



The Contributions of Mount Olives Anglican Church to the Religious and Socio-Economic Life of the People of Ilorin Metropolis

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Abstract

This study investigates the religious and socio-economic contributions of Mount Olives Anglican Church to the development of Ilorin Metropolis. Using historical and descriptive research methodologies, the study explores the Church's role in education, health, youth empowerment and moral reformation. Findings reveal that the Church has significantly enhanced social welfare through scholarship, cooperative societies, and evangelical outreach. However, it faces challenges such as declining attendance and financial constraint. The study recommends that the church invest in profitable ventures, such as shares, bookshops, and the reorganization of its nursery school, to bolster financial resources and continue supporting the community.

Keywords: Church, socio-economic, development, contribution and Ilorin metropolis.

Word count: 144

Introduction

The universal Church which was birthed at the ascension of Jesus Christ began as a gathering of believers who saw, heard and believed the redemptive act of Jesus Christ, spread shortly after the ascension of Christ as a result of persecutions by the Jews community. Although the main core mission of the Church has been evangelism, it has also played pivoted role at its advent to societies as it brought about civilization, development, advancement to the general wellbeing of the habitants of the society. Invariably; it is noteworthy to state that the church is a catalysts for socio-economic development in the society.

Prior to the 19th century, there were many attempts to introduce Christianity in Africa but failed. However, the end of the 19th century began a new era in the history of Christianity in Africa and Nigeria particularly. According to Omotoye, this phase was spearheaded by the Methodist, Church Missionary Society (CMS), Catholic and the Baptist Missionaries.¹

The advent of Christianity in Nigeria brought a lot of development to the Nigerian community hence the missionaries came and introduced the ideology of “the bible and the plough”. It was a system which would combine mission work with the cultivation of large plantation, as a result of this, the idea of the doctrine of the three Cs was formulated: Christianity, Commerce and Civilization.² Thus, Christianity brought to Nigeria western ideas and the wave of modernization spread further into the hinterland to which enhanced development of the Nigerian local villages and the spread of Christianity has continued very rapidly in Nigeria reaching the crannies as evidence with the raising numbers of churches around the nation and their tremendous contributions to societal development. Christianity in Nigeria has brought about civilization and enlightenment since 19th century.³ It is noteworthy to state that despite Ilorin’s multi-ethnic and religious nature, Mount Olives Church and like the universal Church introduced innovative programmes for humanitarian development thus contributing to the socio-economic life of the people of Ilorin metropolis; however, despite this socio-economic contribution there has been questions about Mount Olives Church’s contributions in Ilorin metropolis thus this study examines Mount Olives Church’s contributions to the religious and socio-economic lives of the people of Ilorin metropolis.

A Brief Historical Background of Ilorin Metropolis

There are no places without a history, as history is recorded fact of earlier events of a particular place at a certain period.⁴ The ancient city (Ilorin) is located approximately on latitude 80-30 North and Longitude 40-35 East and cover an area of 765km² (295 sq. miles). It is situated almost at the middle of Nigeria, and hence it is referred to as the “Connecting City of Nigeria”. It is about 300 kilometer from Lagos the former capital city and the economic hub of the country (Nigeria) and 500km from Abuja the federal capital territory of Nigeria.⁵ Ilorin metropolis consists of three local government areas namely: Ilorin East, Ilorin South and Ilorin West. It shares boundaries with Moro Local Government Area to the North, Asa Local Government Area to the West and Ifelodun Local Government Area to the East.⁶

On ethnicity Ilorin metropolis comprises of four groups or ethnics: Yoruba, Nupe (Tapa), Hausa (*Gambari*) and Fulani (*Bororo*). The Yoruba are the majority amongst the aforementioned four ethnics and as a result making Yoruba the most common spoken language in Ilorin metropolis. It is very common amongst the four ethnic groups to marry amongst themselves and this has brought about religious tolerance in spite of the heterogeneous state and religious nature of the people.⁷ In Ilorin metropolis, a strong unity is evident through their deep respect for elders, reflected in their greetings and moral values. This aligns with traditional African norms of honoring the elderly for their wisdom and fostering a just society. Regardless of ethnicity, Ilorin people exhibit this through males prostrating and females kneeling during greetings.

