

Traditional Politics and Missionary Activities During the Colonial Era in Yorubaland, Nigeria: The Implications for Modern Missionaries

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ABSTRACT—One of the challenges confronted by the missionaries of the colonial era in Nigeria, was how to reach the people at the grass root through their community leaders. Those that found themselves in Yorubaland were not exempted from this challenge. In this work, two Yoruba communities namely: Iperu in the then Ijebu province and Shao in the then Ilorin province are considered. The paper examines the interactions between the Traditional Council, the Missionaries and the Colonial Administrators in the period under review. It presents the authority and roles of the traditional rulers along with the council that worked with them for the welfare of the communities. Historical and comparative approaches were employed using available records with personal experiences and observations of the writer. The author discovered that the missionaries, in their efforts to spread the gospel did not all receive similar receptions from the people. The work concludes that missionary endeavors could be challenging but God always work in mysterious ways to fulfill his purposes even, in mission.

Keywords: colonial era, Yorubaland, Nigeria, missionary

I. Introduction

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The Christian Missionary Society, among others, came to the South-Western Nigeria toward the middle of the 19th century through the Atlantic coastal land. At that time, the foreign missionaries teamed up with the freed and converted African slaves to work alongside with the colonial administrators. After establishing their missions in areas that were relatively close to the coast among the Yoruba, there was the need for some of them to spread the works into the hinterland (Mbiti, 2002, p. 231). This paper focuses on the experiences of some of these missionaries in two typical Yoruba communities of Nigeria. The paper compares the historical accounts of the interplay between traditional political organs and the missionaries in two communities: Iperu in Ijebu province (now in Ogun State) and Shao in Ilorin province (now in Kwara State). It considers how the interventions from the colonial administrators (remote or immediate), created inroads for missionary activities in the areas.

II. Political Organization in Yorubaland

Yoruba is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. They occupy the south-western part of the country covering Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, and parts of Kwara and Kogi States. (Akintoye, 2004, in Nike S. Lawal et.al. p.18). The commonest form of political organization in Yorubaland is Kingship (Cf. Manus, 1991, pp. 312-316). Another form practiced is the one in which the head is called *Baale* – *this* literally means the father who owns the land. Generally speaking, the Baale is accountable to the King (Fadipe, 1991, p. 198). In relation to the organization of the court personnel, four major models have been identified among the Yoruba. The models are: the Oyo-Yoruba which is patterned after the political organization of the Alaafin of Oyo; the people of Ondo, Ijesa, Ekiti and Ife followed that of the Ife; those in Ijebuland in their various political units have an organization similar to that in Ijebu-Ode; the model of the court personnel found among the Egba is very simple but resembles the simpler form of political organization found in Ijebuland as per the roles of Ogboni secret society, especially among the Remo people. The model found in Lagos is also simple but regarded as aberrant (Fadipe, 1991, p. 199).

A traditional Yoruba community is usually divided into wards and each is supervised by a chief (Olaniyan, 2002, in Lawal Nike S. P. 279). Each ward is made up of many ancestral compounds – people

of common descent or ancestors – each of the compounds is headed and controlled by the eldest man in the compound. This political arrangement forms a line of communication from the King to the least member of the community (Fadipe, 1991, pp. 97-114). As presented earlier, every traditional community in Yorubaland is headed by a traditional ruler whose rank depends on his position in the political hierarchy of the area. Olaniyan describes the authority of the King in Yorubaland thus:

The Yoruba *Oba* is revered as the focal embodiment of the kingdom; he is regarded not as an ordinary mortal, but one sharing in divinity with the Orisa (gods), a veritable link between his people and the world of the gods and the ancestors, hence his appellation, “Alase ekeji Orisa” (ruler, second only to the gods; or ruler, companion of the gods)... (also) as Kabiesi (he-who-no-one-dares query). This seemingly awesome power is of course greatly circumscribed by traditional constitutional constraints (Olaniyan, 2002, in Lawal, Nike S. P. 274).

As powerful as such a ruler may be regarded by his people, his success, to a great extent, depends on the cooperation of his traditional chiefs. With them, he has the Oba-in-Council which is the traditional political organ chaired by the Oba himself. This body sees to the affairs of their community (Cf. Mbiti, 2002, p. 102).

