



## Irish Missionary Enterprise and Imperialism in the Lower Qua Iboe River Basin, 1887-1930

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### ABSTRACT

From 1887, the lower part of the Qua Iboe River basin played host to Irish missionaries of the same denominational name with the river. The progenitor of this Mission was the Reverend Samuel Alexander Bill who first birthed his missionary enterprise at Ibuno (Anglicised as Ibeno) on the estuary of the great river which empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Qua Iboe missionary enterprise coincided with the period of imperialism, and later, the colonization of the area by the British authorities. In consequence, they became co-terminus in their objective purpose, pursuant to the practicalisation of the Bible and the Plough doctrine which became a creed for the evangelization and subjugation of the area. This paper accordingly examines the interplay between Christianization and imperialism/colonization and notes that both categories were cohorts as they depended on one another as veritable strategies to cow the people of the area into submission for eventual exploitation. The paper gleans its information from primary and secondary sources both of which constitute the hallmark of historical scholarship. Its findings gyrate around the fact that the fortunes of Christian missionisation and imperialism/colonization were two sides of the same coin with far reaching aftermath in the lower Qua Iboe River basin within the periodization of this paper.

**Keywords:** Christianity, co-terminus, imperialism, missionary and Qua Iboe

### Introduction

The river now called Qua Iboe River empties itself into the Atlantic Ocean at Ibuno in a town called "Aqua Obio" meaning "Big Town".<sup>1</sup> When the first Europeans on trade expedition reached "Aqua Obio" and asked after the name of the town, the indigenes of the place, apparently not desirous to disclose its real name to visitors whom they hardly knew, told them "Aqua Obio". In order to record it on their map, the early Europeans wrongly called and spelt it "Qua Iboe" and/or "Kwa Ibo".<sup>2</sup>

This mistake was no doubt intentional but had to do with difficulties associated with language switch for non-speakers. Many of such mistakes are quite ubiquitous with regards to names of people, places and objects. Thus, the early Europeans called "Akwa Obio" "Qua Iboe" or "Kwa Ibo." And the river of the area "Qua Iboe River" or "Kwa Ibo River". This development predated the arrival of the Reverend Samuel Alexander Bill of the Qua Iboe Mission or church to Ibuno (Anglicised as Ibeno), who, in order to taxonomise his pioneering missionary activity in the area, chose to call it "Qua Iboe Project".<sup>3</sup>

Qua Iboe River takes its rise near Umuahia in Abia State, Nigeria, meanders into the northern part of Akwa Ibom State and empties into the Atlantic Ocean at Ukpenekang in Ibuno.<sup>4</sup> From the period very early on, the hydrology of Qua Iboe River facilitated and impacted on various strands of development in its maritime basin. These ranged from navigation, Christianisation/missionisation, trade, commerce, Western education, healthcare, vocational training and various dimensions of imperialism which were largely orchestrated in the lower Qua Iboe River basin.

### Conceptual Annotations

A paper of this genre requires some conceptual annotations in order to define and design its operational parameters and chart a course of discourse. To be sure, certain concepts interact and overlap and thereby mutate in an amorphous manner and obscure comprehension. A conceptual clarification

<sup>1</sup> W. L. Wheatley, *Sunrise in Nigeria* (Belfast: Qua Iboe Church Publication, 1977), p.15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> C. A. Ekere, *Christianity in Etinan: The First Century, 1898-1988* (Uyo: Modern Business Press Ltd., 1988), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> W. L. Wheatley, *Sunrise in Nigeria*, p. 46.

therefore locates a study and by extension, highlights its dimensions. This paper clearly identifies three key concepts which require ventilation. These are imperialism, mission and missionary.

