



## **Abstract**

This dissertation deconstructs Western imposition of ethos upon in the Christian colonization of religion in Nigeria and retrieves crucial elements of Igbo culture and history for a program of building a stronger Church. Central to that project is the construction of a postcolonial Igbo liturgy that achieves a richer relationship between deep-rooted indigenous Igbo sociology and Christian faith expressions.

Though Christianity has been present in Nigeria since the sixteenth century, it was the later Catholic missions beginning in the late-nineteenth century that resulted in phenomenal growth in the Eastern part of Nigeria. The estimated number of Catholics in Igbo land is about 30 million,<sup>1</sup> far more than any other organized religion in the area with Catholics representing seventy percent of the Igbo population, alongside twenty percent other Christian denominations and ten percent either African traditional religion or no faith.

From these numbers one might expect a deep-rooted Christianity in Igbo land as corresponding to the growth in the number of its followers; instead, there is some superficiality especially in the liturgical expression of the people. I argue the reason is that the growth of Christianity in Igbo land went hand-in-hand with colonial expansion in ways that were not sensitive to deep intrinsic values in the culture. As such, today the Igbo cultural identity in certain ways conflicts or is at

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<sup>1</sup> In 2005, there were an estimated 19 million baptized Catholics in Nigeria and 52.6 million in 2010. Nigeria, together with Congo Democratic Republic, boasts of the highest number of priests in Africa. The boom in vocation to the priesthood in Nigeria is mainly in the eastern part (especially among the Igbo ethnic group), which accounts for over 70 percent of the country's Catholic population.

odds with the Catholic liturgical expressions. The Church imposed upon Igbo culture Western forms that are not necessarily Christian and in the process erased important aspects of Igbo tradition, culture, and religion.

To remedy the shallow sensibility of Igbo participation in Catholic worship expression, this dissertation will first analyze Igbo culture with a view to integrating the Catholic faith more authentically in Igbo cultural ethos and then interpret Christianity through the theme of the incarnation with the goal of a new liturgical inculturation that will help the Igbo people to see themselves “genuinely”<sup>2</sup> in the Catholic liturgy. In so doing, an Igbo-infused Catholic liturgy will help Igbo members feel rooted in the church and become a gift to the universal Church.

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Abraham uses the term “genuine” to express the Church that is free from any political or identity claim – where there is no external mediation between the self, the other and God. “It has to enter the mystery of God so that it can fully attend to the mysteries of the human other and self.” See Susan Abraham, “Decolonizing Western Christianity for a Genuine Catholicity of Culture,” *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology* 3 no 1-2 (2019): 47-62. Susan Abraham is Professor of Theology and Postcolonial Cultures, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty at Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley in California.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### I. The Structure

From the ancient days, Igbo religious system was traditional, cultural, and natural. Suffice it to say that it was God-given, original and unadulterated. However, with the arrival of Christian missionaries and their agents of colonization, who met a pattern of life that ran counter to Euro-Christian principles, Igbo religious society, and sacred institutions experienced the first attack by foreign culture, technology, education, and Christianity, to the extent that it became vulnerable.

Unlike major world religions, Igbo Traditional Religion, like other religious systems in Africa has no known founder; it is native and indigenous to the Igbo people. Igbo Traditional Religion, therefore, is the belief system, which has been handed down from one generation to another. It is therefore part of the culture of the people as it is called *omenala*. As such, *omenala* is the term used to describe Igbo culture and the traditions of the indigenous religion. Western Christianity regarded *omenala* as fetish, backward and devilish. The idea makes Igbo Christians aliens to the culture and the Igbo traditionalists, enemies to Christianity. The possibility of postcolonial Igbo liturgy, therefore, entails a mutual relationship between Igbo culture and Christianity. In Igbo language, *Mmeko omenala na Uka* means relationship between culture and religion. *Mmeko* means relationship; *omenala* means culture; *na* is a conjunction, which means and; *Uka* is the term Igbo people use for Christianity.

This dissertation will demonstrate that an inculturated liturgy is a veritable tool for a more effective faith among the Igbo people, preparing the ground for a more integral interaction, and relationship between the Gospel and Igbo culture. The research addresses some crucial issues of the relationship between Christianity and Igbo culture attempting to answer these questions:

1. How is Catholic faith to be proclaimed or integrated into a given culture in order to make sure it is made meaningful to the people?
2. How would the Church and the Igbo Culture be in a relationship for a mutual exchange?
3. How can the Igbo person celebrate liturgy in order to connect to the postcolonial Igbo cultural values?

Generally, my research method is constructive theology and constructive spirituality. The first part of the work gives the scope of the study. In the Chapter One, I will give the background of the study: the Igbo land and the impact of the Western Christianity on the socio-cultural life of the people. I will also explain why I want to use liturgy as a channel of my postcolonial endeavor. In the Chapter Two, I will make a postcolonial analysis of Igbo culture. In doing so, I will identify the unique cultural value of Igbo people, which is essential to construct the postcolonial Igbo liturgy or theology. Chapter Three discusses the methodology I will employ for the construction of the postcolonial Igbo liturgy. I argue for the principle of inculturation as an essential tool for mutual exchange and dialogue between Igbo people and Christianity.

Recent shifts in theology has used terms like, “localization,” “contextualization,” “indigenization,” and “inculturation” of theology. Despite slight nuances in meaning, all of these terms point to the need for and responsibility of Christians to make their own response to the gospel as concrete and lively as possible.<sup>3</sup> While inculturation is commonly used in the Catholic Church, contextual theology is more prominent term among Protestants. Contextual theology is a widely used term for this shift in perspective, focusing especially on the role of context in this kind of theology.

Inculturation is an important and current issue in liturgy today. Different cultures have different values when they talk about inculturation. Hence it is difficult to talk about inculturation as a general term. My concept of inculturation is “*mmeko omenala na uka*”, which means relationship between Igbo culture and Christianity. The idea is derived from the understanding of inculturation as incarnation. As Pope John Paul II states, “It is forever true that the path of culture is the path of human, and it is on this path that human beings encounter the One who embodies the values of all cultures and fully reveals the people of each culture to God self. The Gospel of Christ the incarnate Word finds its home along the path of culture and from this path; it continues to offer its message of salvation and eternal

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<sup>3</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, (Maryknoll, NY: ORBIS, 2015), 1. Schreiter, a priest and member of the Congregation of the Precious Blood, has published several books in the areas of inculturation, world mission, and reconciliation. Widely recognized as the basic handbook for understanding the theological implications of cultural pluralism, this work argues for indigenous people to do their own work of inculturation.

life.”<sup>4</sup> The Vatican II document, on the Sacred Liturgy- *Sacrosantum Concilium*, on its emphasis on active and full participation of the faithful in the liturgy, instructed for proper liturgical adaptation and inculturation when there is need, in order to give people opportunity to experience a more genuine and unique Christian worship akin to their cultural background and experience.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter Four is the construction of the postcolonial Igbo liturgy. I will argue that the postcolonial Igbo liturgy seeks for the adaptation of the cultural values, which are not in opposition to the core value of Christianity. Three areas stand out in my constructing of postcolonial Igbo liturgy: worship, catechesis, and preaching. I will also present social justice as an act of liturgical expression and the basis for mutual co existence. I will summarize and conclude my work in the Chapter Five.

## **II. Igbo Land**

The word Igbo “refers not only to the people but also the language of this group.”<sup>6</sup> They are one of the most populous ethnic groups in Africa. The Igbo people constitute eighteen percent of the total population of Nigeria, which is estimated to

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<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, “Message to the Bishops of Nigeria at Lagos”, on February 15, 1982, in *The Pope Speaks on African Traditional Religion and Cultural Values*, <http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/atr-popes.htm> (accessed April 10, 2019)

<sup>5</sup> Second Vatican Council, “The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosantum Concilium*, 1963,” n. 14, in *Vatican Council II*, Flannery Austin, ed. (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996). Hereafter referred to as SC.

<sup>6</sup> Chibueze Udeani, *Inculturation as Dialogue* (New York: Rodopi B.V., 2007), 8.



be more than 170 million.<sup>7</sup> The geographical survey of the Igbo land shows that it covers a very large span of land in the southeastern part of Nigeria.<sup>8</sup>

One cannot articulate clearly the history of the Igbo people because of the paucity of historically reliable documents to authenticate it. What is known of the origins of the Igbo came from folktales. In fact, some of the elders believe that the Igbo did not come from anywhere but rather their creator “Chukwu” put them in Igbo land as soon as the world was created, which to them justifies the fact that the Igbo did not migrate from any other part of the world, and that is why no other group in the world speaks the Igbo language.<sup>9</sup>

Traditionally, the Igbo live in villages or village-groups surrounded by their farms. The Igbo depended on hard work for survival, as they must work hard on their farms to grow enough food to feed their large families. Though these villages are connected to one another because of the bond of the cultures, each village functions independently and autonomously from the other in its affairs and accept

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Eusebius, Mbidoaka, *Religion and socialization Among the Igbo speaking people of Eastern Nigeria*. (Nigeria, Onitsha:Veritas Press, 2002), 53. Eusebius Mbidoaka describes the location like this: The Igbo occupies to the River Niger the whole of Onitsha and Owerri Provinces and parts of Rivers and Ogoja provinces. To the West of the Niger they occupy Asaba division in Benin Province and Aboh division in Delta Province. The neighbors of the Igbo to the north are the Igala and the Tiv, to the east the Ekoi, to the south the Ibibio, the Ijaw and the Ogoni, and to the west the Bini and the Isoko. A great percentage lives to the east of the Niger, and less than 40% to the west of the Great River. However, the Igbo are found all over Nigeria. Igbo land is thickly populated especially in Owerri, Okigwe, Orlu, Onitsha, Awka, Enugu, Nnewi and Port Harcourt areas. It is important to note here that “Igbo” as a term, has an alternative “Ibo” being the equivalent used by foreigners because of the difficulty in pronouncing the Igbo double consonant “gb.”

<sup>9</sup> Kalu Ogbaa, *Igbo* (New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 1995), 11.

no interference and dictation from any other group. This shows that there is no sustained tradition of centralized states within the Igbo society. Rather, there are strong ties of the village community, the extended family system, age-group associations, and the various religious organizations that are important to community life.<sup>10</sup> The Igbo family is made up of the living as well as the unseen ancestors who are part and parcel of the family and are very interested in the welfare and affairs of the family. Each head of the family has the duty to pay homage and devotion to the ancestors of his immediate line of descent especially to his father and grandfather.<sup>11</sup> Igbo people, like many other tribes in Nigeria, traditionally live in a homogeneous society.

#### **A. Igbos and Religious Consciousness**

Religion has a very vital role in all aspects of the life of the Igbo. They are a deeply and naturally religious people who believe in a benevolent creator, usually known as 'Chukwu,' who created the visible universe (uwa). Religion permeates all aspects of their lives and it is not easy to isolate it. It can easily be put in these words: "Their religion is their existence, and their existence is their religion."<sup>12</sup> The Igbo religion distinguishes between three types of supernatural beings: God, the spirits, and the ancestors. They believe that there is only one Supreme Being, who

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<sup>10</sup> Victor C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., 1965), 41.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Nwaelom, *Religious Education in Igboland* (Rome: Pontifical Universities Lateranensis, 1984), 61.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur. G. Leonard, *The Lower Niger and its Tribes* (London: Frank Cass, 1968), 429.

they recognized with different names: Chineke (God, the Creator), Chukwu (the supreme God), Ezebinigwe or Eze-enu (The king who dwells on high), Obasi (God on high), Osebuluwa (Lord the supporter of the universe). This God who is at the center of the Igbo religion is felt in every aspect of their life and they call upon these names with great respect, love, devotion and reverential fear. They believe that he is the Being to whom all their prayers, atonement, sacrifices and offerings are made. The religious consciousness of the Igbo is really the foundation of the progress of Christianity in the land, especially the Catholic Church. It is estimated that of 45 million Igbo, half are Catholics, and that the Igbo make up about 60% of Catholics in Nigeria and about 7-10 % of the whole Catholic population in Africa.<sup>13</sup>

The Igbo affirm the existence of God especially in their personal names:<sup>14</sup> Chukwubuikem (God is my strength), Chukwubundu (God is life), Chukwunwendu (God is the author of life), IfeanyiChukwu (Nothing is impossible with God), Chukwukaodili (Everything is left to God), Uchechukwugaeme (God's will, will be done), Ogechukwukamma. (God's time is the best). Ngozichukwuka (God's blessing is greater), Kenechukwu (Thank God). For them, culture is understood from the religious perspective. According to Ejizu, "Religion is the womb of culture in the

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<sup>13</sup> David Asoanya Iheanacho, *African Christianity Rises: A Critical Study of the Catholicism of the Igbo people of Nigeria* (Lincoln: NE: iUniverse inc., 2004), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Igbo indigenous names, like most other African names, have high culture content. By this is meant that personal names are not simply labels used for mere identification purposes, as baggage tags are. On the contrary, an indigenous African name on the whole personifies the individual, tells some story about the parents and or the family of the bearer, and in a more general sense, points to the values of the society into which the individual is born.

traditional Igbo background. It permeates most aspects of life and infuses them with meaning and significance.”<sup>15</sup>

Social life is regulated by the dictates and principles of religion, and there is no dividing line between the religion, ethics, and morality. Everybody is religious and everything is done religiously. The inseparability of religion and totality of the Igbo people’s whole of existence are summarized by a down to earth observation by Major A. G. Leonard, a pioneer British colonial master to Igbo land. He observes, “They (the Igbos) are in the strict and natural sense of the word, a truly and deeply religious people, of whom it can be said, as it has been said of the Hindus, that they eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously, dress religiously, and sin religiously. In few words, the religion of these natives, as I have endeavored to point out is their existence, and their existence is their religion.”<sup>16</sup> A great importance of religion among the Igbo people is that it plays a vital role in training the youths, especially in the areas of morality. In this, religion and family training complement each other in helping to achieve children’s moral development. As a result, most of Igbo children are aware and conscious of moral values and ethical principles early in life.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ejizu C, *The Influence of African Indigenous Religion on Roman Catholicism, The Igbo Example*, <http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/ejizu-atrcath.htm> (accessed November 22, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Leonard, *Lower Niger*, 30.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel C. Obi, *Readings for Amerinigerian Igbo* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse 2010), 72.

## **B. Catholic Church in Igbo Land**

Historians and scholars of the Church's missionary activities in Igbo land are in consensus that the Christianity brought to Igbo land by the missionaries was a European-Colonial Christianity that viewed everything from the lenses of the European culture. As such, everything fell short of the European way of life and culture was anti-Christian, fetish and diabolical.<sup>18</sup> The missionaries' beliefs were clear and unequivocal, according to Nwaka Egbulem. They believed that their arrival in a village marked the beginning of a new testament. Life as experienced before was seen as raw, profane, and damned; now that the missionaries had arrived, real life had begun. God, they said, had not visited Africa before; it was the missionaries' task to introduce Africans to the Creator God. And in spite of the way Africans lived out their daily lives in constant celebration of their spiritual encounters with God, little respect was given to their deep-rooted religious life.<sup>19</sup>

Traditional Igbo rituals of conceptions, birth, naming, passage, age groups, marriage, healing, harvest, thanksgiving, chieftaincy, dedication, welcoming, travel, funerals, the final or second burials, and the memorial of ancestors were some of the ways traditional Africans celebrated the communion between humanity and divinity. All these, however, were, in the name of the Lord, swept away by the missionaries as pagan and unspiritual. Along with them went village shrines, ceremonial costumes, local drums, and many other musical instruments, as well as

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<sup>18</sup> Hyacinth Kalu, *The Word Took Flesh* (Bloomington: iUniverse, inc, 2011), 55.

<sup>19</sup> Nwaka. C.Egbulem, *The Power of Africentric celebrations: Inspirations from the Zairean Liturgy*, (New York: Crossroad Pub. Company, 1996), 17.

traditional healers, ministers, and prophets. To embrace the Catholic faith, one was expected virtually to deny self and history, learn to be European in one's thinking, curse the past, and be baptized.<sup>20</sup>

At the present, Igbo land has a good number of Christians than in other parts of Nigeria. Religious activities can be heard every day during worship hours in every city and town. Most churches have many activities besides preaching to their congregations on Sundays. They have Sunday school, choir, schools, daycare, women and men's ministries, teen-youth ministries, Boys and Girls Brigades, children's ministries, Bible study groups, music band, and a host of other ministries. Listening to their gospel bands play is like listening to professional music bands perform, except that the gospel band music lyrics often praise God and the use God's words to ministers to the hearers. Egbulem also notes that the religious configuration of Nigeria has shown that Igboland has the highest concentration of the mainline churches, particularly Catholic and Anglican Churches. This has been attributed to the evangelization strategies, employed, largely, by early missionaries. Unfortunately, these strategies also engendered rivalry and competition between the two groups, robbing them of the real focus and commitment needed to penetrate the traditional religious beliefs and practices of the people. Consequently, routinization has become a common attitude within the Christian population, which calls for a new method of evangelization.<sup>21</sup> The arrival of Christianity in Igbo land had meant the introduction of a Christian worldview.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

Admittedly, Christianity made tremendous achievements. They abolished slave trade and slavery, human sacrifices and twin killing, introduced education, built hospitals and charity homes. They destroyed some level of superstition and increased human knowledge that brought about improved human welfare. Igbo traditional religion was incapable of achieving this because it was static as well as looking downwards. Through education and the Christian religion, it was possible for the Igbo to re-shape their faith and worldview. Nevertheless, syncretistic practices among many Igbo Christians show that Igbo traditional religion is still alive. But this encounter with Christianity means it will never be the same again.

A quick glance at the Church in Igbo land will reveal numerous conflicts between Christian principles and cultural values. Hence, one observes the following:

1. The percentage population of Catholics in each of the major cities in the Eastern Nigeria, the part that is known as the Igbo land is far more than any organized religion.
2. It is common to find those who attend Masses on Sunday fall back to the Traditional religion for other spiritual needs.
3. The percentage of those who attend crusades are far more compared to those who attend regular Sunday Masses.
4. Constant conflicts occur between Christians and members of the African Traditional Religion or among Christians of different denominations.
5. Less than twenty percent of Catholics are active in the parishes they belong.
6. The main strategy of the Pentecostal movements and the Prayer Houses in Nigeria involve – (cultural identity) hospitality, body at worship, music: the

equipment that comes first in the needs of the independent churches, prayer houses, charismatic movements and crusade planners addresses the need.

7. The rate of the spiritual encounter of those who attend crusades compared to regular Sunday worshippers is far high in ratio – they feel the spirit in the vibrancy.

As it stands currently, there is a growing trend of Igbo Catholics who worship at the Catholic Church on Sundays but still find their place in the African Independent churches, Pentecostals, Prayer houses, Nondenominational worship. Even those who maintain full membership in the Church, still find other avenues within the Church for a fuller spiritual satisfaction. As such they belong and participate in the Charismatic Movements, Prayer ministries, Crusade and Revivals. For the future, the Catholic Church in Igbo land needs to revisit her missionary and evangelization strategy. I advocate for a contextual liturgy that will allow the Igbo people to have a sense of belonging in the Church and to experience a joy through bringing their cultural values into worship.

The most important concern of the Igbo Church today is the divided allegiance of most of the Church members between the Christian faith enveloped in Western frameworks and practices, on one hand, and African Traditional Religion on the other. Catholics as well as adherents of African Traditional Religion are concerned regarding the relationship between Igbo culture and Christianity; hence the pertinent need for *mmeko omenala na uka* (relationship between culture and religion in Igbo land).



### C. Why Liturgy?

I argue that inculturation of Igbo postcolonial liturgy is a useful response for the situation of the Catholic Church in contemporary Igbo society. Liturgy is where God meets God's people. It plays a vital role in the life of the Church and is thus an effective vehicle for pursuing necessary changes. The way of worship is the way of belief and the way of living. Liturgy is theology; liturgy is pastoral; and liturgy is mission and evangelization. I see liturgy as the starting point of belief and practices. A liturgy well celebrated, is a teaching moment to the liturgical assembly. Every element of the liturgy is carefully and richly drafted from the scripture and Tradition to speak to the life of the faithful. Each of the prayers and gestures has a lot to express about the theology of the Church and the worshipping community. A Eucharistic prayer for instance, has ecclesial, scriptural, and anthropological character, which leave great impression on the life of the assembly and arouses active participation in them.

Liturgy is essential in the faith life of a religious community as it builds and informs them. Through liturgy flows their daily life pattern in their experience with God and one another. Liturgy is where the faithful make their religious expressions. The basic structure in the Liturgy is the dialogue between God and the people. It is important to create this dialogue so that everyone can be engaged in it. "*Mens sana in corpore sano*" is a Latin quotation: the sound mind is found in a sound body. Worship is not purely and entirely a thing of the spirit for the African and the Igbo in particular. It is the action of the mind that is expressed in the body. When the body is not at work in the liturgy, the spirit loses its focus and attentiveness.

A contextual theology or liturgy, therefore, is appropriate to the spiritual needs of Igbo people today to put an end to the conflicting relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion and thereby deepening a universal appreciation of Igbo cultural values. The essential purpose of inculturation is effective worship. It connects the worshiper more with God and touches the real-life situation in a way that is practical and personal. It brings freedom, gives joy, and evokes feelings of compassion for others.<sup>22</sup> Lamenting on the shallow faith of Christians in African, Reverend John Mbiti commented “We manufacture Christians, but life takes them away from us.” This amounts to saying that the cultural substratum was not converted.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Mary E. McGann, *Let It Shine! The Emergence of African American Catholic Worship*, (New York: Fordaham University Press, 2008), 58.

<sup>23</sup> John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Book Inc, 1990), 232. John S. Mbiti (1931 – 2019) was an Anglican priest from Kenya. He was formerly Professor of Religious Studies at Makerere University, Uganda and Director of the Ecumenical Institute Bossey, Switzerland, and at the publication of this book, is the parish minister in Burgdorf and part-time Professor at the University of Bern, Switzerland. Mbiti observed that an African, at the crossroad of life always run towards the traditional religion than to Christianity. He remains one of the greatest African philosophers and thinkers.

