With the proliferation of churches in Eggon land and their wide embraced of Christianity, some Eggon Christians still find it difficult to drop these anti-Christian practices in their life time. These negative cultural inclinations of Eggon cultural practices is interfering with the laid down doctrines of the church which is affecting the spiritual growth, peaceful co-existence and national development.

Despite the above negative cultural practices of the Eggon culture on Eggon Christians, African culture cannot be ruled out to be completely bad. This is because there are aspects that are good and positively influenced African Christians spiritually for effective service to God and mankind. In the postulation of Atchenemou, Raymond, Moyo and Bill

(2016), affirm the total wrongness of viewing African culture to be bad. This is because there are some values that are biblical and therefore, aid Christians' growth in their faith, resulting to peaceful co-existence and national development. They buttress that, Jesus recognizes and keeps good culture; Jesus rebukes Simon for not being cultural (Luke 7:36-50). These are evidences that, there are important aspects that have positive influence on Christians. Such cultural aspects advocate the normative order or rules of right and wrong and punish wrongs, if it prevails over rights.

Bates (2018) posits that, Christianity is a culture, but a civilized one because it is totally devoid of negative features. He further observes that, despite the negative influences of African culture on African Christians' spiritual commitment, there are aspects of it that are good and therefore, recommended for their preservations by all means.

Mbiti (1975), Karl and Wilfred (2016) opine that, most if not all African cultures also recognize the existence of one Supreme being. Ge is often referred to God, the Creator who made man and the world they live in, including the spiritual powers. They believe that, God is not to be disturbed with everyday problems of life. In the same vein, Kuzhe (2017) and Otijele (2020) postulates that, African concept of God is one and that is why each African tribe has the name of God they refer to God in their language: Hausa- "Allah", "Ham-Nom", Igbo- "Chukwu" and Eggon- "Ahogbhre".

There is no categorical statement that God is responsible for evil, yet, it is implied in African Traditional Religion that, God is



all powerful and is the absolute sustainer and controller of all human beings, and all spirit beings (good and evil). They uphold that, diseases, natural calamities and other forms of atrocities, sufferings, pains are inflicted by wicked people, divinities and ancestral spirits; that all these beings are under the subjection and control of the Supreme God (Karl & Wilfred, 2016). They state that, except God permits any being or evil occurrence, just as in the life of Job, no human being can inflict or cause any evil or bad to occur on another. Therefore, God is ultimately aware of all that happens to His creatures in which the experience of evil by human beings is not excluded. He may not be responsible for such an act, but He will have His permissive will since He is an all-knowing God.

Shaw (2018) views cultural values as those worthwhile and acceptable aspects of non-material of people which help in molding the character of the people. These cultural values are the bedrock of the society. The values held in the society help in shaping the behavior of the people. These values, because of their goodness are transmitted from generation to generation. Also, Fuller (2019) stresses that, the need of preserving African values for the sake of maintaining perfect relationship between the person and his fellow human beings, gods and Supreme God is a necessity. Fadipe (2019) opines that, an African man cherishes his society. They stress that, no one is an island unto himself. Otijele (2020) opines that, the human person is complete only when he relates proper with other human beings, super human beings and Supreme Being.

Idowu (1973), Mbiti (1975) and Kato (1976) in their submission re-instate by saying: "I am because we are, and since we

are, therefore, I am." This is a clear indication that for the traditional African, the reality of the divine-human community overrides that of the individual human persons. The idea of "I" is inferior to the "We" and "I" is dependent on the "We". They stressed that, the spirit of unity is well known in African culture. This confirms why Eggon people refer to themselves as „Eggon kyekyen“, meaning, the "Eggons are one." This spirit goes beyond individualism or nuclear family but also the surrounding members of the communities in Eggon culture. Members of each community come together not only for work and recreation but to amicably solve disputes if there is any (Gana, 2007).

Also, obedience is one of the societal values that African culture advocates her members to strictly adhere to. McCain (2016) asserts that, African culture is well cherished because it stresses the need for all her members to be obedient to the norms and values of the society. This coincides with the postulation of Stevens (2015) who reveals that, the ability of the members of African culture and Christianity to be obedient to God will make their lives better for effective service. Similarly, African culture encourages the spirit of hard work. Evidence of how an individual acquires his wealth or treasure must be shown. It encourages the members of the society to put extra effort in order to better their life and shun corruption and other social vices. They stress that, Christians should embrace the habit of hard work as advocated by St Paul in his Epistles to Thessalonians (11 Thess. 3: 6-15).

