

## **KING JAJA AND CHRISTIANITY IN OPOBO KINGDOM OF THE EASTERN NIGER DELTA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *King Jaja and Christianity in Opobo Kingdom of the Eastern Niger Delta is part of our reaction to the notion that King Jaja was opposed to Christianity. The article traces the activities of missionaries in Bonny before the Bonny Civil War in 1869 which led to King Jaja's founding of Opobo kingdom. In Opobo, King Jaja supported Chief Epelle, an evangelist, to return to Opobo to continue the work of evangelism. This paper specifically looks at the missionary activities of Bishop Crowther and King Jaja who felt he was biased, favoured the Manilla Pepple faction of the royal family against the Annie Pepple group. The paper opines that it was for this reason that King Jaja turned his back against Bishop Crowther and his version of Christianity. This paper uses both oral history and published works in Christianity in Bonny and other parts of the Niger Delta to support the argument that King Jaja was a Christian.*

**KEYWORDS:** King Jaja, Christianity, Opobo Kingdom, Eastern, Niger Delta

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Christianity in Opobo cannot be discussed without going back to Bonny where it started in the Niger Delta. The kind of Christianity Bishop Crowther represented was at variance to the socio-cultural practices of the people of Niger Delta. It was indifferent to unity, peace and sustainable economic development, particularly in Bonny during this period. Economic development was one reason many communities welcomed the missionaries in their areas at that time, believing that the new religion had the capacity to encourage development. Accordingly, Joseph (2015) observes that by 1848, William Dappa Pepple had invited the united Presbyterian Church of Scotland (UPCS) which had established in Calabar in 1846, to establish in Bonny. The reason for the invitation was the belief that the mission work would positively impact on the economic and political needs of Bonny at the time rather than on the religion of the people. The King was concerned only on how the missionaries would make Bonny more prosperous. In essence, the ideological aspects of the Christian religion were of little importance to the majority of Bonny.

Bonny Kingdom exhibited traces of hostility from the reign of King William Pepple in the early 1860s. This hostility showed cracks amongst the chiefs, particularly the chiefs of the two royal factions of Fubara Manilla Pepple and Opubo Annie Pepple. The politics of the period did not help matters. As King William Dappa Pepple ascended the throne, both his biological father's house, the Opubo Annie Pepple house, and his traditional father's house, Fubara Manilla Pepple, desperately claimed him as their own. The fact of his parentage was that King Fubara Manilla Pepple

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traditionally married King William Dappa Pepple's mother but the union did not produce any child. However, when King Opubo Annie Pepple ascended the throne, he took King William Dappa Pepple's mother as one of his wives and had King William Dappa Pepple. From this time onwards, there arose a deep seated hatred for King William Dappa Pepple by the Opubo Annie Pepple group because William supported the Fubara Manilla Pepple. The two factional leaders that emerged from the two royal factions, Chief Oko Jumbo of Fubara Manilla Pepple and Chief Jack Jaja Annie Pepple of the Opubo Annie Pepple group refused to mend fences. They encouraged the existing hostility which adversely affected and tore the Bonny kingdom apart. This was the origin of the political division between the Fubara Manilla Pepple and the Annie Pepple. This was also the situation when King William Dappa Pepple returned in 1861. The Annie Pepple group led by Chief Jack Jaja went the opposite direction and held on to the traditional religion and refused to identify with the Church Missionary Society (CMS) led by Bishop Crowther. The gathering storm culminated in the Bonny Civil War of 1869. According to Alagoa and Fombo (1972:52), Jaja led the Annie Pepple group out of Bonny to Opubo.

Tasie and Wotogbe-Weneka affirm that "the indigenous religion has always been with the people of Rivers State. The level of sophistication... notwithstanding, a critical observation of the religious attitude of most people today will somehow reveal much influences and legacies of the indigenous religion of the people (Tasie and Wotogbe-Weneka 2002:285). This opinion tends to suggest that the people simultaneously tolerate and practice both religions.

An advocacy initiated by Thomas Fowell Buxton encouraged Africans to return to their country after slave trade was abolished and most of them returned to Sierra Leone as liberated slaves. From Sierra Leone they spread to Badagery and later to Abeokuta. It was from Abeokuta that the missionaries entered other parts of Yoruba towns and to the rest of Nigeria.

