



WESTERN COLONIALISM AND CHRISTIAN EVANGELIZATION IN NIGERIA: REASSESSING ITS LEGACY, CHALLENGES, AND MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

The relationship between Western colonialism and Christian evangelization in Nigeria remains a subject of critical reassessment, given its enduring theological, cultural, and missiological implications. This study examines how missionary activities, largely spearheaded by European agencies such as the Church Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, contributed significantly to the spread of Christianity, Western education, and social transformation in Nigeria. However, these contributions were closely intertwined with colonial structures that often promoted Western cultural hegemony alongside the Christian faith. Adopting a historical research method, this study draws on books, journal articles, and credible internet sources to analyze both the positive impacts and the inherent tensions within this legacy. It identifies key challenges arising from this intersection, including cultural alienation, the suppression and marginalization of indigenous religious expressions, structural dependency on foreign mission models, and persistent tensions between African worldviews and Western theological constructs. These challenges continue to shape contemporary Nigerian Christianity and its mission praxis. The paper argues that colonial-era evangelization frequently conflated Christianity with Western culture, thereby hindering authentic contextualization of the gospel. In response, it recommends the intentional development of self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating churches, alongside the promotion of indigenous theological education and local resource mobilization. Ultimately, the study concludes that a critical understanding of the colonial legacy is essential for reimagining mission in Nigeria. By embracing contextual theological frameworks, the Nigerian Church can overcome inherited limitations and advance a more culturally relevant, sustainable, and transformative mission in contemporary society.

Keywords: Western colonialism, Christian evangelization, Mission, Nigeria, Missiological Implications.

Introduction

The development of Christian evangelization and missionary activity in Nigeria is inseparable from the historical experience of Western colonialism. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed the simultaneous expansion of European political control and Christian missionary enterprise across many parts of Africa. In Nigeria, missionary agencies such as the Church Missionary Society, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, and the Society of African Missions played significant roles in spreading Christianity. Their work involved preaching, the establishment of churches, schools, and hospitals, as well as the translation of biblical texts into local languages. These activities contributed substantially to the growth of Christianity and the transformation of social institutions within the Nigerian society.

However, the missionary enterprise did not occur in isolation from the political and economic structures of colonial rule. Evangelization frequently developed alongside the administrative expansion of the British Empire, creating a historical relationship between Christianity and Western imperial power. While many missionaries were motivated by genuine religious convictions and humanitarian concerns, the close association between mission work and colonial authority often resulted in Christianity being perceived as an instrument of Western cultural domination. As a result, the introduction of the Christian faith was sometimes accompanied by the displacement or marginalization of indigenous religious traditions, social institutions, and cultural values.

Scholars of mission history and African Christianity have therefore highlighted the legacy of Western colonialism in the process of evangelization. On one hand, missionary activities fostered literacy, formal education, and new socio-religious communities that significantly shaped the development of modern Nigerian society. On the other hand, the tendency to equate Christianity with Western culture contributed to cultural alienation and the erosion of certain indigenous traditions. The imposition of Western ecclesiastical structures, theological categories, and moral norms often created tensions between the Christian message and the African cultural context in which it was proclaimed.

In response to these historical challenges, contemporary theologians and missiologists have increasingly emphasized the importance of contextualizing Christian faith within Nigerian cultural frameworks. Within the field of African Theology, scholars advocate approaches such as enculturation, contextual theology, and the recovery of indigenous religious insights as means of overcoming the colonial legacy in Christian mission. These perspectives aim to re-express the Christian message in ways that affirm African identity, cultural values, and religious heritage while remaining faithful to the core teachings of the gospel.

Conceptual Underpinnings of Colonialism and Christian Evangelization and Mission

The use of words in academic writing may be confusing if not placed in proper context. Hence, it is imperative to provide a workable understanding of the central variables of this paper: colonialism and Christian evangelization and mission.

Concept of Colonialism

According to Blakemore (2025), colonialism occurs when one nation takes control of another for benefits such as resources. Often, they force their language and culture on the locals. By 1914, Europeans had colonized a large majority of the world's nations. Japan, Korea and Thailand are the only nations Europeans never colonized. Colonialism is related to imperialism.

Imperialism is understood as using excessive power and influence to exact control over another nation or people.