He urges them to be hard working so as to live useful lives to themselves and others (Lawrence, 2017, Edmond, 2018 & Smith,



2019). In African traditional society, images, proverbs, myths, legends and stories are frequent means of communication. These mediums are directed towards making the traditionalists understand and internalize the information conveyed to him through the means (Kore, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Christianity seems to experience a tremendous growth compared to the African Traditional Religion and other religions in the rich African soil. Since the advent of Christianity by the Western missionaries, there has been a great change as many left their old traditional religion for Christianity. This contributed to the formation and proliferation of churches in every nook and cranny of the continent. Despite that, African Christians which include Eggon converts are in a dilemma because the teaching of the new religion is not in agreement with the practices of the inherent culture. To them, the gospel is often not seen as offering resources for life's deepest experiences and when faced with death, famine, infertility, witchcraft and sorcery. This possibly leads some Eggon Christians resort to traditional rites and beliefs (Emmanuel, 2016).

Though, there are many contributory factors that hinder some Eggon Christians in Nasarawa state from living according to the Christian precepts despite its good values; one among them is syncretism. This is seriously making so many Eggon Christians to live a double standard life which is making some of them not to grow spiritually and also affecting the growth of the church and the entire society. Instead of them to experience a genuine growth in their spiritual life, practical Christian living

as the gospel propagates, the reverse is the case. The rate of negative cultural practices found in the church today by Eggon Christian believers is affecting their spiritual growth. This is because many Eggon Christians in the state are faithful to their cultural practices at the detriment of Christianity, thereby, living a confused and double life. They are constantly faced with the challenge of who to serve more. They want to incline to the biblical teachings, but are scared of the immediate consequences that will befall them from their traditional practice.

Despite the long acceptance and embrace of Christianity in Eggon land, the church has been growing in leaps and bounds. Most members of the African Traditional Religion (ATR) who accepted Christianity are at a threshold-neither here nor there, hence, they live a double life. This double life has made most Eggon Christians in Nasarawa State not to experience genuine growth in Christ, therefore, resulting to their inability to serve God holistically. This situation makes so many Eggon Christians in Nasarawa State to look more of traditional religious adherents than Christians. This worrisome situation places many Eggon Christians in a constant battle as they are confused and faced with the problem of whom to serve (Kuzhe, 2017).

Though, there are above challenges encountered by Eggon Christians as a result of their negative cultural practices, it would be wrong to conclude that, Eggon culture lacks positive elements that enhance their spiritual growth, good relationship, peaceful co-existence, societal growth and national development. This study was embarked to investigate the positive influence of Eggon Cultural practices that influence Christian lives



despite the daily confronted negative cultural practices they battled with on almost a daily basis.

Objective of the Study

The study is aimed at investigating the positive influence of Eggon cultural practices on Eggon Christians in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Research Question

The research question is that, what are the positive influence of Eggon cultural practices on Eggon Christians in Nasarawa State, Nigeria?

Hypothesis

The study was guided by the hypothesis:

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the views of members of the various church denominations on the positive influence of Eggon cultural practices on Eggon Christians in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted survey research design and the target population were Eggon Christians from Nasarawa state, Nigeria. A simple random sample population of seven

hundred and fifty (750) respondents out of two hundred thousand (200,000) Christians was adopted. Questionnaire and interview were the instruments used for data collection. The data analysis was based on the responses from 736 respondents. The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. Descriptive data analysis was employed using frequency and simple percentage for demographic variables, mean scores for research question and ANOVA for testing the hypothesis. The mean scores for the items were based on four-point Likert scale and the midpoint average for decision for the items was fixed at 2.50. This implies that, a mean score of 2.50 and above indicates agreement (positive response) with the suggested notion of items while mean score of below 2.50 implies disagreement (negative response). The hypothesis was tested with ANOVA statistics at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results are presented according to the bio-data of the respondents based on various church denominations, research question and hypothesis.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by various Church Denominations

S/N	ITEM	RESPONSES	
		F	Percent
A	Assemblies of God's Church	133	17.7%
B	Baptist Church	152	20.3%
C	ECWA	156	20.8%
D	ERCC	155	20.7%
E	Roman Catholic Church	154	20.5%
Total		750	100

Table 1 reveals that, 133 (17.7%) and 152 (20.3%) of the respondents were members

from Assemblies of God's Church and Baptist Church respectively while 156



(20.8%), 155 (20.7%) and 154 (20.5%) of the respondents were members from ECWA, ERCC and Roman Catholic Church respectively. This distribution implies that, the views of various church members (denominations) were represented in the study.

