

# Conversion to Islam: A Study of the Conversion Motif of the Igbo Christians

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## Abstract

*Conversion to Islam is increasingly growing in areas formerly hostile to Islam. The current study was carried out to identify the reasons responsible for the Igbo Christians' conversion to Islam. Related literature and previous works on religious conversion were extensively examined. Conversion is a complex phenomenon because of its various meanings and understanding in different religions and disciplines (Rambo 1989; Rambo and Farhadian 2014). Thus, conversion is examined here from a multidisciplinary perspective, with proponents of the various disciplines each acceding that conversion is usually more of a gradual process than instantaneous. To identify why Igbo Christians are converting to Islam, qualitative research methods were employed. Data were collected via in-depth, face-to-face ethnographic interviews with 30 (23 males and 7 females) Igbo Christians who had converted to Islam. The interview questionnaire was comprised of three domains: demographic information, their conversion to Islam, and the impact of the conversion on their life. The interviews revealed seven reasons Igbo Christians' were influenced to convert to Islam. These are (1) Intellectual (Islam is more logical and rational behaviorally; cite a negative lifestyle within the local church), (2) affectional (Muslims are loving and caring), (3) mystical (dreams and divine encounter), (4) experimental (giving Islam a try and embraced it in the process), (5) coercion (pressured to convert), (6) desire for upward mobility, and (7) desire to become a Reverend or minister and still have a family. However, intellectual and affectional motifs were the most motivating reasons given for conversion. The findings indicate that there is need for intellectual engagement of the Biblical doctrine in the church. In other words, the church needs to systematically and adequately explain the doctrine of the Trinity, Sonship of Christ, and original sin to members. Given the significant relationship between the intellectual motif and the Igbo Christian conversion to Islam, this must no longer be given cursory attention. It is recommended that the church should wake from her slumber and nominalism, to begin discipling, mentoring and equipping Christians to adequately respond to Muslim objections to the Gospel.*

**Key Words:** Conversion, Igbo, Islam, religion, Christianity, Interdisciplinary

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## Introduction

In recent years, conversion to Islam has significantly increased in areas formerly hostile to Islam. For instance, good numbers of Americans are converting to Islam (Bowen 2009), South Korean Christians are converting to Islam (Kim 2003), and native-born British as well (Ali 1996). This phenomenon is also being observed in Igboland, the Christian heartland of Nigeria (Nnorom 2003), where a growing number of Mosques, Islamic schools/institutions, and affluent Igbo converts to Islam can be observed. Though most people have argued that the Igbo are converting to Islam primarily for the economic motif, which may have been accurate in the past, closer examination shows that this is no longer the case. According to this current research, the Igbo are nowadays primarily converting to Islam for the intellectual motif. This claim is significant because it is often deemed that the Igbo are obsessed with money, thus it is assumed their conversion to Islam is in order to acquire money, but the current research would dispute this assumption.

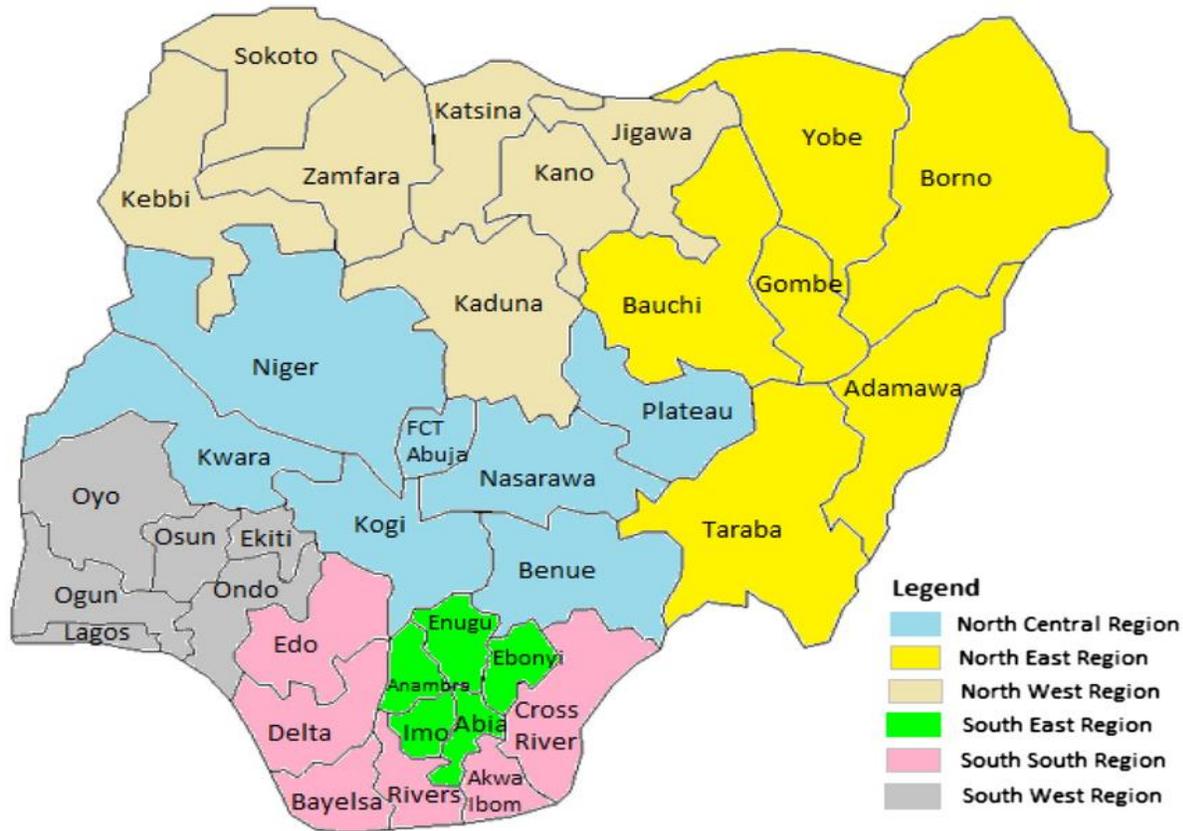
This phenomenon calls for an urgent missiological and scholarly response because of the challenge it poses to the Great Commission, i.e., it challenges Christians' endeavour in making disciples for the kingdom of God and increases adherents for the Islamic faith. This paper, therefore, seeks to identify the reasons Igbo converts to Islam give for their conversion.