The Socio-economic life of the People of Ilorin Prior to the Advent of Christianity

In the remote past, Ilorin was indeed, the major trading and manufacturing centre south of the Niger. Ilorin had a buoyant economy and there was hardly any family compound in the city that was not identifying with a craft or profession or with one economic/commercial activity or the other. For example, “we had and still have in Ilorin family compounds known as; Ile Alagbede (Blacksmiths), *Ile Onikere* (Rafia Mat Weavers), *Ile Asileke*, Ile Olodo, *Ile Oloko-Nla* (Farmers), and amongst others.⁸

All the occupations have been domesticated in Ilorin. Some are peculiar to certain tribes, families and individuals, while others are general. For instance the Fulani keep livestock's, the Nupe are experts in groundnut oil extraction and frying of groundnut cake (*kulikuli*), the Hausa are essentially mat makers and well diggers, embroidery and rope makers. The Yoruba are popularly known for hunting, pottery, mud house building and leather works. The general one includes farming, commerce and cloth weaving. It is important to stress out that the initial professional boundaries have been demolished, hence, the diffusion of the professions. All tribes share profession with one another.⁹

Jimoh, states that, there were many markets in the districts, too. The major ones among them were at *Alapa, Ballah, Otte, Aboto, Afon. Laduba, Elemere, Malete, Ipaiye, Megida, Yowere, Lanwa, Ejidongari, Okuta'ala, Bode-Sa'adu, Oke-Oyi, Iponrin* and many more. items in the markets were mainly food stuff and cash crops like shear butter and locust bean. Some of the markets in the districts were cross-border markets patronized by traders from as far north as Bida and as far south as Osogbo and Ilesa. The market at Aboto was patronized by traders from the Ogbomoso/Ejigbo axis. This was the impressive economic climate that prevailed in Ilorin Emirate in the nineteenth century until the British colonized Ilorin in 1897.¹⁰ Ilorin's markets make it a significant business hub, rivaling Kano. Since the 19th century, it has maintained a major role as one of Nigeria's largest commercial centres.

The Religious live of the People of Ilorin Metropolis

In all sphere of life, Africans are by nature religious and as such it will be in error to carry out a research on the people of Ilorin metropolis without tracing their religious life. Awolalu and Dopamu state, that long before the advent of Islam and Christianity in Africa, Africans knew and understood the concept of God (Olodumare).¹¹ The case of Ilorin metropolis was also in the same bracket; the people had knowledge of God and recognized him to be the supreme deity who has dominion over everything.

According to Saliu and Jawondo, Ilorin, up to the beginning of the 19th century was largely populated by adherents of African Traditional Religion.¹² In the same view, Agboola submits that, like the generality of the Yoruba culture group at that time, the people of this southern area were animists who practiced some forms of African Religions.¹³ The term African Traditional Religion refers to the religious beliefs and practices of the Africans. It is traditional and indigenous to Africa. It could also be called the native religion of Africa because it originated from Africa and is primarily practiced mostly by Africans. The religious belief of the people constitutes a form of ancestral cult, there were ancestral worshippers who venerated the tombs of ancestors and deified them. There were the Egungun and Oro been outstanding as far as ancestrology is concerned. The Egungun symbolizes the ancestors. Some worshipped divinities and gods that were spiritually conceived as having connection with their occupation, for instance most farmers worshipped the god of the land and fertility (land and river), and the hunters and like the blacksmith worshipped the god of iron (Ogun).¹⁴