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## Imperialism

The term imperialism and its latitude is quite troublesome as it mutates according to time, mission and content. As observed by Norman Palmer and Howard Perkins it “can be discussed, denounced, defended and died for but it cannot be defined in any generally acceptable way. It means different things to different people.”<sup>5</sup> Be that as it may, the motives and contents of imperialism are manifold. Hobson’s work, which was published in 1902 as cited in Claude Ake’s *A Political Economy of Africa* notes that imperialism could be explained away in terms of “national pride, quest for glory and bellicosity” but most importantly, “the quest for markets as well as the opportunities for higher returns on investment.”<sup>6</sup> This, according to Hobson, was a necessary colollary in the development of capitalism which saw to a growing “response to industrialization.”<sup>7</sup>

But to Kart Marx, imperialism is traceable to the quest for primitive accumulation and capitalization of surplus value. To him, “capitalism is inherently expansionary”<sup>8</sup> as it ensures the continuous production of surplus value. In order to detonate the peculiar contradictions of capitalism, the quest for sources of raw materials for the industrial machines and the prospect of new markets for surplus production became acutely desirable. Similarly, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin has it that:

Imperialism is capital... in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun, in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.<sup>9</sup>

Imperialism, as could be gleaned from the-above therefore borders on conquest, subjugation, domination and exploitation. The lower Qua Iboe River basin in the period of this study was not quarantined from the missionary influences of the Irish missionaries in particular and the British imperial and colonial influences, conquest and subjugation.<sup>10</sup>

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## Mission

The lexical exposition of “mission” has it that it is a peculiar, unique and specific task which an individual or a group saddles himself or itself with and seeks to accomplish. In theological reckoning, David Bosch maintains that a mission is not just about evangelism but also about the transformation of a society.<sup>11</sup> He accordingly emphasizes the importance of putting this idea within a contextual milieu whereby a missionary must adapt to and adopt the local culture of the evangelized.<sup>12</sup> Building on Bosch’s idea, Paul Hiebert stresses the imperativeness for missionaries to understand the cultural and social dynamics of the communities they serve.<sup>13</sup>

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## Missionary

A missionary is more or less a religious envoy. To David Bosch, he is “an individual who is sent or volunteers to work on a mission, with the primary goal or spreading a particular message, ideology or faith to a specific group of people or community.”<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, a missionary is expected to understand the biblical narrative and implications for mission,<sup>15</sup> and should be mindful of dangers of paternalism as well as the pitfalls of colonialism.<sup>16</sup>

Be that as it may, the lower Qua Iboe River basin during the period of this study was not insulated from the undesirable influences of Irish missionaries in particular and the imperial *cum* colonial influences and subjugation of the British authorities.

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## Imperialism and the Missionary Connection

The wave of Christian missionary activities started in earnest in Nigeria during the fourth decade of the nineteenth century with the birthing of the first group of missionaries at Badagry in 1842.<sup>17</sup> The point to note is that whenever and wherever the British were on the African coast, sequel to the abolition

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<sup>5</sup> Norman Palmer and Howard Perkins, *International Relations: The World Community in Transition*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (India: A.I.T.B.S. Publishers, 2010), p.158.

<sup>6</sup> Claude Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa* (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1981), p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> For more ventilation see Ini Etuk “Economic Basis for the Pacification of Akwa Ibom Area by the British: A Postscript” in *The Calabar Historical Journal*, Vol.6, No.1, 2014, pp.142.

<sup>11</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts on Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), p. 390.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 422.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missional Issues* (Grand Rapids: M.I.Baker Academic, 1994), p. 210.

<sup>14</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts on Theology of Mission*, p. 391.

<sup>15</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2006), p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> David J. Bosch and Yan Engen, *A Missional Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), p.12.

<sup>17</sup> T. G. O. Gbadamosi and J. F. Ade-Ajayi, “Islam and Christianity in Nigeria” in Obaro Ikeme (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) PLC, 1980), p. 349.

of slave trade and slavery, they devised and deployed several means to penetrate the hinterland. These ranged from the signing of dubious treaties of “protection”, the import of which were hardly understood by indigenous states, military pacification to Christianisation.