## Literature Review

### *Brief Introduction of the Igbo*

The Igbo people inhabit south-eastern Nigeria. "Igbo" refers to both the people and their language. The Igbo comprise one of the largest three ethnic groups in Nigeria. They speak the Igbo language, different dialects of which are spoken in many different localities. The Igbo are a sedentary, agricultural people and are bordered by Igalas and the Tvs to the north, the Ijaws to the southeast, the Efiks and the Ibibios to the east and the Binis to the west (Nnadozie 2002, Ottenberg 1959, 130). The Igbo are said to "constitute the second ethnic majority in Nigerian

population and are among the most numerous ethnic nationalities in sub-Saharan Africa” (Manus 1986, 48; Afigbo 1981, 42). According to CIA World Factbook, the Igbo population is estimated at 32 million people. The Igbo are the most populous Christian region in Nigeria. In the map below, the Igbo region is in green and my interviews were conducted in Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi, and Imo.



Culturally, the Igbo are “a self-reliant, self-contained, independent and blissfully traditional-encrusted people” (Ayandele 1973, 1). They are industrious people, dynamic, adaptable, nationalistic and uniquely business and education inclined. Nnadozie buttresses this further by observing that “the Igbo believe in hard work, enduring hardship, the spirit of sacrifice, and posterity. It is well known that the Igbo will deny himself or herself of the bare essentials to provide education for his child or children” (Nnadozie, 2002, p. 61). Ottenberg describes Igbo as “probably most receptive to culture change, and most willing to accept Western ways, of any large group in Nigeria” (1959, 130). Other Igbo scholars like Isichei confirm Igbo receptivity to change observed in their rapid turn from “their traditional forms of wealth and prestige – the accumulation of yams and cowries, the purchase of titles – to the evidently superior techniques, wealth and might of the white man” (Isichei 1969, 130). The Igbo receptivity to change and openness of Igbo culture aided their move to Christianity not because they loved it; rather, they perceived it as a means of obtaining the same power, authority, civilization, and education associated with the changing rules of the colonial masters.

In terms of affinity to worship, the Igbo are inherently religious. They “eat righteously, drink righteously, bath religiously, dress righteously, sin righteously...Religion of these natives is their existence and their existence is their religion” (Leonard 1985, 144). Igbo primal religion is such that it can be reinterpreted, redefined, and manipulated to suit the desire of the Igbo. It does not hold rigidly to a single paradigm or set of assumptions, but instead draws upon multiple ideas. In fact, Igbo primal religion is anthropocentric. Igbo, like other African people, believe that the goal of religion is salvation understood as viable life, better life, and higher social status. This “viable life includes all that makes for status and prosperity, together with bodily health, multiplicity of children, fertility of land as well as the tranquillity of order within society and nature” (Okorochoa 1987,130).

The Igbo expect to receive viable life from religion and any religion that fails to provide this is discarded. So, the Igbo expect power for better life to stem from religious commitment. This is illustrated in the Igbo adage:

“when we offer sacrifices to whomever the gods are they should reciprocate by performing their duties. And if the gods become overbearing we shall show him the tree from which it was carved.” They equally discard any god (minor or major) or religion that fails to yield this viable life for another powerful one that provides this. The power for viable life was one of the factors that resulted in their conversion to Christianity. This is why Okorochoa refutes the popular claim that Igbo conversion is socio-economic. This affirms Horton’s “Intellectualist theory” which explains that:

The acceptance of Islam and Christianity beliefs and practices are only accepted where they happen to coincide with responses of the traditional cosmology to other, non-missionary, and factors of the modern situation. Where such beliefs and practices have no counterpart in these responses, they tend to be weakly developed or absent from the life of converts. Again, where responses of the traditional cosmology to other factors of the modern situation have no counterparts in the beliefs and practices of the world religions, they tend to appear as embarrassing additions to the life of converts (Horton 1974, 104).

### ***Islam in Igboland***

There abounds hot debate on the time of Islam penetration in Igboland. Doi (1984) asserts that it was a 19<sup>th</sup> century event, some pre-date it before 19<sup>th</sup> century while Uchendu (2010) argues it is a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon because the nineteenth century claim “challenges the historical account of the development of Islam in Igboland” (2010, 7).

According to Mbah (2015) the spread of Islam in Nigeria through Sokoto Dan Fodi jihad of 1804 was a trailblazer to the penetration of Islam to other areas previously untouched by Islam. However, the penetration of Islam into Igboland did not follow this practice. Islam penetrated into Igboland through ‘persuasion and absorption process’ (2015, 1). Mbah claims that Islam grew and was sustained in Igboland basically through the cultural and colonial state. The religion grew during the colonial period through trade and the colonial state perceived Islam as a ladder to colonizing the country. Rufai tracing the spread of Islam in Igboland concludes

....that Islam spread to Igboland through the contact of some Igbo merchants with their Nupe and Hausa-Fulani Muslim counterparts in early twentieth century. It is equally derivable that the religion did not make much progress in terms of its acceptance by the indigenous people of the area most of whom saw the religion as an alien practice among them (Rufai 2012, 147–48).