One of the roles of religion, including Christianity in society is its predominant predominance influence on the people. Religion is therefore meant to ensure the continued peace and order in society so as to enhance man's capabilities and wellbeing (Uyanga 2019:9). Where this is lacking, then religion is bound to face attack. The Bonny Kingdom of Jaja's time had multiple political, economic and social problems which he hoped Christianity would have helped to solve. Instead of helping to solve these problems, he observed that those who brought the new religion were biased in favour of the Fubara Manilla Pepple faction of the ruling class in the city-state. In condemning this kind of partiality, Bola Ige noted "I am satisfied in my mind that if the society is fair and just, it is more likely that the individuals who live in it will live fairly and justly". This was Bola Ige's reaction after the annulment of June 12 election in 1993 by General Badamosi Babangida, the Head of State (Oduyoye 2014: 268)

### **The Early Contact with the Portuguese**

During the early trade contact, between Bonny and the Portuguese, the Kings of Bonny were allowed to maintain their traditional names. In the list of Kings of Bonny by A.G. Leonard, Webber and G.I. Jones quoted in Alagoa and Fombo (1972: 89) they all bore native names as follows: Ndoli-Okpara, Opu-Amakuba, Alagbariye, Asimini, Queen Kambasa, Kumalu, Opu Dappa, Amakiri, Apia, Wari, Awusa. It was during the reign of Awusa that the British traders identified him as one who goes on frequent holidays to the countryside and gave him the name, Holliday, which was corrupted to Halliday (Alagoa and Fombo, 1972). Perekule, Fubara, Opubo, and Bereibibo were the

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native names of the early kings. However, by the time the British increased their presence in Bonny, they began to give English names to their customers. By the early 18th century, Perekule became Pepple, Fubara added Manilla and Opubo added Hano, corrupted to Annie. Fubara in particular was identified with the Manilla traditional currency.

### **King William Dappa Pepple and Christianity in Bonny**

King William Dappa Pepple applied for the missionaries to come and establish a mission in Bonny. This invitation first brought Rev Hope Waddell from Calabar in 1846 to Bonny. During his second visit in 1849, King William Dappa Pepple signed an undertaking to stop human sacrifice and to receive missionaries and teachers. Although a site was offered, nothing concrete came out of this first phase of the mission work in Bonny (Alagoa and Fombo 1972:25-26). By 1861, King William Dappa Pepple returned a changed man following his conversion to Christianity during his exile to London. He immediately applied for a Christian missionary to be sent to Bonny. By 1864, Revd Henry Venn, connected the newly Bishop Ajayi Crowther who had just been consecrated by the Church Missionary Society to proceed to Bonny. Bishop Crowther wasted no time in building a school and a chapel and by 29th April 1865, they moved to their permanent site. Jaja saw the kind of Christianity practiced by the missionary King William Dappa Pepple invited to Bonny as a direct trait to unity and peace of the kingdom. The Christianity openly attacked the socio-cultural practices of the people, destroying the traditional and cultural structures on which the wealth of the Kingdom depended.

However, since the Church Missionary Society established their mission in Bonny in 1864, Jaja had watched with dismay how Bishop Crowther's missionary agent in Bonny sexually defiled an Ibani girl (Ayandele 1980), an aberration in Ibani culture, as well as Bishop Crowther's bias in favour of the Manilla Pepple group against Annie Pepple faction. Interestingly, all these contributed to why Jaja was sceptical about Crowther, whom according to Ayandele (1980), he believed, was a "bad man" like his missionary agents.

Meanwhile the relationship between the Fubara Manilla Pepple and Opubo Annie Pepple had gradually tended toward hostility right from the period of Chief Maduka (Madu) Annie Pepple. The hostility robbed off on both Chiefs Alali and Ioli who were Chief Madu's sons and successors. It was not surprising then that Chief Jack Jaja Annie Pepple also inherited the enmity. It is pertinent at this point to recall that in January 1865, before the arrival of Bishop Crowther in April, the Manilla Pepple caused the Annie Pepple group to give up the so-called independent houses which were already allied to Chief Jaja who had been giving them loan and other financial assistance to boost their economic activities.