Blakemore (2025) affirms that colonialism can be traced to ancient times as it was practiced by empires like Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, Ancient Egypt and Phoenicia. These early civilizations expanded their territories beginning from 1550 B.C. They built colonies using the people they conquered and their resources, thereby gaining more political power. Colonialism attracted European countries because it was a tool of expansion and making profits. It enabled them to employ and enslave indigenous people for their selfish benefits.

The colonial period in Nigeria started with slave trade in the 15th century. The slave trade was introduced by Portugal and this region proved to be profitable as it was a big business area for them (Kaitlyn, 2016). The Portuguese engaged in the slave trade in order to get spices and weapons. According to Kaitlyn (2016), the British replaced the Portuguese slave traders in the 18th century. The British traders settled in Nigeria around this time in Lagos. After the slave trade was abolished, they shifted their focus from obtaining goods to increase their ability to trade and converting the people of the area to Christianity.

Understanding Christian Evangelization and Mission

Christian evangelization and mission are central to the identity and practice of the Church, rooted in the biblical mandate commonly referred to as the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20). However, from a broader perspective, Bosch (2011) conceives evangelization as the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ with the aim of inviting individuals and communities into a transformative relationship with God. It encompasses both verbal witness and embodied expressions of faith through social action and ethical living. Similarly, mission, on the other hand, according to Wright (2006) is a more comprehensive concept that includes evangelization but extends to the total participation of the Church in God's redemptive activity in the world often described as *missio Dei* (the mission of God).

Historically, Christian mission has evolved from a predominantly expansionist and church-centered activity to a more holistic and context-sensitive engagement. According to Bosch (2011) and Koko (2020) mission involves witness, service, justice, reconciliation, and contextualization, thereby integrating spiritual and socio-cultural dimensions. Similarly, Sanneh (2009) emphasizes that authentic evangelization requires the translation of the gospel into local cultures, allowing Christianity to take root within indigenous contexts rather than imposing foreign cultural forms.

In the African context, this understanding is particularly significant, as mission must engage deeply with existing worldviews, values, and religious traditions. Bediako (1995) argues that African Christianity thrives when it affirms cultural identity while remaining faithful to biblical revelation. Thus, evangelization and mission are not merely about numerical growth but about fostering a contextualized, transformative faith that speaks meaningfully within specific cultural realities.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in *postcolonial theory* and relevant *missiological theories* to critically examine the relationship between Western colonialism and Christian evangelization in Nigeria. Postcolonial theory provides a critical lens for analyzing how colonial power structures shaped religious, cultural, and epistemological systems in colonized societies. Scholars such as Said (1978) and Bhabha (1994) argue that colonialism extended beyond political control to include

cultural domination and the construction of “otherness,” often marginalizing indigenous identities. In the context of Christian mission in Nigeria, this framework helps to interrogate how Western missionary enterprises sometimes imposed foreign cultural norms alongside the gospel, leading to cultural alienation and the devaluation of African religious heritage. Furthermore, Sugirtharajah (2002) observes that postcolonial critique exposes the lingering effects of colonial discourse in contemporary Christianity, particularly the tendency to privilege Western theological categories over indigenous expressions of faith. This perspective is essential for reassessing mission history and identifying the need for decolonizing Christian thought and practice in Nigeria.

Complementing this, missiological theories, particularly the concept of *missio Dei* and the “Three-Self” principle, provide a constructive framework for reimagining mission. The *missio Dei* emphasizes that mission originates from God and involves the participation of the Church in God’s redemptive work within specific cultural contexts (Bosch, 2011). This shifts mission from a colonial enterprise to a divine initiative that respects cultural diversity.

Similarly, the “Three-Self” principle: self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating articulated by Venn and Anderson advocates for indigenous church autonomy and sustainability (Anderson, 1999). This model challenges dependency on foreign mission structures and encourages the development of contextualized expressions of Christianity. Together, these frameworks enable a balanced analysis by critiquing the colonial legacy while proposing pathways for authentic and culturally grounded mission. They underscore the necessity of contextualization, cultural sensitivity, and theological independence in addressing the enduring challenges of evangelization in postcolonial Nigeria.

Historical Overview of Western Colonialism and Christian Evangelization in Nigeria

The history of Christian evangelization in Nigeria is inseparable from the broader context of Western colonial expansion in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Falola, (2009) observes that prior to European contact, Nigerian societies were characterized by diverse and well-structured indigenous religious systems, including African Traditional Religions (ATR) and, in some regions, Islam, particularly in the northern emirates. These religious traditions were deeply embedded in the social, political, and cultural fabric of the people, shaping moral values, governance, and communal identity (Koko, 2020).