## **Chapter Two: Postcolonial Analysis of Igbo Culture**

### **A. What Is Postcolonial Critique of Religion in the Igbo Context?**

The possibility of contextual Igbo liturgy is not a painting of the Roman liturgy with Igbo color, nor is it importation of Igbo culture into the liturgy. Contextual liturgy is a serious endeavor because it involves careful thought, work, and initiatives. It is not a return to some Igbo past traditions even though it does entail pride and love for Igbo culture. It is not merely a form of cultural romanticism nor a form of cultural nationalism. If it were only that, we would end up blessing oppressive institutions and oppressive practices merely because they belong to the past Igbo cultures. It will therefore entail an honest but critical appraisal of all traditions and cultures. It is a conscious, deliberate, ideological choice. I am also aware that it does not and will not happen automatically, but it is something to be consciously sought after and deliberately defined.

One of the biggest hopes for the contextual liturgy is the adjustment in the missionary strategy of the Church. The more recent shift in the missionary strategy of the Church, especially since after the Vatican II Council, accorded respect to the local cultures as essential to theology. Vatican II Council is the first council in which a bishop whose native land was not European participated. Others shifts include: the Council's approval of the use of vernacular in liturgy; the realization of the Church's responsibility to the third world, which indicates some shift from much use of Neo-Scholastic theology and style that are mainly intelligible to the western minds, to other modes of thought and express that can be understood by a larger range of cultures. The Council also laid the foundations for ecumenism and positive

assessment of other religions. According to Vatican II, the relationship between culture and gospel is theologically founded on the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God. Through the Incarnate Son, God has revealed himself to different people in accordance with their culture and age. Just as God assumed the human nature in order to offer his salvation to all, the gospel should be allowed to assume the different cultures of the people to whom its message is addressed. The Council urged that the cultural achievements of various people and nations be drawn upon in spreading the gospel among them.<sup>24</sup> Also, in the words of the Council Fathers, “Even in the liturgy the Church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or good of the whole community. Rather does she respect and foster the qualities and talents of the various races and nations.”<sup>25</sup>

The fact that the Church advocates for the relationship between culture and gospel does not guarantee that all cultural elements are good. Cultures need analysis and certain elements of cultures need purification to represent the gospel. In constructing local theologies Robert Schreiter <sup>26</sup> insists on a meticulous study of culture. According to Schreiter, there are three characteristics desirable in any cultural analysis used for local theologies: holism, identity, and social change.

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<sup>24</sup> “The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today, *Gaudium et Spes*,” no. 58, in *Vatican II*, Flannery Austin, ed., (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996). GS is the longest of the Council’s sixteen documents, a whole chapter covering about one-tenth of the entire document was devoted to the meaning and problem of culture in today’s society.

<sup>25</sup> Second Vatican Council, “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy- *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.” n. 37, in *Vatican II*, Flannery Austin, ed., (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996).

<sup>26</sup> Schreiter, *Local Theologies*, 49.

Schreiter maintains that to discover a religious experience in a culture, one cannot confine the investigation to stated religious beliefs and practices. There may be many other phenomena going on hidden from view, or not even considered religious. In the identity approach, Schreiter raises such questions as: what makes us who we are, and how do we get that way? What gives distinctiveness to a group, what are the bonds of commonality, and what are the processes by which they are sustained? Some of these questions constitute key categories for listening in a culture. How is one to live when accepted forms of identity becomes less viable, are rejected by whole groups in the culture, or become of no use to the majority? In listening to a culture, especially to the ills that befall a culture, one must be able to deal with social change – not as an aberration but as part of the dynamic of a world such as ours.

In analyzing Schreiter's proposal for a new catholicity, Abraham states,

Schreiter asserts that for any theology attentive to the cultural matrix in which it is being articulated, certain aspects of the culture such as “the values of the culture, its sources of identity, the ills that consistently befall the culture, the modes of behavior and codes of conduct in the culture, the cultural ideals, and the sources of power in the culture” (Schreiter 1985, 40) predominate the theological imagination. These have theological import in that cultural questions lead to constructive theological proposals on “Creation, Redemption and Community.”<sup>27</sup>

Abraham emphasizes deconstruction of culture to construct a genuine catholicity. This presupposes that cultures are with their merits and defects, growths and changes, riches and ills. She writes, “Deconstruction then is a method of

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<sup>27</sup> Abraham, *Decolonizing*, 51.

deepening one's understanding of asymmetrical frameworks structuring one's sense of Self and Other. It means actively recognizing one's privileges and undoing them."<sup>28</sup> Abraham's proposal insists on decolonization, deconstruction and then construction of genuine catholicity. This involves humility and relinquishing of power structures. This is significant as the essay is specially referring to "Western Christianity."<sup>29</sup>

Understanding of asymmetrical framework here is a reminder that we do not have to be the same to be united. Unity and pluralism can be richly interconnected and need not be understood as conflicting ideas. Pluralism is derived from unity for a better functioning and complementarity because the parts make the whole. Harmony is the necessary thing to put this pluralism together for a healthy functionality. It is the term that should be used in the intercultural and inter religious dialogue to give room for freedom and creativity.

One would argue that for a culture that is embedded with an inferiority complex accruing from effects of colonization, what the Igbo culture needs in the global context are courage and recognition, and not necessarily humility and relinquishing of power. The Igbo person in the African context rather seeks for balancing of power both internally and universally. Postcolonial liturgy or contextual theology is also about liberation – the comprehensive liberation of Igbo people, and more specifically the liberation of the subdued culture. This has implications for religious and theological education. After translating or replacing

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 47-62.

missionary-era songs with local ones; after replacing holy communion wine with local wine; after replacing expatriate leadership with local leadership and, the like, we must still ask how far these changes contribute cultural structure and the way we see ourselves.

The principles for the cultural analysis as prescribed by Schreiter is necessary for Igbo culture to construct a theology akin to the Igbo people. However, the question that needs to be addressed is, “Who is the appropriate person to do the cultural analysis or study? Is it going to be an “emic or “etic” study?<sup>30</sup> The emic perspective can be defined as that which the researcher gains from an insider’s point of view. On the other hand, in the etic perspective is the one gleaned from researching the subject as an outsider. Both have advantages and blind spots.

If Igbo people wait for the magisterium to make an objective study of Igbo culture to construct a theology that is contextual to the Igbos, there is fear that it would not bring hopeful result. Therefore, Igbo cultural analysis requires boldness for the Igbo thinkers and theologians to take the lead as it concerns them. The loophole of the Emic perspective is that there is a tendency to overlook elements that might seem queer from the outsider’s perspective. Nevertheless, because the study connects more to the life of the people, it makes a greater impact when it

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<sup>30</sup> The shorthand terms “emic” and “etic” stem from “phonemic” and “phonetic” and emerged from the insights of the linguist and anthropologist Kenneth Pike (1912-2000), who argued that understanding and perspective are profoundly shaped by the relation to the culture studied.

emanates from the inside, but it cannot be complete without the approval from the Magisterium.

### **B. Culture and Postcolonial Theology**

Culture is simply everything that embraces our mode of life. It is both inherent and accumulated. An accumulated culture is an invented culture added to the already present one. It denotes a process of cultural growth whereby new cultural elements or traits are added by invention, discovery, or borrowing as a means of adding to those already in existence with resultant increases in the number of cultural traits. The constant contact and growth of culture sometimes make culture complicated.

Gerald Arbuckle as a cultural anthropologist argues that the thorniest methodological problem in inculturation is the confusion surrounding the meaning of culture because the concept of culture is contentious and complex.<sup>31</sup> He therefore recognizes Edward Taylor's definition of culture as "complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."<sup>32</sup> Arbuckle notes that there are two key aspects to his definition. First, culture comprises those human attributes that are learned and learnable and are therefore passed on socially and mentally rather than biologically. Second, culture is in some sense a "complex whole": unity and harmony are key assumptions.<sup>33</sup> In this sense, culture is understood both from the point of

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<sup>31</sup> Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Culture, Inculturation, Theologians: A Postmodern Critique*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), xx.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Tylor, from *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1 as cited in Arbuckle, 2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



view of nature and nurture. That is to say that even though the individual learns the modus of the group, there are certain pattern that appears in the traces of their characters. There is also some constancy in the diverse nature of culture.

Also, Aylward Shorter, one of the leading contemporary advocates of inculturation, explains culture as what a human being learns, or acquires, as a member of the society. It comprises the learned aspects – as opposed to the inherited aspects – of human thinking and human behavior. Shorter believes then that a more modern tendency is to reverse the order and to define human society in terms of culture. According to this way of thinking, it is what human beings share culturally, their customs, values and distinctive way of living, that constitute them as a recognizably distinct human group or society. It emphasizes that human societies not only possess a culture, but also are distinguished by it from other human societies.<sup>34</sup>

Paul Chung, a contemporary public theologian acknowledges that culture grows by encounter with other cultures. He explains that human life is suspended in webs of significance. Within such webs of significance, culture is interactive and interpretative; in search of meaning in social, cultural, and anthropological locations. In this hermeneutical conversation with others, a new meaning emerges, helping dialogue partners to better understand their own traditions.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Alward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, (Eugene, OR: Orbis Books, 2006), 4.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Chung, *Postcolonial Public Theology*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 97.

Igbo culture should be approached from the postcolonial perspective in order to construct a contextual theology or liturgy. Postcolonial analysis of culture follows from the perception that culture is as a human endeavor is not static, but dynamic. It constantly develops as it encounters strife and progress in the society. Culture is not like little boxes, individually separated but instead, it is like trees in an interconnected ecology that make up a forest. Little boxes do not have direct connection with one another, but trees develop complex interrelationships with one another to make a forest. As Igbo people says that a single tree cannot make a forest. There is always some kind of web and interconnection with one another to make a whole. This is because it is obvious that there is no culture without traits and elements of the other's values in it, which makes culture to be simultaneously negotiated.

Postcolonial criticism assesses and interprets the contexts whereby socio-political powers and identities are constructed. Postcolonial analysis is a sensitive endeavor as articulated by Abraham. She observes, "for postcolonial theologians of culture, it is urgently important that we relativize identity claims, acknowledging the agonism of opposing and even more strident identity conservation from those who are threatened by difference."<sup>36</sup> Postcolonial theology, therefore is not a one-sided endeavor. The pros and cons from the different cultures and even the result of the intercultural relationship should all be in place. In this particular situation, it is not the celebration of the Igbo culture at expense of Christianity or vice versa. The primary goal of postcolonial theology is to critique hegemonic ideological

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<sup>36</sup> Abraham, *Decolonizing*, 59.

constructions that make absolutist or totalitarian claims and to provide legitimacy for alternative theological views.<sup>37</sup>

The use of the hyphen in the term “post-colonial” refers to the historical reality of the colonial encounter. “Postcolonial” refers to a field of study employing Marxist, poststructuralist, and other critical methodologies brought to bear on contemporary knowledge production. The distinction made here is essential in understanding the postcolonial approach, otherwise it will be mixed up with the thought of reaction to what follows colonialism or the effects of colonialism. The postcolonial endeavor is not a mere repeating of oppressions. We cannot change what is already out there in the culture (the contact, interference, corruption, influence), but we can change the way we look at the whole picture today. The postcolonial endeavor is therefore more of a change in perspectives such that the primary aim of postcolonial theory is to create a space for equality and justice.

Postcolonial theology is an umbrella term for the study of the relationship between empires and theologies that have erased specific peoples’ histories, identities, and agency. Postcolonial theology assumes that there has been a colonial theology. All global religions have had a role in this colonial construction and/or postcolonial decolonizing project as either enablers or silent spectators.

### **C. Analyzing Igbo Culture to Construct Postcolonial Theology**

Igbo people express their cultural uniqueness in communality and hospitality. Among all the African cultural values, the one that characterized itself

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<sup>37</sup> Joshua D. Reichard, “Mutually transformative missions: A postcolonial, process-relational Pentecostal missiology,” *An International Review* 43, 3 (2015): 245-257.

most in the social and spiritual life of the Igbo person is the concept of the family and the community as the place to be born, to live, and to die. The Igbo person finds fulfillment only in the midst of others. At the heart of this notion of family and community lies the reason for the exalted view of hospitality for the Igbo person. It translates into moral order, in the strict demand from the practice of social justice, and in the promotion of life and the well-being of others.<sup>38</sup> Hospitality for the Igbo person is not a favor to give at one's disposal but a duty that is imperative to discharge at all time. It is a way of life. In the words of Achebe, "The one who calls the community to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their homes. When we gather together in the moonlight village ground it is not because of the moon. Everyone can see it in his or her compound. We come together because it is good for a community to do so."<sup>39</sup> Hospitality and communality is a way of life of the Igbo. It is in the culture.

The cultural value of hospitality among Igbos is also expressed through the names they give to their children—for example, such names as Ebeleamaka (It is good to be kind and merciful) and Nwanneka (brotherhood/sisterhood is greater than everything). In addition, among the Igbos, people with large hearts who manifest great acts of hospitality and generosity in the community are highly respected and awarded with titles. They are given special title names such as Akunwanne (wealthy for others), Akuluouno (wealth finds meaning only in the

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<sup>38</sup> Nwaka, Chris Egbulem. "An African Interpretation of Liturgical Inculturation: The Rite Zairois," in *A Promise of Presence*, Michael Downey and Richard Fragomeni, eds., (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1992), 240.

<sup>39</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Hienemann, 1959), 155.

community), and Omeluora (philanthropist) to represent their hearts in the community. These titles, which indicate heroic acts of kindness, are highly desired among the Igbo people. The inhospitable person has no prestige and earns such sobriquets as “the tight-fisted one” or “person with a dry heart.”<sup>40</sup>

The Igbos believe that life, earth and the entire cosmos are gifts from God. Every gift, therefore, should be received with deep appreciation. This show of appreciation or gratitude is usually expressed in rituals. Thus, there is ritual of hospitality to welcome seasons, persons, occasions and events. Everything is welcomed and celebrated so long as it is something good and brings life and joy to the people. Notable occasions are: new day, new moon, new year, new baby, raining season, planting season, harvesting season etc.

The Igbo hospitality extends to strangers and visitors. Every visitor is a relative in diaspora and must be welcomed as a member of the community and accorded a respect due to a guest. Onwubiko emphasized, “Among the Igbo, the basis of hospitality is the general accepted principle that guest must not harm his host and that that when he departs he should not develop a hunch back on the way home.”<sup>41</sup> In addition, even family members are respected as guests at the first value, even as they are free to interact and familiarize with the host. The saying goes among the Igbo that “ofeke amaghi na nwanne ya bu obia” (fools do not recognize and appreciate their relatives are guests.)

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<sup>40</sup> Uchendu, *Igbos*, 71.

<sup>41</sup> Oliver A. Onwubiko, *African Thought, Religion, and Culture* (Enugu: Snaap Press), 23.

According to Uchendu, the Igbo hospitality is based on principles of direct reciprocity and indirect reciprocity. For neighbors and close relatives, it is demanded that hospitality be directly reciprocal. It is a give and take affair. With guests and visitors from distant lands, hospitality is based on indirect reciprocity. It is a belief that we are all travelers, one day I may come along your way and expect to be treated fairly. Uchendu emphasized, "It is the Igbo's genuine desire to please his guests, even if doing so costs him the household meal or involves some form of indebtedness: when my guest departs peacefully and satisfied, let my creditors come."<sup>42</sup>

Also, hospitality among the Igbo people comes in different forms. It can come in the form of greetings. A greeting for the Igbo people is not a formality. It involves handshaking, hugging, and many other forms of body contact. A formal greeting suggests suspicion or lack of peace. Other forms of hospitality are expressed through such acts as: the invitation to eat and drink; dancing; singing; entertainment for visitors; exchange of gifts and farm produce; playing hosts on feast days; raising the orphans; sheltering the homeless; and very importantly the cultural ritual of breaking the kola nut.

#### **D. Kola Breaking as a Symbolic Act of Hospitality**

The kola nut is a caffeine-containing nut of evergreen trees of about 20 meters in height. It has long, ovoid leaves pointed at both the ends with a leathery texture. The trees have yellow flowers with purple spots and star-shaped fruit. Inside the fruit, about a dozen round or square seeds develop in a white seed-shell.

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<sup>42</sup> Uchendu, *Igbos*, 72.

This tree propagates through seeds. To the Igbos, the kola nut is not just the small seed, which is very bitter to taste. It is the non-juicy unattractive, reddish or yellowish small content of the pod of a tree called Osisi Oji (kola nut tree). In Nigeria kola nut means different things to different people, as there are also variations in the kola nuts available in the nation. It is grown mainly in the southern part of the country among the Yorubas.<sup>43</sup> The Hausas in the north of the country also eat it more, while the Igbos in the east celebrate it and use it for ritual purposes.

Breaking of kola nut is an encompassing expression of Igbo hospitality and every other forms of hospitality without the kola nut is considered meaningless. Hence kola nut is the greatest symbol of Igbo hospitality. It always comes first. The sacred fruit, kola, is symbol of God's presence in the midst humanity. It is at the center of all cultural activities among the Igbo people. It is eaten not to quench hunger or control appetite, but to acquire blessing and express goodwill and loyalty to the land and the assembly. Presenting a guest with a kola nut is, thus, an important ceremony. Three operations are usually involved: the presentation, the breaking (prayer), and the distribution of the kola nut. The kola is presented by the host of the gathered assemble and the prayer is said by the eldest male member while it shared by the youngest person in the group.

The head of each household says the prayer with the family every morning before any other activity, to connect the household with the gods for the blessing of the day. Breaking of the kola nut is making of good wishes on self and others. It is rooted in the golden rule. It expresses a hospitable heart, the desire for justice and

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<sup>43</sup> Igbos at 18%, Hausas at 25%, and Yorubas at 21% represent the three largest of the 250 tribes in Nigeria distributed throughout 36 states and the capital.

well-being for everyone. Generally, Igbo hospitality that has been seen in different ways reflects their religious consciousness, which is their demonstration of love.

Nwahaghi and Uchem have engaged a postcolonial conversation around one aspect of kola nut ritual. Among Igbo people, it is a taboo for a woman to climb the kola nut tree, harvest its fruits, present, bless, or ritually break it either in public or in private. If a woman happens to be present whenever it is shared, she is always that last to partake of it when all males must have carefully selected and consumed their choice pieces from the broken fragments in the kola nut bowl. Besides, a woman may not be allowed to take any piece by herself from the bowl; it must be given to her by any of the males.<sup>44</sup>

One would argue that if the act of breaking of kola is the expression of hospitality and community life among Igbo people, why are some people separated from its performance. Uchendu did not consider it as exclusion or disability but argues that it is as a result of separation of authority. He states, "It does not imply the woman's disability is a sign of her social inferiority. There are many other linked privileges, which a man may not exercise but women do."<sup>45</sup> But Felix Nwahaghi disagrees with Uchendu and critiques the ritual as a form of discrimination against women. He argues that it "does more than symbolize the exclusiveness of Igbo men, it symbolizes it in opposition to Igbo women."<sup>46</sup> Uchem regards it as a prime instance of subordination of women in Igbo society. According to her, it denies

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<sup>44</sup> Rose Uchem, "Women and the Igbo Kolanut: Theological Matters Arising," in *Women and the Kolanut*, ed. Rose Uchem (Enugu, Nigeria: Ifendu, 2006): 23.

<sup>45</sup> Uchendu, *Igbos*, 49.

<sup>46</sup> See Michael Muonwe for Niwaghi's discussion on the meaning of kola nut in *New Dawn for African Women, Igbo Perspective*, (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2016): 66.



women of their equality with women, dis-empowers them, and presents maleness as the paradigm for humanity. She argues further that it clearly goes against Igbo sense of community and unity (values which kola nut is meant to express) and enthrones fragmentation instead.<sup>47</sup> This is an example of the kind of postcolonial agonism that can be fruitful in moving toward a considered inculturated Igbo liturgy for the Catholic Church in Nigeria.

### **E. Binaries in Igbo Culture**

The Igbo worldview before the colonial influence is where everything is interrelated and complementary; there is no alienation. There are no 'words and opposites' as there are in some other languages. Man and woman, young and old, heaven and earth, big and small, bitter and sweet, good and bad, black and white, rich and poor, wise and fool, the living and the dead, and the likes, are not opposites. They are instead aspects in creation that complement each other because they are all from *Chineke*, the perfect Creator, and they will eventually return the same way. Whatever the Igbo people did begins from the divine, and they move cyclically. Whatever God creates is good, and there is no contradiction.

The physical world is the primary domain of human beings, embodied spirit. Disembodied spirits inhabit the spirit world. The two worlds interact and intermingle. The spirit world is the invisible, non-corporeal side of the visible world.<sup>48</sup> As Ikenga Metu rightly remarked, "The Igbo world presents itself as one fluid coherent unit in which spirits, men, animals, plants and the elements are

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>48</sup> Ihenacho, *African*, 31.

engaged in continuous interaction. The invisible world of spirits, and the visible world shade into, and mutually influence each other.”<sup>49</sup>

In the Igbo world, boundaries are not divisions but were links because according to them “it is where we divide that we connect”. Divisions have their essential attribute just as unity or oneness. Both are parts of creation, as each helps in explaining the other, pointing to *izuoke* (perfection) that can only be in God. A perfect example is in the kola nut, where the lobes are held together in segments – they are viewed not as divided but connected.

Igbo people arrange individuals in age grades, and age grades make a community, the same way that a day makes a week and weeks roll into months, and they circle into a lunar year that keeps on begetting days. They all come together to make *izu; izuzugbe zugbe* – (perfect tone). There is nobody that is considered a disabled person, even if they were in one way or the other incapacitated. Incapacitation cannot prevent one to marry, to own a house, and to make a household – the age-grade can always support everyone. And there was in the past no Igbo beggar because the kindred knew how to provide for one another, primarily through their age grades. No person is forgotten but always counted among the age grade. You can either belong as toddlers or ancestors – all were in the community count. The ancestors are the link group and are not separated. There was no unemployment, as one can either belong to planters or harvesters, hunters, or butchers. If you cannot work as a warrior, you work as a lame; there are plenty of rooms for all, and the age grades enforces it.

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<sup>49</sup> Ikenga Metu, from *Nature of Theism* as cited in Ihenacho, 31.

In the Igbo society, human beings govern themselves according to age grades. Among age grades, there were no boundaries – no religious barrier, no class difference, no ability, and disability. Age grades were custodians of traditions, culture, customs, and religion. They maintain the unbreakable links in society. It operates on the principle that "If you don't listen to your parents and siblings, you must listen to your mates – they will always remind you, bless you and punish you as the case may be." The law of creation rests on age grade to enforce and harness.

The Igbo person believes that there is no salvation outside the world that we live because the supernatural is active in human affairs. Everlasting life for the Igbo is then the unbreakable link in the age grade systems in the societal arrangement that assures everyone is valued and represented in each community. All the Igbo sociological world advocates for is a just society, with the ultimate and absolute human societal arrangement. That is a paradise for the Igbo person. There is no salvation outside the world because both the gods and humans are in active participation in the just society.