Four years after, another agreement followed on 20th January 1869, this time for the preservation of peace and unity in the kingdom. Article 3 of this agreement forbade either Manilla Pepple or Annie Pepple Houses to take any of their work-bars. Meanwhile, traditionally, the heads of the groups where those houses belonged or traded under were supposed to collect the work-bars. Because of the bad-blood already existing between Chief Jaja and the Manilla Pepple group, the latter went through all it took to deny Chief Jaja his entitlement of the work-bars. It was this protracted enmity that ignited the fire that led to his movement with his people out of Bonny to Opubo in 1869. For instance, King George Pepple declared Charles de Cardi persona non grata for assisting Chief Jaja's secession from Bonny. From then on, Chief Jaja separated himself from

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anything that had to do with both the King and the Manilla Pepple group. It was also King George Pepple who masterminded the 1865 Agreement which led to the signing away of the independent houses in Bonny from the Annie Pepple group. When the war ended, King George Pepple accused Charles de Cardi and Archbald Mac Eachan of frustrating the peace effort by promising Jaja of supply of ammunition and provisions. Jaja felt that Bishop Crowther was heavily biased in favour of the Manilla Pepple and for that reason would not have anything to do with their version of Christianity in Bonny. Although Cookey suggested that Jaja defended the deities against the encroachment of Christianity (Cookey 1974:48), this was doubtful. Rather, it was the kind of Christianity which Bishop Ajayi Crowther represented that Jaja recanted. King Jaja stoutly objected to the “CMS represented by Bishop Crowther” (Cookey 1974:97) but did not object to the CMS represented by the Europeans or the British Bishops, contrary to Bishop Crowther who was seen working openly with the Manilla Pepple party.

By the 19th century, the names which Ibani parents gave to their biological and adopted children began to reflect the acceptance of Christianity. In that order, the people of Bonny began to give English names to their children to show the extent of their involvement in the new religion. The super cargoes also started identifying their Opobo trading partners with English names: Finebone, Black Fubara, Strong face, Antonio, Tom Brown, Tobin, John Africa, Jack Tolofari, Allison, Captain Hart, Oko Jumbo, Banigo, Long John, Wilson, Finecountry, Bristol, Dublin Green, Brown (Buo), Wilcox, Dick (Tolofari), Jack Jaja Annie Pepple, Uranta, Annie Stewart, Legg Jack, Ogolo (Ogbunu), Cookey Gam, Jungo Manilla, Arthur Mac Pepple, Jacob John Tom Brown, Yellow John Tom Brown, Duke of Norfolk, and Cockeye Brown to mention a few.

Jaja had already become a Christian before the problem between his group and the Manilla Pepple group. The names he gave to his three children in Bonny could attest to that. He named his first son, Saturday, and his second son, Sunday and also named his adopted son, Thomas. Prince Saturday War Canoe House and Chief Thomas Jaja War Canoe House were created in Bonny before 1869. He named his big war canoe Queen and the other one ObyJack. He also employed an English man, Mr D.C. William as his secretary and Miss Emma Johnson as his steward who later became a school teacher to manage the school in Opobo. These British employees of King Jaja would not have been comfortable serving a pagan king. According to Cookey (1974:31-32), Jaja “possesses a shrewd intellect and a most retentive recollection. Indeed when it is remembered that without the assistance of the slightest education, he transacts business with thirteen vessels....” This assistance also came from his secretary, D.C. Williams and his personal assistant, Miss Emma Johnson. These two, put his thoughts into writing, recorded his trading activities and his foreign relations. Mr D.C. William, in particular, was signatory to most of the treaties concerning King Jaja’s foreign missions. To add to this, Mary Stone who was a government interpreter and one of the signatories to the 1892 Opobo compensation document also aided King Jaja in interpreting some of the treaties before he signed them (Cookey, 1974:176). This goes to show that it was simply not just his natural memory alone that did the work but the combined efforts of the brains he surrounded himself with. This further justify the claim that it was not just King Jaja’s “shrewd intellect and retentive recollection” that moved him above his contemporaries. According to Jones Jaja (2003: 222-223), it was Queen Osunju, the youngest wife of King Jaja, who was said to “have saved some vital documents relating to house histories” especially the box of treaty papers with the Europeans, which Jaja remembered halfway out of Bonny. He had ordered the boat to return to Bonny to retrieve the boxes when Osunju acclaimed, “My Lord, I have them. I am sitting on them”. This goes to show that King Jaja’s friends,

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trading partners, immediate family members and his workforce, including his secretary, D.C. William assisted him both in record keeping and recollections.