Research Question:

What are the positive influence of Eggon cultural practices on Eggon Christians in Nasarawa State Nigeria?

Table 2: Views of Respondents on the Positive Influence of Eggon Cultural Practices on Eggon Christians in Nasarawa State, Nigeria

ITEM	RESPONSES				
	SA	A	SD	D	Mean
1. Eggon Christian believers are also Members of their famous Ombatse traditional society.	100	600	10	40	3.01
2. Eggon culture believes in one God.	500	200	20	30	3.56
3. Eggon culture believes in the mystery of evil.	650	70	05	25	3.80
4. Eggon culture takes proper care of their departed relations' children	15	185	250	300	2.22
5. Eggon culture teaches societal values like obedience, hard work, discipline, hospitality and unity	697	33	06	14	3.89
6. Some Eggon Christians are monogamists	688	45	04	13	3.88
7. Eggon culture believes in worshipping God	182	553	08	07	3.21
8. Some Eggon Christians don't drink alcohol	671	56	04	19	3.84
9. The idea of man's spiritual nature is also found in Eggon culture	690	47	02	11	3.89
10. Eggon culture does apply similar methods proverbs in conveying messages	680	50	03	17	3.86
Cumulative mean					3.52
Decision mean = 2.50					

The results in this table show the mean responses of 3.01, 3.56, 3.80, 2.22, 3.86, 3.88, 3.21, 3.84, 3.89 and 3.89. The cumulative mean value is 3.52 except item 4 that has the mean score of 2.22. This value is below the decision mean value of 2.50. Hence, Eggon cultural practices have some positive aspects on Eggon Christians that influence their spiritual growth in the

state.

Research Hypothesis

The study was guided by the hypothesis: There is no significant difference in the views of the various church denominations on the positive influence of Eggon cultural practices on Eggon Christians in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

**Table 3: Views of Various Church Denominations on the Positive Influence of Eggon Cultural Practices on Eggon Christians in Nasarawa State, Nigeria**

Source of variation	Degree of Freedom DF	Sum of Square SS	Means Square Ms	Fcal	Ftable
Between Means	(K-1) 4	133.28	33.32		
Within Means	(N-K) 745	1850	2.48	13.44	2.37
Total	749	1983.28			

a = 0.05

The result of One-way Analysis of Variance test (ANOVA) in table 03 shows that, there is a significant difference in the views of the members of the various church denominations on the positive influence of Eggon cultural practices on Eggon Christians in the study area. The statistics test (ANOVA) for determining the degree of difference between the views of the members of the various church denominations regarding the positive influence of Eggon cultural practices on Eggon Christians in Nasarawa State shows that, the calculated value of F also known as F-ratio was given as 13.44 while the table (critical) value of F (using statistical table) was given as 2.37. The degree of freedom was 4 and 745 respectively and the hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. This revealed that, the calculated value of $F_{13.44}$ is higher than the table (critical) value at $F_{2.37}$. hence, hypothesis is rejected.

Finding

Eggon culture has some positive cultural practices on Eggon Christians that influence their spiritual growth.

Discussions

From the finding of the study, it was revealed that, Eggon culture has some positive cultural practices on Eggon Christians that influence their spiritual growth, therefore, should be imbibed, preserved, upheld and promoted. The finding strengthens the postulations of Otijele (2020) that, most African cultures also recognize the existence of one Supreme being. He is often referred to as God the Creator, who made man and the world they live in, including the spiritual powers. In the same vein, Kuzhe (2017) asserts that, African concept of God is one and that is why each African tribe has the name they refer to God in their language: “Hausa- Allah”; Ham-“Nom”, Igbo-“Chukwu” and Eggon-“Ahogbhre”.

The finding of the study is consistent with the explanation of Karl and Wilfred (2016) that, there is no categorical statement that God is responsible for evil, yet, it is implied in African Traditional Religion that, God is all powerful and is the absolute sustainer and controller of all human beings, and all spirit beings (good and evil). They uphold that, diseases, natural calamities and other forms of atrocities,



sufferings, pains are inflicted by wicked people, divinities and ancestral spirits; that all these beings are under the subjection and control of the Supreme God. According to them, except God permits any being or evil occurrence, just as in the life of Job, no human being can inflict or cause any evil or bad to occur on another. Therefore, God is ultimately aware of all that happens to His creatures in which the experience of evil by human beings is not excluded. He may not be responsible for such an act, but He will have His permissive will since He is an all-knowing God.

