

## **The Impact Of The Church On The Growth Of Textile Industry In Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Most institutions of the Nigerian society have used textile in various ways both as instrument of growth as well as a means of visual communication. A link between the industry that is charged with the responsibility of production of textiles and the church which is one of the institutions that consume large quantity of textiles has been established. In this paper, we examine the impact of the church as a religious institution on the growth and development of the textile industry. The study reveals that the church through its organs and uniform organizations has continued to patronize the industry and this has contributed to the apparent stability the industry had experienced in the past few years. The problem of gradual collapse of the textile industry and its implications on the sustainability of the uniform organizations within the church was observed. Intervention measures were suggested and recommendations were made in the study.

### **Introduction**

The impact of Christian church was felt in Nigeria as far back as the early 19th century. Adeware (1991) notes that the foreign organizations that were involved in the establishment of the church at the early period were the Methodist mission, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Roman Catholic mission, the Presbyterian mission and the Baptist mission, among others. As these churches had strong holds in different parts of the country, Schools were established and used as powerful agents for social, economic and territorial control.

Olaniyan (2001) observes that when the Anglican, Methodist, Catholic and Baptist Missionaries brought Christianity to Nigeria in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, their doctrine was directed to a total observance of Christianity as a religion. He notes particularly that “all music that was not spiritually uplifting was discouraged or completely banned”. Therefore, converts were not allowed to play any indigenous musical instruments or perform music activity that derived from indigenous musical knowledge. Instead, Christian hymns were preferred. The above observation did not concern only musical art. The manner of dressing of the people was also put to constant check, particularly in the church and school systems. This was one of the reasons the missionaries provided textile materials for the converts, particularly, the ones that should be worn to the school and the church.

The twentieth century also witnessed a new Pentecostal revival among the churches in Nigeria with the result that numerous Pentecostal Churches were established in most parts of Nigeria. Examples of these Pentecostal Churches are the Assemblies of

God Church, Prevailing Word Assembly, Divine Grace Church, Messiah In The New Ministry, Christ's Embassy, Later Rain Assembly, House On The Rock, Amazing Love Church, Deeper Christian Life Bible Church, The Watchman, The Redeemed Christian Church, Dominion City and The Winner's Chapel, to mention but a few.

Establishment of schools and churches at different locations in Nigeria, particularly in the Southern region served as effective means of social, economic and religious transformations. By this means, the missionaries were able to teach the people the art of reading, writing and to some extent numeracy. As for the good intentions of the Christian missions which were, admittedly, part of the rhetoric of colonization, the major outcome was that commercial and economic interests of the colonial administrators received unprecedented boom. This paper, therefore, examines the role of the Christian church in Nigeria and how it has affected the growth and development of the textile industry.

The methodology applied in this study was the descriptive survey. Primary and secondary data were used for the study. The primary datum was collected by the means of oral interview from management staff of some of the textile industries, such as the General cotton Mills, Onitsha, (before its closure a few months ago) and The United Nigeria textile Limited. Women leaders from Christian associations were also interviewed. Secondary datum came from newspapers, magazines, brochures and church bulletins that were relevant to this study.

### **Instrumentalist View of Textiles to the Growth of the Church**

Before the introduction of Christian religion in Nigeria, the traditional society had organized institutions. Nwanunobi (1992,10) notes that the institutions of the society, particularly in Nigeria, usually falls into seven groups, namely, the family and kingship institutions, political institutions, economic institutions, legal institutions, educational institutions and religious institutions. Each of the institutions stated above performs special or combined roles. The family and kingship institutions are those regulating relationships by blood and marriage. The political institutions regulate the exercise of power and government. Economic institutions regulate the production and distribution of goods. Legal institutions deal with the dispensation of justice and social control. Educational institutions deal with norms of socialization and education and Religious institutions deal with religious beliefs, morals and rites.

These traditional institutions have in one way or another used textile material, as instruments of visual communication, individual and group identity, and expression of the peoples' cultures. Onyeneke (1993, 23), an authority on the study of African Traditional Institutions and the Christian Church, observed that "culture is the way the people of that society have been sustained within their particular territory". The societal culture of any territory has a positive value as the distinctive way of living that has sustained the people in their society. It is this instrumentalist function of textiles that strengthened the belief of the early Christian missionaries in the use of textile materials as strong weapon used for conversion of the people from paganism to Christianity. The missionaries knew that the society has strong social and cultural organizations or structures, and retention of cultural heritage is one of the means used by the people to

fight colonial oppression and domination. The British colonial government for example, in its policy of indirect rule, permitted the functioning of native institutions and social organization so long as they did not offend colonial law and the norms of modern world civilization. Textile materials were considered as items that have positive value and as a result, its production and distribution was highly encouraged because its production and use did not offend the colonial laws and norms.