### **The Origin of Christianity in Opobo**

In 1873, King Jaja made the return of Chiefs Cookey and Oko Epelle a condition for his reconciliation with Bonny chiefs. Chief Oko Epelle was already an evangelist before 1873, when he returned to Opobo. According to Epelle (1953:26), Chief Oko Epelle erected within his compound a chapel and for the conduct of Divine Services he secured the services of a Sierra Leonian, Mr Bestman, assisted by two of his men, Daniel and James. To support the efforts of Chief Oko Epelle, King Jaja requested from his friend, Consul Hopkins, for an English missionary. Hopkins contacted Rev John Milum, F.R.G.S., the superintendent of Wesleyan Methodist Mission at Lagos who in 1879 visited him (Jaja) and was hospitably received. King Jaja expressed to Reverend J. Milum his willingness to provide a site for the mission station and to finance the inclusive cost of buildings and of a missionary. (Epelle 1953:28), (Jaja, S.O. 1991:93). Rev Milum explained to Jaja at Opobo: My objective is two-fold. To preach Christianity to you and your people believing it to be the Greater power to raise and strengthen a people and has been the power which has made England and other European nations generally greater and to educate your children so as to fit them to take high places in the advanced state of society which I hope will be found in the not distant future in your country. Our missionaries have nothing whatever to do trading or politics and in every way keep aloof from all things likely to compromise them in their sacred calling (Ayandele 1980).

In spite of these interactions, it is unknown why Wesleyan Mission was not established in Opobo at that period. However, Jaja's interactions with Rev. Milum buttressed the fact that Jaja and his people did not hate Christianity as long as its philosophy did not interfere with the developing socio-cultural, economic and political practices of the area. This was the same aspiration of many Bonny political elites when Christianity was introduced, and according to Finapiri (2001), it underscored why majority of Bonny people turned against their monarch and his family shortly after Jaja left Bonny with his Opubo House members to establish Opobo and prospered exceptionally. Without King Jaja's encouragement of Chief Oko Epelle and his Christian activities, he would not have been able to start a chapel in his compound which later grew into a full-fledged church, St Paul's Church, Opobo Town in 1904. King Jaja in encouraging Christianity imported and installed a medium sized bell in his Opuwari palace complex in 1877. He also requested and received from his British friends a big Bible in the same year named "Bible Opu" to buttress his belief and the immortalization of his ancestor, King Opubo Annie Pepple. In the same manner he named his Kingdom "Opubo Ama" which the British corrupted to Opobo Town. The following year, 1878, he imported and installed another bell, a bigger and giant bell, at the centre of Opobo town. He also encouraged his chiefs to import and install bells in their different compounds. For instance, Chief Shoo Peterside's bell is still present in his gula to date. Chief Ogolo's bell is still standing in his gula. Chief Waribo Uranta installed his own bell in 1904, the same year that St Paul's Church was inaugurated. Chief Cockeye and Chief Peter Cockeye imported and installed their bells which were said to be stolen and sold to a trader in Azuogu, Ndoki. These bells apart from emergency situations were used to call out house members for morning and evening prayers.



**Church Bell: King Jaja's Palace, (Opuwari).  
Erected by John Wilson Browne of  
Birmingham 1877**



**Church Bell: King Jaja  
(For the Community)**



**Church Bell: Chief Ogolo**



**Church Bell: Chief Waribo Uranta**



**Church Bell: Chief Peterside (Opobo)**

Similarly, in 1884 when Consul Hewett was moving round the lower Niger, signing protectorate treaty with the potentates, his encounter with King Jaja in Opobo was remarkable, especially as it concerned article VII of the protectorate treaty which Jaja and some of his chiefs signed on 19th December 1884. According to Cookey (1974), before Jaja signed the treaty, he ensured that article VII which has issues concerning Christian religion was properly framed to enhance peace and development in Opobo. Jaja stipulated and it was concurred that the word “missionaries” in Article VII should be qualified by the word “white”. Epelle continued by saying that Jaja’s attitude against a “black” missionary (and not against Christianity) delayed for long a visit to Opobo of any missionary of the Niger Delta Mission. And the article VII of that agreement read thus:

*All white ministers of the Christian religion shall be permitted to reside and exercise their calling within the territories of the aforesaid Kings and Chiefs, who hereby guarantee them full protection. All forms of religious worship and religious ordinances may be exercised within the territories of the aforesaid Kings and Chiefs and no hindrance shall be offered thereto* (S.O. Jaja, 1991:41).

