



RELIGIOUS CHANGE IN TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS PRACTICES OF IKEDURU SOCIETY, IMO STATE, NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR PEACE AND SOCIAL STABILITY

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Abstract

Contemporary Ikeduru society has, in the recent times, witnessed tremendous religious change as seen from the level of alterations and transformations in its socio-cultural and traditional religious practices. This religious change is caused by Christianity, western education, modernization and civilization, science and technology, globalization, social media and urbanization. The religious change, though helped to transform obnoxious cultural practices, affected indigenous systems of worship, traditional system of moral control, sacred institutions, indigenous values, beliefs, knowledge system, rites, rituals and indigenous mechanisms of peace-building and conflict resolution. Thus, the study examines the nature and effects of religious change in the traditional religious practices of Ikeduru society and evaluates its implications for peace and social stability. The study adopts qualitative and descriptive research designs based on oral information, documentary analysis of books, peer-reviewed journal articles and other relevant scholarly materials. The paper is anchored on structural functionalist theory of social change which posits that the whole institutions in the society function in synergy to maintain equilibrium, stability and order in the society. A change or disruption in the function of one part of the society or institution of the state such as economy, technology, education, religion and so on, will ultimately affect the other parts of the society, bringing about a change in the whole society. It concludes that Ikeduru traditional religious practices should be revived and repositioned because of its role in fostering social justice, peaceful coexistence, conflict prevention and social stability among the people. The paper suggests digital documentation of Ikeduru traditional religious practices, norms, values and indigenous knowledge systems to preserve them for future generations, as parts of strategies for cautioning the effects of religious change on Ikeduru traditional religious practices.

Keywords: Ikeduru society, Igbo land, traditional religion, religious change, peace, social stability.

Introduction

In the recent times, one notices a shift, transformation and to say the least, dislocation in the Traditional Igbo beliefs and practices. There is an abandonment of the traditional ways of life in the entire Igbo land with the incursion of Christianity, especially Pentecostal Christianity and other agent of religious change. In line with the above remarks, Adiele and Okereke (2019, p.783) contend that the presence of Christianity has grown among the Igbo people at various paces, through time with an inexplicable and mysterious power. The Bible has given an explanation to some of the occurrences, happenings and developments in human life that were formerly thought to be beyond human explanation and shown ways of subduing malevolent forces, reversing curses and healing sicknesses using the power of the Christian God.

In fact, a lot of changes have come with the advent of Christianity and other agents of social religious change, putting Igbo Traditional Religion in a precarious situation. According to Kalu (2002, p. 365), the state of Igbo religion and the traditional culture as a whole has remained precarious since the intrusion into the religion, from mid-1800, of the forces of the socio-religious change from the western hemisphere-Christianity, commerce and colonialism. The encounter of the Igbo with the Christian missionaries, European merchants and British Colonial administration brought in its wake the events which gradually but surely dislocated and transformed Igbo traditional society.

Among the people of Ikeduru Local government Area of Imo state, Christianity and other agents of religious change have continued to take their tolls of their traditional religion, causing significant variations and alterations in the popular communal ritual festivals, culture, belief system and organs of social and moral control. According to Jesford Akudinobi of Umuoziiri Inyishi (Interviewed: 22/11/23), Christianity and Western cultural influences have succeeded in eroding the rich cultural heritage of Ikeduru people, such as respect for Eke day, totem animals and powerful deities like Ogbunshiegbe, Amaimo, Amadioha Eziema, Ezealaanyanwu and Ogwugwu. Shrines of these deities and sacred places dedicated for communal act of worship, sacrifice, prayer and performance of certain initiation rites have gone into extinction. Taboos (ritual avoidances) and sanctions that sustained and underpinned the sanctity and sacredness of sacred places and some traditional religious practices have been relegated to the background as a result of the people exposure to Christianity and modern ways of life. (Bethel Nwiwu, interviewed: 22/11/23).