The attitude of the colonial masters to the dress habits of the people apparently affected the peoples' way of dressing to school, the church and at home. With regard to the dressing to church, Onyeneke (1993) observed that "in the church, on the other hand, the impression seemed to have been created that the native African society has got to be totally changed in its way of life, for members to become Christians" Therefore, part of the process needed to promote the adaptation of Christian norms was the adaptation of the clothing culture of the colonial masters. For example, scanty dressing at home, school and the church was discouraged. This was the origin of success of the Christian missions in converting the people to Christianity. One of the very necessary European products that had very high value was textile materials. Textile was used as instrument to motivate the indigenous African chiefs at the early period of slavery.

During the colonial period, Christian missions used textiles as gifts to converts and also as instrument of group identity. Wearing of uniform among the Christian groups was seen not only as a means of making the members spiritually focused, it was also believed that it provided transformational victory. Cloth is one of the cultural elements which had very high value in African cultures because of its expressive, symbolic and iconographic information. Thus, cloth in the form of uniform was viewed as expressive symbol which had transformational power force. It is a religious symbol or instrument that can create a link between the individual, his society and his Christian belief.

### **Adaptation Of Local Textile Materials By The Church**

Adaptation, in this context, means the use of textile material by the Church as sustainable means of identification and propagation of the Christian faith. In the early Christian church, textile was one of the significant features of the church. Distribution of special cloth or uniforms to the early converts served as a means of attracting more people to the church and sustaining their interest in the new religion. It was used not only as a means of identifying the Christian group, but also as a means of communication about the Christian culture, which consist of the collection of rules and norms, that govern ways of doing things usually considered important in the church and society. Onyeneke as earlier cited notes that "there are regulated expectations and norms that usually govern behavior concerning the needs and life of the church and society, and each of these rules exerts in the members some compelling force, a motivational commitment to their observance" These were the purposes clothing materials were expected to achieve. For example, in the church, different arms or segments were created and they are usually identified by the types of cloth they wear. These are the clergy, Choir, Girl-Guild, Boys' Scout, Boys' Brigade, Knights, Mass-servers, Lay-readers, Pastor's wardens, Ushers and Women's Guild, among others. Each group in the church wears its official dress or uniform during the church service. Obedience to these rules and regulations are

mandatory in order to maintain discipline in the church. Also, Altar tables, Pulpits, Lectern and quilted cloth screens have become regular features in the church.

One may be desirous to know the origin of these clothing materials. The questions that may arise in the mind are: Who makes these cloths? Are the cloths imported or manufactured locally? What impact has uniform made to the growth of the Church and development of the Nigerian textile industry?

At the beginning of the colonial period, the colonial masters brought clothing materials as gifts to chiefs and kings in the locality. Most often, clothing materials were battered with slaves. At the end of the slave trade, the missionaries continued to use textile materials as gifts items to local chiefs and community heads. Its use as uniforms in the church and schools encouraged the mass importation of textiles from Europe in the early 19th century. This provided good economic support/ transformation to the colonial government. Walter Rodney (1972, 26) in his book, titled "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa" described this economic relationship as "Relationships of exploitation" This is because the price of manufactured and imported goods is set by the colonial government. Therefore, Rodney argues that the whole import/export relationship between Africa and its trading partners is one of unequal exchange and of exploitation.

However, with the granting of independence to Nigeria in 1960, establishment of textile industries in Nigeria was given accelerated attention and this was sustained until the mid nineteen eighties. Although the foreign ownership of these textile industries is still present, its establishment in Nigeria accelerated the development and growth of textile, and its related industries. Tolagbe and Burnip's (1987) findings from a research they conducted showed that the textile industry in Nigeria has provided for the basic clothing needs of the people in various ways and that the growth of indigenous textile industries in Nigeria in the 1980's placed the country third largest in Africa. Although, the quantity of fabrics produced by the textile industry in Nigeria has not exceeded 55% of local demands, the impact the industry had made so far in the society is great. The church has completely relied on the Nigerian local textile industry for provision of special/ unique designs for various arms of the church both for casual and special ceremonies.