The missionary enterprise therefore also held the key to European penetration into the interior through the prospects of systematic evangelization. In order to ensure what Joshua Goldstein and Jon Pevehouse call “Christian imperialism”,<sup>18</sup> Thomas Fowell Buxton had advocated for the adoption of the “Bible and the Plough” doctrine to engender agricultural development through a curious hybrid with Christian evangelization.<sup>19</sup> The covert undertone of European missionary enterprise could be gleaned from a letter King Leopold II of Belgium wrote to Belgian missionaries in the Congo thus:

Reverends, Fathers, and Dear Compatriots: the task that is given to you to fulfil is very delicate and require much tact. You will go certainly to evangelize, but your evangelization must inspire above all our European interests. Your principal objective in our mission in Africa is never to teach the niggers to know God, this they know already.... Have courage to admit it.... Your essential role is to facilitate the task of administrators and industrials, which means you will go to interpret the gospel in the way, it will be the best to protect your interest in that part of the world.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, Claude Maxwell MacDonald, the Consular-General of the Oil Rivers Protectorate (formerly the Niger Coast Protectorate) which engulfed the Qua Iboe River Basin, also instructed the imperial government in the area to “develop, trade, promote civilization and pave way for placing the territories over which Her Majesty’s Protectorate is and may be extended directly under British rule.”<sup>21</sup>

It would be noted that by 1849, the Lower Qua Iboe River Basin had been brought under the consular suzerainty of John Beecroft. By 1885, the area had come under the Niger Coast Protectorate and by 1891, it was re-named the Oil Rivers Protectorate. Major (later Sir) Claude Maxwell MacDonald who was the Special Commissioner in the Protectorate was accordingly appointed, and substantially too, the Consul-General of the Protectorate. By and Large, he was charged with the responsibility of total conquest and subjugation of the area for effective British trade on the so-called “legitimate items” which in the area, was majorly composed of palm produce, namely palm oil and palm kernel.<sup>22</sup>

### Irish Missionary Activities in the Qua Iboe River Basin

In 1846, Old Calabar, a larger geographical space, had played host to pioneer missionary activities at the instance of the United Free Church of Scotland which had come to Old Calabar. Through British naval manoeuvres, the potentates of Old Calabar, notably, King Eyo Honesty II of Creek Town and King Eyamba V of Duke Town were cowed into signing treaties to abolish slave trade as well as the “Treaty of Amity and Commerce” in 1842.<sup>23</sup> In the wake of this, the two kings appealed to the British government for teachers and facilities to grow, manufacture and sell cotton<sup>24</sup> and to know the God of the white man.<sup>25</sup>

However, response eventually came from the West Indies in the garb of a missionary team led by the Reverend Hope Masterton Waddel, an Irish clergyman who arrived Old Calabar in 1846.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, the news of the missionary exploits of Reverend Hope Waddel at Old Calabar had filtered into the ears of Ibuno chiefs through Efik and Ibuno traders. As chronicled by Robert L. M’Keown, in 1886,

Members of the Ibuno tribe visiting Calabar for purpose of trade were brought into contact with native Christians at Duketown; whilst a white trader, who had settled near the mouth of the Qua Iboe River, gave the chiefs some instruction about the ten commandments, assembled them on Sundays and talked what they called “God Palaver”<sup>27</sup>

The author further maintains that:

The light thus received created a desire for more, and an appeal was made for a missionary. This appeal, expressed in a letter in the name of a number of Ibunos, was carried along the sea coast, and up the Calabar River to Duketown. It was received by Mr. Foster and transmitted by him to the late Dr. Grattan Guinness of Harley College, London.<sup>28</sup>

Mr. Forster was a Jamaican missionary at Calabar<sup>29</sup> while Dr. Henry Guinness was the principal of Harley College which was a missionary training centre in London. In response to the request, Dr. Guinness discussed the prospects of establishing a Christian mission overseas with many Christians in England

<sup>18</sup> Joshua Goldstein and Jon Pevehouse, *International Relations*, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition (Boston: Longman, 2011), pp. 173.

<sup>19</sup> T. G. O. Gbadamosi and J. F. Ade-Ajayi, “Islam and Christianity in Nigeria”, 349

<sup>20</sup> Luiz Arnaut, “Letter from King Leopold II of Belgium to Colonial Missionaries, 1883. Available at <http://allafrica.com/stories200510060035.html> Accessed and retrieved on December 3, 2024.

<sup>21</sup> Ini Etuk “Economic Basis for the Pacification of Akwa Ibom Area: A Postscript”, p. 144.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>23</sup> K. O. Dike, “The Slave Trade Treaties” in P. J. M. McEwan (ed.) *Nineteenth Century Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 118.