It is the contention of Ibenwa (2004) cited in Adiele and Okereke (2019, p.785) that the Christian culture has attacked and altered the way our people do most of their things today. It has altered the way we greet and dress and also impacted negatively on our indigenous occupation and farming. On arrival, it constituted not only a religious force disrupting the initial idyllic, happy and harmonious life, lived and observed by the Igbo (Nkwoemezie in Adiele & Okereke 2019, p.785). Christianity marked a turning point in the socio-cultural and religious set up of the Igbo people.

Though the traditional aspects of Igbo beliefs, precisely Igbo cosmology have been considerably vitiated and undermined through the insidious influence of Christianity and rapid developments of the modern times, they still persists till today, and nobody can say, with certainty that they will be phased out in future. (Nkwoemezie in Adiele & Okereke, 2019, p.785).

Oral tradition has intriguingly revealed that some Christians in Ikeduru Local Government still retain secretly certain beliefs and

practices that belong to Igbo traditional religion and culture, such as consultation of traditional medicine men in time of sickness, consultation of diviners, pouring libations to their ancestors, traditional burial rites, traditional oath taking and recourse to "*Ofo-na-ogu*" (symbol of traditional justice, equity and plea for innocence) when the need arises. (Andrew Ugbondu, Osuji, interviewed: 22/11/23). Ikeduru traditional religious heritage, seems to have bowed to Christianity's influence in the recent times. The invasion and rapid spread of Christianity, western education, modernization, urbanization, science and technology, globalization and social media have distorted and altered Ikeduru indigenous beliefs, religious practices and knowledge systems, though they helped in the transformation of obnoxious cultural practices. This has serious implications for peaceful coexistence, conflict resolution and social stability. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine "Religious change in traditional religious practices of Ikeduru society, Imo State, Nigeria: implications for peace and social stability.

Conceptual Clarifications:

Religious Change

Religious change denotes changes occurring in religious beliefs and practices of the society over a period of time. Kalu (2002), conceptualizes religious change as a gradual but sure dislocation and transformation of people's religious beliefs and practices over time. Religious change, according to Kalu, is part and parcel of every human religious tradition and not only Igbo traditional religion. Religious change, according to Study Smarter (2024) is reform within a single religion that changes the practice of faith from within the Church's administration. It can also mean converting to another religion, abandoning the beliefs of one faith in favor of another. Religious change can occur as the result of social and political change. Thompson (2019), sees religious change as a modification or an alteration in mode of operation, doctrines, theologies, beliefs, values and patterns of church-state and inter-church relationship of a particular religious group. Religion involves, among others, a system of social relationship which relationships are subject to continuous changes, a change in one part of the society can trigger series of change in other parts. Religious change is often triggered by social change in the society (Onwuliri, 2025 p 22).

Traditional Religion

Gehman (2021), sees traditional religion as a religion that is indigenous to a particular people which form their religious background. Amaechi (2005), conceptualizes African traditional religion as the religious beliefs and practices of the Africans. When things begin to fall apart and the centre could no longer hold, people quickly resort to their traditional religion as a way out. It is a religion that is planted within the cultural and social realities of a people. African traditional religion, as an indigenous religion of African people, as observed by Gehman (2021), does not have a historical founder, scripture and codified doctrines. It evolved from the culture of the people and its scripture is the people mind and environment and is therefore found everywhere among the people of Africa. Arinze (2021), describes traditional religion as belief in Supreme Being (God) and other divinities. It is a religion that stands as part of the cultural heritage of the people of Africa. It is found in all areas of their personal lives and dominated their thinking to such extent that it is bound up with the traditional way of life which in turn shaped the religion as well. According to him, African traditional religion has no written scripture or sacred book, but is written on people hearts and religious experience is one of the world recognized religions such as Christianity, Islam, Taoism, Hinduism,

Buddhism and so on. Therefore, traditional religion is passed on from generation to generation through myths, proverbs, riddles, stories and legends. Mbiti (1977), uses five elements to describe African traditional religion. These elements are (i) beliefs, practices, ceremonies, and festivals (iii) religious objects and places (iv) values and morals and (v) religious officials or leaders.