Igbo people governed themselves as a just society. A just society is where people were equal even with their individual differences and sameness, *olusi* (defects), and potentials. In the just society, all individuals use themselves as a mirror to act for or against the neighbor and looking up to the Creator as the supreme guide – do to others as would they do to you. The Igbo sense of justice is on the principle that all fingers are not equal. Igbo community was such that no one was so rich to make others subservient to him or so unfortunate to have to treat them as superiors. Justice is what connects the sky and the earth, humans and gods,

creatures, and Chineke (Creator). God is the one who metes out justice upon man and woman, removes the curse when it is unjust and helps the oppressed. We find such expressions in the daily prayer of the Igbo person, especially in the breaking of kola nut.

One aspect of the just society is that everybody is essential, and unique and all are kings and queens – male, female, old and young, even other creatures have absolute standing as part of the creation. Other people see it as *Igbo enwe eze* (no king among the Igbos). The crucial insight is that there is no one king; instead, there were kings. *Ala*, the earth is the source and judge of human morality and accordingly exercises the primary ritual sanctions in disputes and offenses. The earth goddess, being the nearest to the supreme God, shares in God's justice to a considerable measure.<sup>50</sup> She is a mother who knows when to show mercy and when to punish and is always fair. Everything is perfect because it is from the earth and as long as it observes the law of the earth.

Inculturation of Igbo liturgy is possible if the cultural elements of Igbo people could be analyzed from the postcolonial perspectives. Theology building on postcolonial culture should be able to address the binaries in cultures. As Ilo states “there is no theology which should be proposed to Africa today which will not first show how the gospel has become good news to Africans in their present challenging social context. The role of theology in Africa will be accountability in terms of how a

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<sup>50</sup> John Paul Nzomiwu, *The Concept of Justice Among the Traditional Igbo: An Ethical Inquiry* (Awka, Nigeria: Fides Pub, 1999), 56.

regenerative ethics of communion, mutuality, and friendship has become active and dynamic in the different settings of the Church and in the public square.”<sup>51</sup>

Similarly, the theologians needed today in addressing the exciting frontiers of the Christian faith in Igbo land and Africa, and in arresting the heart wrenching social conditions are those who seriously engage the historical nature of faith. They must draw from their own history and experience, and appropriate the Christian faith as a mediated truth in conversation with traditions, histories, contexts, existential pathos and joys of the people who are seeking faith’s answers to their troubling social context.<sup>52</sup> The strong appeal to traditional theological method with its limitations with regard to history and context poses serious challenges. This is because the theologian is not simply a pipe for mediating the truths and realities about God: faith, morals, social ethics, etc. He or she is an agent of mediated truth. The theologian is a dynamic subject of relations and not an object into which God and the Church pours the deposit of faith.<sup>53</sup>

Domination, abuse of gender and ecosystem are important aspects of justice for the Igbo postcolonial culture and Church. Igbo theologians can not shun these areas in their social analysis of their culture and religion. Evangelization is about building God’s kingdom on earth within diverse cultural and social contexts. Thus, an integral evangelization stems from, responds to, and transforms the social

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<sup>51</sup> Stan C. Ilo, *The Church and Development in Africa*, (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 218. Ilo is a millennium theologian and Igbo Catholic priest who presents an enthusiastic voice for justice and social teachings.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

context and makes available to peoples and nations the abundant life that Christ offers to all.<sup>54</sup>

#### **F. The Poor and Less Privileged in Igbo Postcolonial Theology**

Igbo theological language finds authentic foundations in the Bible, which provides insight on why some people traces the origin of the Igbo people to a Hebrew background. It follows the theological realization of other theologians working in economically lesser developed countries that a theology that does not act on behalf of the poor and the oppressed is not Igbo Christian theology. The divine law of love as in the Old Testament guides Igbo people in their social relationship with one another. In the Hebrew Bible, God's grace of righteousness summons us to uphold a corresponding action, because faith in the God of Torah is active and effective in love and service of our fellow humans as well as care for other creatures. If our relationship to God is influenced by economic realities, unjust economic conditions can ruin the true worship of God. Worshipping God in distorted ways leads to the dehumanization of economic life.<sup>55</sup> In Chung's words, "The biblical notion of God versus mammon helps the church contribute to the renewal of the economic system and structure in the current dehumanizing form, while promoting the integrity of a life-enhancing direction in ecological sustainability."<sup>56</sup> Worship of God goes hand in hand with love of creatures. It is both a vertical and horizontal relationship.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>55</sup> Chung, *Postcolonial*, 176.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

A true Igbo Christianity should involve the spirit of sacrifice and empathy with the suffering creatures of the earth, in order to represent the image of Christ, the redeemer. A theology of the cross cannot be adequately comprehended without God's reconciliation in forgiving both Christians and non-Christians. As a prophetic relief Christ's reconciliation summons the church to be faithful to and responsible for God's compassion for and solidarity with those who suffer. The confession of the church is seriously taken concerning the silence about "the spoliation and exploitation of the poor," while justifying "the enrichment and corruption of the strong."<sup>57</sup>

Bonhoeffer insists: "In the body of Jesus Christ God is united with humanity, the whole of humanity is accepted by God and the world is reconciled with God... There is no part of the world, be it so forlorn and never so godless, which is not accepted by God and reconciled with God in Jesus Christ."<sup>58</sup> A theological doctrine does not overwrite the embracing grace of God in Christ, but the grace of God as the ultimate reality guides and shapes the meaning of the Christian confession in service of the world.<sup>59</sup> The Igbo Church cannot leave herself out of this endeavor.

Igbo postcolonial theology should seek to address undue domination in class and gender. Mostly the domination attitudes have some cultural attachment, which naturally subject some others in underprivileged situation. Ilo is vehement in stating that social analysis and the critique of the power-play and unacceptable social contexts and unjust structures all of which lead to poverty and unnecessary human

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<sup>57</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his *Ethics*, as cited in Chung, 180.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

suffering is vital for doing any kind of theology, especially in the challenging contexts of Africa. Indeed, authenticity and relevance of theology depends on the interpretation and judgment it brings to bear on the social context as it impacts on Christian faith and praxis.<sup>60</sup>

As observed by Chung: “Buddhism and Christianity are “not one,” but “not two” in articulation of the deep compassion and reconciling agape for the sake of the praxis of justice and emancipation regarding those who are weak, poor, and despised – thereby God’s Lazarus in today’s context.”<sup>61</sup> By implication, Igbo culture and Christianity should find themselves at the same level in the work of compassion and justice. The postcolonial Igbo culture cannot build a relationship with Christianity if there is internal cultural imbalance. Religion builds itself in justice and empathy and shuns all sorts of discrimination and degradation. Love and justice should be the common goal for all religions and culture, and also true worship happens only where there is justice.

### **G. Children in Igbo Culture**

Igbo people groom their children to be part of the Igbo society. Children are considered the future leaders, and they begin early to do that. Igbo children grow up and participate in the world of children and the world of adults. They take active part in their parents’ social and economic activities. For instance, they are taken to the market, to the family or village tribunal, funerals, feasts, farms, and religious ceremonies. If there is a social or ritual ceremony going on in Igbo village,

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<sup>60</sup> Ilo, *Church*, 215.

<sup>61</sup> Chung, *Postcolonial*, 180.



everybody is welcome. As Uchendu rightly observed, “Igbo children participate in the affairs of the adult world with childlike enthusiasm; in their own world they dramatize adult roles and spend their leisure hours doing “nursery” cooking, playing father and mother, holding “play” markets and mock fights.”<sup>62</sup> This is essential in the children’s formation and maturity. It is also a way of refuting the argument that because Igbo people are very fond of their children, they spoil them. The affection lavished on infants ends with the arrival of the next baby. The truth is that for most children the period of pampering is short lived. Each child is groomed with their mates and participates in the traditional activities in their communities.

Sociologically, there are a few cultural practices in the Igbo land to give children sense of belonging in their respective communities, as well as to lead them to the process of adulthood. Such activities should be encouraged in the places where they exist but also should be planned and executed in a manner that they foster progress and represent a universally acceptable value. Worthy of mention is the presentation and masquerade initiation ceremonies in my village, Umudim, Ikenga, and the Iwa Akwa festival, which is an induction to adulthood in most communities in Igbo land.

## **1. Rituals For Children in Igbo Culture**

### **a. Child Presentation**

Different communities in Igbo land have rituals or ceremonies to induct their young ones into their society. An instance is the presentation ceremony in my kindred, Umudim Ikenga in Igbo land. There is a presentation ritual for children

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<sup>62</sup> Uchendu, *Igbos*, 61.

born in Umudim kindred of Ikenga. For every male child, there are tubers of yam, a cock or any male animal, and a keg of palm wine. For every female child, there are tubers of yam, a chicken, or any animal. No matter where and when the child is born, the kindred joyfully wait for the presentation alongside the items.

The presentation goes with lots of naming and titles. The child must have received a given name from the family. Still, the community provides a sort of nickname to suggest future expectations from that child. No child presented in Umudim is considered ordinary or average. Kindred has an excellent vision for each child and sees him or her as a future celebrity or a star. The girls are called the Morning Stars. It is essential because the people from the kindred consider themselves very privileged and unique.

The story has it that when my parents presented me, at the moment, my parents said that my name is John, there were unanimous shouts and links with John the Baptist. The village community came up with the wish that I will become a priest. They have different dreams and pronouncements for different individuals. They desire for professions like medical doctors, engineers, top civil servants, and government workers, priests, and reverend sisters. They always aim so high because for them, Umudim is already a privileged aristocratic group.

The names do not end at the meeting place on the day of the presentation. When a kin sees the child, he or she mentions it to remind one of the community's expectations on him or her. Igbo people believe that there is something in a name: a person's name guides that person. The nickname, therefore, has two ways of working on the child. It challenges the child to work hard and fulfill the dream of the

community. It also makes the child believe that he or she is not ordinary or just average. He or she is already a star in the making. We call ourselves *nwannaa*, literally meaning child of our father. It is to remind us of our common origin and fraternity.

### **b. Iwa Akwa – Induction into Adulthood/Age Grades**

Before the colonial era, the system of governance in Igbo land was administered by the structure of age grade system. The Council of Elders was at the helm of governance followed by age grades in hierarchical authority. The age grades were politically very significant. Depending on their hierarchy, they initiated laws and regulations passed on to the Council of Elders for consideration and possible adoption. They played important roles in the social, welfare and economic matters of the communities. The age grades in most cases, act as the community's police or law enforcement agency.

For any male member of the community to participate in any form of communal affairs of governance, he must be inducted upon attainment of the age range of twenty three to twenty five years. The induction ceremony, which permits one to participate in the republican governance structure of the community, is the *Iwa Akwa* Festival. After the *Iwa Akwa* Festival, the celebrant is admitted to the *Umunna*, and Town Union. He can then be accepted as a matured man who can sit with the Council of Elders to discuss sensitive issues concerning the community. Before the induction he was regarded as a mere child, still suckling on the mother's breast.

The origin of Iwa Akwa Festival can be traced to inter-village wars of the past, where only young men of age were conscripted to execute wars. The Council of Elders was the only body that declared war, while the various age grades saw to the successful execution of the war. The command structure came from the oldest age grade and run sequentially downwards. Iwa Akwa Festival is performed in some towns and communities in Igbo land, especially in Imo State.

### **c. Age Group**

Infants are born helpless and thus depend on others for survival. They lack language, culture and moral values at birth, and must acquire these in the societies in which they born. As a child grows up, he develops relationship with his immediate social environment. These can occur as playmates, classmates, or in the activities of their communities. As this relationship becomes stronger, cooperation is fostered and as they grow up the younger or not strong enough among them are sieved out while the remaining will bond together only to emerge members of an age grade later.

In some cases, parents or relations can determine a boy's age mates because they know those who were born during the same period. Such expressions as *nwata ishi okuko ya* referring to persons born during the same period or *nwa ara* which means that any available breastfeeding mother can breastfeed any hungry baby born at the same period are typical Igbo expressions that create solidarity among age grade members, because they had a shared breast milk covenant. In more recent years, baptismal cards or birth certificates are presented to determine the person's eligibility to be a member of an age group.

Every adult man in Igbo land belongs to an age grade. The age grade structure is the platform on which the administration of the community is performed. Most times, community's set of duties, levies and development projects, are done through the age grade structure. Examples are: Njikoka Age Grade of Ikenga donation to some secondary schools in Ikenga and Nwanne Akolam Age Grade bursary awards to various town unions in Ekwulobia.

It is easier to take the population census of the adult men in the community through the various age grades. The construction of roads, bridges, schools, health centers, town halls, electricity projects, etc. are usually executed by communal efforts through the age grade structure. All these are only those who have performed the Iwa Akwa Festival. The age grade structure creates a hierarchical kind of social discipline, which most people unconsciously adhere to. This is also entrenched in our language and makes one to call his senior *nnanyi* or *dede* as some dialects call. The person's mind is then structured to position the person in a particular order of hierarchy and place in our society. The Iwa Akwa Festival is the index on which an adult man is determined in most Igbo communities. If one has not performed the Iwa Akwa Festival, he is not regarded as man and various roles and responsibilities cannot be accorded to such a person. Iwa Akwa Festival admits one to some of the cultural institutions such as *Umunna*, which then exposes one to the details of Igbo traditions, customs and culture and above all exposes one to appreciate the administrative intricacies of various communities. It is from these institutions that one can readily turn to, for ceremonies of birth, Iwa Akwa Festival,

marriage and rites of passage in our culture and for clues on how attitudes are passed on to new generations.

There are a lot of social insurance schemes derived from being a member of an age grade. In event of joy, needs, emergency or misfortune, the age grade gives a kind of social and economic cushioning on both their members and families. It is worthy of note that peer group influence one gets at young age, affects the person throughout life. This can be seen in the age grade system found in many communities, where research has shown that members of an age grade tend to have similar attitudes.

Iwa Akwa Festival is a kind of re-union for many distance relations, friends and in-laws. It also brings economic benefits to the community on the number of visitors and tourists that visit during the period. There is a need to harness the amount of money spent during the period with the various communities to improve the economic status our communities. There is also a need to reduce the cost of the festival to the celebrants and their immediate families.

The Iwa Akwa Festival has undergone certain changes in recent times. It is certain that most young ones are loosely connected to traditional and cultural values. They are now intensely connected online. They are in the age of YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and other online social networking sites. We should understand this and use it to have a sustainable future for our various communities. The challenge of forming age groups through peer group activities is now in the past. One can recommend that age group formation be channeled through these social networks, as we know that they create awareness and make people take certain

action. A group Facebook can be open stating the age range of the age group of the community e.g. 1990 to 1992. This will encourage people of the age range to register online and interact with their peers harmoniously, which eventually leads to the formation of age grade that will last for their lifetime.

There are also arguments that Iwa Akwa can be incorporated into religious practices that can be inter-denominational. By doing this the different religious groups in the community can come together and have an opportunity to pray as one people and share in their faith experiences. It is also a way of entrusting the candidates to the Almighty God and challenging their spiritual and moral maturity. They could be a whole liturgy planned for Iwa Akwa ceremony, like the sacrament of Confirmation.

As beautiful as Iwa-Akwa is, it is important to be gender inclusive. Conducting the induction ceremony only for the boys plays down the role of girls in the community development in Igbo land. Boys and girls are trained to be responsible custodians of their communities. However, it can also be argued that girls have corresponding or related practices for initiation into adulthood in the woman world.

As much as Igbo culture promotes life of children and their participation in the community, there are still arrears of concern for the postcolonial understanding. As pointed out by Adichie, we often use biology to explain the privileges that men have, the most common reason being men's physical superiority. It is of course true that men are in general physically stronger than women. But if we truly depended on biology as the root of social norms, then children would be identified as their

mother's rather than their father's because when a child is born, the parent we are biologically – and incontrovertibly – certain of is the mother. We assume the father is who the mother says the father is.<sup>63</sup>

Adichie also maintains that we should never put the pressure “to be likeable” on our girls because most of times, we teach girls to be likable and to be nice. And we do not teach boys the same. One of the dangers of this is that many sexual predators have capitalized on this. Many girls remain silent when abused because they want to be nice. Many girls spend too much time trying to be “nice” to people who do them harm. Many girls think of the “feelings” of those who are hurting them. Adichie says that this is the “catastrophic consequence of likeability.”<sup>64</sup>

#### **H. Women in Igbo Culture**

Igbo society is patriarchal and male dominant. This does not understate the respect and value Igbo culture attaches to women. Igbo cultural value for women is mainly in the family life, especially in procreation. Consequently, the dream for the Igbo female child is specifically for marriage and family life. Wealth, education or any other social accomplishment by any woman without marriage seems almost meaningless in the eyes of many. Philomena Okeke-Ihejirika, an Igbo woman scholar observes that it is their “primary roles as wives, mothers, and companions to men... that commands the highest social regard in Igbo society.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Chimamanda Adichie, *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*, (NY: Anchor Books, 2017), 50.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>65</sup> Philomena Okeke-Ihejirika, *Negotiating Power and Privilege: Igbo Career Women in Contemporary Nigeria* (Columbus, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004), 40.



In the colonial era, it was hard to find women who attended schools or go into professional careers because the Igbo society considered that as a waste of time and resources. On the contrary, Maduka<sup>66</sup> insists on equal education for women and men. He also championed women participation in the liturgy and religious activities. These did not go down well for a lot of people. There is no doubt that Igbo land is a patriarchal society. Nevertheless, there is certain undue male dominance that create big chasm in the area of gender equality.

Adichie observes “gender roles are so deeply conditioned in us that we will often follow them even when they chafe against our true desires, our needs, and our happiness. They are very difficult to unlearn, and so it is important to try to make sure that children reject them from the beginning. We should instead teach them self-reliance. Tell them that it is important to be able to do things for themselves and fend for themselves.”<sup>67</sup>

In a series of processes involved in Igbo traditional marriage, some people perceive the position of woman in marriage as subordinate to that of man. For example, the man is expected to pay a dowry or bride price to the girl’s family and relatives, which in some cases runs into a large sum of money and materials. It is a

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<sup>66</sup> Rt. Rev. Msgr. Martin Okeke Maduka, alias Nnadiebuebe (1920-1995), is from Ekwulobia, Aguata LGA, Anambra State, Nigeria and is a Catholic Priest of Awka Diocese and a member of the Papal Chamberlin. Nnadiebube is a sage and a protagonist of inculturation by doing a theology of Incarnation viewed through Christians’ contextualization of Faith (Gospel) and Culture (Tradition). He is a great ancestor on how to be Igbo and a true Christian via his peculiar characteristic Christianization of African-Igbo Cultures, that is, an Africanization of Christianity, decades before Inculturation became the evangelical refrain of Vatican II Council (1962-65). By his sublime teaching as a Pastor and profound practice of inculturation, he became the forerunner of Vatican II Council adaptations and renewal, hence, a precursor of African Synod and avant-garde of authentic Igbo Christianity.

<sup>67</sup> Adichie, *Ijeawele*, 19.

symbolic act that serves to create the marriage bond, such that without it no marriage could be legitimately contracted.<sup>68</sup> Ilika observes, that with this ceremony, the man acquires authority over the wife and accepts the duty of catering for her and their future children. It also makes the wife subordinate and dependent on her husband and demands from her an uncompromising obedience and loyalty.<sup>69</sup> Adichie is of the opinion that we need to question the idea of marriage as a prize for women. A marriage can be happy, or unhappy but not an achievement. Teach her what she should value. Do not tell your daughter that she is old enough to marry, rather remind her that she is old enough to find a job and fend for herself. Marriage is not something we should teach young girls to aspire to.<sup>70</sup>

Igbo women are hardworking and powerful. They support their families and husbands in the family duties and responsibilities. However, their strength and doggedness sometimes make people uncomfortable as though people seem more relaxed having women as weaker sex. Adichie observes that our world is full of men and women who do not like powerful women. We have been so conditioned to think of power as male that a powerful woman is an aberration. And so, she is policed. We ask of powerful women: Is she humble? Does she have a domestic side? Questions we do not ask of powerful men, which show that our discomfort is not with power

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<sup>68</sup> Muonwe, *New Dawn for African Women*, 8.

<sup>69</sup> Amobi Ilika, "Women's Perception of Partner Violence in a Rural Igbo Community," *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 9 no. 3 (Jan. 2006): 85. See also Amuluche Nnamani, "Gender Inequality in the Church and in the Society: Our Obligation towards Change," in *Gender Equality: From a Christian Perspective*, ed. Rose Uchem (Enugu: Ifendu, 2005), 30-31.

<sup>70</sup> Adichie, *Ijeawele*, 27.

itself, but with women. We judge powerful women more harshly than we judge powerful men.<sup>71</sup>

The Igbo society in most places recognizes women's parallel government to take charge of the women affairs in the community. The men form the kindred, (Umunna), the women form the Umuada, which is the association for the indigenous women. The Umuada, is often as strong or even more cohesive than the men's group. They make their own laws and run their administration as it concerns them in relation to their communities. There have been cases of the men's overwhelming influence and women's abuse of authority or dominance against other women. Whenever such happens, the effect is always disastrous. Adichie points out that there are many women in the world who do not like other women. She says that female misogyny exists, and to evade acknowledging it is to create unnecessary opportunities for anti-feminists to try to discredit feminism. I mean the sort of anti-feminists who will gleefully raise examples of women saying, "I am not a feminist".<sup>72</sup>

Women take care of the children and the household in a way that is special and amazing. There is no doubt that they are the bona fide custodians of the household. This becomes part of them unconsciously. It never fades or grows old.<sup>73</sup> It is unfortunate that sometimes instead of appreciation, the society takes advantage

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.,14.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>73</sup> I was home with my family at Christmas in 2016. I am so fortunate to have my 83-year-old mum around whom is most fortunate to have her mum (my grandma) still living. When I visited grandma with some beverages, she expressed some excitement and gratitude. When I was about to leave, she called me back and asked me to give some of the beverages to "my daughter" referring to my 83-year-old mom. I was deeply touched by the caring character of a mother.

of these gifts. Our culture celebrates the idea of women able to “do it all” and not question the premise of that praise. It is assumed that caregiving and domestic work are singularly female domains, an idea that should be rejected. Domestic work and caregiving should be gender-neutral, and we should be asking not whether a woman can “do it all” but how best to support parents in their dual duties at home.<sup>74</sup> Parents should work together for the upkeep of their home. There should not be the idea of help but complementarity. Their roles should be dependent on their physical or biological abilities and not on gender.