According to Ayandele, of the many obstacles that deferred the missionary effort, by far the greatest was the opposition of the chiefs to the religious, political and social concomitants of missionary propaganda (24).

King Jaja was forty-three years old when Bishop Crowther arrived Bonny. Ayandele claimed that “King Jaja opposed the introduction of Christianity in Bonny in 1864 and when he had found his own town he informed even the white traders that he would never require their advice and that they should never stay overnight in his town”. He continued by saying that throughout his reign, “he refused to have missionaries in Opobo and did all in his power to oppose Christianity in the Niger Delta” (Ayandele 1969:24). But European records show that King Jaja had three Liverpool friends, Charles de Cardi, Mc Echen and Alexander, as advisers and trading partners. Whatever was held against King Jaja was generally speculative of his behaviour towards the new religion. According to Cookey, it is not known whether Jaja at this stage opposed Christianity for its own sake and because it threatened the fabric of the indigenous society or whether he was jealous of the monopoly which his opponents seemed to exercise over the new religion (Cookey 1974:61). He noted that Jaja was not really opposed to Christianity and would have been willing to see it established in Opobo...” He may have watched closely, the activities of Bishop Crowther and his agents in Bonny and the way their sermons and interference in the daily life of the community tended to undermine the stability of the city-state. As a result, he came to the conclusion “not to have anything to do with the brand of religion represented by Crowther and his agents” (Cookey,1974:84-85).

King Jaja as a natural ruler, not only insisted that Chief Oko Epelle must return to Opobo, he also did not stop him from inaugurating a worship centre in his house. In pursuit of Western Education, King Jaja sent his second son, Prince Fredrick Sunday Jaja; Prince Arthur Mac Pepple and George Cookey to London for further studies (Jaja, 1991), and also sent a delegation of educated Opobo chiefs to London to protest his incarceration in the hands of Heweth and Johnston.

The return of Chief (Evangelist) Oko Epelle to Opobo was dramatic. Chiefs Oko Epelle and Cookey “were specifically named as belonging to Jaja and he requested that both of them should return to Opobo” as a condition for his signing of the peace treaty among him, Her Britannic Majesty and the people of Bonny in 1873. These two chiefs, who were chiefs of Annie Pepple group were in Finima Town at the onset of the crisis that led to the civil war in 1869 which was why they did not return to Opobo with the others. King Jaja was fully aware of Chief Oko Epelle’s vocation as a notable

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evangelist in Bonny and a practising Christian but he still insisted that he returned to Opobo as a condition for the Peace Treaty of 1873.

According to Cookey, Jaja kept aloof and refused to be converted but it was not known “whether Jaja at this stage opposed Christianity for its own sake or whether he was jealous of the monopoly which his opponents seem to exercise over the new religion. Considering the atmosphere of mutual suspicion in Bonny at this time, the second option could be accepted as his reason for keeping aloof. In answer to the second option of jealousy, Cookey observed that “once the new religion had been inaugurated, Jaja made no attempt to rally the conservative forces immediately.” Cookey also noted that Jaja did not attempt to stop the slaughter of the Iguana when it began or to continue the practice of killing twins after its abolition, neither did he reintroduce them later when he founded the city-state of Opobo.

Cookey’s view was balanced, as he noted that, like most Africans of his time, Jaja “believed in the existence of an Omnipotent Being” who could “do anything he likes and no man fit ask him what thing he do”. Nevertheless, he also recognised “worldly deities whose activities influenced human beings and who have to be propitiated” (Cookey, 1974:61). An account of the situation in Bonny after Jaja had blocked all hinterland markets against it would explain further that it was not only Jaja that patronised Bonny deities. In March 1871, Cookey recorded that the situation in Bonny was so bad that King George Pepple, a Christian, resorted with his chiefs to the shrine of the deity, Simingi, to solicit its supernatural assistance (Cookey 1974:74). Also, the new yam festival for 1868 was celebrated with all the traditional rituals (Cookey 1974:61) even though on Easter Day of the previous year, the totemic deity of Bonny, the Iguana was declared “to be no longer Bonny juju”. Even Chief Oko Epelle, the great evangelist, told Carew that they did not wish to hear about the new religion nor even to meet with him (Cookey 1974:61). Gbadamosi and Ade Ajayi (Obaro Ikime, 1980) failed to recognise the *Owu ogbo* institution as part and parcel of the social organization of the Niger Delta. According to them, the Niger Delta educated converts began to join the *Owu Ogbo* in the 1880s (360). On the contrary, the Niger Delta converts were first members of the *Owu Ogbo* (Ekine) Society before being converted to Christianity. He recognised his role in the *Owu Ogbo* Society during the masquerade season. The initiation ceremony into the *Owu Ogbo* Society was compulsory for both slaves and free born members of the society. The *owu Ogbo* Society became more useful during the slave trade period, when it was mandatory for a slave to learn the dancing steps, drum language and the masquerade performance without which a full-fledged recognition would not be guaranteed and such a slave would not be welcomed as a member of any war canoe house.