Similarly, Parrinder (1962), describes traditional religion as having the following elements:- (i) Supreme God or creator, sometimes above other gods, sometimes first among equals (ii) the chief of deities or divinities (iii) the cult of ancestors and (iv) the vast charms and amulets. Idowu (1977, p139) describes African traditional religion by a five-fold classifications. These are:

- i. Belief in God the core and cohesive factor of religion. All are from Him, by Him for Him and responsible to Him.
- ii. Beliefs in divinities. Divinities are divine beings in the sense that they derive life from the Supreme Being. They do God's will and help Him in the theocratic governance and sustenance of the universe. They also serve as intermediaries between God and man.
- iii. Belief in spirits: Spirits are said to inhabit in natural phenomena though they are not part of a restricted to such natural or material objects.
- iv. Belief in the ancestors. These are the living people's kins and relations who are now dead and have migrated into the supersensible world as spirits but still have influence and interests over the affairs of their living relations.
- v. The practice of magic and medicine: The practice of magic and medicine are used by man to subdue and control forces within his environment. They are used to achieve what could not be achieved in the ordinary way. Magic and medicine can be used to achieve good as well as bad ends.

Peace

Peace is the state of uninterrupted calmness, mutual understanding, good relationship devoid of conflicts, fightings and wars. Oji and Olomi (2022), defines peace as the absence of violence in all its forms (physical, social, psychological and structural). The implication of this is that the absence of violence in a society means presence of peace, thus making peace mutually exclusive to war in any environment. Oji in Oji and Olomi (2022), conceptualizes peace as a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly connected with increasing development and reducing conflict, both with specific societies and wider international societies. The World Book Encyclopedia in Awusaku (2013) defines peace as the state of being calm, quiet and free from disturbance. It goes ahead to define peace from political point of view as freedom from among people in the society as there can be one form of conflict or the other among them in peace time such as debates, lawsuits, sports contests and political wrangling (Awusaku, 2013).

Social Stability

Social stability is a situation where the society is not likely to change suddenly or get disrupted over a reasonable period of time. It describes an undisturbed social life of a society. A stable society, according to Umar, Kagara and Abubakar (2019), is one that is satisfied with the ruling party and system of operations and is not interested in revolutionary ideas. They see stability as the ability of an object to return to its original position after it has been tilted slightly. English Language Learners' Dictionary in Umar, Kagara and Abubakar (2019), defines stability in the following sentences:

- i. The quality or state of something that is not easily or likely to change.

- ii. The quality or state of something that is not easily moved.
- iii. The quality or state of someone that is emotionally or mentally healthy.
- iv. The condition of being reliable or unlikely to change suddenly or greatly.
- v. The quality, state or degree of being stable, e.g emotional stability.

Based on the above definitions, social stability can be defined as a state of a society that is not easily changed, moved or disturbed in the face of unfavorable circumstances.

Theoretical Frame work

Structural Functionalist Theory of Social Change

Functionalist theory owes its origin to the works of Auguste Comte who stresses on the importance of social integration in the society during a time of abrupt and rapid change.

(Macionis, 2015). His work was developed and refined by Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons. Functionalist theory is anchored on the stability and order of society which is seen as a biological organism with different interdependent parts that function to maintain the existence of the whole body of the organism. Anderson and Taylor (2005) pinpoint that functionalist theories are predicated on the assumptions that all societies possess basic elements and institutions that perform certain functions necessary for their survival and persistence.

Igbo (2013) observes that functionalism, which is also known as structural functionalism, equates the human society with the human person having a body that is made up of various parts such as head, eyes, mouth, nose, ears, heart, hands and legs. Each part of the body performs its functions in order to maintain the life of the whole body. No part of the body can function in isolation of the entire parts. The whole parts work in synergy to maintain equilibrium, stability and order in the body. Various institutions in the society are said to function that way to maintain order, unity, integration and co-operation in the entire society. A change or disruption in the function of one part of the society or institution of the state such as economy, technology, education, religion and so on, will ultimately affect the other parts of the society, bringing about a change in the whole society. Society according to Igbo is a social system that contains different and interrelated parts such as family, economy, government, political institution, school, religious institutions and so on, which function to maintain stability and survival of the social system.