Uchendu, a great historian, differs from Mbah and Rufai. According to her three categories of persons were involved in introducing Islam in Igboland: a Muslim of Nupe origin known as Ibrahim Aduku who was adopted into Igboland by the Amufie village in Enugu, the migrant hunters from Hausa land and Yoruba who were invited by the Igbo native farmers to ward off elephants that destroyed their crops and the Northern Nigerian soldiers’ presence in Igboland to subdue them to British rule (Uchendu 2010, 210). However, she posits that “the main figure connected with the introduction of Islam into Nsukka Division was Ibrahim Aduku, a horse trader well known by his last name” (2010, 9). We may conclude that Northerners were not responsible for the spread of Islam in Igboland (as some claim); rather Igbo merchants who came in contact with Muslims through trade accepted the religion then returned and introduced it to their community.

### ***Conversion: Interdisciplinary Perspective***

Conversion has become complex in the twentieth century and has attracted interest from various disciplines of study. The term ‘conversion’ has a different meanings to different religions “though it was usually thought of as an issue within Christianity, where the acceptance of Jesus as the only way is primary” (Lamb, 1999, p. 2) . Nock defines conversion as

The reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right. It is seen at its fullest in the positive response of a man to the choice set before him to the prophetic religion (Nock A. D, 1998, p. 7).

Conversion, Taylor argues, simply means “moving away from an inferior to a superior tradition (in the eyes of the convert and of those in the receiving tradition but not in the eyes of the giving tradition)” (Lamb & Bryant, 1999, p. 36). Taylor’s definition sounds pretty good but its weakness is found in what the converter ‘moves’ into- ‘tradition’ he or she considers superior. The word ‘moves’ does not imply a reorientation. James captures certain aspects of conversion in his definition:

To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance, are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities (James, 2012, p. 186).

The strength of James' position is that divine encounter is needed to bring about moral change which is not reflected in Nock's and Taylor's. There is divine and human side of conversion which is called passive and active conversion (Malony, 1988, p. 69). I appreciate Orji's definition as "a total and radical reorientation of one's life to God (not religion), that one surrenders, not only oneself, but also one's unadmitted deepest pretence to absolute personal autonomy" He states that conversion "is embracing what is good, true, noble, and truly humanizing. It is a yes to the mystery of God that finds practical expression in love of one's neighbour, ensuring that one loves unconditionally the way God would have us love (Orji, 2007, pp. 54–55). However, in my own opinion conversion is change from one religion to a new religion. This change may just be adhesion (accepting the outward duties of the religion but not the spirit) but with time it could lead to transformation or intensification of beliefs and practice of the new religion or lead to breaking away into another different religion altogether.

Conversion study is multifaceted, complex, and dynamic that no single disciplinary focus is sufficient to explain it. "The topic of religious conversion requires the resources of various disciplines in order to understand the multiple factors and dimensions that intersect in religious and spiritual phenomena" (Rambo & Farhadian, 2014, p. 12).

### *Historians*

Historians earlier perceived religious conversion as a gradual event, but recently extended their scope of understanding to include an instantaneous and sudden event as well (Baer 2014, 25). Though conversion can be both gradual and instantaneous, most conversion scholars argue it's more of a gradual process than it is sudden. Historians argue that conversion is not "totalizing" or complete. This means that no conversion is completely total because the person converting to a new religion might convert to a different belief and practice while still holding some of their old beliefs and practices. Baer discussed four ways historians describe conversion: acculturation, adhesion or hybridism and syncretism, transformation and turn to piety.

### *Anthropology*

Anthropologists of religious conversion deal with "religious conversion or religious change. They identify and analyze the main factors in conversion process of people changing their religion" (Gooren, 2014, p. 84). They consider how religious change affect daily life of the converts, "examine the reasons and motives for cultural changes which become obvious in the behaviour of a person and attempts to draw a conclusion as to the conversion which has taken place beforehand" (Rink, 2007, p. 29). Süss and Pitzer-Reyl (1996) demonstrate how converting to a new religion affects the everyday life of the convert:

The acceptance of a new religion leads to a considerable change of everyday behavior. A change of diet, a change of clothing style and the observation of a different rhythm in the daily routine which is now shaped by religious observances are frequently the consequences of a conversion. Turning away from the original religion causes the connection to the old culture that was shaped by this religion, to become more and more fragile (cited by Rink 2007, 29).

### *Sociology*

Sociology of religious conversion studies "the social environment of converts and the resulting changes in their personality" (Rink, 2007, p. 26). In essence what are the factors within the social context of the individual that influence conversion to another belief or religion? They focus on the question 'why', 'what', 'how', and 'for what purpose of a conversion. Many sociologists like (Lofland and Stark 1965, 865-875; Rambo 1992, 159-177; Gerlach and Hine 1970, 111-37; Lofland and Skonovd 1981, 373-384; Yang and Abel 2014, 142; etc) provided various answers to the above questions based on their various studies.

### *Psychology*

Religious conversion for psychologists "initially seemed to be seen as an event, a specific moment when someone came to a point of faith." This kind of conversion is considered valid only "if the person experienced a crisis that was relieved by a dramatic conversion" (Paloutzian 2014, 211). Psychologists hold that conversion occurs if a person experiences negative psychological conditions such as "a mixture of anxiety, depression, guilt, aimlessness,

doubt, unhappiness, and related feelings. If this state is sufficiently intense, a person will be motivated, maybe driven, to seek a solution to the crisis” (cited by Paloutzian 2014, 212). Some psychologists termed this as a predisposing condition.