Alagoa and Fombo also recounted chiefs of Bonny’s treatment to the missionaries. One would have thought that Jaja who was said to initiate the starting of war on Sunday would have been at the head of instigating the closure of the missions in Bonny. But this was not to be so. On 7th December, 1881, King George Pepple tendered his resignation letter after being pressured by the exigencies of office. The chiefs accused him of all sorts of things amongst which was that he had broken the rules of the monarchy by going outside the kingdom into the palm oil markets (Alagoa and Fombo 1972:34). In his letter of resignation, he included the plan by the chiefs of Bonny to close “the door of God’s house” which he protested against (Alagoa and Fombo 1972: 34).

Part of the letter read thus:



1. The chiefs prohibited the converts from attending church services.
2. The wooden-made church at Bonny was burnt down and another pulled down at Peterside.
3. All Christians were banished to the plantations and a few persecuted.
4. All Christians were forced to attend sacrifices. (Alagoa and Fombo 1972:34).

At the time all these were happening, Jaja had left Bonny. It is suggested that it was not Jaja alone that practiced dual religions. Other Bonny kings and their subjects did. However, this development has been traced to the nature of their belief system a balance between the old traditional religion and the new one, depending on the situation on ground. Jaja only backed off when his enemies were patrons of the new religion (Christianity) (Obara Ikime, 1980: 354). Most of king Jaja's contemporaries spoke out whenever the need arise. For instance when the missionary activities in Duke Town tended to work against King Efraim Duke, he issued a proclamation forbidding his subjects "to have any dealings either with the missionaries or the Africans from Sierra Leone"(Dike 1956:120). In conclusion, the African monarchs responded to challenges as they come.

The missionaries got involved in local politics in Bonny as well as in other places in Nigeria but Bonny situation was quite remarkable. According to Baikie quoted in Dike "Bonny trade progressed in a comparatively harmonious atmosphere... because of a system of settling trade and other dispute in the "Court of Equity". Consul Hutchinson corroborated Baikie's commendation by adding that "I wish the Bonny Court of Equity to be considered the model" (Dike 1956: 126). King Jaja was never brought to the Court of Equity for any wrong doing. It was the bias in favour of the Manilla Pepple group that led to the apparent antagonism against the Annie Pepple group led by Jaja in the 1860s. This was evident in the huge support the Manilla group received from Bishop Crowther and total neglect of the Annie Pepple group. In 1837, Commander Craigie formally recognised King William Dappa Pepple as the King of Bonny and deposed the Head of Annie Pepple group without any compensation. King William Dappa Pepple's coronation took place on the 9th of April, 1837 (Alagoa and Fombo, 1972:18). By 11th March 1839, King William Dappa Pepple signed the Anti-slave trade treaty for an annual present of £200 (Alagoa and Fombo 1972:18). This state income or revenue was not shared amongst the trading Houses as compensation for stopping slave trade. In reaction in 1843, the Annie Pepple group threatened hostility (Alagoa and Fombo, 17).