Shaefer (2006), remarks that the society consists of a vast network of well-integrated and interdependent parts, each of which functions to maintain equilibrium in the society. When the family functions well by successfully raising new generations of law-abiding citizens; the government successfully provides good governance and protects the fundamental rights of its citizens, schools teach students the skills and values helpful for their transition into productive adults; and religious institutions create a shared moral code among people for their sound moral development, the society will achieve stability and value consensus among its members.

Lie and Brym (2023) critically remarks that if any of these institutions fail in its expected role to the society, it might cease to exist or there might be a state of anarchy. Religions as whole contribute to social stability and also promote value consensus among members of the society.

People are glued together by belief system. A sudden renunciation or abandonment of people's religious beliefs, practices, values and

teachings will invariably affect the stability and equilibrium of the society, especially when a traditional religion of a people, which is noted in their culture is renounced and jettisoned in sheer preference of a religion that is completely alien to the people such as Christianity and Islam; and the pursuit of material wealth and exotic cultural values, which act against the traditional values glove, being one's brother's keeper, solidarity, trust truth, honesty and reliability which are tied to their ancestral lineage and kinship solidarity (Onwuliri, 2025 p 34).

Ikeduru Traditional Religious practices before the invasion of Agents of change

Traditional Ikeduru society, like other traditional societies in Igboland, has a motley array of moral norms, values, taboos, traditional laws and customs which they cherish and observe as part of their total way of life (culture), religion and world view. As Kalu (2002, P.352) has rightly pointed out, a moral conception of man is at the centre of the traditional Igbo worldview.

Individual human life emanated from the Supreme Being who is believed to be the embodiment of goodness and moral perfection. It is held in intricate relationship with the entire beings and forces of the supersensible world. This is the reason underlying the bond of relationship, which is at once religious and moral, existing between man and the various categories of supernatural beings comprising Igbo and Ikeduru cosmology.

Traditional Igbo societies express the belief that is a moral as well as a social being and that the action of each individual has bearing on the other members of the society. At every level of the traditional social structure, principally based on kin-group relationship, they are stipulated moral values and norms of behavior operative in the community and into which all members are socialized, which solid religious foundation (Kalu, 2002, P.356). The above is the case with Ikeduru traditional society. Moral values, often known as moral principles or moral norms are moral standards which deal with the question of human conduct or action which a person does with adequate knowledge, consciousness, reasoning thoughtfulness and freedom of choice and decision (Okaba & Kilani, 1995, P.23).

High regard and respect for traditional moral norms and value system occupied a place of prominence in Ikeduru traditional religious system prior to the advent of Christianity, colonialism, money economy, urbanization and modernization and other agents of religious change to Ikeduru land. According to personal interview with Rev. Bethel Uche, a typical Ikeduru man cannot do without sense of community life (Igwebuike or Umunabuike), sense of brotherhood, solidarity, hospitality, kindness, respect for elders, obedience, honesty, peacefulness, sincerity, integrity in conduct, discipline, justice and self control. The above is corroborated by the words of Justus Opara (Interviewed: 21/2/2024), who remarks that "good moral life and cleanliness of hands marked the traditional religion of the Ikeduru ancient kingdom. Immorality and moral bankruptcy were visible characteristics of an irreligious man who was regarded as an abominable person in Ikeduru community.

As Barrister Ephraim Nwaigwe observed, the fear of powerful duties in Ikeduru land such as Ezeala Ogbanshiegebe, Ezealaogwugwu, Ezealaigbudu and ancestors formed the basis of traditional morality that operated with the people's traditional religion in the olden days. Things have changed drastically, according to him and the traditional fears have been dissipated and moral life thrown to the winds (Interviewed: 21/2/2024)

Prayer and worship were very important and indispensable aspects of Ikeduru traditional religion. They were highly valued as means of

maintaining good relations with the Supreme Being, spirits, divinities and ancestors as well as for currying their favour. In their worldview, they express the belief that the entire universe is dominated by the presence of supersensible forces and spirit beings which needed to be influenced and placated by prayer and worship. Prayer is the process of bringing or presenting one's petitions before the Supreme Being, deities, or the ancestors. In prayer, the worshiper makes known his or her specific requests or desires to the Supreme God, deities or ancestors with the hope of receiving positive answers or responses in the shortest possible time.