Working along with the council of chiefs, the king of a particular political unit sees to the “religious, health, legislative, judiciary, administrative, executive, and police functions” (Fadipe, 1991, 202) of his area. Commenting further on the functions of the council of chiefs under the chairmanship of the King Fadipe (1991) explains that,

At one hour (the council) sat in a judicial capacity, at another in legislative, and at still another as a council of the executive, discussing issues of peace and war, receiving envoys and deciding upon the religious measures to be taken to ensure public health and safety. (pp. 1991, 202)

By ideology and practice, the coming of the missionaries to Nigeria, was regarded as an intrusion into the social and political life of the people. In Yorubaland, their arrival divided the traditional rulers into two factions – pro-missionary and anti-missionary

respectively. For instance, those who were engaged in slave business and some religious practices which the colonial administrators frowned at tried to avoid them. However, there were some who believed that in spite of ideological differences of the colonial masters, the people could benefit greatly if the foreigners were given open-arms-reception (Ayandele, 1991, pp. 5-7).

III. Missionary Activities in Iperu-Remo

Iperu is a large town in Remo section of the Ijebu province (Johnson, 1998, in Adegbola p., 92) in old Western Region of Nigeria – currently situated in Ikenne Local Government of Ogun State. Like any other traditional Yoruba community, the town is under the care of a paramount traditional ruler with the title, Alaperu of Iperu. It is one of the communities in Remo under the sovereignty of Akarigbo of Remo whose palace is at Sagamu-Remo, the political headquarters for Remoland. Practically speaking, the people of Remo under the kingship of the Akarigbo do not regard themselves as Ijebu *per se*. This is partly because the communities under the latter are grouped under Ijebu-Ode and headed by the Awujale of Ijebuland. In spite of the line of demarcation between the Remo and Ijebu peoples, they are closely linked in their socio-cultural and religious-political life. This may be the reason why some people, including the then missionaries, regard the Remo people as partly Ijebu. In this light, this paper has the inclusion of the Remo people in mind when talking about the Ijebu.

In this work, the concern is the responses of the Iperu community, through their traditional political leaders to the inception of the Christian mission in the colonial era. Specific attention is paid to the experiences of James Johnson, a Christian Missionary Society (CMS) missionary of Ijebu and Ijesa parentage (Ayandele, 1991, p. 196). James Johnson was described as “the greatest African missionary-nationalist of his days in Nigeria” (A.P.S., ‘The Jebu Matters’, by the Jebu Descendants in Ayandele, 1991, p. 55), one who believed that Africa should be evangelized by the African if the valuable customs and institutions of the people would be retained. (*The Negro* (S. Leone), Jan 1, 1873 used in Ayandele, 1991, p.186).

He persistently struggled, for many years with the traditional political organ of Iperu in order to establish a Christian mission in the

community. As Johnson himself observed, the people of Iperu shared the common idea with other Ijebu that acceptance of Christianity would mean the loss of religious, political and socio-cultural independence to the English foreign ideologies (Johnson, 1998, in Adegbola, p. 92). In a similar sense, Ayandele (1991) said that they also saw the possibility of the Missionaries seizing their country just as it was in Lagos (p.55), this mindset made the people in Ijebu province to resist any Christian enterprise.

Before Bishop James Johnson's first visit to Iperu in 1878, he accounted for a futile effort of European missionary, Reverend D. Hinderer, in the same community about thirty-nine years earlier. There was the record of another Native Missionary who was coming to Iperu from Abeokuta, few years after the attempts made by Reverend D. Hinderer. The latter was said to have had it tough with the people and ended without any appreciable result - although the record shows that there were very few individuals who embraced the faith possibly from outside Iperu. Those in this category, who were lucky not to be sent into exile by the community, secretly practiced their faith when at home.

Bishop James Johnson at his first visit to Iperu on May 19th, 1878, had to disguise himself in order to have a free access to the community. In his own words Johnson said he did this by,

Throwing up the legs of my trousers, throwing a sheet as a covering cloth, after the fashion of natives, over me, dispensing with my shoes and going for a time bare-footed and hiding my umbrella away from sight, so as not to attract notice, as I would not otherwise have been permitted to enter the town (Johnson, 1998, in Adegbola pp. 92, 93).