Anthropologists, historians, sociologists, and psychologists have therefore continued to grapple with the essence and nature of religious conversion. This indicates that conversion phenomenon is a complex one and no single discipline adequately explains it.

### ***Conversion Motifs***

Lofland and Skonovd (1981, 373-384) developed a conversion motifs theory used to study conversion motifs of individuals to a different religion. This theory stipulates that six motifs influence conversion: 1) Intellectual- the potential convert begins with individual and private investigation about the new religion through reading books, watching television, attending lectures. 2) Mystical - this conversion motif is dramatic, sudden and induced by voices and visions. This is what some scholars call “born again”, Damascus Road experience, “Pauline”, “evangelical”, etc. 3) Experimental- the prospective convert takes a pragmatic ‘show me’ attitude, ready to give the process a try, but withholding judgment for a considerable length of time after taking up the life-style of the fully committed participant and making significant sacrifices. 4) Affectional- this motif’s thesis is that personal attachments or strong liking for practicing believers is central to the conversion process. In other words, “personal experience of being loved, nurtured, and affirmed by a group are central to the conversion” (Mehmedoglu and Kim 2003, 124). 5) Revivalist- this motif refers to managed or manipulated ecstatic arousal in a group or collective context that has transforming effect on the individual. 6) Coercive- this “entails an extremely high degree of external pressure over a relatively long period of time, during which there is intense arousal of fear and uncertainty, culminating in empathetic identification and even love”(Lofland and Skonovd 1981a, 383).

### **Procedure**

This research is based on the analysis of the interviews conducted in different parts of Igboland with 30 Igbo. The sample consists of 23 males and 7 females who were contacted through the Chief Imams, referrals by interviewed converts, and missionaries. Before the interview, the interviewees were told that the information they provide would be used for this research. With their permission, I conducted tape-recorded interviews with the individual converts for periods ranging from 45 minutes to 2 hours.

### **Results and Discussion/Findings**

#### ***Socio-demographic Factor***

*Gender:* Of the 30 converts interviewed, 23 were males and 7 were females. The discrepancy in the number of the gender is most likely as a result of the method used in selecting participants. The interviews were conducted during Ramadan and in the mosque before and after prayers and fewer women than men joined in. Also, those referred to me by the Chief Imams and few other referrals were mostly men. Furthermore, most of the Igbo Muslim women encountered are indigenous Igbo Muslims while my research targets converts to Islam.

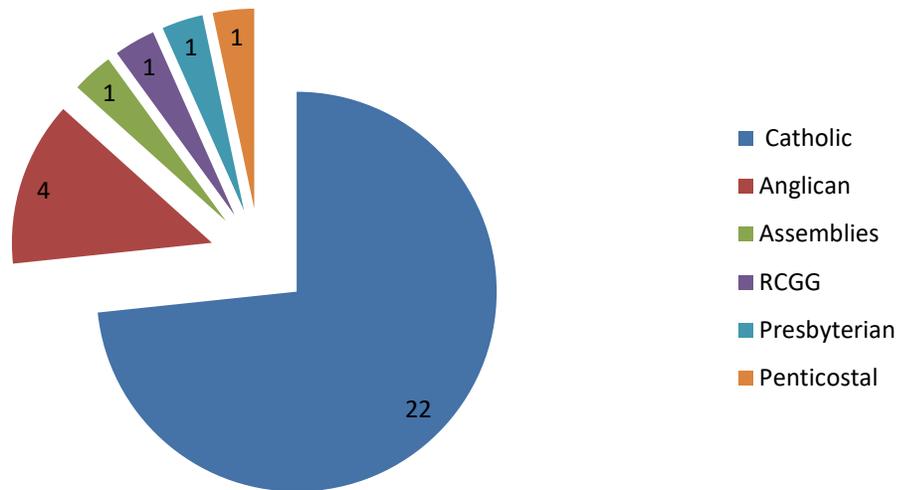
*Educational background:* Majority of them are educated while very few have limited or no education. This is evidenced from their educational background. 1 PhD holder, 6 Graduate degree holders, 14 Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination holders, 1 Junior Secondary School holder (JSS3), 2 First School Leaving Certificate holders (FSLC), 3 with no educational qualification, and 3 who did not specify their educational qualification.

*Occupation:* The converts were gainfully employed by the government, self-employed in different businesses, and trades except two converts that were students and 5 retirees. They had a means of livelihood and provided for themselves as well as their dependants. Their occupation ranged from business, tailoring, apprentice, Imams, students, civil servants, retirees, teachers, drivers, farmers, medical doctor, P.R.O Islamic community, and mechanic. The 5 retirees lived satisfactorily through farming, pension, and provision from their children. The apprentice (1 convert) was married thus her husband catered for her.

*Marital status:* 22 converts were married, 6 unmarried, 1 engaged while one did not specify his marital status.

*The Religious backgrounds of the Converts:* Of the 30 converts, 22 were from Roman Catholic, 4 Anglican, 1 Assemblies, 1 Redeemed Christian Church of God, 1 Presbyterian, and 1 Pentecostal.

**Figure 1: Church Affiliation**



As noted in table 1, the religious background of the converts was Christianity. 28 of the 30 converts claimed to have been practicing Christians prior to conversion while 2 reported that they were not practicing Christians prior to conversion. These converts were categorized into three categories: those who claimed to have been weak and nominal while in Christianity, those who reported to have been committed Christians prior to conversion, and those who stated to have been young prior to conversion, thus, knew little about Christianity.

The first category (14 converts) was those who considered themselves weak and nominal prior to conversion. These converts were nominal Christians who attended church on Sundays only and not serious with the activities of the church. Religion, for them, was merely something called Christianity, Islam or Hinduism but they became transformed after their conversion to Islam. The following statement by a convert illustrated their nominalism.