<sup>24</sup> E. U. Aye, *Old Calabar Through the Centuries*, cited in Monday Abasiattai’s “Christian Missions and their Impact in the Lower Cross River Region” in Monday Abasiattai (ed.) *A History of Cross River Region of Nigeria* (Enugu: Harris Publishers Ltd., 1990), p. 215.

<sup>25</sup> Ini Etuk, “The Economics of Mary Slessor’s Missionary Enterprise in Ibibioland, 1876-1915” in *International Journal of Humanities, Social Science and Management (IJHSSM)* Vol.4, No.1, Jan – February, 2024, pp.326-354.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>27</sup> Robert L. M’Keown, *Twenty-Five Years in Qua Iboe* (London: Morgan & Scott Ltd., 1912), p.52.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>29</sup> Eva Stuart Watt, *The Quest for Souls in Qua Iboe* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott Ltd., 1951), p. 13.

and Ireland. Meanwhile, Samuel Alexander Bill, a former student of Harley Missionary Training College had an incubated desire for missionary work. This desire was further fired by the persuasive content of a lecture which was eloquently delivered by The Reverend Wm Rodgers at Ballymacarrett Presbyterian Church titled "Glimpses at the Map of the World".<sup>30</sup> When the opportunity for oversea missionary work presented itself, Samuel Bill readily availed himself.

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### Samuel Alexander Bill and the Qua Iboe Mission Project

Samuel Alexander Bill was born in Belfast, in Northern Ireland on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December, 1863 into a dedicated Christian family. To be sure, Samuel was thus prepared for eventual missionary work. Par adventure, the letter of request by Ibuno chiefs, as noted earlier, was delivered to Henry Grattan Guinness, who ventilated its content as enclosed in a letter addressed "Ibuno Qua Iboe" to the hearing of his students during breakfast.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, Samuel's curiosity was profusely roused and as noted by Robert M'Keown, "Mr. Bill was led to offer himself, that the Gospel might be carried to those who had made known their readiness to receive it."<sup>32</sup>

The point to note is that Samuel Bill still offered to venture into an uncharted missionary enterprise in spite of overt warnings by his principal, rather discouragingly, that "it is a wild country... a treacherous, fever – ridden climate, and cannibalism is not unknown in the area."<sup>33</sup> Samuel's resolve was unflinching and to him also, the prospects of better life beyond the shores of Great Britain were quite bright as recounted by many missionaries and traders in Africa. He must have heard of the missionary exploits of the Reverend Hope Masterton Waddel and Mary Mitchell Slessor in the Old Calabar with an outlying influence on contiguous areas such as Ibuno.<sup>34</sup>

In any event, modest preparations were made for Samuel's departure to Old Calabar. Dr. Henry Grattan Guinness, his principal and benefactor, in concert with his wife had offered to sponsor his passage to Ibuno "besides furnishing the means to a limited outfit"<sup>35</sup> but Samuel had to postpone his departure date by three weeks. Within this brief period, Samuel perfected his engagement to his wife, Grace Kerr who was a student at Doric Lodge which was also a Girls' Missionary Training School affiliated to Harley College.<sup>36</sup> However, the prospects of also engaging in trade and working in the imperial enterprise as an adjunct to his missionary enterprise were not lost on Samuel as noted Robert M'Keown.<sup>37</sup>

He set sail from the port of Liverpool on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September, 1887 to Calabar which he arrived on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October the same year. Samuel was promptly given a modicum of orientation and tutelage on the lores, mores and language of the area by earlier Presbyterian missionaries and Mr. Foster at Calabar.<sup>38</sup> He finally arrived Ibuno on the estuary of Qua Iboe River on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, 1887 and was warmly received by Ibuno indigenes who "in anticipation of receiving a missionary ... had built a small house which the Reverend Samuel Bill roofed with corrugated iron, given him by a trader."<sup>39</sup> This trader was Mr Williams, a Sierra Leonean who had earlier settled and traded along the Qua Iboe River for several years.<sup>40</sup> Mr Williams understood and spoke the English language fluently as well as the indigenous language of the Ibuno people. He interpreted for Reverend Bill and together with his wife, supplied Bill with food, other basic requirements of life and generally assisted him in his pioneer missionary endeavours.