It is also noteworthy to state that the third decade of the 19th century in Ilorin was dominated by Islamic religion; the light of Islamic religion was spread to the nooks and crannies of the city of Ilorin through the Islamic clerics who migrated to Ilorin from other places for the purpose of propagating the Islamic faith. Furthermore, because of the strong

footing of the Islamic religion in Ilorin, Christianity could not penetrate into Ilorin. Omotoye, states that, the introduction of Christianity to Ilorin started in the middle of the 19th century. Rev. J.T Bowen of the Baptist mission based in Ogbomoso visited the town in 1855 and met Emir Shitta who politely disallowed him from preaching the gospel because the town was referred to as the city of Qur'an. Bishop Samuel Ajanyi Crowther who was a missionary in the Niger Delta also made an attempt to evangelize in Ilorin in 1857 and 1859 respectively. He was not given the support for evangelizing in the town. The scenario started to change with the activities of itinerant Osomalo textile traders in Ilorin metropolis and its suburbs. Many of the traders were converted Christians from home.¹⁵

Another episode that brought Christianity to Ilorin was the construction of the railway from southern region to the northern area of the country. Many of the workers of Railway Corporation employed were Christians in their communities before they were employed by the railway corporation. The railway Christian workers and Ijesa Osomalo Christian traders became useful agents of Christianity in Ilorin metropolis. Therefore, the two bodies prepared the ground for evangelization of Ilorin metropolis.¹⁶ The coming together of the railway Christian workers and Ijesa Osomalo Christian traders became the foundation for Christianity's growth and spread throughout Ilorin metropolis, reaching every corner of the city.

The Establishment of Mount Olives Anglican Church Tanke

The birth of Mount Olives Anglican Church can be likened to the parable of the monster seed (Mark 4:31-32). Following the establishment of the Diocese of Kwara in the Anglican Communion on November 1, 1974, Bishop Herbert Haruna's visionary efforts for gospel expansion resulted in the creation of Mount Olives Church during his episcopal visit to Ilorin Archdeaconry. Oyebanji and Olsehide affirm that, shortly after his (Rt. Revd. Herbert Haruna) installation (of the pioneer bishop) at St. Mark's Cathedral, Offa, and eager to expand the work of God in the diocese, the new Bishop paid his first episcopal visit to the three archdeaconries under the Kwara Diocese, namely; Offa, Ilorin and Lokoja Archdeaconries.¹⁷ Oyebanji and Olsehide further state that, it was during his visit to Ilorin Archdeaconry that he discovered that many Anglicans in the town were not worshipping in any of the three existing Anglican churches namely, St. Barnabas' Church, All Saints' Anglican Church and St. Paul's Anglican Church. The Bishop soon found out the reasons for this, as earlier noted, were the mode of service, the length of service and language of worship in the churches.¹⁸

To overcome language barriers and obstacles hindering worship at existing Anglican churches in Ilorin, proactive measures were implemented, aimed at harmonizing factors for sustained church vitality. Oyebanji and Olsehide state that, after the episcopal visit, Rt. Revd. Herbert Haruna (the Bishop) embarked on extensive consultations as to what could be done to bring back (these) members, and to prevent more people from leaving (the church), accordingly, the bishop, through a circular dated May 18, 1979, set up a committee to look into the possibility of transforming the Bishop's Chapel into a place of worship that could accommodate about a hundred parishioners.¹⁹

Ann Egun Haruna also states that, the two standing Anglican churches in Ilorin then were Yoruba speaking, one at the Murtala Mohammed Way, now a Cathedral, and the other one at Baboko. So he thought that his Chapel, a private chapel to the bishop which was at the Bishop's Court, was something he could use to start up the *English section* of the Church. This he did and threw it open to the public. It was named Mount Olives Anglican Chapel and it grew and grew until the time he retired in December 1994 and it is still growing.²⁰

The Contributions of Mount Olives Anglican Church, Tanke

Mount Olives Church is a vital societal element, providing spiritual guidance and robust socio-economic involvement. It significantly shapes Ilorin metropolis' socio-economic landscape, reflected in its contributions highlighted below.