Women in the Igbo traditional setting participate in religious duties as well as men, just as there are female gods and deities in Igbo religion. In fact, in most cases the female gods are regarded as more powerful, for example Ala, the goddess of land is the most powerful deity in Igbo land. There were also priestess and prophetess who served along side with priests and prophets, even though this was rare. Consequently, in the postcolonial Igbo Church, women participation in the ministries should be encouraged.

### **I. Ecology in Igbo Traditional Religion**

The most powerful deity in Igbo traditional religion is Ala, the earth goddess. She represents the Land, as the mother of creation and source of all has life. All creation belongs to Ala and everything is put to use according to her principles. Ala does not distinguish between male and female, rich and poor, old and young. She decides which waters are to be fetched, rivers to catch fish, forests to hunt, and lands to cultivate. Igbo understanding Ala also shows the cycling nature of life. Life

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<sup>74</sup> Adichie, *Ijeawele*, 11.

starts from the earth and comes to the living bodies, and eventually goes down and ends in the earth. This cycle can only be completed if there is proper management, care and concern.

In recent times, many people out of greed destroy forests and wild creatures, which are dedicated to the deities in Igbo land. Maduka was against ecological degradation and insist that there should respect to all life. Similarly, Chung devotes some aspects of his work on public theology and ecological justice. He was quick to observe that the global-ecological culture is socially relevant, and becoming a major issue in the context of public theology and interreligious dialogue. Basically, human thought is socially and publicly embedded within the cultural life setting, such that we communicate and advance our knowledge of and attitudes toward life in a system of culture. The global-ecological culture as the fabric of meaning challenges us to interpret our experience and guide our meaningful action in the current network of social reactions and relations.<sup>75</sup> It is a thing of concern that some cultures are selfish in relation to the ecosystem. Public theology establishes worldwide relevance by seeking emancipation from violence, poverty, and injustice, while acknowledging the otherness of God in God's solidarity with innocent victims and nature. It critically analyzes the extent to which our public life and environment is affected and vitiated in predominant social mechanisms of injustice and violence.<sup>76</sup> The ancient Igbo culture protected the ecosystem through customs and dedication to deities. Unfortunately, the modern Igbo person under the pretense of

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<sup>75</sup> Chung, *Postcolonial*, 201.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

Christianity is destroying the life of creatures and ecological life due to greed and indifference. The Igbo Christian should strive to uphold the custom and Christian mandate to preserve life rather than destroy, in all circumstances. Regarding such a situation and ecological concern, Chung comments, “In learning about the life and beauty of nature, it is indispensable to adopt a new attitude toward nature in terms of respect, collaboration, and dialogue rather than dominion and control. This attitude is a radical change and transformation and may transpire in human approach to nature only through a new dialogue.”<sup>77</sup>

Chung also reminds Igbo Christians that theology in a postcolonial frame of reference challenges the limitations of human self-invention grounded in competition, expansion, greed, and domination tied to the modernist values of over-humanism and androcentric culture. Thus, it requires a new perspective of Earth-honoring values, respecting a network of interdependence while subverting the life-destroying systems at work in our global, public sphere.<sup>78</sup> His statement in line with Pope Francis’s eco-justice, where human being should take charge to tend and not to dominate.

Igbo people are widely known for their industrial spirit and entrepreneurship. The negative part of it is overindulgence in the activities that diminish the life of other animals and ecosystem. There are lands that have been rendered barren because of excessive use of artificial farming materials and fertilizers. Similarly, some people use chemicals in fishing, and some others use

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 201.

dangerous materials in hunting, thereby endangering the life of other human beings, land and creatures. Chung notes that to the extent that humans have been successful in the pursuit of their material interests to control and manage nature, a field of problems has marked human ingenuity. Driven by modern economic progress, advanced science, and technology, nature itself is increasingly exploited and colonized by the system of capital and politics.<sup>79</sup>

For the sake of Christian eco-theology and ethics, Larry L. Rasmussen argues that Christian theology must rediscover that all of the earth community and creation's well-being are at the center of Christian responsibility, including liturgical and contemplative practices. "God-Cosmos-Earth-Church" takes priority over against "God-Church-World". Eco-justice is central to Christian faith. The long-term task is the conversion of Christianity to the Earth, building toward sustainable communities. Christian faith must be a form of Earth-honoring Christian communities.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>80</sup> Rasmussen, from *Is Eco-Justice Central to Christian Faith?* as cited in Chung, 208 – 9.

## **Chapter Three: Principle of Inculturation**

### **I. Inculturation For Postcolonial Igbo Liturgy**

#### **A. Colonial History, Vatican II, and New Vision for Inculturation**

Under colonialism, the missionaries in Igbo land were partners with the Western political and economic forces that introduced a wide range of Western values and institution building, while also indoctrinating the Igbo people with a sense of racial inferiority and a strong dislike for their own religion and culture. Under these circumstances, conversion to Christianity amounted to “conversion” to a whole new culture: colonialism. Benjamin Ray observes that it was only when European colonialism became firmly rooted in sub-Saharan Africa in the late nineteenth century that Christian missionaries and their African catechists succeeded in harvesting a large number of converts.<sup>81</sup> Udeani also affirms that the ecclesiology behind the missionary activities was not so much inspired by salvation theology, but was bound up with a juridical apologetic understanding of the Church. A territorial conception explains why missionary activities were understood through the lens of a territory whose people needed to be brought into the Christian faith. Conversion was understood as a radical break with one’s history in every area of life.<sup>82</sup>

The period after Vatican II, however, envisioned a new missionary strategy, one that recognizes the importance of the indigenous culture for the proper

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<sup>81</sup> Benjamin C. Ray, *African Religions: Symbols, Ritual and Community 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2000), 170.

<sup>82</sup> Udeani, *Inculturation*, 74-75.



formation of the Christian faith in that culture. As the theology of liberation dominated the Latin American world, the renewal spirit of the Second Vatican Council was equally vibrant for the African Church. There developed within the African continent a theology that could be identified as characteristically African—both in point of emphasis and method. While the purpose of theological reflection remained the same, African theology underlines the encounter of the gospel with prevailing African experiences.<sup>83</sup>

The Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops held in Rome in 1994 expressed the importance of inculturation. The Synod considers inculturation an urgent priority in the life of the particular individual churches for a firm rooting of the Gospel in Africa. Inculturation seeks to dispose people to receive Jesus Christ in a manner that is integral with their cultural ethos. The Church then touches them on the personal, cultural, economic, and political levels so that they can live a holy life in total communion with God the Father, through the action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>84</sup>

### **B. Worship as Site for Inculturation**

Igbo people see worship as a channel to display their deep experience of the mystery of God revealed in their story. And since Igbo sociocultural groups have successfully integrated body and spirit into interactional gestures, a healthy expression of the incarnation in Igbo Christian liturgy should constitute the intent of the inculturation of worship in Igbo Christian communities. Here inculturation

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<sup>83</sup> Eloka Patrick Omuta, *From Vatican II to African Synod: Catholic Social Teaching in African Context* (Enugu, Nigeria: SNAAP, 2004), 53.

<sup>84</sup> John Paul II, “Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation,” *Ecclesia in Africa*, (Rome: Vatican Press, 1995), 62.

involves the relationship between culture and the Gospel. As such, the relationship presupposes the Gospel as incarnation in every culture and among all peoples. Inculturation can be understood as the experience and expression by Igbo Christians of the mutual impact of Gospel and culture in their respective sociocultural area. When the community sings, dances, makes music, listens, plays or proclaims the word, it is all in testimony to the wonders of God among the people. These wonders include the joys and pains, the hopes and the anxieties of the entire community. Igbo people profess that God is part of everyday experience, whether beautiful or ugly. It is with that attachment to God that ugly moments are bearable. That is why the liturgical assembly is the place for everyone to come to cry out their pain and sing out their joy.<sup>85</sup>

Igbo people believe that the awareness of the divine is so strong that you can see, hear, feel, and touch it in the way people talk, behave, even worship, sing, and dance. In a nutshell, Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, a Nigerian Jesuit priest observed that the African universe is charged with a palpable spiritual energy; this energy comes from faith in the existence of many spiritual realities: gods, goddesses, deities, ancestral spirits, and so on. African spirituality draws on the energy that comes from this awareness that the human being is not alone in the universe; the universe delineates a shared space between creatures and their creator.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Egbulem, *Power*, 78.

<sup>86</sup> Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, *Theology Brewed in An African Pot* (Maryknoll, N. Y: Orbis Books, 2008), 139 -41. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator is a Jesuit priest from Nigeria. He teaches theology and religious studies at Hekima College, Jesuit School of Theology and Institute of Peace Studies (Nairobi, Kenya), where he is also the rector.

The liturgical life of the Igbo person is not to be imposed, but rather nurtured and harnessed. For most Africans, religion is a matter of practice; it happens in the ordinary events and experiences of daily life. To live is to be religious; to be religious is to greet God with many names in the multiple circumstances of one's life here and now. In African spirituality, the experience of God is more important than theology or a discourse about God. Orobator is quick to observe that one of the implications of the above statement is that when we talk about African spirituality, we need to understand that it is Christianity that is a "stranger" to Africa, not spirituality. The missionaries did not invent African spirituality. Long before they came, Africans had already developed their various ways of expressing and celebrating their experience of God through different means – priests, priestesses, prayers and forms of worship, shrines, sacred places, taboos, and respect for ancestors.<sup>87</sup> Hence, the saying that the missionaries did not bring God to African, rather God brought the missionaries to Africa.

### **C. African Spirituality**

African spirituality runs deep and spins through African cosmology and certain perspectives on life. Simply put, African spirituality is a spirituality of life itself in all its dimensions. The notion of life forms the ethical and religious compass of the African religion: the goal and aim of human existence is life in its fullness. All religious celebrations in Africa center around life, that is, on how to protect life from harm, celebrate it as a gift, and strengthen or prolong it in the community. The respect for life extends to and encompasses nature, in solidarity with nature

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 141.

(animal, plant, and geo-ecological life) and the rest of the universe. For this reason, many elements of the environment are protected and conserved as a matter of religious conviction. Thus, there is a belief that nature is a privileged locus for encountering the gods, goddesses, deities, and ancestral spirits.

Igbo culture manifests itself in the appreciation of community life and human relations, the sense of time and the sacred, hospitality and respect for human life, the spirit of hard work, honesty, respect for men, women, young, old, and also of nature and all that it contains. Every aspect of Igbo culture is therefore, attached to a divine protection, which in some cases may lead to estrangement or enslavement of the people. But, the truth that is found in every culture is that no culture is perfect; every culture struggles with its dark sides and as such needs to be transformed by the light of the Gospel for its purification and restoration.<sup>88</sup> Richard Reichert explains that the “awareness that no culture or system of thought can ever fully incarnate God’s word goes to the very heart on inculturation.”<sup>89</sup>

#### **D. African Theologians and Models of Inculturation Theory**

Although African theologians have used a variety of terms – contextualization, adaptation, indigenization etc., - to describe the methods and tasks that characterize their theological practice, it is the term inculturation which has come to be more or less formally associated with at least one dominant wing of African theology. Antonio shapes a hermeneutic of inculturation, trying to interpret the importance of the terms used in defining inculturation. Orobator explores a

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<sup>88</sup> *NDC*, 63.

<sup>89</sup> Richard J. Reichert, *Renewing Catechetical Ministry: A Future Agenda* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2002), 158.

postcolonial African literature to enrich African interpretation of the term. While Antonio moves from the universal to the particular, as he starts from Pedro Arrupe's definition,<sup>90</sup> Orobator on the hand starts with the particular and moves to the universal and ends with Arrupe's commonly accepted definition, which presents inculturation as an incarnation.

Both Antonio and Orobator use Pedro Arrupe's definition of inculturation and present it as the profound way of capturing the meaning and the practice of inculturation. In as much as inculturation as incarnation has a popular acceptance among Africans, it should be noted that inculturation as a practice is experienced differently by different cultures. Consequently, Antonio observes that it is unlikely that what inculturation is in Kenya will always in all essential details turn out to correspond to its sensibilities and practices in Nigeria. Even within Nigeria, it will not be the same thing for the Hausa and the Igbo person. There is no such thing as inculturation in the abstract since to inculturate means to attend to the structures of a specific context and to the form and content of ritual practice in this or that culture. Inculturation is always constrained by the local situatedness of all human practices.<sup>91</sup> Inculturation happens within a context.

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<sup>90</sup> Pedro Arrupe SJ (1907-1991) was a Spanish Basque Jesuit priest who served as the twenty-eighth Superior General of the Society of Jesus. He has been called a second founder of the Society due to his leadership of the Jesuits to implement the vision of the Second Vatican Council with regard to faith-full justice in the preferential option for the poor. Arrupe further argues inculturation means theologically the Incarnation of Christian life and message in a particular cultural context. Such an inculturation a principle unifying the culture that transforms it into a new creation.

<sup>91</sup> Edward Antonio, *Inculturation and Postcolonial Discourse in Africa Theology*, ed. Edward Antonio (NY: Peter Lang, 2006), 29.

The Igbo understanding of inculturation is a relationship, which does not necessarily entail equality but emphasizes equity and a sense of justice that is based on the principle that though all fingers are not equal they have equal value and all make a vital contribution. Relationship happens in a context. For Orobator, the origin of inculturation goes back to the debate over the relationship between the Christian message and people's cultures in which there are certain kind of conflict and imbalance between indigenous culture and Christian. Hence, Orabotor concludes that inculturation is a multidimensional reality rather than a unidimensional one. 'A person can see the sun from many different places' – we can look at inculturation from various perspectives in order to create a fuller meaning, not only of the term itself but also of its practice.<sup>92</sup>

Though the incarnation of Christ as metaphor and model for inculturation can be a powerful theological vehicle for inculturation, the challenge as observed by Antonio is posed by the argument that by becoming human—unless this was only in appearance and not in reality—the incarnation merely reinforces ambiguities of language and communication. As he states that the purity of the Logos as Word made flesh does not seem to have purged language of its inherent social, political and semantic, let alone, theological ambiguities. This ignores the obvious reason that we do not possess the divine power and knowledge.<sup>93</sup> The metaphor, which has been used to characterize inculturation, comes from the world of horticulture and

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<sup>92</sup> Orobator, *Theology*, 129.

<sup>93</sup> Antonio, *Inculturation*, 47.

has to do with the idea of inculturation as planting the gospel into the soil of culture. A variation of this metaphor is the evolutionary notion of 'adaptation' according to which inculturation is likened to adapting 'the gospel to African cultural forms. In African where cultural identities are often tied to concepts of earth, soil, and land the metaphor of planting the gospel into the soil of culture has a certain appeal, but it also has certain problems for its suggestion that meanings are somehow 'natural' in the sense of being part of nature.<sup>94</sup> Antonio's use of 'natural' here seems to refer to the land that inhabits the people other than the people that live in the land. Inculturation, as a contextual endeavor, targets people's consciousness, culture, and traditions. It builds on how they perceive their world and how they relate to one another. Nature is static, while culture and traditions are dynamic. The idea of the incarnation assures the Igbo people that they cannot be strangers to their own experience because God meets them where they are. Inculturation as incarnation is the consciousness that Christianity is about their God, land, and self. It is not an imported spirituality or a cosmetic faith experience but piety that is inwardly found in them as a people. The gospel is not just planted on their land but revealed among them.

Orobator eventually is committed to Antonio's idea of African theologians making use of 'symbolic structures of their cultural contexts.' Orobator does this through language and literature. He constantly uses excerpts from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*,<sup>95</sup> which arises from a postcolonial critique exploring the

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>95</sup> In the novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the character Okonkwo struggles to understand and cope up with the changes got from Christianity and British control. The novel

interaction between the traditional African society and British colonizers. Like Achebe, Orobator incorporates proverbs and indigenous Igbo metaphors in these quotations from *Things Fall Apart*.

### **E. Mmeko as Core Value in Igbo Spirituality**

Orobator argues that the conditions for a true inculturation process involve freedom, mutual enrichment, dialogue, and humility.<sup>96</sup> These terms in Orobator's process and practice of inculturation provide essential elements for a healthy relationship. These attributes of relationship serve as my starting point for my formulation of inculturation as *mmeko* (relationship) in Igbo church. I argue that the idea of inculturation as a 'relationship' is an appropriate metaphor for the process and practice of inculturation in the Igbo church. Relationship can be translated as *Mmeko* in Igbo language. I therefore propose *mmeko uka na Omenala* for the Igbo church, which is a way of advocating for a relationship between Christianity and culture. I draw upon Orobator's concepts for developing my idea of inculturation as *mmeko*. The process and practice of inculturation through the essential attributes of a good relationship becomes the model and method. Some features associated with *mmeko* are friendship, marriage, encounter, dialogue, communion, conversation etc.

*Mmeko* as a relationship seeks for justice, respect, mutuality, adjustment walking together, dialogue etc. To achieve the kind of integration needed in an

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examines various situations occurred after the post independence fictional West African village. Achebe conveyed through his novels how the British legacies continue to weaken possibility of unifying the country.

<sup>96</sup> Orobator, *Theology*, 132 – 36.



effective inculturation, there should be a sincerely mutual dialogue between Christian faith and culture resulting in what Vatican II describes as “marvelous exchange.”<sup>97</sup> None should stand above and speak to the other. It is not merely “speaking to,” but “speaking with,” for real dialogue is not vertical but horizontal. Both must establish deep-rooted mutual interaction. Inculturation thus, requires a careful dialogue and integration that is not mechanical or artificial. According to Arbuckle, Inculturation is a dialectical interaction between Christian faith and cultures in which these are challenged, affirmed, and transformed toward the reign of God, and in which Christian faith is likewise challenged, affirmed, and enhanced by this experience.<sup>98</sup>

Inculturation as a relationship also comes in in the form of integration in such a way that it becomes a process whereby pertinent elements of a local culture are integrated into the worship of a local Church. Thus, integration means that culture will influence the way prayer formularies are composed and proclaimed, ritual actions are performed, and the message is expressed in art forms. Integration can also mean that local rites, symbols, and festivals, after due critique and Christian reinterpretation, will become part of the liturgical worship of a local Church. Without such meticulous integration, no meaningful progress can be made.<sup>99</sup> In the concept of integration, John Paul II expressed his understanding of inculturation as

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<sup>97</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church, Ad Gentes*, 1963, n. 22., in Vatican Council II, Flannery Austin, ed., (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996). Hereafter referred to as *AG*.

<sup>98</sup> Arbuckle, *Culture*, 152.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Schreier, “Inculturation or Identification with Culture,” *Concilium*, no 2 (1994); 22.

“the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures, and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church.”<sup>100</sup>

#### **F. The Slow Pace of Vatican II Inculturation in Nigeria**

Inculturation has been unfortunately slow in Igbo land and parts of Africa. It is sad that some of the national bishops’ conferences and other ecclesiastical authorities seem to be stingy or rigid in interpretation and application of the mandate. Hence there are still some traces of inflexible uniformity or highly monitored freedom. Almost six decades after the convocation of Vatican II, the score sheet on inculturation or the localization of the Church in Africa remains unimpressive. Apart from the official Roman approval of the “Roman Missal for the Diocese of Zaire,” official interest in the practical application of inculturation has been very limited. Indeed, many bishops have placed obstacles to harmless practices, many have refused permission for experimentation, and many more have ignored the whole issue. The kind of control exercised by both local and Roman Church organs dampen the enthusiasm of those involved in experimentation. Thus, Uzuoku expresses, “This [i.e., the control] is often done in the name of unity and orthodoxy, under the phobia of heresy and schism, with caution of superstition and magic, nationalism and superficiality, and allegations of lack of ‘sound’ theology and deviation from ‘healthy’ tradition.”<sup>101</sup> Nigeria for a long time shied away from

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<sup>100</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, “The Apostles of the Slavs,” *Slavorum Apostoli*, 2 no. 21 (June 1985).

<sup>101</sup> Elochukwu E. Uzuoku, *Worship as Body Language, Introduction to Christian Worship: An African Orientation* (Collegetown, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1997), 31.

inculturation and clung firmly to the colonial Christianity and viewed inculturation as a return to paganism or infidelity to Rome.

The experience of the Igbo person in the liturgy seeks for understanding and appreciation to enrich the universal Church. With inculturation, the local community plays an essential role and is understood as the maker of its own theology, though in dialogue with the universal church.<sup>102</sup> The people are the real agents and subjects of the process. They are the one who listen to the Word and respond to it in their life and celebration. Their response is obviously mediated by culture. This is where the real encounter between the Gospel and culture takes place. The problem today is whether the people are free to respond in terms of their culture and way of life or ready-made response patterns by way of theological and prayer formulae, rituals and symbols are imposed on them. One could wonder whether such an imposition of response-patterns is an exercise, whether conscious or otherwise, of power and control rather than a real need of evangelization.<sup>103</sup> A true sense of inculturation comes from the people arising from traditions and cultural practices and popular devotion.

The postcolonial Igbo liturgy needs freedom and relaxation that touch the life and practices of all the Igbo cultural experience. In African society, for instance, inculturation would mean utilizing African concepts, wisdom, philosophy, and worldview. These serve as a prism through which the people perceive and express

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<sup>102</sup> Peter Schineller, "Inculturation as the Pilgrim to Catholicity," in *Concilium* 204 no. 4 (1989): 99.

<sup>103</sup> Amaladoss, M., S.J., *Beyond Inculturation: Can the Many be One?* (Delhi: Vidyajyoti Education and Welfare Society, 2015), 27

who God is, the nature of the human person, the meaning of the world around them, and their relationship with it. Effective inculturation presupposes a thorough knowledge of the culture of the people; otherwise, no proper dialogue with it will be possible.<sup>104</sup> Genuine inculturation begins from below, not from above, thus ensuring the much-valued ingenuity and originality need in the process. This entails sincere respect and utilization of people's philosophy and wisdom, their cultural endowments and general worldview.<sup>105</sup>

Inculturation includes liberation, the freeing of a people and cultures from all forms of domination and injustice. This also applies to evangelizers themselves, who must develop the insight and willingness to abandon their own cultural expressions of faith that do not pertain to the heart of the Good News.<sup>106</sup> Inculturation promotes social justice especially as it concerns the principle of subsidiarity. The principle of subsidiarity assumes that people best understand their own need and how best to meet them. It requires that assistance to individuals and nations should be such that it encourages, supplements and complements their free human potentialities.<sup>107</sup> It seeks to allow each people and culture the freedom to religious expressions as a people without undue imposition from the hierarchy. In discussing the principle of subsidiarity, Pope Pius XI stated that it is wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community. It is equally an injustice, serious evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a

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<sup>104</sup> Arbuckle, *Culture*, xxiii.