As aptly captured by Akpan Esen,

The Qua Iboe missionaries led by Samuel Bill arrived in Akwa Ibom territory from Northern Ireland to set up a base at Ibenu at the mouth of Qua Iboe River. Later, they moved up to Eket, Etinan, Uyo and Abak areas, so that what had been happening culturally at Calabar; Greek Town and throughout the Cross River Basin under Hope Waddel and Anderson also started happening among the villages in the Qua Iboe River Basin.<sup>41</sup>

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### Imperialism and Pacification of the Area

The Berlin-West African Conference of 1884/1885 marked a watershed in the history of the Qua Iboe River Basin area. Readily, it inaugurated the terrain and tenor of imperial tendencies at the instance of the British. Consequent upon this, a protectorate status was conferred on an area which also engulfed the Qua Iboe River basin in the south-eastern part of a land mass later designated Nigeria. By this time, the Oil Rivers Protectorate under the consular authority of Major (later sir) Claude Maxwell MacDonald, was proclaimed for Great Britain. He thus became the first British Commissioner and Consul – General for the area. By 1893, the Oil Rivers Protectorate was re-christened the Niger Coast Protectorate. In 1896, Sir Claude Maxwell MacDonald was succeeded by Sir Ralph Moor as Consul - General.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Robert L. M'Keown, *Twenty-Five Years in Qua Iboe*, p.53.

<sup>31</sup> Ifeke Paul, *The Identity Conflict and Quest for Peace in Qua Iboe Church* (Uyo: Goodluck Foundations, 2019), p.23.

<sup>32</sup> Robert L. M'Keown, *Twenty-Five Years in Qua Iboe*, p.55.

<sup>33</sup> J. S. Corbett, *According to Plan: The Story of Samuel Bill, Founder of Qua Iboe Mission, Nigeria* (Cheshire: Wright's Sandbach Ltd., 1986), p.11.

<sup>34</sup> For more details, see Ini Etuk "The Economics of Mary Slessor's Missionary Enterprise in Ibibioland, 1876-1915."

<sup>35</sup> Robert L. M'Keown, *Twenty-Five Years in Qua Iboe*, p.55.

<sup>36</sup> Ifeke Paul, *The Identity Conflict and Quest for Peace in Qua Iboe church*, p. 24.

<sup>37</sup> Robert L. M'Keown, *Twenty-Five Years in Qua Iboe*, p.55.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Akpan J. A. Esen "Educational Development" in S. W. Peters, Edet R. Iwok and Okon Edet Uya (eds.) *Akwa Ibom State: The Land of Promise – A Compendium* (Lagos: Gabumo Publishing Co. Ltd., 1994), pp. 147 – 148.

<sup>42</sup> For details, see A. E. Afigbo "The Eastern Provinces under Colonial Rule" in Obaro Ikime (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, pp. 410 – 414.

Ralph Moor was a man of blood and a war monger who brooded no resistance to British imperial rule. He accordingly organized and supervised the pacification of the entire area under his jurisdiction. In 1896 the Assistant District Commissioner for Eket, Mr. Horace Bedwell, Ralph Moor's subordinate, acquiesced to the Reverend John Kirk's entreaties to bring Mkpok Eket under British bombardment alleging human sacrifice in the town. This was seen as a practice which was out of synchronisation with Christian sensibilities. As a sequel, Mkpok Eket was completely sacked by the British imperial forces with many human casualties.<sup>43</sup>

Quite importantly, Ralph Moor saw to the destruction of the "Long Juju" of Arochukwu in the Aro Expedition of 1901/1902 under Major A. G. Leonard. This expedition was seen as a "war to end all wars" and to bring the area and adjoining territories under the suzerainty of the imperial British authorities.<sup>44</sup> Howbeit, the Aro expedition did not and could not end all wars as the Ibibio society was largely segmentary and various village communities wore the republican toga as their political paraphernalia. It thus became apparent to the British invading authorities that the Ibibio hinterland had to be conquered gradually and systematically. It was only by the closing years of the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that a sizeable chunk of the Lower Qua Iboe River Basin was brought under effective British rule after stiff and protracted resistance.