The office of traditional religious priests was very important and indispensable traditional Ikeduru society. Traditional religious priests were vital for continuous existence and survival of traditional religious and culture of the people. They were agents as well as representatives of the Supreme Being or deities among worshiping communities or devotees. They were very well informed about the nature of divine laws and principles governing human relationship with divine beings, deities and various propitiatory sacrifices necessary to maintain and sustain man's relation with the Supreme Being and other super sensible beings and their activities in the society. Traditional priests were seen as mediators or go-between the divine beings and humans beings. The nature of their service made it a dignified one. According to Osunwokeh (2014, p.168), priestly office is one associated with aura of dignity and power.

Before the intrusion of forces of religious change, Ikeduru traditional religion was replete with traditional rites and ceremonies by which the people marked principal events in the community or stages in the life of individuals. Traditional rites and ceremonies were performed according to prescribed procedures handed down to the people by their ancestors. The collection of traditional religious ceremonies performed in accordance to laid down procedures becomes the people's rituals. Ezenweke and kanu (2012, p.51), see rituals in African traditional religion, as prescribed ways of worshipping, praying, sacrificing, making of offering and so on.

Traditional oath-taking was one of the common practices in indigenous religion of traditional Ikeduru society before the emergence of Christianity and other agents of socio-religious change in the area. Traditional oath-taking, according to Onunwa (2005, P.169), is known as idu-isi or inu iyi in Igbo land and it implies the physical actions one performs when carrying out the ritual (of oath-taking). That is to say, in oath-taking, a person literally nods his head in the name of god that he accepts that stipulations of an oath or that what he is saying is the truth. On the other hand, inu iyi implies drinking the iyi (water). This means that one drinks water or wine in the process as a practical enactment of the oath. Traditional oath-taking served effectively in those days as an instrument of social control, promoted peace social justice, unity, mutual trust and ensured reduction in crime rate among Ikeduru people. If there was a dispute between two individuals, families, kindreds, communities and so on, and if peace was made, the parties involved, would seal the whole covenant with an oath, to elicit strong and conscious commitment to keeping the terms of the covenant from both sides. Such conscious commitment would be hinged on the conscious fear of the disaster or misfortune that would accompany a breach of such covenant.

Traditional marital rites formed cardinal and fundamental aspect of Igbo traditional rituals before the advent of western civilization in Igbo land. In traditional Ikeduru society, traditional marriage was esteemed highly as it constituted an integral part of the people's cultural heritage and identity. Traditional Ikeduru held the view that family peace and stability translate into kindred, village and

community peace and stability. Family peace and stability, to them were products of well constituted marriage between marriageable young lady and young man. This informed the use of this proverb by old people to describe marriage. *Nwoke n' nwanji lujoro di n' nwunye, ga-ebi ajo obi n' ezi n'ulo ha, were kwa ajo umu gbaa onwe ha gburu gburu*. When a youngman and a young lady failed to make a good match in marriage, they will not live peaceably in their family, and will also surround themselves with bad children.

Agents of Religious Change in Ikeduru Society

Observation has so far, shown that a number of the remarkable religious change that is witnessed all over Ikeduru traditional religious landscape in the recent times. These causal agents are the triggers of the change in the patterns of the people's traditional religious practices and modifications which occur in their traditional religious and cultural norms, values and belief system. They are agents which engender the alterations which takes place in the traditional society.

These agents of religious change were alien to Ikeduru traditional society, that is to say, they were not there when Ikeduru land was in its original and purely traditional form without any modern influence. They invaded Ikeduru traditional society in the early part of 1900, with little or no resistance from indigenous religious and socio-cultural institutions and have since then sought to reform and better the nature of their institutions and as well as disrupt and eradicate the ones considered obnoxious and dehumanizing to the people of the area. The above scenario portrayed distinct progressiveness of Igbo traditional religion in general and Ikeduru traditional religious practices in particular. These causes and agents of religious change in Ikeduru traditional religion include Christianity (Ezegbe, 2004), western education (Danfulani & Danfulani, 2018, p.23), modernization and civilization, science and technology (Eghagha, 2015, p.138), globalization (Anyanwu & Ezenwa, 2014, p.243) urbanization (Aghulor & Uyamasi, 2015, p.127), and social media.