The advent of Christian mission in Nigeria began in earnest in the early nineteenth century, closely linked to the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and the activities of freed slaves returning to West Africa. The establishment of Sierra Leone as a settlement for freed slaves became a significant base for missionary outreach into Nigeria (Ajayi, 1965). From this base, European missionary societies such as the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, and later Roman Catholic missions expanded their activities into various parts of Nigeria.

One of the earliest and most influential missionary efforts, according to Ayandele (1966) was led by the CMS, which began work among the Yoruba in the 1840s. The return of liberated Africans, such as Samuel Ajayi Crowther, played a crucial role in this process. Crowther, a former slave who became the first African Anglican bishop, was instrumental in translating the Bible into Yoruba and promoting indigenous leadership within the church. Similarly, Methodist and Catholic missions established churches, schools, and medical facilities, thereby contributing to the spread of Christianity and Western education.

However, missionary expansion did not occur in isolation from colonial interests. Falola & Heaton (2008) argue that as European powers formalized their control over African territories during the “Scramble for Africa,” missionary activities often aligned, directly or indirectly, with colonial administration. The British colonial government, which formally established control over Nigeria in 1914, frequently relied on missionary institutions for education and social services. This partnership created a complex relationship in which mission and colonialism were mutually reinforcing.

Missionaries introduced Western education as a primary tool for evangelization. Schools established by missions became centers for literacy, religious instruction, and the dissemination of Western cultural values. While this contributed to the emergence of an educated elite and facilitated socio-political development, it also promoted Western norms at the expense of indigenous knowledge systems (Sanneh, 2009). The translation of the Bible into local languages, however, represented a significant positive development, as it enabled the indigenization of Christianity and fostered its widespread acceptance.

Despite these contributions, missionary approaches as Bediako (1995) and Koko (2020) note often reflected a cultural bias that equated Christianity with Western civilization. Indigenous religious practices were frequently condemned as pagan or primitive, leading to the marginalization of African spiritual traditions. This created tensions between converts and their communities, as adopting Christianity often required rejecting traditional cultural practices.

Moreover, the structure and governance of early churches were largely controlled by European missionaries, limiting the development of indigenous leadership. Although figures like Crowther demonstrated the potential for African leadership, such initiatives were often undermined by racial prejudices and institutional constraints within missionary societies (Ayandele, 1966). This contributed to a dependency on foreign leadership and resources, a legacy that persisted even after Nigeria gained independence in 1960.

Kalu (2008) emphasizes that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Christianity had become firmly established in southern Nigeria, with significant expansion into the Middle Belt. The growth of mission churches eventually gave rise to indigenous Christian movements, including African Independent Churches (AICs), which sought to express Christianity in culturally relevant ways. These movements represented early efforts at contextualization, challenging missionary dominance and asserting African agency in the practice of Christianity.

Suffice it to state, based on these historical indices, that the historical development of Christian evangelization in Nigeria reflects a complex interplay between missionary zeal and colonial power. While missionary activities contributed significantly to religious expansion, education, and social change, they were also implicated in processes of cultural domination and dependency. Understanding this historical context is essential for critically reassessing the legacy of Western colonialism and for developing more contextualized and sustainable approaches to mission in contemporary Nigeria.

Positive Contributions of Western Colonialism and Christian Missionary Activities in Nigeria

Despite the complex entanglement of Christian missions with Western colonialism in Nigeria, missionary activities made significant and enduring contributions to religious, educational, and socio-cultural development. A critical and balanced assessment requires acknowledging these positive impacts while situating them within their historical context.

Rapid Expansion of Christianity through Organized Missionary Efforts

One of the most notable contributions of missionary activity was the widespread establishment and expansion of Christianity in Nigeria. Through persistent evangelistic efforts, missionaries facilitated the growth of Christian communities, particularly in southern Nigeria. This expansion laid the foundation for the emergence of vibrant indigenous churches that continue to play a central role in Nigeria's religious landscape (Kalu, 2008). The Christian message also introduced new ethical frameworks centered on concepts such as human dignity, compassion, and social responsibility.