<sup>105</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 22.

<sup>106</sup> Arbuckle, *Culture*, 170.

<sup>107</sup> Omuta, *Vatican II*, 33.

greater or higher association what lesser and subordinate organization can do. Every social activity by its very nature is supposed to help build the members of the social body and never to reduce them into nothing.<sup>108</sup>

The nurturing and formation of the faith experience involves a kind of relationship, which is free and mutual. The unmasking of the cultural domination, for example prejudices and discrimination, is an extremely difficult process. Hence it is imperative in these postmodern times for theologians to collaborate with the social sciences, whose role it is to uncover the positive and negative qualities of cultures.<sup>109</sup> Inculturation as *mmeko* can be understood as “the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. It is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures.”<sup>110</sup> The dialogue and relationship bring much grace and blessing to the universal church and the faith of the people of different cultures.

### **G. The Real Danger of Syncretism**

Inculturation is not simply baptizing some indigenous religious practices and carrying them over, whole and entire, into Christianity, or even replacing some sacraments with them simply because they are similar. If that were done, such rituals, no matter how similar they might be in appearance to the Christian

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<sup>108</sup> Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 35.

<sup>109</sup> Arbuckle, *Culture*, 170.

<sup>110</sup> Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 11.

sacraments, can never claim Christ as their source.<sup>111</sup> The Second Vatican Council, while extolling inculturation theology as a way of enriching the Church's evangelization with fresh approaches, warned of the dangers of religious and cultural syncretism. The Council insists that all manners of acting that convey the "appearance of syncretism and false exclusiveness" must be avoided.<sup>112</sup> Reacting to the issue of syncretism in the inculturation endeavor, Schreier notes that religious syncretism is a phenomenon common in many religions and is widespread among the neo-religious movements in many parts of the world today. It is also a danger in the theology of inculturation. Religious syncretism has to do with combination of elements of two religious systems to the point that at least one, or both, lose basic structure and identity.<sup>113</sup> In this event, one cultic group continuously borrows from another in an effort to enrich itself or to be reshaped into new form. This could be the result of ignorance or false piety.<sup>114</sup>

Local communities should be careful to avoid falling into the error of syncretism; however, the question is, "To what extent can the faith interact with a culture or a religious tradition within the culture without being considered religiously syncretic? Or, simply put, how can religious syncretism be concretely

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<sup>111</sup> Michael Ukpong, *Igbo Culture and Gospel: Empirical-theological Research into Inculturation in Nigeria*, (Regensburg: LIT VERLAG 2015), 325.

<sup>112</sup> *Ad Gentes*, 22.

<sup>113</sup> Schreier, *Local Theologies*, 165.

<sup>114</sup> Omuta, *Vatican II*, 67.

recognized in the process of inculturation?”<sup>115</sup> According to Shreiter, religious syncretism is simply not compatible with true Christianity. In fact, any modification to biblical law and principle for the sake of a “better” religion is heresy (Revelation 22:18-19). In Christianity, syncretism represents an undesired and illegitimate mixing of religious elements of diverse origins. It generally occurs when the Christian religion incorporates elements from other religious traditions so that its own basic structure or identity is compromised. This view has been nurtured by the constant concern of Christian theologians to safeguard Christianity’s uniqueness among other religions.<sup>116</sup>

Genuine inculturation by no means aims at going back to Igbo pre-colonial standards of cultural life. It is not something such as using a guard in place of a chalice or a chalice made of wood or to use untreated pieces of tree trunk as seats around the altar and the like. Suggestions such as these imply that Igbo culture is a stagnant culture or should be so. Neither does inculturation intend to turn the Church into a cultural museum. Outside the Church, a lot has also changed. The style of building and dressing has changed. Nevertheless, in all these changes there are still traces of what they were originally. Even the indigenous religion has not remained totally unchanged. Culture is a living thing and, like every living thing, grows by shedding old cells and replacing them with new ones, which, in some beings, cause certain features to wither away and new one to develop as signs of

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<sup>115</sup> Michael Muonwe, *Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration*, (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2014),166.

<sup>116</sup> Schreiter, *Local Theologies*, 144.

maturity. Such it is with culture. The cells of certain body features are changed, but the features remain the same and fulfill the function for which they are known.<sup>117</sup>

The Igbo person enjoys a spontaneous pattern of life that should not be confined to the Western thought process, and inculturation should not be hostage to a reactionary theology that seeks to purge local churches of everything “foreign.” Surely, there are crucial elements of Western Christianity that no local church can afford to drop. We cannot disown the earlier history of the Church, which is largely the history of Western Christianity. We cannot break with the Martyrs and Saints of the Western Church, for they form part of our history as well and of our connection to the roots of Christianity. Through inculturation, we use the common patrimony of the Church in our own way, provided that that way does not mean abusing the Church or the common patrimony.<sup>118</sup>

#### **H. Looking toward Dimensions of Genuine Inculturation**

Inculturation is at times taken to be synonymous with the adjustment of liturgical texts or practices. For example, a diocesan liturgical committee may legitimately decide to introduce some local customs into the liturgy to give it some “cultural flavor.” It is then said “the liturgy has been inculturated.” This is a step in that direction.<sup>119</sup> Inculturation, however, is not introducing an artificially created action into the liturgy just for the sake of offering something different. Whatever is allowed into the liturgy in the name of inculturation must be something known to

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<sup>117</sup> Ukpong, *Igbo*, 324-25.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Arbuckle, *Culture*, 168.



have always belonged to the traditional culture and must be worthy of Divine Liturgy. Inculturation envisions the Christian Faith as a transforming power in the lives and culture of a people through an authentic relationship between the faith and the culture in which it has been planted. Thus, Christianity absorbs traditions of the culture that are consonant with the Christian Faith. When this is correctly done, some local religious actions or postures can naturally and spontaneously enrich the liturgy without anybody raising an eyebrow.<sup>120</sup>

In this task, catechesis makes every endeavor to “transmit the Gospel message in its integrity and purity, safeguarding the integrity of the message and avoiding any partial or distorted presentation.”<sup>121</sup> In this way, inculturation becomes correctly understood and carried out as a means for proper insertion of the Gospel message into the very culture of the people so that it influences in no small measure that culture in its entirety, rather than being understood as an “external adaptation designed to make the Christian message more attractive or superficially decorative.”<sup>122</sup>

The task of liturgical inculturation in Igbo land is *mmeko omenala na uka*, which is to integrate successfully the various dimensions of the Igbo gesture into Christian worship. The voice is raised in song and prayer; the hand and the whole body are poised in orientations of prayer, dance and the execution of liturgical arts

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<sup>120</sup> Ukpong, *Igbo*, 325.

<sup>121</sup> Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), n. 111. Hereafter referred as GDC.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

and architecture; and the Christian person at prayer, inserted with the wider society, is summoned to display responsible behavior (the ethical dimension of worship). Inculturation becomes one way in which Igbos and indeed African Christians participate in re-creating the continent, a task consonant with the Christian vocation to re-create the world.<sup>123</sup> John Paul II, addressing Nigerian bishops, during his visit to the country, spoke of the divine message being incarnated and communicated through the culture of each people. On his return to the Vatican after his visit to Africa in 1982, he said: "African culture is a splendid substratum, which awaits the incarnation of Christianity."<sup>124</sup>

We have to put inculturation in the context of the incarnation to represent the Gospel as an essential element in Igbo culture. Fr. Pedro Arrupe, on April 15, 1978 issued a letter to the whole congregation of Society of Jesus (Jesuits) on the subject of inculturation<sup>125</sup> in which he described inculturation as: "the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation."<sup>126</sup> The whole process of inculturation is like a symbiosis between faith and culture, a

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<sup>123</sup> Uzukwu, *Worship*, 16.

<sup>124</sup> John Paul II, "African Culture a Splendid Substratum," *L'Osservatore Romano* (February, 1982): 24.

<sup>125</sup> Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 10.

<sup>126</sup> Arrupe, "Letter to the Whole Society," 2. Quoted in Peter Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990), 6.

process that involves “give and take” between them. Consequently, “not only must there be a process by which faith transforms and purifies culture, but there has to be a process by which the very faith itself has to be rethought and re-interpreted, naturally within clearly defined limits, and in the light of the categories and requirements of every culture.”<sup>127</sup>

Culture and the Gospel have a special kind of relationship, ‘*mmeko*’ that does not destroy, rather helps to explain each other. Every enduring faith is built within the context of a culture. The true and lasting faith is never devoid of culture, and culture serves as the context of faith development.<sup>128</sup> It is through the bonding of faith and culture that the realization of one’s personhood and the freedom, which is the foundation of authentic humanity is achieved. The idea of *mmeko* in inculturation presupposes inculturation as an interaction between Igbo culture and Christian religion. It is like the relationship in marriage which brings different individuals, from different families, and many other differences toward a common purpose, such that they will no longer be two but one in union and intention. A relationship like this seeks for the parties to harmonize their perspectives for a common purpose. It is the idea of complementarity. Within this line of thought, Orobator conceives inculturation as a generic term; the realities involved in the encounter do not remain the same as the process of inculturation unfolds. Word

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<sup>127</sup> Emilio Alberich, *Is the Universal Catechism an Obstacle or a Catalyst in the Process of Inculturation?* In Johann-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx eds., *World Catechism or Inculturation in Concilium 204 Special Column* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark Ltd, 1989), 92.

<sup>128</sup> Frank Lucido ed., *Reflections on Inculturation* (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 2002), 25.

became flesh; flesh too became word. Both are transformed. Inculturation, then, occurs when two hands wash each other, and both are clean.<sup>129</sup>

Inculturation from the postcolonial Igbo perspective is the understanding that there is unity in the midst of diversity. Diversity is not chaos but brings about complementarity and enrichment when it is properly harmonized. This reminds me of the African philosophy that emphasizes dialogue as coming together to agree on where agreement exists and also to agree on where disagreement exists, and thus so as to work together and move ahead regardless of differences. Core values needed to guide this unity and diversity is: maintaining unity in things that are general; freedom in what is doubtful; and charity in all things. Consequently, inculturation can only happen with humility, respect and love.

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<sup>129</sup> Orobator, *Theology*, 136.

## **Chapter Four: Postcolonial Igbo Liturgy**

### **I. Mmeko omenala Na Uka – Inculturating a Postcolonial Igbo Liturgy**

If the Christian faith is to find its deepest roots in the spiritual culture of Igbo people, there must be a sincere dialogue and collaboration. *Mmeko* as a relationship entails openness, sincerity and accommodation. Igbo people are open to accommodation and integration because of their understanding that the earth has plenty of rooms for everyone. Among the Igbo people, a big palace is a thing of joy because it suggests varieties. Persons with differing potentials exist in a big palace and each is a blessing to the whole family, where each person's gifts and talents are needed. No one is simply accommodated or tolerated, but rather is celebrated and seen as complementary to others' gifts to make a whole. Such is the approach with which Igbo people seek for the relationship between Igbo culture and Christian religion.

A postcolonial Igbo liturgy seeks for the adaptation of the cultural values that are not in opposition to the core value of Christianity. It is however, open for an interaction that can correct, purify and adopt her and thereby have her survive in unity in diversity. As stated earlier, the task of liturgical inculturation in Igbo land as *mmeko omenala na uka*, is to integrate successfully the various dimensions of the Igbo gesture into Christian worship. The voice is raised in song and prayer; the hand and the whole body are poised in orientations of prayer, dance and the execution of liturgical arts and architecture; and the Christian person at prayer, inserted with the wider society, is summoned to display responsible behavior. Igbo people see worship as a channel to display their deep experience of the mystery of God

revealed in their story. And since Igbo sociocultural groups have successfully integrated body and spirit into interactional gestures, a healthy expression of the incarnation in Igbo Christian liturgy should constitute the intent of the inculturation of worship in Igbo Christian communities. The traditional Igbo person understands liturgy or worship as a community activity, where members of such community communicate and keep in touch with the multidimensional spaces through a sacred passage of time.

In my visit to an African American church in Oakland, St Columba Catholic Church, I witnessed a unique type of liturgy different from other American churches. The Church setting and architecture create a sense of hospitality, which is essential to the mission and vision of the parish, as an African American community. There is powerful expression of freedom and community life running through all the different parts of the celebration. Impressively, St Columba blends effectively both a Catholic and an African-American church tradition. The liturgy is remarkable, the choir excellent, and the preaching stellar. In a conversation with the pastor about the organization and structure of their unique liturgy, he said that what the community took as risk in the liturgy was accepted as a special gift to diverse cultural heritage of the diocese. Some of the special features of the liturgy are: convocation, procession, preaching, Eucharistic elements, The Lord's Prayer, kiss of peace, recession, accommodation, color, and dressing.

My proposal for the postcolonial Igbo Church is for the Igbo people in their worship to be able to stand firm like the African Americans at St. Columba church. Our vision is that the Spirit of God will move us so that through Igbo cultural values

and traditions, we will serve the global Church and that our Church and her ministries and organizations work to make the gospel message of Jesus Christ better known in our spiritual family, our communities, and the world. I have a dream for the Church where the love of God and God's love for us can be felt the minute you come to a liturgy. The energy in the African American liturgical celebration gives me hope that our Igbo liturgical celebration will be a gift to the universal Church. Three areas stand out in my constructing of postcolonial Igbo liturgy: worship, catechesis, and preaching.

## **II. Worship for the Postcolonial Igbo Church**

There is no separation between religion and culture among the Igbo people. Their social life is guided by their religious beliefs. This makes it necessary to connect the attitude of the Igbo people in the liturgy with their daily life as contained in the teaching of Christ, the commandment to love one another. It is the life that the Igbo person is called to live before, during, and after the religious worship: the life of witness to Christ who is love, in line with their cultural values. Worship for Igbo people is an avenue to express and encounter their cultural value of hospitality. In the context of the liturgical inculturation, the Igbo are invited to enrich the Church with the gift of hospitality expressed in their vibrant and enthusiastic worship and celebrations.

In constructing a liturgy for Black American Church Mary McGann explores Rev. Clarence J. Rivera Black Americans needed a Church that represents their identity and experience. She notes the characteristics of Black American spirituality as

contemplative, holistic, joyful and communitarian.<sup>130</sup> By extension, the ideas from the Black American Church are cultural sentiments of Igbo people in worship. Those qualities are essential attributes that are hardly separable in Igbo worship. Igbo worship has to be free and relaxing, and flow from the body and the spirit at the same time in order to be effective.

When it is properly planned, liturgy should arouse passion and excitement from the faithful; prepare them to pray and fill the vacuum and the yearnings in their hearts. A good liturgy involves planning and preparations. Thus, in preparation for liturgy, it is important to ask the questions, “Are there people excluded from the way we plan and prepare our Liturgy? How does the Eucharist bring all the faithful together? These questions are addressed by inviting every member of the faithful to be part of the celebration. There is always an abundance of what is to be done. There are multiple ways of how people can engage and participate in the celebration. There is a need to give people opportunities to use their talents in liturgical celebrations because every member is part of the whole. In this way, the meaning of the Church being Catholic can be lived out and be understood in a practical sense, by all.

It is through liturgy as a communal act that individuals within a Christian community sanctify themselves and renew their responses to God in faith. In gathering together for a liturgical celebration, the worshipping community shares its faith with one another and through that strengthens one another because “in

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<sup>130</sup> Joseph L Howze, et al., *What We Have Seen and Heard: A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization from the Black Catholic Bishops of the United States* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1984), 30.



gathering as members of the assembly, we come as individuals, not for what we can 'get out of it' but for what we can share with the other members. In this sharing, we are all strengthened and grow in faith and love."<sup>131</sup> In fact, liturgy affords a good formative forum by grooming the faith of a Christian community.<sup>132</sup> As a result, liturgical leaders in a Christian community must plan for good liturgy that will help to build the faith of the Christian faithful.<sup>133</sup> Simply put, what the community puts into the liturgy individually and collectively is what they receive. The quality of liturgy depends greatly on the efforts of the community led by their leaders to plan and celebrate a good liturgy.<sup>134</sup>

Igbo Catholicism needs to reclaim the fullness of her religious and ritual heritage and train ministers for the tasks of leadership, especially in bringing the body to worship. These will enable composers and musicians to explore various styles of Igbo sacred music and collaborate in the creation of new musical settings. Music for Igbo people is not just an appealing sound. It is a rhythm that harmonizes realities. As Kabasele notes, "In Africa, rhythm is supreme and is everywhere. The world moves in a rhythm. Seasons follow one another. People are born, they grow, and then die. They are carried by the rhythm. It is universal for humans to attempt

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<sup>131</sup> Caroline M. Thomas, *The Ministry of the Assembly* (San Jose, California: Resource Publications, Inc., 2008), 4.

<sup>132</sup> Thomas H. Groome, "Purpose of Christian Catechesis," in *Empowering Catechetical Leaders*, Thomas H. Groome and Michael Corso, eds. (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 2002), 19.

<sup>133</sup> Diana Dudoit Raiche, "Planning and Improving Parish Catechesis" in *Empowering Catechetical Leaders*, Thomas H. Groome & Michael Corso eds. (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 2002), 196.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

to overcome anxiety by celebrating rites along stages in life's journey. In them we invoke the One who can master life in all its twists and turns."<sup>135</sup> Igbo worldview is where the divine interacts with the material world in constant communion. The body is an essential part of prayer so as to be part of the rhythm. Kabasele also notes that since rhythm constitutes a fundamental reference to the intelligibility and experience of the universe, dance becomes a necessity for prayer. Above all, in the liturgy there exists a communion between forces of immanence and transcendence.<sup>136</sup>

Successful liturgical inculturation transforms the Christian liturgical celebration into an integrated cultural experience. Worship that is truly human and truly Godlike, requires a broad sensorium of engagement – visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile that reflects the “fertile genius” of God exhibited in creation.<sup>137</sup> The idea of the whole body and creation at worship enhances the sacramental understanding of Christian worship for Igbo people. In the Igbo traditional musical instruments, there are different elements of the earth: drum is from animal skin, *ogene* is made of metal, *ekwe* is made from wood, *opi* is animal horn, *ichaka* are piece of sand and stones, etc., which entails that everything and all creatures are in the wave of the cosmic movement.

Similarly, McGann argues, “Color, sound, movement, pulse, and rhythm, which reflect the energy and revelatory kenosis of God in creation, enhance liturgy’s

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<sup>135</sup> François Lumbala Kabasele, *Celebrating Jesus Christ in Africa: Liturgy and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1998), 25.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>137</sup> McGann, *Shine!*, 61.

sacramentality, revealing a God who rejoices in the created universe and delights to be among God's own children."<sup>138</sup> For instance the liturgical colors and vestments the Igbo Church should have designs marking fertility, as well as rings, spirals, pearls, and shells, signs of fertility and richness because worship is the place where life becomes fruitful and where we possess the veritable richness of our being. In the Igbo Church, the architecture must express Igbo symbols that can reflect the life and culture of the people. In affirmation Kabasele observes that for a church, the main entrance constructed in a shape of masks of African masquerades would be quite suggestive. He observes that there are many masks of initiation that symbolize life, fertility, and rebirth.

Igbo worship is a family reunion to be approached and attended with joy and warm heart with the aim of fraternal interactions and unity. It is where everybody feels important and believes in acceptance, equality and love. The Holy Mass is a rite of hospitality where the hospitality elements of dance, hugs, smiles, warmth etc. are expressed. Hospitality in words and rituals, takes the universal language of love among all peoples, which is the central message of the incarnation. For worship to be effective it must be enjoyable – that is, open to the joy that dilates the heart, puts mind and body at ease, and draws the spirit into the delight of God's ever-abiding nearness. Rivers insists that the sacramentality of Christian worship rooted in the incarnation of Jesus, demands such enjoyment.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Clarence Rivers, *Soulfull Worship* (Washington, D.C: National Office for Black Catholics, 1974), 51.

Rivers also contends that music is key to effective and artistic performance. Music is capable of accomplishing spiritual life goals in ways that plain rational words cannot: namely, it expresses the inexpressible, touches hearts, penetrates souls, and creates an experience of things that cannot be reasoned. The old African American adage says, "The Spirit does not descend without song."<sup>140</sup> The Igbo Church is like the African American Church where everybody is essential to musical performance, either by singing or playing an instrument, clapping, moving or making sounds. Music and dance are part of Igbo culture as there are music and dance for every situations and conditions. Schineller notes that in Igbo land, "A celebration without song and dance, without a deliberate, unrushed atmosphere, is no celebration at all. When Nigerians gather to celebrate, as they frequently do, the occasion is most often marked by joy and festivity. Traditional dances with traditional costumes link the person with the past."<sup>141</sup> The movement, however, should follow the rhythm of the celebration to convey the true meaning of the event.

An effective way to plan the liturgy in line with the music and dance in postcolonial Igbo Church is to have music and dance group as a ministry in the community. This will allow for proper planning and composition of music appropriate for different seasons and events. Apart from celebrations that reflect the rhythms of human life, there are also sacred moments that Igbo people celebrate regularly. The new moon, the beginning of planting season, the harvest season, and

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<sup>140</sup> McGann, *Shine!*, 74.

<sup>141</sup> Peter Schineler, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 77.

the new yam festival are a few of the many reasons people celebrate in the course of the year.<sup>142</sup>

Procession and offertory dancers are essential to lead different worshipping communities for more organized performance and effective worship. It can be music with traditional Igbo music instrument or modern musical instrument. Emphasis should be more on the performance and meaning other than the source or the history; the same goes to the language of the songs. Igbo Church can make use of music borrowed from other cultures insofar as it is appropriate for celebration. This is what makes the Igbo Church a universal Church. Consequently, Rivers proposes that the challenge of interculturalism is not to dismiss the orientations of Western culture, with its thrust toward more detached, discursive, and technological approaches, but to recognize that all people need both the discursive and poetic. Communities adapted by the contrasting Western and African-based ideals have much to learn from each other. It should be noted that every culture is intercultural. The fruit of this exchange will be more than learning of a new “techniques of performance.” Rather, it will enable persons and communities to be more effective witnesses to their faith, freer channels of God’s grace and the Spirit’s action in Christian worship.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Egbulem “Mission and Inculturation: Africa,” in *The Oxford History of Christian Worship*, Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, eds. (NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 680.

<sup>143</sup> McGann, *Shine!*, 71.