I was a member of Anglican Church; that is where I was baptized. I was born and brought up in that church as I found my parents, though they were not committed. They were not committed but any time there was any festivity in the church they would invite my father and he would go but on Sundays we did go there and worshipped. (Convert 25)

For this category, conversion means transformation, i.e., “taking of a new way of life in place of the old... a deliberate turning from indifference, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right” (Nock 1998, 7). Transformation occurs in two ways: either turning to piety within the religion one adheres to or exchanging the beliefs or practices of his/her religion to another. For these Igbo converts, their transformation did not occur within Christianity but in a different religion – Islam. This seems to indicate that transformation can occur in any religion other than in Christianity. This transformation is evidenced in their changed lifestyles and commitment to God via praying five times a day, obeying the Qur’an, participating in Ramadan; change in their attitudes, habits and behaviour.

The second category is those (13 converts) that considered themselves committed Christians while in Christianity. They had clear understanding of evangelistic perception of what it is to be a Christian and had even accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They equally attended church regularly including weekly services and were baptized (infant baptism). They received Eucharist, participated in the activities of the church, contributed

towards the projects of the church and belonged to one or two groups in the church. One male convert taught catechism, and was being trained to become a Reverend father. These converts (except two male converts) became disenchanted as well as disillusioned and changed to Islam. Their disillusionment was not with the theological beliefs or practices of Christianity but with the attitude and behaviour of some Christians and pastors. A convert stated his disenchantment with the church thus:

Then they (Christians) believe that Jesus is their Lord and personal Saviour and that He is the Son of God. So that as a Christian you need to believe in Jesus and as well be born again. Yeah, I believed in that day and was in the intercessory arm of the church (Convert 22).

For these Igbo converts conversion meant and means transformation – exchanging their Christian beliefs and practices to another religion, Islam, because the same dedication, commitment, and adherence they exhibited in Christianity they are exhibiting in Islam. They observe and obey Qur'an teachings, observe the Ramadan, engage in da'wah, serve as Chief Imams, pray regularly, etc. Thus, their conversion seems a carryover of their commitment from Christianity to Islam: no new transformation occurred. The only change is just the exchange of belief and practice to a different religion. The converts' rejection of their parents' religion did not imply rejection of their belief in God because they converted to another religious alternative that still believes in God.

The third category is those (3 converts) that considered themselves young when they were Christians, therefore, knew little or nothing about Christianity. A convert reported that "when I was a Christian I would say it was during my childhood though I was not a stubborn or rebellious person right from that time". Another stated thus:

When my parents were Christians (still are) that time I did not know much, I was still a young growing boy. So, I will not talk much concerning Christians. That time I was about 14 years. At least a child of about 14 years that time knows nothing, not that he knows nothing but he knows nothing concerning religion (Convert 4).

For this category, conversion means the same thing as the first category above, transformation. They are now changed and transformed people just like their counterparts in category one above.

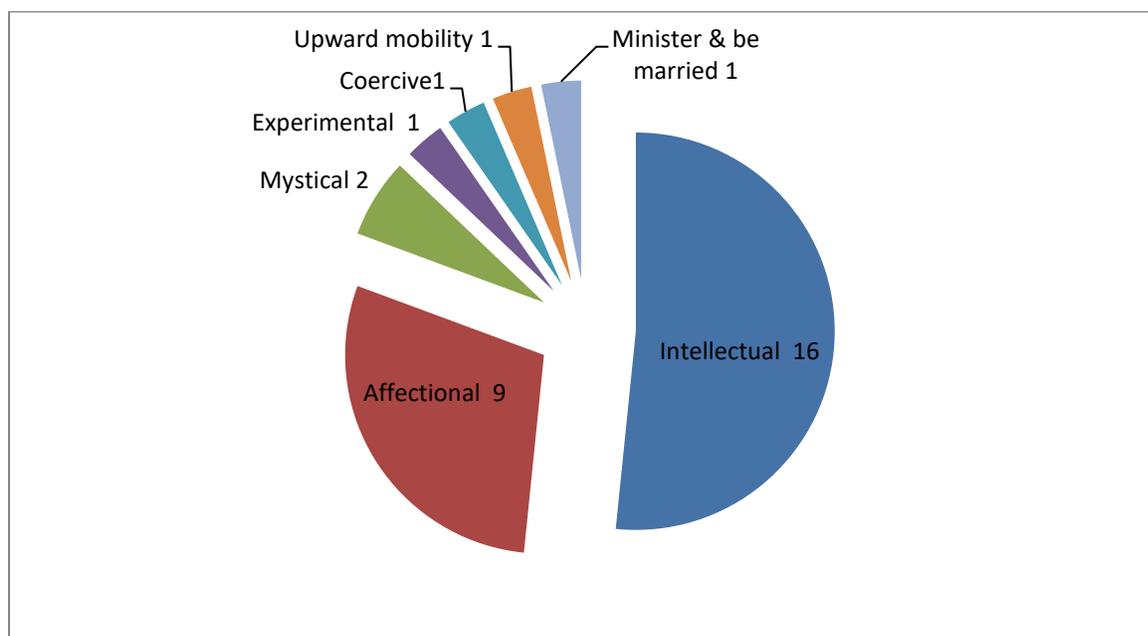
The narratives of the converts appear to insinuate that the effect of Christianity in Igbo society is reducing. Furthermore, the church seems to be losing members not to a different denomination but to different religion without being aware of this. Also they (the narratives) suggest that the church is losing its influence over the people.

In concluding the background analysis of these converts, there is no concrete conclusive demographic pattern to describe them because they came from different Christian affiliations, various parts of Igboland, had varied educational backgrounds, were involved in various professions as well as belonged to different gender. This finding reveals that conversion to Islam occurs across age, professions, gender, education, and religions.