### **The Nigerian Textile Industry**

Before the colonial government came to Nigeria, indigenes produced fabrics on local looms. Although the quantity of fabric that was produced from the local looms was not large to satisfy the clothing need of the society, it made a great impact to the lives of the people. Investment by foreign entrepreneurs brought to Nigeria sophisticated mechanized textile machines that engaged in mass production of textiles, which apparently, made the textile industry of Nigeria in the opinion of Audu (2003) the "second biggest in Africa, second only to Egypt's and ahead of South Africa. However, it has been established that the output of the sector has never exceeded 55 percent of annual domestic consumption, allowing for a thriving trade in imported textiles (Tolagbe & Burnip, 1987).

Some of the most important textile industries in Nigeria which were involved in the design and mass production of fabrics for the use of the church and schools are the

Specomill, Ikeja, Lagos; Northern Nigerian Textile Ltd; the United Nigeria Textile Mill Ltd; General Cotton Mills, Onitsha, Nichemtex Ltd, Ikorodu, Lagos; Afprint Nigeria Ltd; Gaskya Textile Ltd and Asaba Textile mills Ltd, among many others. The Church obviously, has made extensive impact on the growth of textile industry in Nigeria because it has been the major patron of the industry through its schools and administrative organs. The local textile industries received regularly commissions to produce special designs for use in the schools and the church. The most common costumes which are used in the church for the priest and clergy include the miter, the red and white cassocks; white surplice and assorted colours of hoods and cape. Large quantity of school uniforms are commissioned regularly for production by the textile industry for primary and secondary schools. Also very large quantity of cloths which are used as special uniform for various groups in the church particularly, women groups are regularly produced in the local cottage industry and modern textile mills.

For example, the Anglican Priests and the Methodist Priests dress in the Cassock, white Surplice, Stole and white Clerical Collar. The Roman Catholic Church Deacon and the Anglican Church Deacon officiate in the Stole over the white Cassock. Sometimes they wear their Chasuble over the white Cassock.

The altar is a unique section of the church that is given special attention in decoration. Altar tables decorated with symbolic and iconic table cloth are constant features. Chalice cover also regarded as chalice burse and veil made of special cloth are provided. Symbolic designs on these special cloths are produced by artists for the industry. However, the church that commissions the design is involved in determining the motifs and patterns that will appear on the fabric.

Different kinds of chasuble are worn at special occasions; the red Chasuble is worn by the Roman Catholic Reverend Fathers and Anglican Church Priests on days of service of the life of martyred men like Peter, Luke, Paul and Stephen. They officiate in white and green Chasubles during celebrations like weddings and ordinations of priests. They officiate in purple Chasuble at funerals, during lent season and at Easter. The blue and green Chasubles are multi- purpose dress that can be worn when there is no special event in the church.

The Chasubles have various colours; red, white, green, purple and blue. All over the world and particularly in Nigeria, different designs of uniforms are made for choristers of different churches. Some dress in the traditional Cassock with Surplice worn over it while some dress in suit. Some also dress in hoods worn over their personal garments. This depends on the norms of the church. At an interview held on the 2nd of May 2008, the respondent Mr Theophilus Agbo, a designer of clergy uniforms explained that Altar boys and girls officiate in the Roman Catholic Church. They are also called Mass Servers. The altar boys and girls usually wear white fabric.

Another group that wears special uniform is the Knights. The Knights are “soldiers” of the church who defend the faith of the church. In times of need in the church they come to aid the church morally and financially. The knights of the Roman Catholic and the Anglican churches usually wear unique uniforms to mark special ceremonies in the church. It is also becoming most fashionable for the knights to wear other kinds of special cloths during their general social meetings and funeral meetings of deceased

members. Demand of these special fabrics by the Knights, which is expected to cost millions of naira for Nigerian users in particular, has contributed a lot to sustain the growth of the textile industry in Nigeria.

The mission schools are important users of school uniform. Students of mission schools in Nigeria usually go to school dressed in uniforms and these are produced by the local textile industries. Although some of these uniforms can be bought from Europe, most of the fabrics meant for use by the pupils and students in mission schools are locally produced and sewn in Nigeria by Nigerian tailors.

The ministries of women are another group in the church that has made impact on the textile industry. The women organizations in the churches are noted for being identified in uniforms. These ministries include the Mothers' Union, Catholic Women's Organization (C.W.O), Women's Fellowship, Ladies Fellowship, and Women's Guild. These women ministries are apparently, turning into a world wide Christian social movement. The major aims for establishing these ministries are to strengthen and preserve marriage and family norms and values through Christian principles, and also to help the society at large when the need arises. The Nigerian chapter of these organizations identify themselves in their different uniforms.