As indicated, this became necessary as the educated and native missionaries who were believed to have adopted the British ways of life and served as their religious agents were usually betrayed by their *elegant* appearances.

In this instance however, Johnson's disguise did not succeed as the news of his presence and that of his native associates to preach Christianity in the town, soon got to the community leaders. This immediately ignited the anger of the community leaders. So, Johnson, his friends and host were summoned to appear before the Ogboni. After the interrogation, the verdict from the Ogboni was for the native

missionary to leave the town the next morning as the community had nothing to do with Christianity (Johnson, 1998, in Adegbola p., 93).

Apart from a visit, on a neutral ground, which Johnson made in 1882, the next time he visited Iperu as a missionary was in 1890. Without any disguise, he stayed with the king (Alaperu) who professed Christianity. Shortly after his arrival, the native missionary was again summoned to report before the chiefs in Ogboni House to explain his mission in the town as it was in 1878.

Painting a vivid picture of the typical Ogboni house (that of Iperu) John says:

The inhabited section of the Ogboni house was partly a prison for criminals, recaptured runaway slaves and other offenders; partly a sty and a fold for pigs and sheep; and partly a dwelling for those who had the care of it.....very badly kept and in a filthy condition (Johnson, 1998, in Adegbola p.93).

Under the condition described above, the missionary considered the place unsafe for his health so he decided to wait outside until they would be ready for him. On that fateful wet and cold Saturday, Johnson stayed for four hours before he was invited to state his case. He presented before the elders the request to stop persecuting their children who had shown interest in Christianity at home, while those who had been sent away from home for the same reason should be called back. No positive response was given to these requests before they left him one by one in the Ogboni house. They offered him the meeting place for him to pass the night but later reluctantly allowed him to return to the palace when he objected staying in the unfit Ogboni house. After his departure from the town, the king was heavily fined for hosting the missionary. Persecution was not limited to the young converts but also extended to their sympathizers. Example was given of Chief Bisuga whose belongings were confiscated, his house demolished and who sought for refuge in Ijebu-Ode for eight years before being permitted back to reunite with his family (Johnson, 1998, in Adegbola pp. 93, 94).

Despite all odds, Johnson resolved not to give up on the people of Iperu until his effort has yielded positive result. As a result of this, he made another visit in August 1892. This time the reception was not different from those he had earlier. Having turned down the offer to lodge in Ogboni house, or that of the late Oba's servant (Oja), he was

finally taken to the house of the late Oba (his former host). As usual, he was invited for interrogation at the Ogboni house in the morning of the following day. This time Johnson decided to make some points clear to the community leaders: First, he is their kinsmen; second, he had committed no offense that warranted the treatments meted out to him; third, he had been very friendly and the permission sought to establish Christian mission was for their welfare. He requested for a positive change in their response by accepting their children, who professed Christianity, permitting free Christian activities and assigning a piece of land to operate from (Johnson, 1998, in Adegbola p. 96, 97).

This time, it was like a magic as the leaders urged him to give them a short time to contact the Akarigbo, at Sagamu, under whose jurisdiction Iperu and its Oba operates. News came that the demands of the persistent missionary had been met having consulted with the Akarigbo and the *Ifa* (the Yoruba Oracular Divinity) a few days later. Describing the reception accorded him and his friends on returning to Iperu on the 19th and 20th August 1892 Johnson (1998) said:

We ... received a very hearty greeting from our host and other friends ... eighteen of the influential chiefs and sub-chiefs called to pay us a formal and complimentary visit ... (they) presented us with a present of welcome – a sheep and five heads of cowries – and informed us of their decision to grant us a piece of land for Mission work, and that an assignment had already been made. This was the first compliment of the kind I had ever received from Iperu since my first official visit to it in 1878.... (Johnson, 1998, in Adegbola, pp. 97- 98).

The requests presented by the Christian agents before the people of the community include the following: permission to build a mission station, putting an end to the persecution of the Christian converts or the intending converts; to recall their children who had escaped for their lives as a result of persecution for professing Christianity; permission to have a resident Christian missionary agency for the purpose of evangelism and educational work; and a piece of land to be assigned for church building. By doing these, the community would only be following the examples of other Yoruba communities like, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Oyo, and even the nearby Sagamu (Johnson, 1998, in Adegbola, p.97).