### The Impact of the Irish Mission and Imperialism in the Area

The Irish missionary enterprise in the Qua Iboe River Basin precipitated a rather multifarious impact in the area of discourse. Significantly, it was a co-traveller in the British imperial manoeuvres and pacification of the Lower Qua Iboe River basin from 1887 to 1930 and beyond. As noted by Uwem Akpan, the area constituted a prominent part of the Calabar Province with six administrative districts namely, Uyo, Itu, Opobo (now Ikot Abasi), Eket, Abak and Ikot Ekpene.<sup>45</sup>

In concert with the "Bible and the Plough" doctrine of Thomas Buxton as noted earlier, the Reverend Samuel Alexander Bill of Qua Iboe Mission indeed softened the ground through preachments to the indigenes of the area to regard British imperialism as a "divine visitation." Whereas the British authorities concentrated their efforts in the economic and political dimensions of imperialism, the missionaries focused on the religious and cultural domination of the area. Both categories of *dramatis personae* were not mutually exclusive. Rather, they were co-terminus and symbiotic in their objective purpose, namely, the subjugation and subordination of the area to British rule.

### Introduction of Christianity

In tandem with the missionary enterprise in the Lower Qua Iboe River basin was the introduction of Christianity into the area. From pristine times, the religion of the area was basically indigenous. The proto religious profile of the area acknowledged and indeed, revered the existence of a Supreme Being called *Abasi Ibom* with his retinue of lesser deities, ancestors and spirits.<sup>46</sup> No doubt, the religious pantheon of the area had ramifying influence and control on the people of the area.

In 1887, however, the Reverend Samuel Alexander Bill birthed at Ibuno, the estuary of the Qua Iboe River basin with a strange religion called "Christianity" which he and his subsequent co-missionaries introduced into the area. In spite of incipient resistance, the new religion gradually made inroads into the basin. The point to note however, is that the indigenous religion of the locals was polytheistic in configuration. To them therefore, an admission of some other "God" to it did not really matter. After all, it tendentiously enriched its pantheon. Howbeit, Christianity was embraced with cautious reservation as it disdainfully found faults with indigenous cultural practices like membership in cultural societies like *ekpo*, *ekpe*, *ekong*, *ataat*, *idiong*, *obon*, *ebre*, *iban isong*, and so on.<sup>47</sup> Added to this, the new religion disparaged other harmless lores and mores of the area and gradually but surely foisted itself on the people.

By 1930, many indigenes had not only become Christians but also adherents of the Qua Iboe Mission, later Qua Iboe Church, in many towns and villages with peculiar church buildings and structures of the Irish, nay, British. Some of these towns included Ibeno, Ukpeneke, Mkpok, Ikot Ubo, Afaha Eket, Atabong, Ndiya, Etinan, Ndon Utim, Nditia, Itam, Uyo, Ikot Edong, Ika Annang and so on. Mission stations were opened up in these localities and they eminently became centres for the evangelism and propagation of Christianity of the Qua Iboe Mission (Church) denomination. Of interesting note is the fact that they were all located on the banks of the Qua Iboe River, its tributaries and adjoining territories.

### Introduction of Western Education

The Irish missionaries, notably, introduced Western education into the area. As noted by Emmanuel Ayandele, "Christian missions were more than destroyers, they were builders as well and to some extent, preservers."<sup>48</sup> The introduction of western education by the Irish missionaries in particular was seen as precursory to effective imposition of *Pax Britannica* over peoples under the sway of British hegemony. To facilitate effective control and administration, British imperial and colonial masters largely depended on the missionaries, whom they saw as cohorts, in the propagation of the tenets and tenor of Western education. The cardinal rationale for Western education in the area was to train support staff to assist or supplement British

<sup>43</sup> Eva Stuart Watt, *Quest for Souls in Qua Iboe*, p. 56; see also Ini Etuk, "Economic Basis for the Pacification of Akwa Ibom Area: A Postscript."