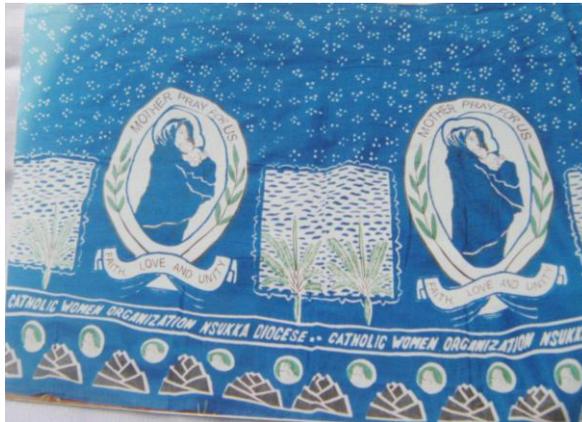
For example, the Catholic Women Organization (C.W.O) is the ministry of women in the Roman Catholic Church. It was formerly called Christian Mothers Association. Every baptized Roman Catholic woman is qualified to be a member whether married or not married. Those who are not married must have reached the age 40 years before they can become members of C.W.O. The organization usually organizes interviews for women that want to become members of C.W.O. How active a person is in the church is one major factor for consideration.

At an interview held on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 2008, in her office, Dr (Mrs) Nwozuzu observed that they officiate in uniforms. Formerly, they had one uniform in Nigeria, but today, different dioceses have their special uniforms peculiar to them. There is also a national uniform for all the associations within the church group. The national uniform has the background fabric in white and blue colours. It has the logo "C.W.O. Nigeria" printed on it in red and blue colours. It has a lantern as motif signifying light as shown on plate 1



***Plate 1: National Uniform of C.W.O, Nigerian Chapter  
Designed in three colours; Blue, yellow, purple on white background.***

The Catholic Women Organization (C.W.O) uniform for Nsukka diocese has the background fabric in blue and white colours. Its motifs are stars designed in white colour and arranged in all-over repeat pattern. The picture of Mary carrying the baby Jesus is printed on it, with the messages such as ‘Mother Pray for Us’; ‘Faith, Love and Unity’ (plates 2 and 3)



***Plate 2: Sample of the uniform of C.W.O. Nsukka Diocese.  
Designed in two colours; Blue, purple on white back ground.***



***Plate 3: C.W.O members, dressed in their uniform.***

The colours of these uniforms are symbolic. The blue represents love, the white stands for purity, while the green represents life. They dress in the uniforms to mark special events such as Mothers' Day, funeral of dead member, consecration of Bishops and at ordination of priest. Because of the large number of women that use the national uniform and the Diocesan ones in the Roman Catholic Church, millions of meters of these fabrics are produced for the church in Nigeria.

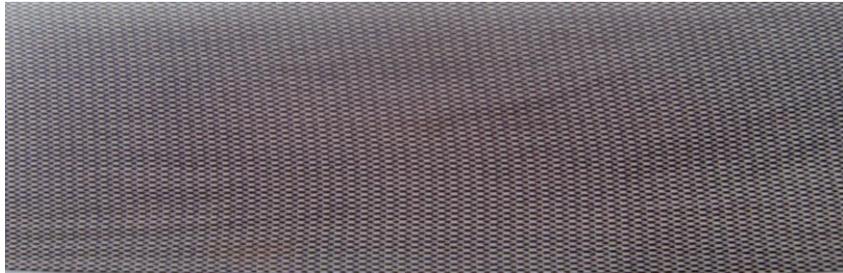
The ministry of women in the Presbyterian Church is called Women's Guild. Mary Slessor who stopped the killing of twins is the founder of the Guild. Membership of the Church qualifies a woman to become a member of Women's Guild whether married or not married. A person is accepted as a member after passing through a study class. The Women's Guild has three different uniforms. They have the uniform with an artist's impression of Mary Slessor carrying twin babies, (plate 4). The design is printed in blue, white and yellow colours. To immortalize Mary Slessor, the founder of this organization, the uniform is worn only on mothering Sunday.