At that point, the Lord touched the hearts of the people and promised to seek the consent of the overall King for the area, the Akarigbo of Remoland. Along with this consultation, like every other traditional Yoruba community, the people also consulted the *Ifa* (the oracular divinity) the same night. As the missionaries learnt later, the answers from both the higher King and the oracle were favorable. They were especially warned by the oracle that “the messengers who had come to the chiefs and their mission should not be refused, for they were calculated to do the town much good.” (Johnson, 1998, in Adegbola, p.97). Commenting further on the intervention through the oracle Johnson asserts: “thus the Lord who was anxious to save them, condescend to show them by the only means which they respected and believed in (though He was opposed to creature worship) that which was for their good, although they had for nigh 40 years persistently rejected it. How marvelously great is divine love” (Johnson, 1998, in Adegbola p. 97).

Explaining the wonderful breakthrough to preach on the streets of Iperu after years of appealing to the community to accept Christian Mission, Johnson exclaimed: “Street preaching in Iperu, unfettered, unhindered! What a change! Who could have predicted this! What has God wrought! Divine power and Divine Love are equally great” (Johnson, 1998, in Adegbola, p. 97).

IV. The Reaction of the Colonial Administrators To the Opposition in Ijebuland

The positive response experienced by Bishop James Johnson may not be unconnected with the fear created by the way the Ijebu were forced to surrender through military attack.(Cf. Manus, 1991, p.317) According to Ayandele (1991) various missionaries suffered insult and humiliation during their trips from Lagos to a place like Ibadan (p. 63). This made Guiberlt Thomas Carter who assumed the office of the Administrator for Lagos Colony in March 1891 (C.M.S. G3/A2/06, James Vernal to Hamilton, 14 May, 1891 in Ayandele, 1991, p. 60) vowed to force Ijebu people to comply. While Educated Africans – such as the freed slaves - then regarded such a plan as master minded by the European missionaries, and described it as “*unrighteous war*” (A.P.S., “Jebu Matters”, 9, May 1893 in Ayandele, 1991, p. 66) a missionary, C.C. Newton, the eve of the attack, reasoned that “war” is often a means of opening a door for the gospel to enter a country. A

sword of steel often goes before a sword of the spirit. The leading of troops here now may be part of the divine plan for answering our prayers and opening Ijebu and other interior countries to the gospel”(C.C. Newton to Tupper, 12 April 1892, in *Foreign Mission Journal*, Vol. Xxiii, July 1892, in Ayandele, 1991, p. 67). Attacked by a group of less than 500 soldiers made up of Hausa and those from Gold Coast, the Ijebu finally surrendered to the Lagos Government and subsequently opened to the missionary activities in May 1892(Ayandele, 1991, p. 68). Ayandele (1991) further shed light on why they brought missionary war when he said:

They (the missionaries) had observed that, of all the coastal tribes they knew, the Ijebu were the most intelligent, the most industrious and the shrewdest. If converted, they believed, they would become the spearhead of missionary propaganda in the rest of the country. Their observation was quite correct. Africans of Ijebu origins in the Wesleyan and C.M.S. missions were the best stock they had (p.67).

The attack and the subsequent victory created fear in the hearts of many who were resisting British and missionaries. The defeat was considered as disappointment from their juju and deities who they thought were defending them (C.O. 147/85, Carter to Knutsford, 20 June, 1892). They embraced Christianity *en mass* as they saw the supremacy of the missionary to theirs. Their destruction of the Ogboni house by the military further created a religion political vacuum in the land (Ayandele, 1991, p. 68).

V. Christian Mission, Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in Ilorin Emirate

T. J. Bowen, a Baptist missionary who visited Ilorin in 1855, was one of the first Christian missionaries to visit the area. He desired to make the visit two years earlier but was informed by concerned traders from Ijaye that the Muslim town of Ilorin would not welcome any Christian. (T.J. Bowen, *Adventures and Missionary labours in the Interior of Africa, 1849-1856*, Ed. By E.A. Ayandele (London, 1968), p. 189 in Danmole, June 1985, p. 24). To avoid the possibility of having his request been turned down, the missionary came to Ilorin without any permission from Emir Shita (1836-1861). He made it to