Introduction of Western Education and Mission Schools

Closely related to evangelization was the introduction of Western education. Missionaries established schools as instruments for both literacy and religious instruction. These institutions played a pivotal role in producing an educated African elite who later contributed significantly to Nigeria's political, economic, and intellectual development (Ajayi, 1965). Education also enhanced social mobility and facilitated engagement with global ideas and systems. Importantly, missionary education contributed to the development of written forms of indigenous languages, thereby preserving and standardizing local linguistic traditions. Commenting on the missionary education, Jordan (1905) writes that the missionaries' formal education was a means to an end because it was believed that through sustained education programme, both religious proselytization and social transformation would be realized. Education provided by missionaries introduced Western ideas about governance, morality, and social organization, which influenced the modernization of Nigerian society (Baur, 2009).

Translation of the Bible into Indigenous Languages

Another critical contribution was in the area of Bible translation and linguistic development. Missionaries such as Samuel Ajayi Crowther translated the Bible into Yoruba and other local languages, making Christian teachings accessible to indigenous populations (Sanneh, 2009). This process not only facilitated evangelization but also affirmed the value of African languages and cultures, enabling Christianity to take root in local contexts. Sanneh (2009) argues that this *vernacularization* of the gospel represents one of the most significant contributions of missionary Christianity, as it allowed for a degree of cultural adaptation and ownership.

Establishment of Social Amenities and Institutions

Missionary activities also contributed to social transformation through the establishment of healthcare institutions and the promotion of social reforms. Mission hospitals and clinics improved access to modern medical care, reducing mortality rates and enhancing public health (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Additionally, missionaries were instrumental in advocating against certain harmful practices, such as the killing of twins and aspects of the slave trade, thereby contributing to humanitarian reforms. Furthermore, missionary engagement fostered early forms of social organization and community development. Churches often became centers of social life, providing support systems, moral guidance, and communal identity. These institutions helped to shape emerging civil society structures in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. In this sense, evangelization under colonial influence contributed to broader social change and the emergence of a new educated class within Nigeria.

Provision of Socio-Economic Opportunities

Stewart (2005) notes that embracing Christianity provided African captives with opportunities for leadership, education, travel, and social mobility, which were unavailable to them



as adherents of African religious traditions. Becoming a Christian meant having the opportunity to learn how to read and write, along with the opportunity to receive standard theological training. This offered converts more potential for upward mobility than ancestral religions of Africa. Ekechi (1971) adds that the writers of the era had tended to stress the utilitarian aspect of Western education as a means to higher jobs and overall economic improvement to the neglect of its ideological aspect. From 1901, both the C.M.S. and the R.C. Missions were bent on expanding their education programme.

In light of these positive impacts, it could be argued that while missionary activities were not without limitations, their contributions to religious expansion, education, language development, and social transformation were substantial. These positive legacies continue to influence Nigerian society and provide important foundations for contemporary Christian mission and development.

Critical Challenges and Negative Impacts of the Alignment of Western Colonialism and Christian Evangelization

While Western missionary activities in Nigeria contributed to significant religious and social transformation, they also generated profound challenges and negative consequences that continue to shape Nigerian Christianity. A critical examination reveals that these impacts were largely rooted in the close alignment between missionary enterprise and colonial ideology.

Cultural Alienation and Loss of Indigenous Identity

One of the most significant challenges was cultural alienation. Missionaries frequently equated Christianity with Western civilization, thereby portraying African cultural practices as inferior or incompatible with the Christian faith. Indigenous religious beliefs, rituals, and social institutions were often dismissed as “pagan” or “primitive,” leading converts to reject elements of their cultural identity (Bediako, 1995). This process disrupted traditional value systems and created identity tensions among early African Christians, many of whom found themselves navigating between inherited cultural frameworks and imposed Western norms. This often led to a rejection of local cultural expressions in favour of Western cultural norms, including Western dress, names, forms of worship, and social organization (Walls, 1996). Over time, this contributed to a sense of cultural alienation among some Nigerian Christians. As Hastings (1966) puts it, the first assumption of these early missionaries was that everything African was heathen and superstitious barbarism. They came with an almost impregnable confidence in the overwhelming superiority of the European West and in all the ways of society and culture which they had taken for granted in their own homes whether Evangelical or Catholic. According to Hastings (1966), the missionaries admitted little, if any, culture of value in Africa, just as many had denied that it really had any religion other than fearful superstitions. It was this feeling of superiority which crystallized in the social situation of masters and servants, which was very much pronounced in the churches established by the early foreign missionaries. Ibewuike (2006) revealed that the missionaries, for example, condemned polygamy, traditional names, and sought to abolish the traditional marriage ceremony in favour of a church wedding. However, these attempts were not successful.