### ***Factors Influencing Conversion to Islam in Igboland***

Lofland and Skonovd (1981) postulated six conversion motifs, as noted previously. These conversion motifs were appraised in this study and their applicability examined. Applying these conversion motifs to this study, the Igbo converts to Islam experienced all except revivalist. Intellectual and affectional were dominant while mystical, experimental and coercive were extremely uncommon. Two other reasons emerged that were not covered by Lofland and Skonovd's theory: upward mobility and a place to serve as minister and still get married. Table 5 below demonstrates this.

Figure 2: Factors influencing Igbo conversion to Islam



The intellectual motif was reported by 16 converts as reason for their conversion. They reported to have read Islamic books, materials, Qur'an and listened to preaching and discovered that Islam is reasonable, rational, and logical. Doctrinal issues such as the Sonship of Jesus (Jesus being the Son of God), the Trinity, original sin, mediatory role of Jesus, Bible being changed over time, contradictions in the Biblical accounts especially in the Gospels, division of the Bible into Old and New Testaments, Jesus being God, denominationalism in Christianity (they reported that in Islam you just have Muslims there is nothing like Anglican, Roman Catholic, Jehovah Witnesses, etc. When you report to be a Christian then you are asked which church? Is the church divided? They would ask) and God speaking to people in the Bible indirectly through authors (e.g., letter to the Philippians, Romans, etc). They perceived all these as irrational, unreasonable and illogical. Islam on the other hand, they stated, is reasonable, rational, and logical because it enables you understand that God is one not two, Qur'an incorruptible, God speaks directly to you in the Qur'an, you worship God straight not through anybody, explains how God cannot have a son, oneness of Allah, and the teachings of Islam are simple and reasonable.

You know, the New Testament does not teach completely how Christ came to that Divinity state but the Qur'an helped us understand that Christ's divinity is just like a messenger like all other prophets. So when I saw it, I realized that there is a difference there. We in Christianity we are almost worshipping Christ indirect way because in every prayer we say in the name of Jesus which in Qur'an it is not like that. Qur'an starts everything with the name of God, bismillahi, in the name of God the most gracious the most merciful, that is how we start. This thing touched me very well and I said I better follow that way. (Convert 7)

The second item is the hypocritical life of some Christians and pastors. 5 (4 males and 1 female) converts asserted that their conversion to Islam was due to the attitude of Christians such as false accusation of embezzling church funds, hypocrisy, refusal to assist the needy, lies, maltreatment, greed, poisoning, flamboyant burial rites, refusal to bury the deceased who is not up to date in his/her dues payment, excessive demand of money by the church, flamboyant lifestyle of pastors, usurping of church members, and the prosperity gospel in the church. A convert reported that she abdicated from Christianity "because of the way the Christians treated my husband, because of the Christians' attitude towards my husband" (Convert 5). Another asserted that,

If you like attend church 100 times per day and fail to pay your dues when you are in need they will forget you. If you like to participate in the building of the church and other activities but if you fail to

pay your dues they will forget other good things you have done in the church. They are demanding dues even if it is N200.00 that is contributed its mandatory that you will pay yours, they don't care whether you have or not. What a rich man pays is what a poor person will pay. When a Christian dies, the record book will be brought to find out if the deceased was up-to-date in his payment of dues and they know the deceased was a poor person. This deceased person was committed in the church and participated in all the activities of the church but if this deceased person has unpaid debt the church will refuse to bury the remains. It is now the animists, traditional people who will come to bury the person. Is it good? The traditional people will say, we can't leave the corpse since the church won't bury because he was not paying his due, let us bury him. (Convert 15)

The third issue the converts mentioned was the ethical, moral, and consistent life of Muslims as stipulated in the Quran. 4 converts reported that they were convinced to embrace Islam due to the lifestyle of Muslims demonstrated in their seriousness to the things of God (praying five times daily), neatness and purity (this purity is outward cleanness like washing oneself before and after sexual intercourse. This lifestyle also includes abstinence from the following: drinking alcoholic drinks and eating of pork, touching the Qur'an and entering the mosque during menstruation. It also involves washing oneself after defecation, ablution before prayer, their fear of God, their love for one another, truthfulness, and good character. One convert said, "I started observing some characters in their lives which were quite different from mine; they were not living as sinful as I was. After a while I started liking Muslims, no one preached to me, it was just their characters that influenced me to join Islam" (convert 10). Another convert posited,

It's just that I saw the seriousness when it comes to the things of God compared to we Christians' seriousness to the things of God. Because in Islam what I observed is this; someone will leave whatsoever thing he is doing - your business, your job, whatsoever thing you are doing at that point in time. Whenever you hear the call for prayer you will rush down to the mosque to make sure that you give what belongs to God at that point in time. But in Christendom there are people that they know they are to go to church around 7:00 o'clock in the morning and maybe close by 12:00noon, you see some people coming 11:50. (Convert 20)

As noted above the converts in this category did not experience any predisposing tension, crisis, and trauma, spiritual condition to know God better, social pressure or emotional feeling of hopeless or economic situation that drove them into conversion to Islam. Rather, it was a conscious and intentional decision after a long period of study of Islamic materials, Qur'an inclusive, a careful observation of the character of Muslims as compared to the Christians' and the church. There was no external force or enticement or inducement involved in their decision to convert to Islam. This finding seems to negate the popular assertion that the Igbo are converting to Islam due to the economic benefit or material enticement. Majority of the converts were established in their professions and businesses prior to their conversion to Islam thus their monetary or economic situation did not play a role in their conversion. This finding also indicates that the Igbo are delving into other religions other than Christianity. Furthermore, this finding appears to negate Okorocho's assertion that the Igbo embrace religion that will usher them into a viable life (increment of social status and better life) because these converts to Islam were also professional in their occupations, established, and married with children prior to conversion. It is true that this motive was present in the Igbo conversion to Christianity but it appears absent in these converts explanations of why they converted.