Effects of Religious Change on Ikeduru Indigenous Religious Practices

The religious change is associated with profound effects on Ikeduru religious and cultural foundations. It disrupted Ikeduru traditional religious practices, made people to discard some of the practices as of no relevance to their personal spiritual well being, as well as undervalue Igbo traditional religion generally as an archaic religion. As observed by Hyacinth Nwachukwu, the change brought by Christianity in our land made people to look down on Igbo traditional religion in general and Ikeduru traditional religious practices in particular as old and antiquated from of religion that is inimical to people's faith in the Supreme God who created the universe (Interviewed: 17/6/24). In corroborating the above, Ibude (2015, p.94), remarks that religious change disrupted the old good and well established religious order for which the Igbo were formerly known. He contends that the old Igbo traditional society was known for sober, reflective and persistent thoughtful mood with which they approached traditional burial rites in the olden days. This has been disrupted by Christianity and modernity which made people to now see burial as a gateway to ostentation and enjoyment. A practice that is antithetical to Igbo spirituality and religiosity.

Religious change also brought divergent religious worldviews, beliefs and conflicting practices among traditional Ikeduru people. This is associated with a pronounced level of faith attenuation among few traditional religious adherents in Ikeduru land, who got profoundly influenced by widespread modern perceptions of things among majority of people in the society.

Moreso, religious change succeeded in whittling down the power and influence of powerful deities in Ikeduru traditional society, such as, *Amadioha Eziamaka, Iyiafor Iho-Dimze, Ezeala oghanshiegebe, Ezealaigbudu, Ezealaogwugwu, and Ezeala ugoaku*. The old fear, awe and aura of respect that were originally associated with the shrine of these deities, the presence of their chief priests, the mentioning of their names in time of dispute, for those who would like to swear with deities, and sacrifices made in their honour, were all fizzled out in the presence of pervasive wind of religious change blowing in Ikeduru land. Similarly the fear of the ancestors as capable of meddling in the affairs of their living relations, punish the wrong doer or bless the good person for his benevolence to others in the society has been thrown overboard. Many people who have identified with Christianity do not recognize the ancestors anymore nor fear them as potent force in the socio-religious affairs of the living members of their families.

Christians now see pouring libation to ancestors and their veneration as idolatry and anti-Christian practices. In support of the above, Akochalam Chukwuma has this to say:

The change brought by modern ways of life in general and Christianity in particular, has made our ancestors indifferent and passive observers in our society, with no power to act or contribute anything anymore to the well being of the people. All attention has been shifted to the Supreme God, Chukwu, who created all mankind, whose fear and power have also been reduced by Christianity and education, which have taken over our land. (Interviewed: 4/7/24).

Religious change, triggered by the spread of Christianity, advancement in education, modernization, civilization and other forces of change, is associated with loose values, character deformation, disruption and distortion of moral order of Ikeduru society. Traditional religion of Ikeduru in the olden days, was made up of traditional system of morality, norms, mores, taboos and values that held the society together and also helped in the maintenance of a seamless moral order. The coming and spread of Christianity as well as other agents of religious change in traditional Ikeduru society disorganized and destroyed the time-honoured moral order and the primary of good moral character believed to be the foundation of peace, justice and good life in the society. Onyenze (2017, p.140), underpins the above, when she remarks that Christianity and other agents of socio-religious change have initiated a continuous change in Igbo traditional religious and cultural lives in the recent times. It destroyed the old high premium placed on peace and peaceful resolution of conflicts among the people.

Religious change led to under-valuation of traditional moral system and the ancestors as the custodians of the people's morality which culminated in the vitiation of the foundation of the traditional Ikeduru moral system. The fear of the gods and ancestors were the basis of the strong moral structure of the traditional Ikeduru society, and as the influence of the gods and ancestors was grossly undermined and whittled down by Christianity and modernization and other agents of religious change, there was a collapse of the old strong moral structure of the people. Today, crimes of all types abound, prostitution, kidnapping, lies, robbery, materialism, corruption, fraud and cheating are all holding sway in contemporary Ikeduru society, unlike in the olden days.