Suppression of African Traditional Religions

Closely related to this was the suppression and marginalization of African Traditional Religions (ATR). Missionary approaches often adopted an exclusivist stance that left little room



for dialogue or integration with indigenous spiritual systems. As a result, ATR was delegitimized, and its adherents were socially and religiously marginalized (Sanneh, 2009). This not only eroded indigenous religious heritage but also hindered the possibility of developing a more contextually rooted theology that could engage African worldviews meaningfully.

Dependency Syndrome in Church Structures

Another enduring challenge was the creation of structural dependency within the Nigerian Church. Early mission churches were heavily dependent on foreign funding, leadership, and theological direction. Decision-making processes were often centralized in Europe, limiting local autonomy and initiative (Ayandele, 1966). Although some efforts were made to promote indigenous leadership, these were frequently constrained by racial prejudice and institutional control. This dependency syndrome persisted into the postcolonial period, affecting the sustainability and self-reliance of many church institutions.

Westernization of Theology and Worship

Furthermore, the Westernization of theology and worship practices posed significant limitations to the authenticity of Christian expression in Nigeria. Missionaries introduced theological frameworks, liturgical forms, and ecclesiastical structures that were deeply rooted in European contexts. These imported models often failed to resonate with African cosmologies, communal values, and symbolic systems (Walls, 2002). Consequently, Christianity was sometimes perceived as a foreign religion, disconnected from the lived realities of the people.

Tension Between African Worldviews and Imported Doctrines

The tension between African worldviews and Western theological constructs further complicated the reception of Christianity. African societies traditionally embrace a holistic worldview that integrates the spiritual and material realms, whereas Western theology has often been shaped by dualistic assumptions (Bediako, 1995). This divergence created challenges in areas such as understanding of healing, spiritual warfare, and communal life. In response, many African Christians sought alternative expressions of faith, leading to the emergence of African Independent Churches (AICs) that attempted to bridge this gap.

Negative Perception of Christianity

Finally, the close association between mission and colonial administration contributed to the perception of Christianity as an instrument of imperial domination. Missionaries often benefited from colonial protection and, in some cases, supported colonial policies, whether intentionally or indirectly (Falola & Heaton, 2008). This association undermined the credibility of the Christian message and fostered resistance among certain communities.

Suffice it to state from the foregoing that the negative impacts of missionary activity in Nigeria were multifaceted, affecting cultural identity, religious expression, and institutional development. These challenges underscore the need for a critical reassessment of missionary history and highlight the importance of contextualized approaches to Christian mission that respect and engage indigenous cultures.

Postcolonial Realities and Contemporary Nigerian Christianity

The postcolonial era in Nigeria has witnessed significant transformations in the structure, expression, and theological orientation of Christianity. Following political independence in 1960,

Nigerian Christianity began to gradually detach from direct Western missionary control, yet many colonial-era patterns and influences have persisted. These enduring legacies continue to shape the identity, mission, and challenges of the contemporary Nigerian Church.

One notable postcolonial reality is the persistence of inherited ecclesiastical structures and theological frameworks. Many mainline churches still operate within organizational models established during the colonial period, often reflecting Western liturgical styles and doctrinal emphases (Walls, 2002). This continuity has, in some cases, limited the extent to which Christianity has been fully contextualized within Nigerian cultural settings. Theological education also continues to rely heavily on Western paradigms, sometimes at the expense of indigenous theological reflection (Bediako, 1995).

However, the postcolonial period has also been marked by the remarkable growth and diversification of indigenous Christian movements. African Independent Churches (AICs) and, more recently, Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have emerged as significant forces in Nigerian Christianity. These movements often emphasize experiential faith, healing, prophecy, and spiritual warfare, reflecting a closer engagement with African cosmologies and existential concerns (Kalu, 2008). Their rapid growth suggests a strong desire for forms of Christianity that resonate more deeply with local realities.

In addition, contemporary Nigerian Christianity has increasingly embraced efforts toward contextual theology. Scholars and church leaders have sought to reinterpret Christian doctrines in ways that affirm African cultural identity while remaining faithful to biblical teachings. This includes the incorporation of indigenous music, language, symbols, and communal values into worship and theological discourse (Sanneh, 2009). Such developments represent important steps toward addressing the cultural dissonance created during the colonial missionary era.