## A. Eucharistic Elements

Liturgical inculturation in Igbo land is a holistic approach to the cultural values and elements. It is a concern that African clergy are importing many liters of Western mass wines for the celebration of the Eucharist in Africa when Africa has an abundance of alternatives, such as palm wine found in most African countries—wine from African soil that holds cultural significance for the Africans.

Unfortunately, though, a good number of the African clergy are not ready to give a chance to any alternatives. Some pertinent questions that might help in the argument of the befitting Eucharistic elements in Igbo Church are, “What elements are used in the traditional sacrifices and rituals in Igbo land and why are those elements used? Why does the Church in her Eucharistic prayers say, “Accept our gifts, the fruits of the land and work of our hands?”<sup>144</sup> Why do the faithful in Igbo land and mostly African countries receive the Eucharist only in one form as against the Western counterparts who receive in the form of bread and wine? These questions are relevant ritual, contextual, and economic questions concerning the Eucharistic elements.

Igbo people do not have problems with varieties in order to accommodate as many people as possible. For instance, the deeply significant kola nut as the symbol of hospitality can be substituted nevertheless with bitternut or even white clay in the absence of the kola nut. The aim is to make it possible for both rich and poor to perform this basic ritual of hospitality. There were some reports that Msgr. Maduka

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<sup>144</sup> Eucharistic prayer for the preparation of the gifts: Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: *fruit of the earth and work of human hands*, it will become for us the bread of life.

proposed for the use of palm wine and cassava baked cake in the Igbo Church, but had it quickly dismissed without experimentation. Unfortunately, there no alternative to the proposal and the question continues to surface until this day.

In opposition to those advocating for use of Eucharistic elements other than bread and wine, Father Boote once wrote, “But the Eucharist is the re-enactment of the last meal of Jesus, and one will never find in the gospels the words that Jesus took a bowl of rice and a cup of tea.”<sup>145</sup> Kabasele notes that in Boote’s opinion that the biblical origins of the liturgy oblige all of humanity to attach itself to the Jewish symbolism and then adopt it for eternity. In the context of the civilization of the people of the Bible, bread and wine are essential, culturally relevant elements for nourishment. They are, in a sense, the first and principal food of the human person as yam and corn are for the Igbo person.

Following Father Boote’s argument, one wonders whether there is actually an incarnation. One can argue that bread and grape wine made and grown in Palestine incarnates Christ for the Jews, and yam and palm wine incarnate Christ for Igbo people. One can as well argue that Jesus spoke Aramaic and not Igbo, and that he ministered in Galilee and not in Igbo land. Even in the Lord’s Prayer, the English translation has it “Give us this day our daily bread,” whereas in the Igbo translation it is “our daily food.” Igbo people have the proverb that the wood in a particular town is to be used for the people’s fire making—a literary message that everything works from a context.

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<sup>145</sup> B. Boote, from *Le probleme de l’adaptation en liturgie*, as cited in Kabasele, *Celebrating*, 55.

Kabasele also insists that celebrating the Eucharist in Africa with the local food and drink in a land with neither wheat nor vineyards is to make the local nourishment and drink a place of the epiphany of the Lord's own meal and the proclamation of his death and resurrection. On the table of his disciples at Emmaus Jesus took what the disciples had with them. He ate it in a new way that proclaimed his death and resurrection.<sup>146</sup> Everybody cannot afford bread in Africa. It is not as common as it is in the Western world. To celebrate the Eucharist with cassava or corn, which are common in Igbo land, in effect sets in motion a form of economic liberation. Interestingly, Kabasele reports that Congo (Zaire) has successfully carried out several experiments using fresh, grated manioc soaked in water to produce a flour of fine texture. This flour produces fine slices of bread, which last over two months if they are properly baked. They have also made corn wine that remains wholesome much longer than palm wine.

We have to understand that Jesus made use of the things available in the culture and in the time. Consequently, Uzukwu argues that the unique transformation of the Jewish ritual by Jesus does not lie in the domain of the elements. Jesus ate and drank like any other Jew.<sup>147</sup> If Jesus were in Igbo land, he would eat yam and cocoyam and drink palm wine. Jesus used the food items of his cultural meals. As Igbo person, Jesus would make use of kola nuts and *nzu* (white chalk) as ritual elements. The question of the use of wheat or barley bread and grape wine should not be a dogmatic. We must celebrate the Eucharist with food

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<sup>146</sup> Kabasele, *Celebrating*, 20.

<sup>147</sup> Uzukwu, "Food and Drink in Africa and the Christian Eucharist," *Bulletin of African Theology* 2 no. 4 (1980): 183-184.



and drink that arise from our cultural elements: the fruits of our land and the work of our hands.

A proper liturgical inculturation takes into consideration the life, tradition, and values of various cultural groups. It must align the idea of the incarnation of Christ to the context of different cultures. In this spirit, Anscar Chupungco maintains that liturgical inculturation operates according to the dynamics of “insertation” in a given culture and interior assimilation of cultural elements. He shapes this perspective from a purely anthropological point of view, that inculturation means that the people are made to experience in liturgical celebrations a cultural event, whose language and ritual they are able to identify as elements of their culture.<sup>148</sup>

### **B. Preaching in the Postcolonial Igbo Church**

In most cases, the duty of preaching is not about how I communicate the word of God, but how I understand the work that I do. Hence, the real problem of the preacher is not only how to preach but also what to preach.<sup>149</sup> This is because preaching is more of the message than of the technique. In preaching, it is important to have the knowledge of God, the Word, self and the community in order to have a more effective proclamation. The understanding of the self on the part of the preacher in relation to the work of preaching explains a lot on the impact the preaching makes to those who listen to the word. The Igbo person understands that

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<sup>148</sup> Anscar Chupungco, “A Definitions of Liturgical Inculturation,” *Ecclesia Orans* 5 (1988), 17.

<sup>149</sup> William Hill, O.P., “Preaching as a Moment in Theology,” in *Search for the Absent God: Tradition and Modernity in Religious Understanding* (N.Y.: Crossroad, 1992), 181.

there is power in the tongue because words can create or destroy. Words convey messages, which different people might interpret in different ways. Context therefore plays a great role in interpreting the content of a word. According to Uzukwu, “In Africa the word is everything, it cuts, flays. It models, modulates. It perturbs, maddens. It heals or kills. It amplifies or lowers according to its force. It excites or calms souls.<sup>150</sup> Preaching as the work of God is both an art and an act of faith.

In preaching, exegesis and critical thinking are necessary but the work of preaching does more than these. The work of preaching is in the proclamation of the word of God. It comes from the heart and reflects the image of God in the community or on the listeners. The effect of preaching reflects on the direct hearers of the word and the life of the *communitas verbi*, that is, the community of the word. In the words of Sister Thea Bowman: “People from Africa are people of the Word. Among us the Word is celebrated, it is the incarnate; it is embodied in song, in dance, in story, in poetry, in sculpture, in relationships. What you witness in our churches is that embodiment and that celebration of the Word.”<sup>151</sup> Preaching in Igbo liturgy should incorporate elements of traditional proverbs, songs, folklores, stories, and even dance.

Preaching in Igbo traditional society requires that the preacher master Igbo language and use of words. One way of expressing the mastery of words in Igbo is by the use of proverbs. Metuh rightly observes, “Proverbs are one of the most reliable

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<sup>150</sup> Uzukwu, *Worship*, 271.

<sup>151</sup> Thea Bowman from *Fire in the Pews*, as cited in McGann, *Shine!*, 21.

forms of oral tradition, and as such are vehicles of the authentic beliefs of peoples living in preliterate societies.<sup>152</sup> As such, Igbo people regard anybody who exercises good command of proverb as a wise person and an orator. The person is also regarded as being close to the ancestors. Hence Okpalike states, “One who uses proverbs with tact, precision, and fluency may be understood as endowed with ancient wisdom and can be called a repertoire of philosophy, history, and tradition.”<sup>153</sup>

My theology of preaching for postcolonial Igbo Church is grounded on the understanding of preaching as the work of God. It perceives preaching as a prophetic ministry, as a message of hope, as a ministry of social justice, and as an eschatological message. Just as Jesus demonstrated through his teachings, preaching has to involve explanation and application. Explanation here, is based on the readings within the context of the scripture and the contemporary society. Equally, the application of the readings on what the readings invites the hearers to do and not to do. The power of story telling helps to drive this message home just as Jesus used the parables to drive home his message about the Kingdom of God.

In the same way, I see the story and the characters and the setting in *Cry, The Beloved Country*, as a pattern portraying the traits that are characterized in my theology of preaching. It is a book that I adopt in my preaching style as it concerns the postcolonial Igbo Church, which will help me to convey God’s message to Igbo

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<sup>152</sup> Ikenga Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion, A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria*, (Enugu, Nigeria: SNAAP 1999), 23.

<sup>153</sup> Chika Okpalike, *Ichuaja in Igbo Traditional Religion*, (IN, Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc. 2008), 139.

people and the world. *Cry, The Beloved Country* is a novel written by a famous South African writer and statesman, Alan Paton, in 1948 shortly before the apartheid. In this classical piece, Paton foresaw the divisive situation in South Africa characterized by segregation and inequality among the citizens. It was the ugly situation that eventually led to the apartheid in South Africa. Under the apartheid, the rights, associations, and movements of the majority black inhabitants and other ethnic groups were curtailed, and white minority rule prevailed.

Paton expresses the racial and economic divisions in the country. He makes use of the different characters and the setting to illustrate how the economic and political situations were detrimental to the traditional social system, family values, social justice, morality, peace and tranquility in the country. In his lamentation he expresses:

“Cry, the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear. Let him not love the earth too deeply. Let him not laugh too gladly when the water runs through his fingers, nor stand too silent when the setting sun makes red the veld with fire. Let him not be too moved when the birds of his land are singing, nor give too much of his heart to a mountain or a valley. For fear will rob him of all if he gives too much.”<sup>154</sup>

The soil of the village of Ndotsheni is exhausted by overplanting and overgrazing; as a consequence, the land has become sharp and hostile in various ways. For this reason, most young people are leaving the villages to seek work in the cities. The protagonist of the novel, Rev. Stephen Kamalo, is a Catholic priest. He realizes in the events of the novel that most of the young people who have pursued the economic lure of Johannesburg have lost their moral values and direction in life. Far away from the stable structures of the tribal culture, they have become

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<sup>154</sup> Alan Paton, *Cry The Beloved Country* (N.Y: Macmillan Pub., 1987), 8.

unmoored, which he surmises has played a large role in the moral and spiritual downfall of these displaced young people who have often turned to crime.

Paton did not lose hope, as is depicted in the novel. Even though he was prophetic and broke open the critical situation of the country, he nevertheless foresaw unity and peace. This fact shows through the voice of the protagonist, whom he portrays as steadfast to his faith even in the face of ominous troubles. He implies that trust in God, and unconditional love, are the means to bring peace to the beloved country and to unite the diverse groups therein.

Fear and tension as a result of crime and injustice is at the core of the story. The black majority were affected the injustice of the white minority. The affluent white people on the other hand were at the mercy of the black criminals. The bad social structure gave room to division and disintegration. With this situation on ground, the human trait that constantly surfaces in the life of the major characters in the story is fidelity. Fidelity is depicted in the way they perceived life and its challenges. It is expressed in their trust in God, hope, reconciliation, social justice and life after death. Their lives spoke volumes regarding God's prophetic message to humanity and the eschatological dimensions of life.

### **III. Catechesis for the Postcolonial Igbo Liturgy**

Experimentation and the practice of inculturated Igbo liturgy require teaching and catechesis. Inculturation requires a necessary amount of time to sow the seed and for it to germinate. Efforts at inculturation are not just to create new rites but also to respond to the needs of a given culture in such a manner that adaptations are

not in opposition to the Roman Rite. Teaching is an essential tool in evangelization. The growth and integration of the gospel in Igbo land depends so much on what the people know and are ready to put to practice.

Before new adaptations, proper instructions and catechesis would, be given to the clergy and the faithful. The General Directory for Catechesis, also known as GDC<sup>155</sup> gives six fundamental tasks through which catechesis helps the catechized to know, to celebrate, to live and to contemplate the mystery of Christ; and also, by initiating and educating them in community and missionary life. These six fundamental interrelated tasks are: Promoting knowledge of faith; Liturgical education; Moral formation; Teaching to pray; Education for community life; and Missionary initiation. These six tasks of catechesis are vital to the Church in Igbo land.

To realize the full integration of Church and culture, it is necessary to explore various ways of making their celebration meaningful to both the receiver and the administrator. It is through proper liturgical catechesis that a community prepares to celebrate liturgy and reflects on what they celebrate. Liturgical catechesis has the primary aim of promoting “a deep sense of the meaning of liturgy and sacraments.”<sup>156</sup> It helps a community to know that the liturgical celebrations are meant to deepen their relationship with one another and God. Liturgical catechesis links catechesis and liturgy which are both “rooted in the Church’s faith, and both

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<sup>155</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *General Directory for Catechesis*, (Washington D.C: USCCB, 1998), nos. 85 & 86.

<sup>156</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2005), 111.

strengthen faith and summon Christians to conversion.<sup>157</sup> Liturgical catechesis provides opportunities for the community to reflect on their reasons for gathering for the liturgical celebration and encourages proper celebration of the liturgy, which is “the breath of Christian life.

#### **A. Catechesis on the Sacraments**

At the heart of the liturgical celebrations of the Church is the celebration of the sacraments. These Sacraments are: Baptism, Confirmation or Chrismation, Eucharist, Penance (Reconciliation), Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Matrimony.<sup>158</sup> These Sacraments are “efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us.”<sup>159</sup> The Sacraments are gifts of God to the Church to strengthen the spiritual life of the Church. It is clear that “the visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.”<sup>160</sup> Hence, it is through these sacramental celebrations that the Church, the body of Christ, is built up, the Christian faithful worship God and are sanctified <sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States*, 1978, n. 113. In *The Catechetical Documents: A Parish Resource* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996).

<sup>158</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), n. 1113. Hereafter referred to as CCC.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, n. 59.

Sacramental catechesis in the postcolonial Igbo Church must be geared towards the formation of the people's faith to participate actively and fully in the sacramental celebrations, in order to experience them and as such be influenced by them. It is through proper catechesis that the Igbo faithful will be able to understand the meanings and the effects of the symbols of the sacraments and through that, be able to participate actively in the sacraments, which were instituted to nourish the lives of the Christian faithful.<sup>162</sup> It is through the experience of the symbols and signs of the sacraments by proper participation in them that we enter into the realm of God and experience God because, "we do not see God directly, but rather we experience God as reflected in creation, in people, in oil, bread, wind and water."<sup>163</sup> The experiences of the mystery of God in the sacraments are meant to flow in and out of the daily lives of the faithful. In fact, the celebration of the sacraments is "a constant reminder that God is in our daily lives supporting and nurturing us. The sacraments are signs of shared hope in God's commitment to us and in our commitment to God and to God's reign on earth."<sup>164</sup>

### **B. Catechesis on the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation**

A proper catechesis for Baptism, as one of the Sacraments of Christian initiation is essential aspect of inculturation of the Gospel in Igbo land. The three corresponding rites in Igbo culture: child presentation, *iwa akwa* (initiation into adulthood), and kola nut ritual can lend a lens to fully appreciate the importance of the Christian initiation. The Igbo traditional rites and the Christian celebration are

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.



by no means opposing to each other, rather they can harmonize to make stronger impact on the community. As Baptism makes a child a member of Christ's faithful so does the child presentation initiate the child into Igbo village community. Kalu affirms that in Igbo land inclusion or entrance into the family and community happens through a process of initiations from birth to adulthood. Without these initiations, one is not considered a member of the society.<sup>165</sup> Within the rites of Baptism and the Igbo corresponding child presentation, the candidate takes a name and is welcomed into the group.

John Mbiti also speaks powerfully about initiation in African culture. According to Mbiti, "When the child is still small other rites are performed which are considered before the child can be full member of the society... It is known as 'second birth' or 'to be born twice.' This takes place before the child is initiated [into full adulthood]; unless the child has gone through this 'second birth,' he or she cannot participate fully in the life of the community."<sup>166</sup> The implication of celebrating the Christian rites of initiation and the traditional Igbo rites of initiation as different ceremonies is that one is celebrated as a formal event, while the other with deep commitment. The consequence is that the Igbo Christian either considers the members of the church as his or her brethren at the expense of the kindred or vice versa. Hence the conflicting relationship in the community, where the Church is accused of bringing divisions in families and communities can be avoided when they are celebrated as one.

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<sup>165</sup> Kalu, *Word*, 78.

<sup>166</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions*, 113.

Another issue of concern is the names some Igbo Christians take up in Baptism. Why do we still take two personal names, one at the traditional ceremony and the other at Baptism? Most of the time, we know the meaning of the traditional names, because they are not randomly given; they are carefully selected as it relates to the circumstances of the child's birth or the family's mission and vision for the child. In Uzukwu's articulation, "Names display the web of relationships through which the individual is defined. The neonate is linked to loved ancestors, to the day of the week, to prayers made to God or spirits, to particular wishes or experiences of the parents, and so on."<sup>167</sup> On the other hand, unfortunately, we do not know the meaning of most of our baptismal names because they are foreign names.

Nathaniel Ndiokwere, a contemporary Igbo theologian, raises some cultural questions regarding some sacramental rites. Ndiokwere asks: "In Baptism, does the little sprinkling of water or pouring of few drops of water on the forehead bring out the full meaning of 'washing in the waters' the actual washing away of some 'dirt?' In Confirmation, does the anointing on the forehead with a minute drop of Chrism convey the whole idea of receiving the Holy Spirit ... Is that single external sign sufficient to effect initiation into adult Christian life?"<sup>168</sup>

### **C. Catechesis on the Sacrament of Eucharist/Holy Communion**

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: "The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that of

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<sup>167</sup> Uzukwu, *Worship*, 274.

<sup>168</sup> Nathaniel I. Ndiokwere, *The African Church, Today and Tomorrow*, v.2 (Enugu: Snaap Press, 1994), 99.

the unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being.”<sup>169</sup> It is also “the source and summit of the Christian life.”<sup>170</sup> The Eucharist is at the heart of the Church’s activities and holds the Church together. It does to the Church exactly what the kola nut does to Igbo people. Any catechism for the Igbo traditional people that does not connect the understanding of kola nut ritual cannot find its root in the heart of the people.

The breaking of kola nut is at the center of Igbo traditional religion because of its spiritual importance to the people. According to one of the renowned experts in Igbo cultural studies, F. C. Ogbalu, “Oji (Kola nut) shows the love of man for his neighbor and his God. That is why in all occasions and every event in Igbo land, be it the settlement of a dispute, or sacrifice, or an entertainment of visitors, the first thing to do is to break, share and eat kola nut.”<sup>171</sup> It is a ritual that represents the Igbos as a religious people, functioning both a form of prayer and of relationship.

Obiajulu also observes, “Even in praying over the gift (the kola nut) certain epiclesis<sup>172</sup> is used in inviting God to come and bless the gathering and the particular intention for which people are gathered. Anamnesis<sup>173</sup> is also used to call

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<sup>169</sup> CCC., 1325.

<sup>170</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, n. 11, Vatican Council II, Flannery Austin, ed. (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996). Hereafter referred to as LG.

<sup>171</sup> Francis C. Ogbalu, *Omenala Igbo* (Onitsha: Varsity Press, 1974), 51.

<sup>172</sup> *Epiclesis* is from Greek meaning to “call upon” or invoke. It is found in the genre of prayer known as the Eucharistic prayer, that is the prayer used over the elements of bread and wine during the celebration of the Eucharist. Cf. Espin Nicklloff, *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2007), 403.

to memory the good works of our ancestors after whom the living relatives believe they are ever in communion with the living."<sup>174</sup> With the above analysis Obiajulu emphasizes the relationship between the breaking of kola nut and the Eucharist in the Christian tradition. He maintains that the both rituals are spiritual practices and are of parallel importance to the Igbo people and the Christians respectively. They both make use of invocation of the spirits and are both forms of enacting a living memory.

Igbo people use kola nut in all kinds of sacrifice and religious events. Chewing kola nut is not like chewing gum or coconut or another plant, but it is chewed with moral conviction. In this state, therefore, it stands as a covenant for the life of those that chew it. It serves as the invocation and connection with the spirits and the gods of the land. Whenever there is a breaking of kola nut, there is an automatic introduction of a sacrificial element in the communion between human beings and the gods. So, kola nut communion serves as a means of interconnecting an event with the spiritual/ancestral world. The Igbos believes that both spirits and humans share and eat kola nut."<sup>175</sup> That explains why after breaking the kola nut, a tiny piece is thrown out to the spirits. They do this before the consumption of the

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<sup>173</sup> *Anamnesis* is a liturgical term of Greek origin meaning remembrance, but often intended as a participatory act through which the Christian experiences moving into the paschal mystery, life, passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. See also Espin Nicklloff, *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2007), 50.

<sup>174</sup> Obiajulu, Obiajulu, *metaphysics of Kola Nut* FILOSOFIA THEORETICA: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religion, Vol. 2 N 2, July 2013. <https://www.scribd.com/document/250078977/Obiajulu-metaphysics-of-Kola-Nut-Ft-2-2-2013> (accessed May, 12, 2017).

<sup>175</sup> Ihenacho, *African*, 122.

rest of the nuts. Invariably, Igbo people eat the kola nut under a sense of solemnity and sense of reverence due to the ancestors' participation in the communion through libation. The ritual of the breaking of kola nut is a sacred covenant among the living, between the living and the departed, for the adulation of *ndiichie* (ancestors). It is a solemn sacrifice to benevolent deities in the presence of *Ani*, the earth deity, in supplication that the divine will of *Chineke* (the Creator) be done on earth.