The Religious Contributions of Mount Olives Anglican Church, Tanke

Mount Olives has always been a mission-oriented, evangelical Church from the very beginning. Apart from the worship services and activities, the church regularly organizes special programmes such as retreat, revivals, seminars and other outreaches. During these programmes, different renowned servants of God were often invited to minister. These could be from any denomination or Para-Church organization.²¹ The Church helps in building moral standard in people through its beliefs in the Supreme Being who is more powerful than humans. This faith condemns immorality such as stealing, killing, arson, maiming, cheating and the likes. It also plays fundamental roles in nation building and the fight against corruption. In affirmation of these facts, the very well-known story of *Vanguard* 12th September 2016, of a student who withdrew from University of Ilorin and returned his WAEC certificate in order to start all over after been born again, is a clear indication that the religious contribution of the Church in the society cannot be undermined.²²

Mount Olives Anglican Church has often times invited preachers across different denominations to preach at their various programs and this has caused Mount Olives name sky-rocking, and has its members fully committed to winning souls for Christ. Mrs. Ajileye of Mount Olive Chapel, Basin Road, Ilorin is another example of a woman leader who preaches the word of God and wins souls for Christ.²³ Mount Olives through its evangelical outreaches and soul winning programs has affected the people of Ilorin metropolis and has influenced the religious growth and development of the people in its totality.

Oluwataye Kolawale states that:

When we go out for evangelism, we work strategically, we go out to areas of need, we reach out to those whom the gospel has not yet reached with very much impact, we go to those who are in need and in order to woo their hearts we take with us gifts or items that are enticing, and we consider the warfare of this people, and look keenly at areas of their lives which we can afford to affect and make impact on.²⁴

In affirmation, Fadairo Dotun, affirms that:

The youth fellowship has been going out for evangelism, and when we go out, we reach out to people who are in need of the message of Christ, this often takes us to areas such the prison; now refer to as correction of center, we visit the inmates and study the bible with them, and encourage them to be of good faith, we give them bible passages to read, passages that will encourage them..²⁵

The Educational Contribution of Mount Olives Anglican Church, Tanke

It is pertinent to note that the establishment of schools was a major policy of the various missions in Yorubaland.²⁶ One of the major strategies of conversion by the Christian missionaries since the 19th century was the introduction of western education in Nigeria.²⁷ Daniel and Abolarin, quoted Omotoye saying that: "This was a strategy adopted by the early missionaries to win converts to their various mission. The Christian missionaries have been consistent and dogged in their aspiration of the establishment of schools in this regard".²⁸ Inspired by the Church Missionary Society (CMS), Mount Olives Anglican Church aimed to

establish a school. In 1991, Mount Olives Anglican Nursery School was founded, but it faced low student enrollment and later closure.

Oyebanji and Olasehinde, state that, the underlying principle is to ensure an all-round physical and spiritual development of members, as part of fulfilling a cardinal goal of the church, namely, making every member a growing and mature servant of Christ. Thus, apart from regular conferences, training and workshops, the establishment of Mount Olives Nursery and Primary School in 1991 was a significant milestone achievement. The school commenced operations on February 4th, 1991.²⁹ Oyebanji and Olasehinde, also added that, the school started well and flourished while the church was still at the Bishop's Court, although lack of transportation was a major hindrance to many parents who wanted to enroll their children in the school. In addition to other setback, the movement of the church to its permanent site worsened the transportation situation, coupled with other attendant challenges, the school eventually closed down.³⁰ Mount Olives Church's persistent endeavor led to the reopening of its closed school in September 2021, featuring modern classrooms on its premises.

Mount Olives through the support of its members, visitors, individuals and family or groups donations started awarding scholarship to students towards reaching their educational goals. In affirmative, Oyebanji and Olasehinde, also state that, Chief James Olorunleke Mejabi educational endowment fund was initiated and endowed by the Mejabi family in collaboration with Mount Olives Church to mark the 70th birthday anniversary of the patriarch, Chief James Olorunleke Mejabi in 2000. The objective of the fund is to assist and support needy children in their educational pursuits. The beneficiaries could be from Mount Olives or other churches, including Chief Mejabi's home Church, Holy Trinity Anglican Church in Ikoyi-Ijumu, Kogi State. The maximum amount given to each beneficiary is ten thousand Naira (#10,000.00) for secondary school and fifteen thousand naira (#15,000.00) for students in tertiary institution.³¹ Although the Church has one Church owned school, it has directly and indirectly contributed to the educational development of the community.