Ilorin but the missionary was not allowed to see the Emir until after many days. (Ibid. In Danmole, June 1985, pp. 24, 25) When he was finally granted audience with the monarch, Bowen's request to reside in Ilorin was frankly turned down because the Emir "did not want the preaching of the gospel in his domain." Another Baptist missionary, W.H. Clarke, also visited the Emir of Ilorin shortly after Bowen's visit in 1855 (ibid., pp.188-189 In Danmole, June 1985, p. 26); he made another visit in 1856 and could not even see the Emir (W.H. Clarke, *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland, 1854-1858*, ed. By J.A. Atanda (Ibadan U.P. 1972), p. 105 in Danmole, June 1985, pp. 26,27). The determination to establish a mission field in Ilorin made Clarke to pay another visit to the Emir in 1857. His approach of presenting Arabic Bible notwithstanding, "Clarke's attempt to gain converts for Christianity in Ilorin again did not, yield any fruit." (Clarke, p. 165 In Danmole, June 1985, p. 27). This was because the Islamic monarch did not make positive response even to his friendly approach. In 1872, Bishop Ajayi Crowther, an African from Yoruba tribe, also visited Emir Aliu (1869-1891) of Ilorin. In spite of the warm reception accorded him by the Emir and his chiefs, coupled with the ability to communicate the message to his audience in the local language (Yoruba), Crowther's effort to turn anyone to his religion failed. (C.M.S., CA3/04 960, "Annual Report for 1873 by Bishop Crowther." In Danmole, June 1985, p. 29)

The C.M.S. missionaries also made attempts later to reach the people of Ilorin and its environ with the gospel. According to an account, S.S. Farrow visited Ilorin during the reign of Emir Moma (1891-1895) (C.M.S., "A visit to Ilorin by S.S. Farrow", *Niger and Yoruba Notes*, Vol. 10 (1895) In Danmole, June 1985, p. 30). Like his predecessors, Emir Moma did not allow the establishment of a Christian mission in Ilorin. In 1897, Ilorin fell into the hands of the colonial administration and everyone would expect free propagation of the gospel in the emirate. The presence of the Royal Niger Company notwithstanding, Emir Sulaiman (1895-1915) remained resolute to forbid the preaching of the Gospel when Bishop Tugwell visited the town in 1898.(C.M.S., "Bishop Tugwell's visit to Ilorin", *Niger and Yoruba Notes*, Vol. 5, n. 54, [Dec. 1898] In Danmole, June 1985, p. 30)

Considering the persistent refusal of the gospel by these Emirs, Danmole (June 1985) remarked that it was the responsibility of the Islamic monarchs to protect the religion and do everything possible to promote its ideals. They also thought that the missionaries, apart from

the propagation of their religion, are also out to promote political and economic interests of their country (p. 31). He observed that, such stiff oppositions as posed by the Emir of Ilorin, like any other Islamic monarch in the Sokoto caliphate, toward the preaching of the gospel within his jurisdiction, hampered the establishment and growth of Christianity in that part of Nigeria.(Danmole, June 1985 p.22).

When the emirates fell into the hands of the colonial administrators, the Emirs lost the political control of their areas. Apart from this, the resistance to the missionary activities could no longer be done without the consent of the Residents (Colonial Officers) who themselves were Christians. (Lord Lugard, *Political Memoranda* [London: Cass, 1970], pp. 19, 305 in Danmole, December 1989, p.82)

Although colonial rule created a good atmosphere for the propagation of the gospel in the emirates, it also guaranteed protection for Islam. It was on this ground that attentions of the missionaries were directed more to the non-Muslim areas of the emirates. In relation to this “the power to grant permission for the opening of mission stations had passed to Residents whose responsibility included the recommendation of requests for land by Christian missions to the Governor of the Northern Province.” (Lugard, pp. 392, 393 in Danmole, December 1989, p.84). One of the missionaries that came during this period was D.C. Babcock of the Seventh-day Adventist Mission.(Hermon-Hodge,H.B.(1929), *Gezetteer of Ilorin Province*, p. 268 Danmole, December 1989, p.85.)