The breaking of kola nut promotes *koinonia*<sup>176</sup> among the partakers as it forms them into a community of love and brotherhood. The ritual establishes a communion between the individuals with the gods. It unites the living, the ancestors and the gods into one communion. A great significance of the kola nut ritual is that it affirms a sense of community among those who participate in the ritual. It also assures both the host and the guest that they are one and that they share a common bond. The Igbo traditional society lives separate from one another and functions independently. Because of such autonomy, they often had frictions and wars to assert superiorities. To reduce such tensions when they come together, they share in the Kola nut ritual to establish a common ground for association and interactions. Thus, kola nut breaks barriers and unites people into one community. In the words of Dr. Nwabueze, "If we do not share kola nut with us, you cannot guarantee your safety in our midst. But with the bond of commitment and the covenant in the ritual,

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<sup>176</sup> *Koinonia* is an abstract term that denotes "participation" and "fellowship," thus implying a close bond. In St. Paul's view, those who partake in the Lord's Supper participate in the *koinonia* with the Body and Blood of Christ. (1 Cor 10:21) See Nicklloff, *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies*, 720.

we are vulnerable.”<sup>177</sup> According to Ihenacho, “An essential kind of communion meals among the Igbo people is the kola nut breaking, sharing and eating a meal. It is the most simple, the commonest and the most indicative of Igbo people's spirituality and religion.”<sup>178</sup>

#### **D. Catechesis on the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation**

When Christian tradition of reconciliation arrived in Africa it encountered a profound richness within the culture. There was already present the practice of the confession of faults and of reconciliation to the community, in particular for great events in the life of the community, at childbirth, reunions, separations, disputes, and other sorts of disruptions to the equilibrium. At the rite of reconciliation, the one at fault steps forward and makes a confession, in the presence of the injured parties or their representatives. Depending on the wrong that has been committed, he or she will, for example, speak a good word to replace the bad that had been said. It could be the paying of a fine or a gesture of self-abasement and humiliation for having scoffed at an elder.

In the Igbo society, repairing wrongs done is especially a community affair. A wrong once committed, even in private, is a disorder that is introduced into the earth and the social tissue. Therefore, its repair must be public. This is not to say that every repair of a wrong involves the whole village and all the people. It would usually be sufficient to have some representatives from the groups of those concerned. Discussing about the culpability and responsibilities of those involved

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<sup>177</sup> Okoye F. Nwabueze, *Kola nut breaking* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sqNERR50yc> (accessed May10, 2017).

<sup>178</sup> Ihenacho, *African*, 121.

are finished before the rite occurs. In addition, a determination has been made as to what action is needed to return to the right order and to reestablish the equilibrium that has been ruptured by the wrong.

According to Orabator “Reconciliation involves a process, of which a personal interior feeling of remorse and guilt is only one stage. The other steps include a public confession, that is, in the presence of the community or extended family, punishment, a ritual cleansing, and the reconciliation proper. The ultimate grace of reconciliation is the restoration of the original harmony with God, self, community and nature.”<sup>179</sup> The last stage of the reconciliation process is the communion meal for reintegration into the community. Ihenacho states, “Communion meals are used in procuring the reconciliation of feuding parties, whether the enemy is long-standing or not.”<sup>180</sup> The most important aspect of the communion meal is the breaking of kola nut, where they contribute, pray and share together with the community, the ancestors, and the gods.

“Kola is also used as a symbol of reconciliation and to make a covenant between two or more persons.”<sup>181</sup> In Igbo land, reconciliation ritual is common for both individuals and large groups. Reconciliation presupposes conflict and separation, which breaks the bond of community and the gods. If two persons are not at peace, they cannot share together in common ritual or share in the same

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<sup>179</sup> Orabator, *Theology*, 63.

<sup>180</sup> Ihenacho, *Africa*, 125.

<sup>181</sup> Jon Ofoegbu Ukaegbu, *The Kola Nut: As an Igbo Cultural and Social Symbol* in “IgboNet” <http://kaleidoscope.igbonet.com/culture/kolanutseries/jukaegbu/> (accessed on 5/12/2017).

covenant meal, likewise groups or communities. They should reconcile before they can be part of the community. That is evident in the attitude of Ezeani, who is the priest of the earth-goddess when he visited Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo had beaten his wife, Ojiugo, in the week of peace, thereby breaking the sacredness of the week of peace. That necessitated a visit from the priest of earth-goddess who is the custodian of the town. When Okonkwo presented him with some kola nut, Ezeani said, "Take away your kola nut. I shall not eat in the house of a man who has no respect for our gods and ancestors." By not observing the sacredness of the week of Peace, Okonkwo had broken the bond that would empower and sustain his sharing kola nut with the traditional priest, Ezeani who represents the community.<sup>182</sup>

There is an argument that the notion of pardon is hardly present in Igbo traditional reconciliatory rites. The claim is that the offender is punished and reprimanded rather than acquitted or forgiven. Kabasele warns about the danger of missing the role of God as the One forgives sins. He says "... it is important to remain cautious. The whole system within African society needs to be welcomed and evangelized, for it is the forgiveness of God in the church that forms the theological heart of the rite of penance."<sup>183</sup>

The Christian belief in the mission Christ has a role to play in the sacrament of reconciliation, to effect change in the ritual life of the community. The use of the Word of God, and the gospel as the good new of salvation is essential here. God is merciful and God's forgiveness always remains gratuitous. There should be

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<sup>182</sup> Achebe, *Things*, 9.

<sup>183</sup> Kabasele, *Celebrating*, 61.



emphasis on prayers asking for the grace of God's forgiveness and for the forgiveness of the people, and one for the other. Taking care that the fines do not become heavy burdens should also be a part of Christian reconciliation. Even though the communal meal and other Igbo reconciliatory rites function as powerful symbol across cultural differences, the Christian meaning shines through it. It is the sacrifice of Christ that becomes the guarantee of reconciliation.

#### **E. Catechesis on the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick**

Catechesis for the sacrament of the anointing of the sick should receive a great attention among Igbo people, for a rooted *mmeko* between culture and Christianity, because of Igbo understanding of healing and wellbeing. Most of the reason why Igbo people leave the Catholic Church is because of the search for healing. A spiritual healing, which pays no attention to the body does not carry along the Igbo person. The Igbo Church seeks for Jesus as the healer and omnipotent.

The sacrament should be periodically celebrated within the mass, to afford great opportunity for its catechesis. An initiative that can help in the understanding of this sacrament is the celebration of mass in the family compound of those who are homebound. These moments of catechesis made most parishioners appreciate and participate with faith in the sacrament and not to be scared about it as a preparation for death, but instead to understand it as a sacrament of healing.

Igbo people because of their deep religious consciousness attribute most sickness as spiritually originated. Treatment of sickness, in similar fashion, can occur on two levels. The visible causes call for an ordinary healing by means of leaves, roots and other natural elements. An illness by supernatural causes enjoins

another level of attention. There might be a need to reconcile members of the family, group or villages or there might be need to make a special appeal to forces beyond the visible. Such an appeal is accompanied by invoking the protection of a divine healer for incantations and similar rituals to the gods. In most case sin and sickness intermingle both in understanding, attention and effects. In the past the Church has tried simply to dismiss sorcery as vain beliefs and superstitions. In reality, however, this is like covering burning cinders with ashes.

Today, pastoral practice is different, and sorcery is seen as an incarnation of evil, in which its spells are pernicious and sometimes fatal. Kabasele notes that the sorcerer is part of a coven that knows how to provoke and channel the interaction of spiritual forces. Instead of using these forces for good, the sorcerer turns them into a catastrophe for his neighbor. This evil is not innate in the person, for, as it is said, "People are not born sorcerers; they become sorcerers." This happens through the evil of other sorcerers who prey upon the weakness of fragile men and women to deceive them. Such a man or woman is dangerous to the community. The healing involves vomiting out the sorcery in a rite of purification. The power of Christ is presented as able to stand against it and consequently heal it. The gospel and Christian prayer are presented as forces for liberation, and Christians should turn to them to expel the evil that contaminates the sorcerer.<sup>184</sup>

#### **F. Catechesis on the Sacrament of Matrimony**

The Sacrament of Matrimony needs a great catechesis in Igbo land. In Igbo culture, marriage is a process and does not just happen at the exchange of consent

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<sup>184</sup> Kabasele, *Celebrating*, 65.

like in the Christian marriage. Igbo people attach important values to family and have elaborate preparations in the building of a new home. The several rituals and stages of marriage play great role in understanding of the marriage because they serve as teaching moments for the couples and their respective extended families. There are slight differences in different communities or areas in Igbo land but generally it is a dynamic process. According to Uchendu, "Marriage is so important and central to the Igbo that nothing concerned with it is taken lightly. The whole process falls into four interrelated stages: asking the girl's consent, working through a middleman, testing the bride's character, and paying the bride price."<sup>185</sup>

One of the methods through which the missionaries attempted to evangelize Igbo people was through Christian villages.<sup>186</sup> The new converts were enjoined never to marry according to the traditional laws and customs or to participate in the traditional rites of initiation into adulthood, for fear that they might fall back to their old ways. These villages were for the missionaries a favorable place where the Catholic doctrine could be imparted both to the new converts and especially the catechumens devoid of the neutralizing influence of non-Christians.

The conflicting nature of the marriage ceremonies in Igbo land is such that the couple will have to perform both the traditional rites and the Christian rites to

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<sup>185</sup> Uchendu, *Igbos*, 51.

<sup>186</sup> These villages were set up by the missionaries to break the link between the new converts and their pagan environment, that is, the traditional village environment. Accordingly, as people embraced the Catholic faith, they were instructed to build a house for themselves in the Christian village and, thus, cut themselves off as far as possible from pagan influences.

be recognized as married people. The risk of performing only the traditional ceremony is serious to the extent that the Church does not recognize them as married, and termed the couple as 'living in sin'. They are denied the sacraments of the Church and not given Christian funeral rites. In some extreme cases, the penalty is extended to their children, as some are not baptized until their parents are married in the Church.

On the other hand, the consequence of omitting the traditional rites of marriage is like excluding one from the kindred. Expressing the essential nature of the traditional marriage ceremonies, Ndiokwere notes that a person who marries only in the Christian way without performing the traditional rites is not considered a fully married person in Igbo traditional society. In some cases, they are denied certain rights and privileges in the community and could even be ostracized.<sup>187</sup> Certainly the person who refuses to perform the rite for the kindred will never be allowed entrance to any traditional marriage ceremony within the kindred.

At the African Synod in Rome, Cardinal Thiandoum affirms, "Marriage and family need to be looked at more closely in order to recover and promote the precious values of traditional African family. We need greater appreciation for our various customary laws of marriage and serious effort to harmonize them with church laws of marriage."<sup>188</sup> These practices are gifts to the Church's catechesis, rather than superstitions to be thrown away. There are however some aspects of the Igbo marriage that needs modification and purifications. Issues like high bride price

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<sup>187</sup> Ndiokwere, *African*, 32.

<sup>188</sup> Cardinal H. Thiandoum, from *The Task of the Special Synod For Africa*, as cited in Onwubiko, *African Thought*, 146.

in certain communities presents marriage as an economic endeavor. Also, all religious aspects of the rituals should be done in the light of the Gospel.

Marriage unites families and should not divide them. Igbo marriage is an alliance between two families rather than a contract between two individuals. Many families are sanctioned in Igbo land because of the mix marriage<sup>189</sup> between their children. The issue of Catholics marrying non-Catholics, which has caused a lot of controversies within the Church in Igbo land. The Awka Diocesan Synod Acta stated that: "Where Catholic parents give out their daughter in marriage to non-Catholics, they incur the penalty of suspension from the sacraments unless they show *non-cooperation* by not taking dowry.<sup>190</sup> They should however not deny their *erring* children."<sup>191</sup> This portion of the Synod Acta sounds very rigid and unrealizable but it has been the standing rule in the diocese.

In response to the bond of marriage for the couple, Kabasele notes that in traditional African teaching, marriage is not indissoluble. It is understood that shipwrecks are possible in the course of human life: bad treatment by one of the partners, the unkindness or malevolence of one family, the discovery of sorcery, sterility, misconduct, death, and all that is opposed to life can all be causes of dissolution.<sup>192</sup> Mmeko as a relationship is free and mutual. When it is not working,

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<sup>189</sup> Mixed marriage is an expression implying a marriage between a Catholic and non-Catholic.

<sup>190</sup> Igbo people do not recognize any marriage where there was no exchange of dowry. To reject the dowry amounts to rejecting the marriage.

<sup>191</sup> Awka Diocese, *Synod Acta* (Okpuno, Nigeria: Fides, 1995), 202-203.

<sup>192</sup> Kabasele, *Celebrating*, 71.

there should be undue stress to keep the bond. “If the baby is dead, the baby sitter is relinquished of his or her job.”

### **G. Catechesis on the Sacrament of Holy Orders**

Catechesis for the sacrament of Holy Orders is rooted in Baptism: “that the whole Church is a priestly people and that through Baptism all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ, the common priesthood of the faithful.”<sup>193</sup> Further, catechesis on the sacrament must point out clearly: “The ministerial priesthood differs in essence from the common priesthood of the faithful because it confers a sacred power for the service of the faithful.”<sup>194</sup> “Holy Orders is the sacrament through which the mission entrusted by Christ to his apostles continues to be exercised in the Church until the end of time; thus it is the sacrament of apostolic ministry.”<sup>195</sup> The purpose for which priests are consecrated by God through the ministry of the bishops is that they should be made sharers in a special way in Christ’s priesthood and, by carrying out sacred functions, act as his ministers who through his Spirit continually exercises his priestly function for our benefit in the liturgy.<sup>196</sup>

Priests exercise cultic and leadership roles in the communities. They exercise a ministry of word, sacrament, and pastoral leadership within a local church

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<sup>193</sup> *NDC*. 139.

<sup>194</sup> *CCC.*, n.1592.

<sup>195</sup> *CCC.*, n.1536.

<sup>196</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 1965, n. 5. Vatican Council II, Flannery Austin, ed., (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996).

community, whether on the parish or the diocesan level.<sup>197</sup> Dale Cannon identifies six functions common to almost all known cultures that he calls the “ways” of dealing with “ultimate reality”: (1) sacred rite, (2) right action, (3) devotion, (4) shamanic meditation, (5) mystical quest, and (6) reasoned inquiry. He then defines “priest” or priestess” as “duly authorized leader of sacred rites.”<sup>198</sup> In order to function properly the priest needs special training and formation. Formation to the priesthood is an important aspect of the vocation to the priesthood. According to *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, “A correct and in-depth awareness of the nature and mission of the ministerial priesthood is the path, which must be taken in order to emerge from the crises of priestly identity.”<sup>199</sup>

The priests occupy a prominent place in Igbo Traditional Religion. They minister in temples, shrines and sacred groves. The office is open to man and woman but mostly men. “They are well-versed on religious knowledge in matters of myths, beliefs, traditions, legends, proverbs and in the religious practices of their people.<sup>200</sup> The prospective priest undergoes training and initiation by older or more experienced priest or priestesses. In most parts of Igbo land, the training is done in the shrine, temple or sacred grove. “Training to become a priest involves learning various prayers, dances, songs, rituals, skills and crafts and all aspects of their

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<sup>197</sup> Thomas P. Rausch. S. J., “Priesthood in the context of Apostolic Religious Life”: in *The Theology of Priesthood*, Georgen, and Garrido, eds. (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2000), 105.

<sup>198</sup> Dale S. Cannon, *Six Ways of Being Religious: A Framework for Comparative Studies of Religious* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1996), 54.

<sup>199</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Pastores dabo vobis*, (Mar. 15, 1992), 11.

<sup>200</sup> Mbiti, *African*, 161.

religion".<sup>201</sup> The training is always characterized with keeping certain taboos, certain foods, which are considered taboo to the divinity, will be avoided, and he is withdrawn from the public. The taboo is religiously kept and breaking it may be suicidal.

The priest in Igbo traditional religion has always been an important figure. The priests primarily stand between man and God. Suffice it to say that he is the chief intermediary between the divine beings and man as a means of contact between God, the divinities and the ancestors. The priest is the spiritual symbol of God and divinities among the Igbo. Since he hears and speaks on behalf of the people, he is like the spiritual pastor of his community. They make intercession with God on various needs of the people.

When people want to make offerings, intercede with the ancestors or the divinities, it is the duty of the priest as they link between the people and the spiritual beings to receive the offerings and make intercession on behalf of the people. As next to them in the hierarchy of powers he is the natural link between the living and the powerful spirits of dead chiefs and elders. In times of misfortune and sickness, people approach the priest, and he seeks the intervention of the divine beings on behalf of the victim. Thus, he has the power and ability to drive away malevolent spirits, turn one's misfortune and heal the afflicted on behalf of the divine spirits. He can also intercede on behalf of the general community in event of any adversity of communal dimensions. It is the function of the priests to offer sacrifice to God, the divinities and the ancestors so that they will be pacified and

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.



reverse such general adversity. The priests also serve as messengers between his people and the spiritual beings. In this capacity he receives revelations and messages from the spiritual world and passes them on to the living members of the community. He is in this regard, the mouthpiece of the spiritual world.

The traditional Igbo priest is also seen as social figure. He is expected to conform to certain regulations governing their moral and spiritual states during and immediately after performing the priestly functions. For instance, the priest may be regulated against eating certain foods, have sexual intercourse, mix with people, though, depending largely on the sub-cultural area in Igbo land. "They are men and women of respectable character, trustworthy, devout, obedient to the tradition of their office and to God or the divinities they serve, friendly, kind, 'educated' in matters of their profession and religious."<sup>202</sup>

They are the repositories of community customs, and taboos. They play prominent roles during coronation of kings and chieftaincy installation. They are involved in the traditional social activities and engaged in non-spiritual matter like hunting and blacksmithing. In a nutshell, they are well versed in religious knowledge, in matters of myths, beliefs, traditions, legends, proverbs and the general socio-religious practices of the community. Indeed, the contributions of the priests in Igbo traditional religion can hardly be over-emphasized.

A postcolonial Igbo priest as an agent of Inculturation and evangelization is a preacher using Igbo texts (stories, proverbs and folklores); a liturgical planner inviting people for active participation in liturgy (through dance, music, as readers);

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 189.

a mediator between God and human beings through healing ministries and blessings; a Eucharistic presider making use of local symbols and cultural elements in worship; a leader in social justice inviting people to preservation of ecology and love of creation, economic concern for others.

#### **H. Catechesis on Funerals**

Among Igbo people, all of life was regularly punctuated with celebrations and festivities. Even death became a ceremonial event, especially that of an elder. An elder's funeral can be extended for months and can be repeated in several consecutive years.<sup>203</sup> The preparation and celebration of funerals are catechetical in nature. They are great opportunities to reflect on the meaning of death, especially in taking care of some cultural practices that frequently come up in different communities due to some fetish beliefs about the dead in Igbo Land. These situations need intensive catechesis in order to avoid dangerous crises that usually come up with them.<sup>204</sup>

In Igbo land, the proper carrying out of the burial ceremonies is the most important duty in life. Unless the person is buried with the due ceremonies, it is thought that he or she will not join the ancestors, which amounts to saying in the Christian terms that the person will not go to heaven. Today, through the influence

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<sup>203</sup>Egbulem "Mission and Inculturation: Africa," 679.

<sup>204</sup> Some communities in Igbo Land deny the women the right to see the corpse of their dead husband or to do the "dust to dust rite" (pouring small sand into the grave by bereaved families as a farewell before covering of the grave). They believe that any woman who does that has a curse upon herself. Some Christian women who ignored this custom were banished from community life. This tradition has been abolished but it still causes some friction in some communities. The Awka Diocesan Synod gave directives regarding this in its discussions on Funeral matters in nos 149- 158.

of Christianity, some of the customs relating to burial are changing and some disappearing.

#### **IV. Liturgy, Ecology, and Justice**

What happens in the Eucharist does not end at the locus of the celebration, but continues outward in the work of the faithful. According to Mary Collins, liturgy well celebrated is worship that is evangelical, catechetical and mystagogical.<sup>205</sup> The Eucharistic celebration calls for active participation and continual proclamation and life of witness by all Christians. At the end of the liturgy the faithful are sent with the word “go” to implement the reign of God in the world. This can only happen, if the faithful participated well in the Eucharist and found meaning and their life in the rituals celebrated. It can be said that the ultimate goal of the liturgy is to live a good life that leads us to everlasting life. When the People of God gather as the Church to worship God, their lives are touched and influenced by the work of God. Liturgy therefore informs as well as directs the life of the People of God. The way they pray is a result of their belief and this reflects in their lives- *lex orandi, lex credenda, lex vivendi (agendi)*, that is, the law of prayer is the law of faith and the law of life.<sup>206</sup> In the words of Corbon, “We pray as we live, and we live as we love; everything

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<sup>205</sup> Mary Collins, “Liturgy for a Laity Called and Sent,” *Chicago Studies*, 39 no.1 (2000): 59.

<sup>206</sup> BJohn F. Baldovin, S.J., *Bread of Life, Cup of Salvation: Understanding the Mass*, (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 2003),152.

depends on the place that is our habitual focus and around which everything acquires its meaning.”<sup>207</sup>

We do not worship God in isolation but through communion with all creatures. Creation and the Earth are manifestations of divine presence in the universe. Effective worship leads to *metanoia* – that ongoing conversion of heart and renewal of spirit that changes people’s perspective and shapes them into disciples who participate fully in Jesus’ mission in the world to be messengers of Good News, caring for the poor, freeing the oppressed, and bringing God’s kingdom to birth in the world.<sup>208</sup> We worship God in a real place, with a real community and with concrete things. The whole creation is connected to our worship. Our ritual celebration evokes our imaginations when we make use of the elements of creation in our worship. There is a connection between human beings, creation and life of faith. The encyclical of Pope Francis *Laudato Si*, about the care of the creation has great significance to faith and ecology. He urges the world to be conscious of the global warming and ecological crises by reminding us to express our faith in God through the care of the creation.

The nature of the human person is such that no one can adequately survive without the coexistent interaction with the other. It is the nature of human beings to complement and depend on one another. Hence, the human person is a social being. They live better in joy and harmony if there is equity and fairness. However, the urge for survival and the desire to be more secured expose human being to greed

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<sup>207</sup> Jean Corbon , *The Wellspring of Worship* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press: 1998), 206.

<sup>208</sup> Rivers, *Soulfull Worship*, 51.

and avarice. This attitude is commonly exposed in economic struggles. It therefore leaves imbalance in the society and bereaves its cohesion and fairness.

Great inequality exists in the life of people from different nations and classes. While some people are not sure of food, clothing and shelter; others are lost in the problem of choice and selection. This situation raises a lot of economic questions and presents some challenges to every human being. True religion must embody justice and love. This is what it means to be a religious. Religion is not about contemplating about God but about taking up actions that communicate love and justice.<sup>209</sup> It is about praising God and loving our neighbor. The world is the body of God in which we are created and where we live. There is no separation between our life and the activities of God. "We live here and with God."<sup>210</sup> A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the life of the community. It is wrong when it tends to do otherwise. According to the document issued by the World Council of Churches, "The Churches' strength lies in its prophetic witness to proclaim God's love for the whole world and to denounce the philosophy of domination that threatens the manifestations of God's love."<sup>211</sup> It proposes for the adaptation of the favor that comes with the celebration of the jubilee as a way of forgiveness of debts and promotion of distributive justice.