The Economical Contribution of Mount Olives Anglican Church, Tanke

Christian churches, like Mount Olives in the Anglican Communion, drive moral and economic growth. Their skill development programs combat poverty, enabling employment and vocational progress for members and locals. The role of the Church in the development of the societies that they are established has become significant as there is an increasing recognition that the inner city Churches can play a leading role in motivating the resident of low-class locations to better themselves.³²

Mount Olives Church established a cooperative society to foster economic growth. This initiative encourages savings and funds for business investment, promotes trade, offers loans, and empowers both members and non-members. This partnership facilitates business sustainability and grants access to loans from individuals, banks, and the Church itself. These banks are encouraged to give soft loans to the members of the Church, most especially those with small scale business men and women.³³ Oyebanji and Olasehinde, state that, the activities of the cooperative society include developing and supporting businesses of its registered members.³⁴ Mount Olives employs pastors, staff, and supports livelihoods through payroll, including Mount Olives Nursery School staff and security personnel.

The Political Contribution of Mount Olives Anglican Church, Tanke

It is not worthy to state that the Church serves as an agent of political sensitization, the church plays a major role in instilling awareness to the political class especially in the act of governance by inculcating into its members high sense of duty, morality, selfless service,

respect for human lives, public accountability, love of one's neighbor, sense of humanity and abhorrence of violence. There is a sense of religious re-awakening which has got a positive impact on the political development of the country. Not only that, it has equally contributed to national integration, political mobilization, reformation of ethnic identity, nationalism, peaceful co-existence, economic, social and political development. Omotoye observed that, the Church leadership is apolitical in partisan politics of the country.³⁵ Although both Muslims and Christians politicians are seen visiting the Church seeking for blessings and prayers.

Apav Francis, states that;

During electoral campaign politicians frequent the church, and often time when given the opportunity to speak, they go on seeking prayers.³⁶

It is also an undisputable fact that Politicians utilize Churches, including Mount Olives, for campaign support, sensitizing congregations, fostering political engagement, benefiting national participation.

Fadairo Dotun states that;

The Church sensitizes the congregation on the importance of political participation, although, this often occurs much more during election period and it helps the people to coordinate themselves during election periods as not to become militating factors against the demonstration of peaceful franchise of the people.³⁷

In some of the sermons of Mount Olives, it emphasises active political participation, one of the topics repeatedly emphasis during Sunday sermon is; **Christianity and politics; (after Election, what is next?)**, the question has prompted many people into active participation in politics.

The Challenges/Failures of Mount Olives Anglican Church, Tanke

Every institution is faced with failures and challenges, often stemming from overlooked mistakes or negligence. Mount Olives Church is no exception, grappling with its own challenges and failures. These challenges and failures encompass the following aspects.

Declined Attendance

Mount Olives Church is currently grappling with a concerning issue declining attendance. This predicament is particularly pronounced among the younger generations, and the church is finding it challenging to both attract and retain members. Oyebanji and Olasehinde affirmed that, another weakness is the dwindling attendance which is noticeable at both mid-week activities and Sunday services.³⁸ This decline is notably conspicuous during the church's weekly programs, and its repercussions reverberate through various facets of the Church's operations, most notably in the realm of evangelism. Unfortunately, the declining attendance has left an indelible mark on Mount Olives Church, and it's imperative to delve into the consequences of this issue.

The heart of any Church lies in its congregation, a collective body of believers who assemble not only to worship the Almighty but also to be nurtured and instructed in the teachings of the faith. Moreover, the church serves as a beacon of light, equipping its members with the tools necessary for propagating the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In essence, the church's role extends beyond the walls of the building; it is a vital instrument in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. However, the decline in attendance at Mount Olives Church is jeopardizing this essential mission. This challenge is not confined to a mere numerical decline but casts a shadow over the church's ability to fulfill its vital mission, especially in the domain of evangelism. Oyebanji and Olasehinde identify the decline in attendance as the proliferation of

Churches in the neighborhood along Pipeline Road which is capable of depopulating the Church.³⁹

Economic Distress

Economic adversity has emerged as the epicenter of Mount Olives Church's formidable challenges. The repercussions of the prevailing economic hardships in the country have left the church community in a state of lamentation, grappling with a significant conundrum. Members of this devout congregation find themselves in the throes of financial strain, making it increasingly arduous to contribute meaningfully to the church's financial needs. This unfortunate circumstance has cast a pall over the church's ambitious projects and aspirations, hampering their realization.