The second factor for the Igbo conversion to Islam is affectional motif. 9 converts (4 males and 5 females) reported that their reason for conversion was affectional. Their decision to convert was influenced by opinions, lifestyle, and demands by friends and neighbours who were already practicing Muslims. For the four males, the kindness, love, and care from Muslims as well as healing received from a Muslim endeared them to Islam. For instance, Okafor with his wife returned to his home town after the demise of his father to assume the inheritance of his late father. Being the only son left with lots of land and property, he was poisoned. According to him, he vomited blood frequently which incapacitated him for four years. He tried both western and traditional medicines to no avail; he resigned to fate, waiting for death. A friend of his introduced him to a Muslim, who is an Alhaji from Southern part of Nigeria, residing in Igboland. This Alhaji assured Okafor that he would be cured through prayer and an appropriate day was fixed for the healing session. While in the house of the Alhaji, about 12 midnight the Alhaji woke Okafor up and began praying. Okafor said, "I never knew how Muslims prayed. He was hitting his head on the floor, kneeling down, standing up and I was just imitating whatever he did" (Convert 29). At 3:00a.m sharp the Alhaji wrote something on the black board from the Qur'an which he washed off with water. This water

was poured into a star beer bottle reaching only half of the bottle and Okafor was asked to drink it for 40 days. He was healed at the completion of the medication.

The 5 female converts in this category converted before marriage in order to marry their spouses. One convert was engaged to marry a Muslim man; this engagement occurred after her conversion. This is in accordance with the Qur'an teaching that Muslims do not engage in marital relationship with a non-believer unless the potential spouse becomes a Muslim. "*Do not marry Unbelieving women (idolaters), until they believe: A slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though she allures you. Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe: A man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever even though he allure(s) you ...*" (Q. 2: 221). Islam is very strict, tight, and uncompromising on mixed marriage. This strictness is high for the non-Muslim man who must convert in order to marry a Muslim woman. This challenges the popular tradition that a woman leaves her religion and adopts that of the husband. But in Islam, the reverse is the case, as the non-Muslim man must renounce his original religion and accept Islam before he can marry a Muslim lady. This is due to the Islamic emphasis on the role of the man, as the head of the family; he determines the direction of the home. So, allowing their daughters marry a non-Muslim man means the lady will reject her faith and embrace that of the husband which Islam does not tolerate. However, in this study, those in this category were women and their conversion was therefore associated with marrying a Muslim partner. This may also have been possible because of the traditional subordinate role of women and the Igbo custom that a woman has no religion until she is married. I observe this customary belief in some converts' narrative. For example a convert said, "I got married and joined my husband in Islam. When you are married you follow your husband to his church you don't join another church. So I joined him in his religion" (Convert 1). Another said, "He is the one I joined to embrace Islam. You know that women don't have a choice; it is your husband that you will follow." (Convert 24)

In the case of the Mystical motif, 2 (males) converts reported to have undergone a mystical experience before they embraced Islam. One participant reported seeing Jesus in a dream seating on a Camel practicing Islam.

It was Jesus Christ that was shown to me in my dream. I was in the dream in my corridor, I saw flowers everywhere and Jesus Christ was in the sitting room performing sallah. He was performing sallah (ablution) and reading the tesbie (prayer bead). This tesbie he was reading was like the skin of a ram. So Jesus Christ showed me that he is not a Christian but a Muslim. It was God who called me to join Islam. (Convert 11)

The second convert narrated having seen Mohammad in his dream frowning at him for a possessing rosary and Catholic prayer book. This encounter did not compel him to convert but after the death of his father, two elderly Muslim men passed by his house and inquired of the burial. Thereafter they exclaimed allahukubari three times and walked away; immediately he decided to become a Muslim.

I was just in front of my house and these two elderly men passed by my house and said; you are back, you are back. May God help me, may God help me, and may God help me. They finished this prayer and moved on. When they finished this prayer and moved on I cannot explain again, I cannot explain anything to you again that happened except that I went to one one Hausa, his name is Mallam One. I told him that I want to enter Islam. We drove to TWO's home and he asked me if my father is a Muslim, I said no. Is your mother a Muslim? I said no, he asked me what I saw in Islam that influenced my decision. I said that it is because I want to enter Islam. (Convert 22)

Though only men reported this conversion type, however, relationship between gender and mystical motif is non-significant in this study. This appears to prove Lofland and Skonovd's assertion that "little or no social pressure is involved rather the convert is even likely alone at the time of the actual event" (Lofland and Skonovd 1981, 377). Both converts were alone at the time of the event and no social pressure was involved.

The Experimental motif was very rare in this study as just one (male) interviewee reported having experienced it. According to him, when he saw a messenger in the office with the Islamic prayer bead, he was curious and enquired its meaning. The Muslim messenger patiently explained what the prayer bead is and how to use it. This interviewee wanted to give it a try and today he is a committed Muslim.

The Coercive motif was also present in this study: one (male) convert alluded his conversion to coercion. The convert is a University student who shared a room with a Muslim friend. After their relocation to the mosque the friends of his roommate kept pestering him to embrace Islam. He initially objected but as they continued pressurizing him about it he decided to embrace the religion.