<sup>44</sup> Adiele E. Afigbo, "The Eastern Provinces Under Colonia Rule" in Obaro Ikeme (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, p. 143.

<sup>45</sup> Uwem Jonah Akpan, *Akwa Ibom and Her Neighbours: A Study of Regional Diplomacy Since the Pre-colonial Period* (Uyo: Heritage Preservation Foundation, 2018), p.210.

<sup>46</sup> Edet A. Udo, *Who are the Ibibio?* (Onitsha: Africana - Fep Publishers Ltd., 1983), pp. 253-283; Ekong E. Ekong, *Sociology of the Ibibio: A Study of Social Organisation and Change* (Calabar: Scholars Press (Nig.) Ltd., 1983), pp. 43-70; Robert L. M'Keown, *Twenty-Five Years in Qua Iboe*, p.37.

<sup>47</sup> The cultural societies among many others were quite prominent in the Lower Qua Iboe River basin. They played political, economic and social roles in the area.

<sup>48</sup> Emmanuel Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis*. (London: Longman Group Ltd., 1966), p. 283.

administrative staff. The missionaries were concomitantly regarded as partners in the promotion of a new economic and social order through education. Little wonder then why the British administration supported the Irish in their educational enterprise. The missionaries conducted Sunday Schools in respective churches and established many primary schools in designated villages as Qua Iboe Mission "Group" or "Central" Schools. Some of the earliest schools included Central School, Ibeno; Grace Bill School, Eket; Qua Iboe Central School, Mbioto; John Kirk Memorial School, Etinan; Central School, Ibesit; Central School, Ikot Edong and so on.

In primordial reckoning, bible classes were organized for "illiterate" early converts in the local churches "in the afternoon and evening sessions when the people had returned from their farms."<sup>49</sup> In 1915, the first post-primary educational institution was established by the Qua Iboe Mission in Etinan. According to Charles Ekere, the school "started as a Boys institute at Okat in 1891, from Okat it moved to Nditia in 1896. Later it moved to Ikot Edong, and in 1915, it found its permanent location at Etinan".<sup>50</sup> It was at Etinan that it assumed its post-primary status.

In the mission schools were taught subjects in basic literacy such as reading, writing, moral instructions, bible lessons and numeracy. Pupils and students were thus prepared to become deacons, preachers, pastors, interpreters, teachers and catechists to meet the missionizing and evangelistic needs of the Qua Iboe Mission. In cohort with the imperial and colonial administrative desires, modern agricultural and elementary sciences were also taught.

### Healthcare

Early Qua Iboe missionaries were quite alien to tropical diseases and indigenous healthcare practices were regarded as profoundly heathen. They were either living witnesses or had heard of various health trauma suffered by early Europeans in their incursion into tropical hinterlands. It therefore became apparent to them that in order to succeed, Western healthcare practices must be introduced into the areas of their domiciliation. Consequent upon this, early missionaries tried their hands in the preparation of certain medicines to contain a few ailments. For instance, the Reverend Samuel Alexander Bill is said to have been engaged in preparing and prescribing medicine and nursing the sick in Ibeno and environs.<sup>51</sup>

In 1927, Qua Iboe Church Hospital was established in Etinan by an Irish Medical Practitioner, Dr. Bernard Wheatley but the building comprising "two wards (one male, one female) an operating theatre, a small dispensary and a patients' waiting room"<sup>52</sup> were commissioned by the Reverend Samuel Bill on the 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1928<sup>53</sup>. As noted by Charles Ekere, the aims of the hospital were:

- a. To manifest the love of Christ to those who came within its care;
- b. To minister to the sick and injured;
- c. To care for their mothers and babies in the Maternity section of their hospital and in Maternity clinics attached to the hospital;
- d. To promote public health and preventive medicine; and,
- e. To provide Christian training for those who feel the call to the ministry of healing.<sup>54</sup>

Early staff members included Dr. Wheatley at the apex who was joined by miss Hilda Davis, a trained Irish nurse, Miss Grace J. Udo Ema, Miss Abitu, Abel Akpan and Saturday Ogolo.<sup>55</sup> Subsequently, Mr. Tom Udo Etuk, was trained as the first male nurse who joined the staff after training.<sup>56</sup>