VI. Missionary Activities in Shao, Ilorin Emirate

One of the missionaries that visited Ilorin with the aim of evangelizing the city during the colonial era was a Seventh-day Adventist missionary, David Caldwell Babcock. An American missionary, Babcock and his family members came to Ilorin from his first station in Nigeria, Erunmu near Ibadan, Nigeria, in the year 1915. On his arrival, the missionary called on the resident colonial administrator in the province. In consultation with the Emir of Ilorin, Babcock was directed to Shao, a community of few kilometers from Ilorin. This option was given to the Adventist missionary because all the attempts made by the people of Ilorin to Islamized Shao never hitherto, yielded any fruit. The possibility of the people of Shao yielding to the appeal from Christian missionary, since they rejected

Islam, also informed these directives (Babcock, July 26, 1915. in D.O. Babalola, 2004, p. 27).

Emir Bawa, the reigning Emir of Ilorin, instructed one of his palace guides to lead the missionary from Ilorin to Ohoro Abilude, the reigning Ohoro of Shao (Oladele, p.8). In Shao, the missionary was joyfully received by the Ohoro and his Chiefs after he had explained his mission to the community. As a guest of the community, the missionary was hosted in the palace of Ohoro while Emir's guide returned to Ilorin. Oba and his chiefs later met to see how they could join hands and demonstrate their support for the guest and his mission. The traditional leaders' conclusion for the Ohoro and each of the chiefs was to donate a male child from their respective families to join the new faith. The decision of the Oba-in-Council became a law for the people. The young men immediately formed the nucleus members for the new church in Shao (Oladele, 8). There is no doubt that the founding members from the families of the Oba and his chiefs added to the strength of this newly established church in the community. The church gradually grew as Babcock and his new members preached from house to house and attracted more converts.

Before he was finally given a piece of land opposite the palace and beside the community central market, the missionary was holding services for the church within the palace. Another piece of land was assigned to the white man to build his residence after living in the palace for a period of time (Oladele, p. 8). It should be noted that this was the period when missionaries, in some communities, were assigned evil forests to build their residences and churches with the hope that such spirits-inhabited forests would consume the foreigners and their new religion.

The new church gradually increased in membership, though not without negative reactions and challenges from the adherents of traditional religion in the community. However, the fact that the church members and the missionary in charge had the support of the Oba and his council members such opposition did not deter its developments. Seventh-day Adventist Church was the only church in the community for 37 years. So in 1952, another American missionary for Sudan Interior Mission, Reverend Dereck C. Porter also paid a casual visit to the Ohoro of Shao, Oba Yusuf Afolabi Alabi, Oyerinde II (Porter, Derek C., "Personal Account of Reverend Porter's Missionary Work in Nigeria" as related on September 28, 1986 at a Valedictory Service at the ECWA Church, Shao in Oke, 1996, pp.35, 37).

Before this time, Porter had established few of his churches in the Igbomina part of the province before coming to Shao. He made few of such visits to the Oba before he finally made his intention to found a church in the community known to Ohoro - who had then become his friend (Oladele, p. 11). The steps taken in receiving this other missionary were very similar to those of D.C. Babcock. Ohoro shared this idea with his close royal friend, Oba Abdulkadiri, the then Emir of Ilorin. The latter supported the idea as he had met with the mission while in Jos, Northern Nigeria (Ajao, Interviewed, July 4, 2004).

As it was in the case of Babcock, the Ohoro later met with his chiefs to deliberate on the reception of the new missionary and his plan to establish another church in Shao. It was decided by the Oba-in-council to receive him the way they did for the Seventh-day Adventist missionary years earlier. Before the arrival of Reverend D.C. Porter on the appointed day, the Oba, his chiefs, and the would-be-converts from their respective families were on seat. Nothing could gladden the heart of the missionary than the readiness of the people to accept him, his church and to provide nucleus members for the new faith. So the church took effect in earnest and grew gradually in the community (Oladele, p.12). It was in this way that the people of Shao community received the missionaries and Christian faith into the community. As mentioned earlier, some of the converts also suffered persecutions in one form or the other, yet the light of the gospel could not be put off from the community.