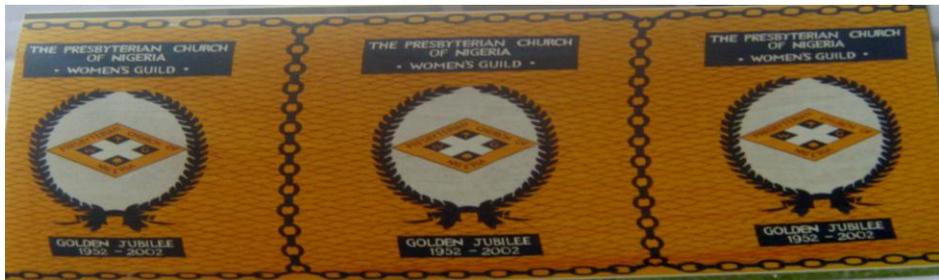
***Plate 4: Sample of the Presbyterian Women's Guild uniform. Designed in two colours; Blue and yellow on white background.***

The group also has another uniform that is called *Nkpuru oka*, which means the seed of maize (plate 5). The motif and pattern are derived from maize seed and the fabric

is produced in light blue colour. This design is worn during regular meetings of the group. The *Nkpuruoka* design is also worn at the burial of members of the Guild. The guild also has the third uniform which is yellow colour version of the *Nkpuruoka* design, (plate 5). This fabric is worn by a member officiating on Sunday at service or worship. The yellow fabric is also worn at baptism and confirmation ceremonies of children. It was designed to celebrate the golden Jubilee of Presbyterian Women's Guild in Nigeria in 2002. One hundred and fifty thousand meters of this fabric was commissioned for production of this uniform by the church at the first instance.



*Plate 5: Presbyterian Women's Guild Uniform: Nkpuruoka fabric. Designed in one colour; Blue on white background.*



**Plate 6: Presbyterian Women's Guild Uniform for the Guild's Golden Jubilee Celebration. Designed in two colours; yellow and blue on white background.**

General Cotton Mill Limited Onitsha (GCML), for example, is responsible for the printing of the uniforms of the Presbyterian Women's Guild.

The ministry of women in the Methodist Church is called Women's Fellowship. At interview held on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2008 at Methodist Church Nsukka premises, Mrs Dorcas Ikejiofor, a member of the Women's Fellowship related that before a woman is admitted into the Women's Fellowship, she has to pass through the Ladies Fellowship where they undergo some tests. The Women's Fellowship has its national uniform (plate 7). The common colour with all the ministries of women in all the churches is blue. The National uniform of the Methodist Women's Fellowship is designed in blue, white and yellow colours. However, every diocese has its own uniform peculiar to it. For example, the diocese of Enugu design has its national logo on white background circled by the inscription of the Methodist Church of Nigeria, Enugu diocese (plate 8).



***Plate 7: A cross section of members of Methodist Women's Fellowship in its national uniform.***



***Pate 8: Uniform of Methodist Women's Fellowship. Diocese of Enugu.***

***Designed in four colours; Purple, Yellow, Blue and White***

The Assemblies of God Church Nigeria, Women Ministry is not left out in this general desire of women to be identified in special church uniforms. At an interview held on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 2008 in his office, Mr Chukwuemeka Nwigwe, a member of the Church, said that the women appear in their special uniform at Mothering Sunday events and when they are welcoming their General Superintendent at functions and at other functions that are determined by the group.

According to Mothers' Union Manual in the Anglican Communion (2007), Mothers' Union and Women's Guild are the Ministries in the Church. The Mothers' Union started appearing in national uniform in 1976. According to Anglican Church Constitution (1990) of the Mothers' Union, the national uniform has the image of Mary Sumner and other relevant symbolic patterns printed on the design, (plate 9).



***Plate 9: Anglican Mothers' Union general uniform in blue colour and Women's Guild in green colour.***

Every Diocese in Nigeria has its own uniform peculiar to it. However, blue is the common colour of the uniforms of all the dioceses. The Mothers' Union Logo which is also printed on the uniform remains the same for all the dioceses. However, some dioceses add special patterns/symbols that make their design unique. This shows that every diocese has the freedom to vary its design provided it maintains its uniform logo and its blue and white colour-ways.