### Vocational Training

This was quite a vitriolic aftermath of the Irish Mission in the Lower Qua Iboe River Basin. Although indigenous vocational skills still subsisted, new ones were either grafted onto them or fresh ones were clearly introduced. This condition of affairs came about as a result of new vocational demands at the instance of the missionaries as well as the imperial and colonial masters. As noted by Robert L. M'Keown,

During Mr Bill's first term in the Qua Iboe, he formed the idea that the work of preaching, teaching and healing, should be supplemented by the establishment of some kind of industry. It soon became evident that the growth of the mission depended on the provision of stations for the white workers, as well as churches and schools of the natives.<sup>57</sup>

In this direction,

Mr Bill approached Sir Claude MacDonald, then Consul-General of the Niger Coast, resulting in the drawing up of a scheme for the training of native lads in carpentry, towards which the Government undertook to give a small grant. The industrial department was thus inaugurated in 1894 with a staff of seven boys, to remain in training for four years each.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>49</sup> C. A. Ekere, *Christianity in Etinan: The First Century, 1898-1998*, p.81.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>51</sup> Robert L. M'Keown, *Twenty-Five Years in Qua Iboe*, p. 81.

<sup>52</sup> C. A. Ekere, *Christianity in Etinan: The First Century, 1898-1998*, p.39.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>56</sup> Oral Interview with Anietie Tom Etuk on April 16, 2019 at Etinan Town. Tom Udo Etuk, his father, was also the grandfather of Ini Etuk, a co-author of this paper.

<sup>57</sup> Robert L. M'Keown, *Twenty-Five Years in Qua Iboe*, p. 77.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78

This development thus set the pace for training of the people of the area in different vocations. For instance, the Reverend John Kirk who was the first resident pastor of Qua Iboe Mission in Etinan was also a man of many parts. According to C. A. Ekere, “he had some training in first aid and in the rudiment of medicine.”<sup>59</sup> Accordingly, he trained George Okpon, one of his servants on how to administer drugs to patients. He also trained Ikot Iko as a carpenter.<sup>60</sup> Subsequently, Thompson Umoebo was trained both as a carpenter and a builder. Umoebo was associated with the building of several Qua Iboe churches with their unique structure across the length and breadth of the Qua Iboe River basin.<sup>61</sup>

Vocational trainings were generally offered by resident Irish missionaries at their various stations as well as by medical professionals at their institutions. These trainings, were by and large, witnessed in teaching, preaching, building, carpentry, bicycle repairs, road construction, nursing and general healthcare practices, interpretation, office work and so on.

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## Conclusion

The river which came to be generally known as “Qua Iboe” or “kwa Iboe” has its headwaters at Umuahia in Abia State, Nigeria and empties at its estuary into the Atlantic Ocean at Ukpenekang, Ibuno in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The indigenes of the Lower Qua Iboe River Basin had led their existence in a variety of political, economic and social endeavours. Quite importantly, they also practiced their indigenous religion with variegated activities from the pristine times.

However, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1887, the Reverend Samuel Alexander Bill arrived Ibuno and introduced Christianity in the garb of Qua Iboe Mission (later Qua Iboe Church) to the indigenous people of the area. Interestingly, he christened his missionary enterprise after the name of Great River of the area which the Europeans christened “Qua Iboe” or “Kwa Ibo”. Samuel Bill and his co-missionaries concentrated their efforts in planting Christianity on both banks of the river and adjoining areas with same name, “Qua Iboe Mission” later, “Qua Iboe Church”.

Irish missionary enterprise coincided with the period of imperialism and eventual colonialism of the same area by the British. In concert with the “Bible and the Plough” doctrine, both parties became co-terminus in the physical and spiritual subjugation of the Lower Qua Iboe River basin with multifarious and enduring impacts.

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<sup>59</sup> C. A. Ekere, *Christianity in Etinan: The First Century, 1898-1998*, p.11.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12

<sup>61</sup> Oral interview with Anietie Tom Etuk on April 16, 2019 at Etinan Town.

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