In the olden days when traditional religion of the traditional Ikeduru society was undisrupted and intact, its norms, values and ideals fostered social cohesion unity and strong sense of communal life among the people.

There is a loss of traditional festivals, different music, dances, songs, folktales and myths that sustained and enhanced social life among the old Ikeduru people as a result of religious change. Religious change emasculated traditional oath-taking that controlled the spread of crimes among the people of old.

Implications of Change in Ikeduru Indigenous Religious Practices on Peace and Social Stability

Religious change came in with disruptive influence, weakening the fabric of social cohesion and communal life among Ikeduru people. The communal life (*Igwebuike*) sense of brotherhood, the belief in one being his brother's keeper (*Onye aghala nwanne ya*), were all disorganized by Christianity and modern forces of change. The old emphasis on community well-being and the need to maintain proper links of relationship among people in the families, kindreds, clans, villages and larger society were all relegated to the background by "individualism, selfishness and self interest brought about by religious change in the area. "*Nkemdirim* (leave my own for me)", *Onyekagha nke ya* (one's interest should be given priority)", *Onyeananam* (let no one beg me of anything)" and other forms of individualism dominated the social life of the contemporary Ikeduru people as a result of religious change which discouraged social solidarity.

Today, there is a growing disunity, in-fightings, inter-kindred, inter-village and inter- community clashes among the people of Ikeduru. Land disputes and domestic violence are on the increase because the regulating power of the ancestral cult over people's misdeeds and abominable acts has been dislodged by Christianity and western cultural influence among the people. Ironically, the door is wide open now for the speedy passage of all forms of antisocial activities in the land, a bad legacy nurtured and sustained by religious change in Ikeduru land.

Strategies For Cautioning Negative Effects of Religious Change on Ikeduru Indigenous Religious Values

To ensure that diverse Ikeduru traditional religious practices, values, norms, and indigenous knowledge systems are safeguarded and protected from being eroded by modern agents of religious change, this paper suggests the adoption of the following strategies.

1. Strong emphasis should be laid on the necessity for effectual and impactful family orientation of children, especially the youths, on diverse socio-cultural practices, indigenous values and knowledge systems as well as traditional religious beliefs of the Ikeduru people.
2. Ikeduru people should seek for better ways of reconstructing their traditional religious values, norms, beliefs and practices to make them adapt perfectly to their modern socio-ecological realities. Their traditional religion and culture remain their identity as authentic community of people in Igboland.
3. Digital documentation of Ikeduru traditional religious practices, values, norms, and indigenous knowledge systems should be encouraged and pursued vigorously by elders, traditional rulers and Ikeduru Local Government authority to ensure that they are safeguarded and preserved for future generations.
4. The strategy of periodic organization of cultural festivals should be adopted. This will significantly enlighten the youths on the relevance of Ikeduru indigenous religious institutions in promoting peaceful coexistence and social stability.

5. Traditional religious education should be compulsorily taught in all primary, secondary and tertiary institutions in Igbo land to facilitate cultural revival and preservation in the face of powerful agents of social religious change.

Conclusion

The paper examined the changing patterns of traditional religious practices in Ikeduru society and highlighted how these changes influence peace and social stability. The invasion and rapid spread of Christianity, western education, modernization, urbanization, science and technology, globalization and social media have distorted and altered Ikeduru indigenous beliefs, religious practices and knowledge systems, though they helped in the transformation of obnoxious cultural practices. The younger generations now have little or no regard for sacred groves, traditional rituals, rites, festivals, ancestral worship, traditional oath-taking and indigenous religious traditions, though most of them have become eroded by the sinister flood of religious change. The study argued that the current undervaluation and abandonment of indigenous religious practices cannot bring about any meaningful socio-cultural, religious and economic development, but rather a destruction of the structures on which the people's cultural identity, communal solidarity and indigenous peace-building mechanisms are built. Serious efforts should, therefore, be made to revive, reinvigorate and reposition the Ikeduru indigenous religious traditions and practices because of their very role in fostering social justice, peaceful coexistence, conflict prevention and social stability.

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