In the intricate tapestry of a church's vitality, its financial sustenance plays a pivotal role. Traditionally, the lifeblood of the church's operations flows from the heartfelt contributions and generous donations of its faithful congregants. These resources are not merely financial transactions; they are the tangible expressions of unwavering devotion and commitment to the church's mission. Yet, the harsh economic climate has severely restricted the capacity of Mount Olives Church's members to make these vital contributions.

The domino effect of this economic distress is palpable. With diminished financial support, the church faces daunting limitations in pursuing its envisioned projects. Up to date, the Mount Olives Church Nursery School building at the Church premises is yet to reach completion although it has been put into use already. Although, the church has not relented in efforts to achieve financial stability it has not yet achieved success in the area.

The Length of Service/ Mattins

Mount Olives Anglican Church's journey from its original objectives to its current state is a poignant example of how the intersection of tradition, community dynamics, and evolving needs can shape the trajectory of a religious institution. What began as a vision for a succinct, English-focused service lasting only an hour has transformed over four decades into a more complex reality, and the extension of service duration have had profound implications for the church's identity and congregation.

Oyebanji and Olasehinde submit that, needless to say that we have since moved far from that precept, albeit gradually, so that presently, parishioners often spend up to three hours or more at matins.⁴⁰ The initial establishment of the church with the intention of conducting all matins in the English language and keeping the service duration to one hour reflects a desire for a modernized, efficient worship experience.

The extension of service duration beyond the envisioned one-hour timeframe is an outcome that could be attributed to various factors. Religious services often become the focal point of community life, providing opportunities for social interaction, fellowship, and the nurturing of spiritual bonds. Over time, it's conceivable that additional elements such as extended prayers, more elaborate sermons, or heightened musical performances have been integrated to enrich the worship experience. The resulting three-hour services might be seen as an immersive and spiritually fulfilling event for some attendees. However, the unintended consequence of this extended duration negatively impacted the congregational dynamics.

Conclusion

This study contributes to scholarship on religion and development by highlighting how faith based institutions, through integrated social initiatives, can compliments government efforts in sustainable community advancement. Mount Olives Church stands as a key example, not only spiritually but also as a force for positive change through diverse socio-economic efforts, profoundly impacting positively on the lives and the people of Ilorin Metropolis. Mount

Olives Church's immeasurable contributions span all societal aspects, fostering socio-economic growth in Ilorin metropolis.

Recommendations

Having conducted a research on the contributions of Mount Olives Church Ilorin to the socio-economic development of the lives of the people of Ilorin metropolis, the study recommends that;

1. The Church should invest her money in profitable enterprises such as buying of shares in companies or institutions, opening bookshops and reorganizing the church owned Nursery schools.
2. That Church investments should be encouraged not to have higher taxation from government as the government must see them as employers of labor.
3. That Entrepreneurship education should be encouraged by the church and made available to the general congregation to help members develop skills that can ensure their financial breakthrough stability.
4. The study recommends that the church should reorganize the church emergency clinic, and stock it with first aid equipment's for the case of emergency.
5. The study also recommends that there should be Preservation of Records to preserve church records. If filling is taken for granted, the church will run into problems of not telling her own story.
6. The study recommends that Youth development and empowerment program should be adhered to, as the youths are the future hope of the society.
7. The study also recommends that the Educational curriculum of the church owned school should encompass the needs of students (pupils) and practical's should be taken seriously, hence students tend to remember more of what they practicalize than what they read.
8. The church should widen its scope of activities and seek to carry its witness to the economic and socio-political arena.

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