This finding of the study concurs with the expression of Shaw (2018) that, cultural values are those worthwhile and acceptable aspects of non-material of people which help in molding the character of the people. These cultural values are the bedrock of the society. The values held in the society help in shaping the behavior of the people. These values, because of their goodness are transmitted from generation to generation. This is affirmed by Fuller (2019) that, the need of preserving African values for the sake of maintaining perfect relationship between the person and his fellow human beings, gods and Supreme God is a necessity. These values are also biblical, though, African Traditional Religion, differs from the biblical faith on how to achieve them. African culture relies largely on the fear of the spirit-beings in charge of the various domains of life to enforce its system of values. The biblical faith relies rather on the Holy Spirit who regenerates fallen man and sets him free to serve God honestly and to love his fellow man.

The finding of the study coincides with the submission of Idowu (1973), Mbiti (1975)

and Kato (1976) who re-instate by saying: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am." This is a clear indication that, for the traditional African, the reality of the divine-human community overrides that of the individual human persons. The idea of "I" is inferior to the "We" and "I" is dependent on the "We". This seems to be in conformity to the corporate solidarity living that is stressed in the Bible by the societal people. Therefore, the significance of interpersonal relationships of mankind cannot be quantified and should be emphasized since no one is an island. This confirms why Eggon people refer to themselves as „Eggon kyekyen“, meaning, the "Eggons are one." This spirit goes beyond individualism or nuclear family but also the surrounding members of the communities in Eggon culture. Members of each community come together not only for work and recreation but to amicably solve disputes if there is any (Gana, 2007).

McCain (2016) and Kunyihop (2018) posit that, African culture is well cherished because it stresses the need for all her members to be obedient to the norms and values of the society. This concurs with the postulation of Stevens (2015) who asserts that, the ability of the members of African culture and Christianity to be obedient to God will make their lives better for effective service. Similarly, African culture encourages the spirit of hard work, discipline, high moral values, love and shun negative vices. Evidence of how an individual acquires his wealth or treasure must be shown. It encourages her members of the society to put extra effort in order to better their life and shun corruption and other social vices. They buttress that, Christians should embrace the habit of hard work as advocated by St Paul in his Epistles to Thessalonians (11 Thess. 3: 6-



15). They stress Christians to be hard working so as to live useful lives to themselves and others as admonished in the Bible (Lawrence, 2017, Edmond, 2018 & Smith, 2019).

On whether Eggon culture believes in one God, 93 respondents affirmed positively to the existence of one Supreme God while only 7 responded negatively. This is in line with the views of Karl and Wilfred (2016) who opine that, African culture recognizes the existence of one Supreme Being which is God, the Creator of heaven and earth. On whether Eggon culture teaches social values like obedience, hard work, discipline, unity and hospitality, 90 of the respondents interviewed answered yes while 10 said no to it. This is in line with the assertion of Stevens (2015) who notes that, African culture is well cherished because it stresses the need for her members to be obedient to societal norms and values.

The finding of the study further coincides with the views of Kore (2020) that, African traditional society, images, proverbs, myths, legends and stories are frequent means of communication. These mediums are directed towards making the traditionalists understand and internalize the information conveyed to him through the means. This has its elements as the proverbs, psalmist, dreams, prayers as media of message conveyance in the scripture. In African culture, there is commitment and loyalty when messages are directed to their members compare to the way Christians do respond to messages of God. Viewing these positive aspects being stressed in African culture just as the Christian religion teaches same, it may not be wrong to stress that, African culture has some positive elements that should

be upheld since they enhanced members' spiritual lives, good relationship, peaceful co-existence which impact people's lives that can result to societal growth and national development.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that, Eggon culture has some essential cultural aspects that influence their Christians' spiritual growth, hence should be imbibed, upheld and enhanced for peaceful co-existence, societal growth and national development.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Efforts should be intensified by the Clergy, ministers and church elders on the need for all Eggon Christians to strongly uphold or imbibe the positive aspects of their culture for societal growth. This can be done through sensitization on Christian literature, newsletters and tracts in Eggon language. This will help them to be faithful to one religion and avoid living a double standard life or serving two masters.
- ii. Since few Eggon Christians are still engaged in the negative cultural practices despite their conversion to Christianity in the state, there is need for the church through pastors, ministers and church elders to organize proper discipleship classes and training programmes so that they would uphold their positive cultural aspects while discarding the negative ones.



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