King Jaja would not have been able to express himself politically without first recognising the usefulness of educated personnel in his workforce. Moreover, it would not also have been impossible for the British people he employed to agree to work with a pagan king. According to Gbadamosi and Ade Ajayi, religion was a vehicle for the expression of political views. George Cookey in 1936 testified that himself, Chief Sunday and Mac were together under the training of King Jaja until three of them proceeded to England for education (Jaja 1991:103). It is pertinent at this point to ask the question: What was King Jaja doing with English names if he was adjudged an ardent traditionalist? Cookey was quick to answer this question by saying that "King Jaja preserved the traditional Igbo practice of naming some children after the day they were born, but substituted the Christian names of the days to facilitate identification by European traders (Cookey 1974:87). As a traditionalist, King Jaja would have named his first son Oruene instead of Saturday and his second son, Tamunoene instead of Sunday. The British traders would still have identified them as King Jaja's children, agents and traders, especially as the King's trading flag fly on every trading canoe from Opobo.

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It is suggested that what happened to King Jaja was a matter of propaganda championed by the Manilla Pepple group in general and Chief Oko Jumbo in particular. Of all the Kings of Bonny before him, none passed through scrutiny as did King Jaja. None of them was looked upon as either a Christian or traditional religion practitioner. Even when King William Dappa Pepple returned to Bonny as a Christian, he did not burn down either the shrine of the deity or the house of skulls. This propaganda machine was heightened to prove to the Consul and the Supercargoes that King Jaja was not a Christian. But the propaganda did not deter Consul Livingstone to turn the table against the Bonny people during the negotiation to make King Jaja sign the treaty of 1873. Consul Livingstone who had always believed King Jaja as very troublesome had to revise his stand and come round to the view that Jaja was not the main obstacle to settlement (Cookey 1974:74). It was also discovered by the team of arbitrators that the first shot in the civil war had actually been fired by the Manilla Pepple faction and according to Cookey, it was for this reason that the terms of the settlement were made quite favourable to Jaja (Cookey 1974:76).

In all of this, there was no record by the British that King Jaja was a pagan and that he resisted Christianity and “feared it as a plague” as suggested by Ayandele. Religion was never brought in as an obstacle militating against British trading business on Bonny River and in no time was Jaja brought to the court of Equity for religious impropriety or that Jaja’s juju blocked Bonny rivers and so prevented ships from arriving Bonny river. Of all the articles of the treaties and conventions signed in Bonny, non-mentioned juju nor did the articles place any importance on religious activities of any individual in Bonny. King Jaja was also friend of the British government and he was invited to help fight against the Asante. He consented and sent a contingent of Opobo warriors against the Asante and afterwards the British presented him with a sword of honour from the Queen (Cookey 1974).

## CONCLUSION

The general expression of belief in God and the practice of the traditional religion of the Ibani people set them aside as a society willing to accept innovations as well as retain their old practices. The Ibani would give to Caesar what belonged to Caesar and to God what belonged to God. The Ibani would be guided by the lessons of Christianity and also freely maintain the traditional practices of their society. While the church had come to stay and the local authorities rendered services in the church, the king awarded local titles to deserving members of the society. Titles such as Amaopusenibo, Amaopuorubo, Arusibidabo, Warisenibo, Jeki Opuosenibo, and Jeki Opuorubo are still accepted by the Christians.

In Ibani society, the traditional drum names of kings and war canoe chiefs still remained after one hundred and fifty years of the existence of the Annie Pepple group in Opobo. The annual masquerade festivals, Egbelegbe, Ofrima, Owu Asara, Ijuruma, Aba Ofuruma, Taria, and Owu Igbila were all reinacted on yearly basis. The flexibility in the social organisation of the Ibani clan has allowed Christianity and traditional practices for symbiotic relationship. Two polo houses, the Diepiri and Kiepirima still keep alive the age-grade system, where each age-grade with its Ekpe masquerade performs a week after the National Nwatam carnival (Second week of January every year). The celebration of womanhood, Egerebite/ Bibite ceremonies has become stronger with the passage of time. Unless a woman goes through the ceremonies, she is forbidden to tie the real Indian George wrapper in Opobo Kingdom for any ceremony. The Ngunume has also been adopted as an

annual songs and dance performance in all the sixty-seven war canoe houses in Opobo kingdom without which the cultural aspects of praise songs and folk songs in honour of house chiefs and other memorable events of the houses will not be said to be complete. The culture of the people both in Bonny and in Opobo has been entrenched. A typical Opobo man will not run to church when a visitor is in his house on Sunday morning, he would first entertain his visitors before heading to the church, no matter how late. The elders will converge at the Opubie on 31st night to send the old year away and welcome the New Year. On the New Year day, Nwaotam carnival engages most Opobo people.

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