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. The tension between Western-influenced Christianity and African worldviews continues to manifest in areas such as ethics, spirituality, and ecclesiology. Furthermore, economic dependency, though reduced, still affects some church institutions, particularly in relation to funding, theological resources, and global partnerships. The globalization of Christianity has also introduced new dynamics, including the export of Nigerian Pentecostalism, which now plays a prominent role in global mission (Kalu, 2008).

Moreover, the Nigerian Church faces the task of addressing broader societal issues, including poverty, corruption, and social injustice, within a postcolonial framework. This requires a redefinition of mission that goes beyond evangelization to include social transformation and public engagement. Bosch (2011) emphasizes that mission in the contemporary world must be holistic, integrating proclamation with action.

In conclusion, postcolonial Nigerian Christianity is characterized by both continuity and transformation. While colonial legacies remain influential, the rise of indigenous expressions and contextual theological efforts demonstrates a growing capacity for self-definition and innovation. The ongoing challenge lies in critically engaging the past while constructing a mission that is authentically African and globally relevant.

Missiological Implications for the Nigerian Church

The historical entanglement of Western colonialism and Christian evangelization in Nigeria presents critical missiological implications for the contemporary Church. A reassessment of this legacy necessitates a deliberate shift from inherited colonial paradigms toward mission approaches that are contextually grounded, theologically sound, and culturally affirming.

A primary implication is the urgent need for authentic contextualization of the gospel. The colonial missionary model often conflated Christianity with Western culture, thereby limiting the capacity of the faith to engage deeply with African worldviews. Contemporary missiology emphasizes that the gospel must be incarnated within specific cultural contexts without compromising its core message (Bosch, 2011). In the Nigerian context, this requires integrating indigenous languages, symbols, and social structures into Christian worship and theology. Sanneh (2009) argues that the translatability of Christianity provides a strong theological basis for such contextual engagement, enabling the faith to take root in diverse cultural settings.

Closely related to this is the necessity of reclaiming African theological agency. The dominance of Western theological frameworks during the colonial period marginalized indigenous interpretations of Scripture and Christian experience. Bediako (1995) contends that African Christianity must articulate its theology from within its own cultural and historical context, addressing existential questions relevant to African societies. This involves developing theological education that prioritizes local realities while engaging global scholarship.

Another significant implication is the need to strengthen indigenous church autonomy through the application of the “Three-Self” principle—self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. Originally proposed by Venn and Anderson, this model remains vital for overcoming the legacy of dependency created by missionary control (Anderson, 1999). Nigerian churches must prioritize financial sustainability, local leadership development, and grassroots evangelistic initiatives to ensure long-term viability and mission effectiveness.

Furthermore, the Nigerian Church must adopt a holistic understanding of mission that integrates evangelization with social transformation. Colonial-era missions often emphasized spiritual conversion while inadequately addressing systemic social issues. In contrast, contemporary missiology recognizes mission as participation in the *missio Dei*, encompassing justice, peace, and human development (Bosch, 2011). Given Nigeria’s socio-economic challenges, including poverty, corruption, and inequality, the Church is called to engage actively in nation-building and advocacy for social justice.

The postcolonial context also calls for a critical re-evaluation of the relationship between Christianity and culture. Rather than rejecting indigenous traditions wholesale, the Church must discern and appropriate cultural elements that are compatible with biblical teaching. Walls (2002) highlights the dynamic interaction between the gospel and culture, emphasizing that Christianity is inherently cross-cultural and continuously reinterpreted in new contexts.

Finally, the Nigerian Church has a growing role in global mission. As Christianity declines in parts of the West, Nigerian churches are increasingly becoming missionaries to other regions of the world. This shift requires a missiology that is not only contextual but also globally conscious, avoiding the replication of the same cultural impositions that characterized earlier Western missions (Kalu, 2008; Koko, 2020).

In all, the missiological implications of colonial history demand a transformative approach to mission in Nigeria one that is contextual, holistic, self-sustaining, and globally engaged. By addressing these imperatives, the Nigerian Church can overcome the limitations of its past and contribute meaningfully to the advancement of Christianity in the contemporary world.

Policy-Driven Recommendations

In light of the enduring legacy of Western colonialism on Christian evangelization in Nigeria, this study proposes several policy-driven recommendations aimed at fostering a more

contextualized, sustainable, and transformative mission praxis. These recommendations address theological development, institutional reform, economic sustainability, and socio-cultural engagement within the Nigerian Church.