VII. Analyses and Modern Applications

The following analyses and conclusion can be drawn from the accounts presented so far :

A. The Interventions of the Colonial Administrators

In Ijebu province, the people persistently refused the free operations of the colonial leaders and Christian missionaries and this resulted into the military intervention in 1892. The military action relaxed the atmosphere and subsequently paved way for Christian enterprises in the area. In Ilorin province, the presence of the colonial administrators with the method of indirect rule, in the Muslim dominated area, weakened the religio-political power of the Emir. Although D.C. Babcock was not permitted to operate in Ilorin town,

he could not be denied the opportunity to operate within the emirate unlike many others who came before him. The relationship that resolved the oppositions here came from the Government of the day. *Today*, religious/missionary activities will meet with least or no opposition if, from the onset, permission is properly sought from the relevant government organization of the area concerned. In various parts of Nigeria, it is essential for religious bodies that are planning to hold public evangelism to obtain permission from the police authority to ensure it is a free program.

B. The Roles of the Traditional Council

As explained in the work, Yoruba traditional rulers are highly respected by their subjects. The word of a King is a command for the people under his jurisdiction to obey. This notwithstanding, his success to a large extent, depends on the cooperation of his chiefs (or the Ogboni as in Ijebuland) who are members of his council. In Iperu, this political organ slowed down the missionary activities for years. A similar body with the Emir also held back missionary works in Ilorin province for a period of time. In the case of Shao, the Traditional Council was responsible for the prompt acceptance and growth of Christian mission in the community. The situation here also has a lesson for *modern missionaries*. The message is, as much as permission from the government is necessary, the roles of local/traditional authority should also be recognized. Their support should be sought as such approval would go a long way to assist the work. The author has witnessed occasions where village heads and their chiefs attended public evangelism as they were contacted and thereby invited from the onset for such programs. The presence of such dignitaries usually indicate acceptance by the host communities. This would go a long way to encourage the members of such community to attend.

It is also relevant to state here that the form of oppositions that the gospel workers may face today is rarely from the traditional religionists (like the Ogboni in the then Ijebuland) as from the Muslims and Christians of other denominations. The Christian-Muslim opposition is responsible for many religious conflicts especially, in the Northern part of Nigeria. In such areas, the religious intolerance is so serious that neither the police nor the traditional authority would easily consent to open proclamation of the gospel. In some of such areas, personal and church-centered evangelism could

be the best. In relation to Christians of other denominations, the opposition is based on the view that the in-coming Christian body is usually regarded as “sheep stealers.” However, such oppositions are normally short-lived as long as the approvals from the police and the relevant local authority have been secured.

C. Relationship with the Missionaries and the Experiences of the Converts

The local authority was inhospitable to the missionaries in Iperu for years as reflected in the types of accommodation offered and the hosting periods. In Shao, the missionaries, especially Babcock, was given the privilege of living within the palace with the Oba. This should remind *modern missionaries* that responses to missionary endeavors may differ from one place to another. To expect positive responses from everyone/place that they approach with the gospel may be unrealistic. The fact however remains that with prayer, resistance and apparent stiff oppositions are not beyond what God can resolve.

The opposition mounted against the missionaries and Christians by the community leaders in Iperu had adverse effects on the practice of Christianity. On the other hand, the support from the Oba and his chiefs for the missionaries and the new faith encouraged the practice of the religion by the new converts in Shao. As pointed out, for the gospel workers of today, those who accept or would accept Christian faith *today* should also be aware that the path that leads to the cross may not always be rosy. The new believers should be encouraged to see beyond the oppositions (if not avoidable) in their immediate environments.

VIII. Conclusion

In assessing the roles of the traditional council in each of the communities under review, it is very pertinent to realize the fact that each acted the way it did having the welfare and sincere love of its people in mind. Each demonstrated its utmost loyalty for its people in line with the “oath of office” taken before accepting the mantle of leadership over the people (Cf. Manus, 1991, p. 313). They acted in line with their primary responsibilities which were of utmost importance to them while the “feelings” of the missionaries – positive

or negative – were of less importance then. From this angle, one would see that the interactions did not really portray one community as being more god-fearing or idolatrous than the other, rather it was a matter of patriotism. The greatest joy is that Christianity has taken over in each of these communities. The people today are enjoying the diligence of the gospel. The accounts from each of these communities should remind missionaries of all ages that God has one thousand and one ways of reaching the unreached and thus his purpose fulfilled. One may conclude by saying, he that will learn from history will not repeat the mistakes of the past.

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