***Plate 10: Anglican Mothers' Union uniform. Diocese of Nsukka.  
The blue design is printed on white background.***

At an interview held on 7<sup>th</sup> of July, 2007, at St. Andrews Anglican Church Trans Ekulu Enugu premises, Ven. Benjamin O.Nnaji a member of the Anglican clergy explained that when the dioceses come together, one is able to identify the diocese a woman belongs by the design, name and other information which the design sends to the viewer or observer. The Anglican Women's Ministries have many designs for various occasions. For example, events marking the coronation of bishops, special anniversary celebrations, ceremony marking the establishment of new dioceses, among others, have special designs commissioned and produced by the textile mills in Nigeria, particularly the General Cotton Mills limited, Onitsha.

From the above discussion, one can conclude that the church and its agents, the mission schools, are the major patrons of the Nigerian textile industry. This development has helped to sustain the industry when it had serious competition with imported textile materials. The industry has derived huge financial benefit from the church through commissions for production of cloths for its uniform organizations. Although no research report on financial commitment by the church to the Nigerian textile industry for production of uniforms for the use of the church and schools has been published, the quantity of fabrics produced for this organization annually runs into millions of metres. It is not out of context to estimate that the church and its organs spend millions of naira annually to provide uniforms to its various organizations.

**Problem of the industry**

Unfortunately, many of the textile mills that have been supporting the church in producing textile materials for its use and at affordable price have closed down and the few mills that have not yet closed down are working below its capacity utilization of equipment and staff. Olowo, B (2007) in his article "Improving the Nigerian Textile Industry" listed some of the problems the industry had faced for over two decades. Among these are lack of raw materials, power, human resources and attitude of investors in the textile sector. More information on the problems of this sector was given by Ogunnaike (2010) and Yusuf (2011) respectively. Yusuf observed that lifting of ban on importation of foreign textiles and the devaluation of the naira which raised the cost of imported textile raw materials such as dye stuff, chemicals, machine spare parts have always affected the growth of local industry. Ogunnikie stressed that negative perception about "made in Nigeria" products has greatly affected the patronage of Nigerian textile products. The closure of many Nigerian textile industries has posed a very serious challenge to the church and its organs. It is doubtful whether the church will be able to pay the very high cost of production of uniforms that are commissioned to be

manufactured in Britain, China or Holland for the church in Nigeria. Can the poor masses pay for these fabrics which may be higher in price and less affordable? It is feared that the Nigerian textile industry will totally collapse if urgent action is delayed to address the factors that are responsible for this problem.

Most uniform organizations are gradually restoring the status quo. This means that the uniform organizations will no longer have the freedom to produce its own special designs. It has to make its choice of uniform from assorted foreign designs that are available in the Nigerian market. The implication of this is that some organizations in the church may cease to wear uniforms that have special mark of identity. This apparently, will adversely affect some of the reasons that informed the use of uniforms which include elimination of high class syndrome and social stratification that is always noticeable among the women folk in the church and the society. It has been observed that wearing uniform to the church helps to bring unity and strength to the organization. It also enhances the members' senses of responsibility and their desire to achieve positive results in their activities. These ideals should not be compromised. Therefore, effort should be made to sustain the Nigerian textile industry because of the important role it has played in the growth and development of the church, particularly, in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

It has been observed in this paper, that from the beginning of the Christian Missionary activity in Nigeria, clothing and textiles played important role in the growth and development of the church. The growth and stability the church has recorded are partly due to the formation of uniform groups. Wearing of uniforms has helped each group to be identified as a united group within the church, where class distinction is totally rejected. Special uniforms for which the church and its groups are identified today are produced in the local industry and these are supplied at affordable price. This has apparently helped to sustain the relationship between the church and the industry. The industry has helped to provide services to the church while the church provided the financial support to the industry through numerous commissioned projects. All these are viewed as positive development which needs to be sustained. The apparent collapse of the Modern textile industry in Nigeria is seen as a major challenge to the church and the nation. Therefore, both the church and industry should work together to ensure stability and growth in the system for the development of the society.

### **Recommendations**

The economic implications of the points discussed in this paper are enormous and call for awareness to be created for all segments of the society because of the importance of textile as the second basic need of man in the society after food. There is need to revamp the textile sector of the economy for the interest of the masses. The government should provide the clement environment and facilities the industry needs for growth. The Nigerian textile industry presently, lacks the economic force to match the trans-national companies that are at the front lines of globalization. Therefore, the government has the powers to protect its industries from pressures from multi-national textile companies.

The church should go into partnership with banks to establish local textile industries. This type of institutional solidarity will help the church, which is the major consumer of textiles to maintain its dignity and improve its social and economic welfare. Wearing of uniform in the church and at schools should be encouraged and sustained for the purposes of creating unity among the groups in the church.

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