First, there is a critical need for the intentional development and institutionalization of contextual theological education. Nigerian theological institutions should prioritize curricula that engage African worldviews, indigenous knowledge systems, and local socio-religious realities (Koko, 2020). This includes promoting research in African theology, intercultural hermeneutics, and contextual ethics. As Bediako (1995) argues, authentic African Christianity must emerge from within its own cultural and historical context. Policy frameworks guiding seminaries and Bible colleges should therefore emphasize indigenous scholarship alongside global theological discourse.

Second, church governance structures should be reformed to strengthen indigenous leadership and autonomy. The continued reliance on foreign models of administration often limits contextual adaptability. Adopting and operationalizing the “Three-Self” principle self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating remains essential for sustainable mission (Anderson, 1999). Church policies should mandate leadership development programs that equip local leaders with theological, administrative, and intercultural competencies necessary for effective ministry.

Third, economic sustainability must be prioritized to address the lingering effects of dependency on external funding. Nigerian churches should develop policies that encourage local resource mobilization, income-generating initiatives, and financial accountability systems. This aligns with the broader missiological emphasis on self-supporting churches and reduces vulnerability to external influence (Bosch, 2011; Koko, 2018). Financial independence will enable churches to design and implement mission strategies that are contextually relevant and locally owned.

Fourth, there is a need for deliberate integration of African cultural values and expressions into Christian worship and practice. Policies guiding liturgy, music, and community life should encourage the use of indigenous languages, symbols, and artistic forms that resonate with local congregations. Sanneh (2009) highlights the importance of vernacularization in making Christianity accessible and meaningful. Such integration fosters a sense of ownership and reduces the perception of Christianity as a foreign religion.

Fifth, the Nigerian Church must adopt a holistic mission policy that integrates evangelization with social transformation. This includes active engagement in addressing issues such as poverty, corruption, conflict, and environmental degradation. Mission should be understood as participation in the *missio Dei*, encompassing both proclamation and social action (Bosch, 2011). Churches should therefore collaborate with civil society and governmental agencies to promote justice, peace, and human development.

Finally, there is a need for critical historical awareness within church policy and practice. Church leaders and institutions should incorporate studies on the history of missions and colonialism into training programs, enabling a reflective engagement with the past. This will help prevent the uncritical perpetuation of colonial patterns and encourage more informed and intentional mission strategies (Walls, 2002).

It is pertinent to state that these policy-driven recommendations provide a strategic framework for addressing the lingering effects of colonialism in Nigerian Christianity. By fostering contextual theology, institutional autonomy, economic sustainability, cultural integration, and



holistic mission, the Nigerian Church can advance a more authentic and transformative expression of the Christian faith.

Conclusion

This study has critically examined the complex relationship between Western colonialism and Christian evangelization in Nigeria, demonstrating that the spread of Christianity was both transformative and deeply entangled with colonial structures. The findings reveal that while missionary activities significantly contributed to education, literacy, healthcare, and the expansion of Christian faith, they also facilitated cultural displacement, theological dependency, and the marginalization of indigenous religious expressions. The study argued that the fusion of Christianity with Western cultural norms created enduring challenges for authentic contextualization within Nigerian societies. Furthermore, the persistence of colonial-era ecclesiastical structures and theological paradigms continues to influence contemporary Christian practice in Nigeria. At the same time, the research highlights the resilience and adaptive capacity of Nigerian Christianity, particularly through the rise of indigenous movements and ongoing efforts in contextual theology. These developments demonstrate a gradual shift toward a more self-defined and culturally resonant expression of the Christian faith. By employing postcolonial and missiological frameworks, this study contributes to scholarship by offering a nuanced reassessment of missionary legacy that moves beyond simplistic binaries of success or failure, instead emphasizing the need for critical engagement with history in shaping present and future mission praxis. The study concludes that a historically informed and contextually grounded approach to mission is essential for addressing the lingering effects of colonialism. It underscores the importance of theological indigenization, institutional autonomy, and holistic mission strategies in fostering sustainable and transformative Christianity in Nigeria. For further research, this study suggests deeper empirical investigations into grassroots Christian practices, comparative analyses across different African regions, and interdisciplinary studies exploring the intersections of religion, culture, and socio-political development. Such inquiries will further enrich understanding and support the ongoing evolution of mission in postcolonial contexts.

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