My roommate and I lived off campus which is far from the University so I began making plans to come down to school here to reduce expenses. So my friend told me that he is a Muslim, why not come down

here (central mosque) so we can stay in the mosque and from the mosque we can search for apartment. So I consented, he said he is not forcing me to embrace his religion and we moved into the central mosque. Many of his Muslim brothers were forcing me to convert into Islam I said no. So they were like trying to push me for roughly a month and then one day I just decided to make up my mind and embraced the religion. So that is how I started. (Convert 30)

The Revivalist motif was not brought up by any convert. There were two other reasons not covered by Lofland and Skonovd's theory but which was identified in this study: upward mobility and adequate place to serve God and still marry. One (male) convert stated that his conversion to Islam was an opportunity to improve his status quo. He stated that there are opportunities you may not have because you are not a Muslim. "The attraction for me is that, me also I wanted to use that system also because I went to that North to learn work and it is because you are a Muslim that you can sit with somebody that is Muslim. If you are a Christian you will not feel comfortable sitting with them." (Convert 4) Nnorom's (2003) research among the Igbo of Afikpo mentioned that the desire for status quo is a strategy Islam adopts in Igboland. This present study seems to apply to Nnorom's finding.

One male convert cited as his conversion motif, the process of looking for an adequate place to serve God and still marry. He was a staunch Catholic brought up by an Irish missionary with the desire to become a Reverend father, but his mother wanted him to bear her grand children. In order to grant his mother's wish, he embraced Islam where he could serve as a minister and marry as well. Today, he is an Islamic preacher with a family.

What influenced my decision in embracing Islam is because I want a way that I will serve my God and to be recognized as a Reverend Minister which I did. I have my ID card because I belong to an organization known as the council of Ulama of Nigeria, am their field worker in KK. It was only by self conviction that took me to Islam because since I could not be in the reverendhood and I need some other place where I can serve my God and to be recognized then marry and bear issues like my mother told me. (Convert 17)

The conversion of the converts in this sample was gradual; it did not occur suddenly; rather, a considerable period of months or years of study and reasoning were involved; often aided by Muslim friends. A significant number of the converts reported to have articulated their decision, considered the advantages and disadvantages, and consciously studied the religion over time before embracing it.

Yang and Abel (2014) developed seven stages an individual must undergo for conversion to occur. The first three are termed predisposing condition (when people turn to religion for lack of something, absolute deprivation, poverty or bad health) while the last four termed situational contingencies (encountering a member of the religion, having a pre-existing bond with a convert in the religion, neutral or break attachment, exposure to intensive interaction). Many of the converts in this study had no predisposing condition; they experienced no spiritual distress or crisis. They were neither deprived or in abject poverty but one convert had a prolonged illness that drove him to seek help from a Muslim. Though the predisposing condition was unobvious in these findings, situational contingencies were obvious. This supports Lofland and Stark's (1965, 865-875) claim that complete conversion will not occur without the situational contingencies despite how predisposed the seeker may be.

## **Conclusion**

The overriding purpose of this study was to identify the reasons the Igbo converts to Islam give for their conversion. To achieve this purpose, interviews were conducted with 30 Igbo converts to Islam residing in various parts of Igboland. The following conclusion can be drawn from the findings:

- 1) In general, the Igbo converts to Islam were well educated and appeared to have been successful in their business and jobs prior to conversion.
- 2) In most cases their first contact with Islam was through friends, colleagues, neighbors, relatives, and spouses.
- 3) All the converts described themselves as Christians prior to conversion but their commitment to the religion differed.
- 4) 17 converts considered themselves young, weak and nominal while in Christianity but became transformed after conversion to Islam.
- 5) Thirteen claimed to have been transformed and committed while in Christianity but disenchanted and disillusioned with the attitude of some Christians and pastors, decided to change to Islam exchanging their beliefs, practices and commitment.
- 6) Intellectual and affectional motifs were the most motivating factors for Igbo conversion to Islam.

## Recommendations

The church in Igboland must be aware of this emerging trend in the region: Islam is penetrating Igboland through Igbo not Hausa. She should wake up from her slumber, nominalism, prosperity Gospel, and unnecessary financial dues imposed on the members. To accomplish this, the church needs to return to the teaching of the Bible, discipleship, and mentorship. She should eliminate and abolish the dues imposed on the members especially as such dues are linked to the church's refusal to bury their deceased (members) or give them succour in times of need, sickness, and lack.

Many people popularly claim that the Igbo who are converting to Islam do so for the financial and economic gain so their conversion is not taken seriously. But this is a fallacy that keeps the church from taking this phenomenon seriously because she erroneously assumes that those Igbo converts to Islam will return to Christianity after benefiting from Islam. This research shows that a majority of the converts were already educated, gainfully employed, had families, and settled in life prior to conversion. Thus, their conversion was not influenced by any of these; but rather by the rationality of Islam, negative lifestyle of Christians, and financial demands from the church.

There is an urgent need for indigenization and acculturation of the gospel in Igboland, i.e., Igbo ways of life must replace Western ways of life. The gospel presented by the early missionaries came with Western baggage and modern day preachers have continued in that pattern. For this to occur, pastors need thorough Biblical training and its relevance to Igbo culture, beliefs, practices, and worldview. They need to contextualize the Gospel in a way that is appropriate to the Igbo people so they can own the gospel. Both the gospel and Christianity need to be culturally integrated for it to have a lasting impart in Igboland.

Christians as children and adults need to know what they really believe and be good disciples. This can be accomplished by the church intentionally teaching members the doctrines of the Bible, leading them to trust in Jesus alone for eternal life, discipleship programs and mentorship.

The Igbo people should make burial simple to its bear minimum, so that the poor can also bury their dead with dignity. There should be a standardized, acceptable, and affordable way of burying the dead that the community commits to. For example, the dead must be buried within 3-7 days of demise, the bereaved throws no party or celebration to feed sympathizers; rather sympathizers should come with food and cash to support the bereaved.

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