The issue of economic justice and concerns for the poor needs the attention of all and sundry. In the Old Testament, God is presented as taking the side of the

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<sup>209</sup> Sallie McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008),102.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*,120.

<sup>211</sup> World Council of Churches, "Ecojustice and Ecological Debt," Sept. 2, 2009.

poor and the less privileged. God commanded the people to always provide and care for the poor. God says “If there is a poor man among you, one of your brothers, in any of the towns of the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand to your poor brother; but you shall freely open your hand to him, and generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks” (Deut. 15:7). This is in recognition that we should stand for one another and be our neighbors’ keeper. This is a call to work for distributive justice.

Perhaps the letter of the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB), titled *Economic Justice for all* is very precise and adaptable to the present context and situation. The document, which came up in 1986 has its teaching in four specific areas: Employment, Poverty, Food and Agriculture; and Development. According to the Bishops “This letter is a personal invitation to Catholics to use the resources of our faith, the strength of our economy, and the opportunities of our democracy to shape a society that better protects the dignity and basic rights of our sisters and brothers, both in this land and around the world”<sup>212</sup> The document addresses the principles of the Catholic Social teachings: Human dignity, Solidarity and the Common Good, Charity, Subsidiarity, Distributism and Social Justice.<sup>213</sup>

In the *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis states that social justice cannot be separated from environmental justice because they are dynamically integrated. He calls it *integral ecology*. Pope Francis uses the term *Our Common Home*: by this he is

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<sup>212</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Economic Justice for all: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington, D.C: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1997), 30.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

emphasizing that the earth belongs to the whole creation without exclusion. He is speaking to the humanity regardless of the faith denominations. It is an invitation and an ethical call, which concerns everybody. His relating to earth takes leave from St. Francis of Assisi who challenges us to care for the earth, and he makes prayer out of his relationship with the earth and creatures.<sup>214</sup>

We cannot care about ecology without caring about justice. Ecology evokes feelings from us. What need is for me to care for other creatures and disregard the needs of my fellow human beings? The wealth of a nation is not just the fiscal cash but also the common good. Human beings as social creatures cannot possibly survive without the interactions of the others. To acquire wealth means to have utilized the public resources and share in other people's efforts and contribution. No one can exist in isolation of others. It is false for one to say that no one contributed to his or her wealth and that he or she has achieved wealth solely on their effort. Such a claim omits a plethora of interactions and interconnections within society that are integral to their wealth accumulation. Each person contributes to the good of others to the best of his or her ability. "He that hath a talent," said St. Gregory the Great, "let him see that he hide it not; he that hath abundance, let him quicken himself to mercy and generosity; he that hath art and skill, let him do his best to share the use and the utility hereof with his neighbor."<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Pope Francis, "On the Care of our Common Home," *Laudato Si*. (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2015), 23.

<sup>215</sup> Leo XIII, "Encyclical on Capital and Labor," *Rerum Novarum* (1891): 17.

A more authentic economic stability is possible only when there is equity and fairness. If there is a just distribution of the common wealth, and care and concern for others, there is bound to be a more peaceful society. When people are well taken care of and are fairly treated, they live more happily and healthily. Another result is that there is going to be a peaceful coexistence that symbolizes love. Such a situation helps in crime reductions and then restoration of human dignity. We will end up having a more progressive society and community where love conquers injustice and strife.

Non-profit organizations are encouraged to extend some acts of charity to the suffering members and the underprivileged. What goes on in some those organizations, which are set to reach out to the poor and less privileged is disheartening. For example, in the month of September 2012, the eastern Nigeria witnessed excessive flooding which cost the lives and properties of a great many in the communities. Families were rendered homeless. The government so kindly responded by granting some aids to those communities. It is unfortunate that this turned out to become an opportunity for the leaders of some of those communities to get rich by depriving the poor masses the chance of benefiting from that help.

There are many ways of making this balance other than charity and welfare organizations. Community developments and building of infrastructures that will enhance people's living conditions like good roads; hospitals, electric supply, water, and school are some major approaches that are very necessary. Creating job opportunities so as to engage the so many unemployed people is a very important factor to eradicate poverty and hardship and bridge the class gap in our society.



According to the NCCB “The most urgent priority for domestic economic policy is the creation of new jobs with adequate pay and decent working conditions.”<sup>216</sup> This can come in the form of raising some government structures in the poverty-stricken areas to awaken their awareness and give them sense of belonging. Credit facilities can be given to farmers especially in the agricultural areas to raise their life standard.

Another way of balancing the economy is by making the economic policies that will give opportunities to those in the low and middle classes. “Needed economic improvement is not achieved merely by supplying loans and capital equipment and demonstrating superior techniques of production. It must be generated primarily from within, looking at cultural and other factors that have defeated many such programs in the past.”<sup>217</sup>

Education is another area where the world and the governing bodies should pay attention in order to liberate those who are in the bondage of ignorance. Because of lack of basic education, a good number are denied of their rights. The educated elites in most cases take advantage of the ignorant majority and divert their own share of the democracy dividend. With education half of the problem of poverty and hunger is solved. When people are ignorant or illiterate the situation becomes worse. These two evils make people unaware of their rights and force them to accept a life of resignation and fatalism. The hunger for instruction is indeed not less depressing than the hunger for food: an illiterate is a person with an

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<sup>216</sup> NCCB, *Economic Justice*, n.136.

<sup>217</sup> Buchanan N.S. & Howard Ellis, *Approaches to Economic Development* (New York, 1958), 407.

undernourished mind. The ruin of the economy, sometimes hastened by the unjust conditions of the world market, should be considered a major cause of violation basic human rights in Africa.”<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> John Paul II, Letter to Bishops of the World on the Occasion of Presentation of the Working Paper *Instrumentum Laboris* in Preparation for the 1983 Synod of Bishops,” *Notitiae* 19 (March) 1983: 113–118.

## **Chapter Five – Conclusion: Vision for the New Proclamation**

### **I. Christ, the Incarnate Word speaks to all Peoples**

When we look at the Gospel of St Luke, there is one underlying theme, one message that is so evident throughout the Gospel, which is 'universal salvation'. Jesus in this gospel demonstrated in a special way God's love for all irrespective of their race, gender, or social status. Simply put, it means the universality of the love of God. Which means to say if God's love is universal, then it is open to all of humanity -nobody is excluded, everyone is invited to experience the universal love of God. Look at the people he called: the blind, the lame, widows, orphans, prisoners, children -all those people who were considered to be outcast or considered to be the very low of the social ladder. He assured them that they were loved.

It is unique in the Gospel of St Luke to hear the story of the Prodigal son (Lk 15:11- 32), where the Father is the image of God, waits at the gate every single day for the wayward son to come back. Despite the sinfulness of the son, the father runs to the son and offered love. Then there is the story of the lost sheep, wherein the shepherd goes out to search for the one lost sheep leaving the ninety-nine behind. (Lk 15:1-7) There's a woman who lost the coin, that despite the darkness of the night, she went out to look for the lost coin. (Lk 15:8-10) Then we heard about the Zacchaeus the tax collector (Lk 19:1-10), who was called by Jesus, come down quickly, for I will come to your house for dinner and dine with tax collectors, prostitutes, adulterers, all kinds of sinners, he ate with them. Then there's the story of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37), where Jesus says everyone is our neighbor,

including our enemies. So, when we look at all these, we can truly say, that the love of God is Universal. It is open and offered to all.

Jesus is the human face of the merciful God who came to reconcile all things and all people. It is in the ministry of Jesus, in his death, in his resurrection, his ascension at the right hand of the father, that we experience, not only the universality of the love of God, but very importantly, we experience the merciful love of God. The message of gospel is the Good news and an example of God's mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and unconditional love. Jesus is asking us today, you and me to extend that same love, mercy and compassion towards our brothers and sisters by opening our hearts to reconciliation, to meaningful dialogue, that leads the path of hope and unity.

Thanks to the merciful and loving God, who created us out of nothingness but by His pure and unconditional love for us, let us be challenged by God to open the doors of our homes by inviting in a special way, those who have been estranged from us, especially a dear family member, those whom we have considered to be our enemies, those who have done us wrong and also the stranger who we treat with suspicion or contempt. We invite them around the table of the Eucharist because around the meal of fraternity, because around that table there is peace and harmony, unity, reconciliation, forgiveness, and there is love. This will not be easy, and it is definitely a challenge. Jesus wants others to experience what love truly means through each and every one of us. He wants us always to keep in mind, the universality of the love of God, and the merciful face of the God.

In my theology of preaching for postcolonial Igbo Church, I see preaching as something that requires trust and surrender to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Preaching in this regard, involves knowledge and personal conversion.<sup>219</sup> This is necessary so that the love of God can move the heart, which in turn can mobilize the intellectual expression to action. The life of the preacher is part of the preaching. Hence, the preacher cannot do just to preaching the word of God by seeing it only as an address to the people of God. It should come from inside and be preached in a way that it is an event to open the future.

My theology of preaching for the postcolonial Igbo liturgy therefore is grounded on my understanding of preaching as the work of God in Igbo land, which invariably directs my mindset goals when I am doing the work of preaching. In addition, my theology of preaching expresses the fact that preaching is Trinitarian in dimension. It is about the work of God the Father, who speaks; about the Son who saves and about the Holy Spirit who enlightens. According to the theologian, Karl Barth, believers have “a passionate longing to lay hold of that which, or rather of him who, overcomes the world because he is its Creator and Redeemer, its beginning and ending and Lord.”<sup>220</sup>

Stallings goes on to remark that preaching in the Black community is heavily rooted in the Word of God as well as in the experience of Black people. “Preaching has to touch the fiber of one’s being in order to be effective and in order to bring

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<sup>219</sup> William J. Hill, “Preaching the Word: The Theological Background,” in *The Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society, 28<sup>th</sup> Convention*, Walter J. Burghardt, ed. (Washington, D.C. Catholic Theological Society of America, 1973), 173.

<sup>220</sup> Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (New York: Harper, 1957), 109.

forth an affective response... If people are going to be fired up to do something for God, they have to feel the power of that Word. The problem in many of our churches is that we have churches that are not on fire with the Word of God. ... You cannot have fire in the pews if there is ice in the pulpit!"<sup>221</sup> Preaching should aim at igniting the spirit of action and service on the faithful.

Preaching is about exposition, teaching and exhortation. It takes courage and demands faithfulness. There are some hard truths that need to be told. At times some messages may be challenging to preacher's personal life or that of friends, colleagues or the *communitas verbi*, yet he or she is obliged to preach them. Equally, in the face of conflicting, confusing and contradicting messages of our modern-day society, preaching continues to be a great challenge to the preacher who in his or her prophetic mandate needs to preach the truth without fear or favor. Nevertheless, the preacher's voice acts as an instrument to share the truth and to direct the society to the truth. Preaching as a prophetic ministry challenges the preacher to be the custodian and the defender of the Word of God as found in the Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

In as much as preaching entails being courageous to condemn evils and refute errors, preaching also brings hope and restores confidence. This is because preaching breaks open the word of God so that something new is experienced. Christ as the incarnate word of God is the central object of preaching. In Him is the fullness of hope in God. The Incarnation is therefore a central aspect of preaching. The effort to preach as Jesus did brings the desired hope to people as Jesus did.

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<sup>221</sup> George Stallings, from *Fire in the Pews*, as cited in McGann, *Shine!*, 21.

Thereby, the word of God built on message of hope from the preacher addresses the life conditions of believers and becomes a foothold for them in the face of challenges. The hearers of the Word of God want to feel the supernatural presence of God in their life. Thus, Karl Barth, emphasizes that Christians have “a passionate longing to have the word of God spoken, the word which promises grace in judgment, life in death, and the beyond in the here and now, God’s word – that is what animates our church-goers.”<sup>222</sup>

Preaching promotes the work of social justice. It brings liberation to the captives and comfort to the poor. At the start of his public ministry, Jesus went to the temple and read the scripture passage from the prophet Isaiah, announcing the jubilee year of the Lord. Jesus therefore started his preaching by announcing the message of God’s favor to the people. At the time of Jesus’ ministry, he went about curing diseases and attending to people who were experiencing difficulty. Preaching therefore addresses human condition and gives hope to the suffering world by restoring their faith and confidence in God.

Preaching aims to invite the people to learn the demands for justice from Christ, the prophets, the apostles and the evangelists. Preaching addresses the social and political systems, confronts policies that are detrimental to lives of the poor and the unprivileged. The preacher is sent to preach against the injustice that abounds in the political affairs without being partisan. The theological foundation of preaching as a ministry that promotes justice, challenges the preacher to reflect and to share

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<sup>222</sup> Barth, *The Word*,109.

with how they can be people of justice in words and in actions. It is a call to be each other's keeper. The faith that does justice is the faith that is alive and active.

Preaching prepares the hearers of the word to live a good life here on earth and at the same time to be worthy of the eternal life. I am always mindful of this aspect of the theological foundation of my preaching. This makes the message of eternal life a foundation in my preaching. As the Apostles testified after the resurrection, the message of eternal life ought to form the bulwark of preaching. St. Paul stated, "If Christ had not risen from the dead our faith and preaching would have been in vain" (I Corinthians 15:14). Hence preaching always encourages people to continue to say yes to the gift of salvation, which Christ has given through his passion, death and resurrection.

Preaching in this regard involves knowledge and personal conversion. This is necessary so that the love of God may move the heart in order that the intellectual expression may come to action. The life of the preacher is part of the preaching. Preaching informs and shapes the life of the preacher and the community. Hence, Paul Janowiak states, "The preacher cannot do just to preaching the word of God by seeing it only as an address to the people of God. It should come from inside and preached in a way that it is an event to open the future."<sup>223</sup>

## **II. Genuine Catholicity**

In this research, I have argued that Igbo people are deeply religious people who practiced their traditional religion very seriously before they embraced Christianity. There was a violent clash and conflict at the initial contact of the Igbo

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<sup>223</sup> Paul Janowiak S. J., class lecture presented at Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, April 12, 2016.



traditional religion and Christianity. Presently, Christians are more numerically powerful than traditional religious practitioners in Igbo land. However, some Christians still hold tenaciously to the practice of Igbo traditional religion. Even though change is constant in human life, it is often hard and consequently resisted. Likely, beneficiaries of the old system are often suspicious of the opportunities of the new system. The early Christian evangelization and the European conquest of Igbo land left the Igbo cultural life, and their religion intermingled, which led to further divisions and further frictions.

The study also establishes that it is through the bonding of faith and culture that the realization of one's personhood and spiritual freedom, which is the foundation of authentic humanity, is achieved. Before the arrival of the European missionaries and their agents of colonization in Igbo land, the people had belief and a robust religious system, which recognized the existence of Almighty God called Chukwu (The Big God) or Chineke (God that creates) worshipped through divinities. Ancestors are revered and venerated. In some sub-cultural areas and communities, the four Igbo market days- Eke, Ori, Afo, and Nkwo<sup>224</sup> including notable rivers, streams, forests, trees, and hills were also deified.

The idea of *mmeko* in inculturation presupposes inculturation as an interaction between Igbo culture and Christian religion, and it is like the relationship in marriage which brings together different individuals, from different families, together for a common purpose such that they will no longer be two but

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<sup>224</sup>Four days make one week in Igbo traditional counting. They are four market days, Eke, Oye, Afor and Nkwor, which in traditional Igbo culture are cultic and aligned to gods and their shrines.

one in union and intention. A relationship like this seeks for the parties to harmonize their perspectives for a common purpose. It is the idea of complementarity. Within this line of thought, inculturation then is when two hands wash each other in a way where both acquire a new lustrousness. Both the Igbo culture and the universal Church can enrich each other through a mutual exchange. Igbo community, through their cultural values, stands to enrich the universal and vice versa.

The concrete and particular path I have shaped with the help of numerous interlocutors is for an inculturated postcolonial Igbo liturgy. Postcolonial liturgy is not the idea of “either or” but of complementarity, shaping a path where everybody can follow and feel at home because it is free from any external influence and is where everyone is a child of God not being privileged in a way that excludes others or being excluded because they are marginalized. What will our liturgy look like if all are Igbos equal—male, female, children, rich, and poor? What will the liturgy look like when all find themselves in it? What will the liturgy look like when it is absent of economic, political, social domination, and discrimination?

If the Magisterium understands inculturation as an open-ended endeavor and facilitates it for the maturity of people’s faith, the whole Church would be enriched by the outcome of the process. Inculturation as contextualization is the idea that we can see the sun from the different vantage points of culture. As Abraham states, “Every theology is therefore contextual, and every theology is to be relativized in light of the divine and human communication.”<sup>225</sup> Inculturation

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<sup>225</sup> Abraham, *Decolonizing*, 55.

profoundly embraces the understanding that there is unity amid diversity. Diversity is not chaos; rather, it is a rich source of complementarity and bounty when it is properly harmonized. The vital principle that guides this unity and diversity should be maintaining unity in things that are general, freedom in what is doubtful, and charity in all things. With this, inculturation proceeds with humility, respect, and love.

I have a dream for a postcolonial Igbo Church, which is a community within the communion. It is not a different type of Catholicism, but of the same universal Church within the context of Igbo people. It challenges us with the question: what does it mean to be a Catholic? It does not necessarily mean that the other person is changed to become a catholic. It is instead a relationship that entails bringing out the best in the other by living as the light. According to Ilia Delio, the term catholic is like the work of yeast in baking bread, which entails patience, perseverance, and attentiveness. Delio maintains that Jesus's catholicity was in the way he brought people together – physically, emotionally, and spiritually – and healing them of their divisions.<sup>226</sup> It does not necessarily mean that the other person is changed to become exactly like someone else; it is, rather, a relationship that entails bringing out the best in the other by living as light.

For Jesus, the kingdom of God is in connection with his relationship to the poor, the marginalized, the sick, the troubled, the captives, and so on. He did not make salvation an abstract event, but something concrete in living in our

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<sup>226</sup> Ilia Delio, *The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2011), 64.

communities. This gift of salvation given to us by Jesus is an offer and not an imposition. It, therefore, requires response and attention by individuals, groups, and communities. Understanding the liturgy as the internalization of God's love leads to the centrality of the worship as the basis of catholic life. The liturgy, therefore, signifies that each member is not external to the other members but somewhat internally related to the other members of the Body of Christ. Our relationship with Christ is to reflect in the relationship to one another. Jesus's pattern of human reality is in reconciliation, forgiveness, peacemaking, and compassion. In the same way, the followers of Christ are identified by these traits across the universe. It is the true identity and the catholicity of the Church. According to Abraham, "Catholicity's fullness is cognizant not just of claims to authority and truth but also to justice and peace." <sup>227</sup> To be a genuine Catholic, therefore, is to be a person of peace, compassion, kindness, forgiving spirit, hospitality, and indeed of all aspects of love as preached and observed by Christ.

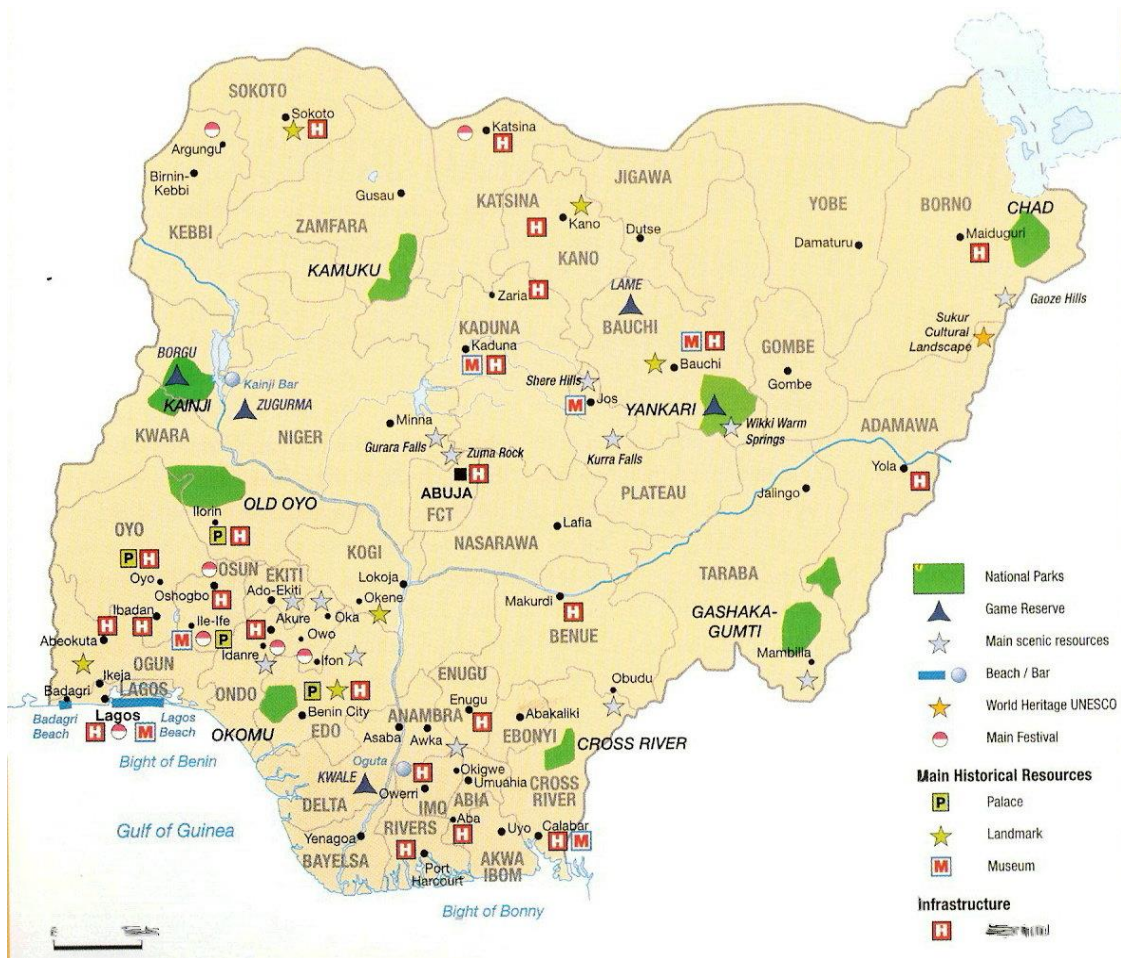
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<sup>227</sup> Abraham, *Decolonizing*, 60.

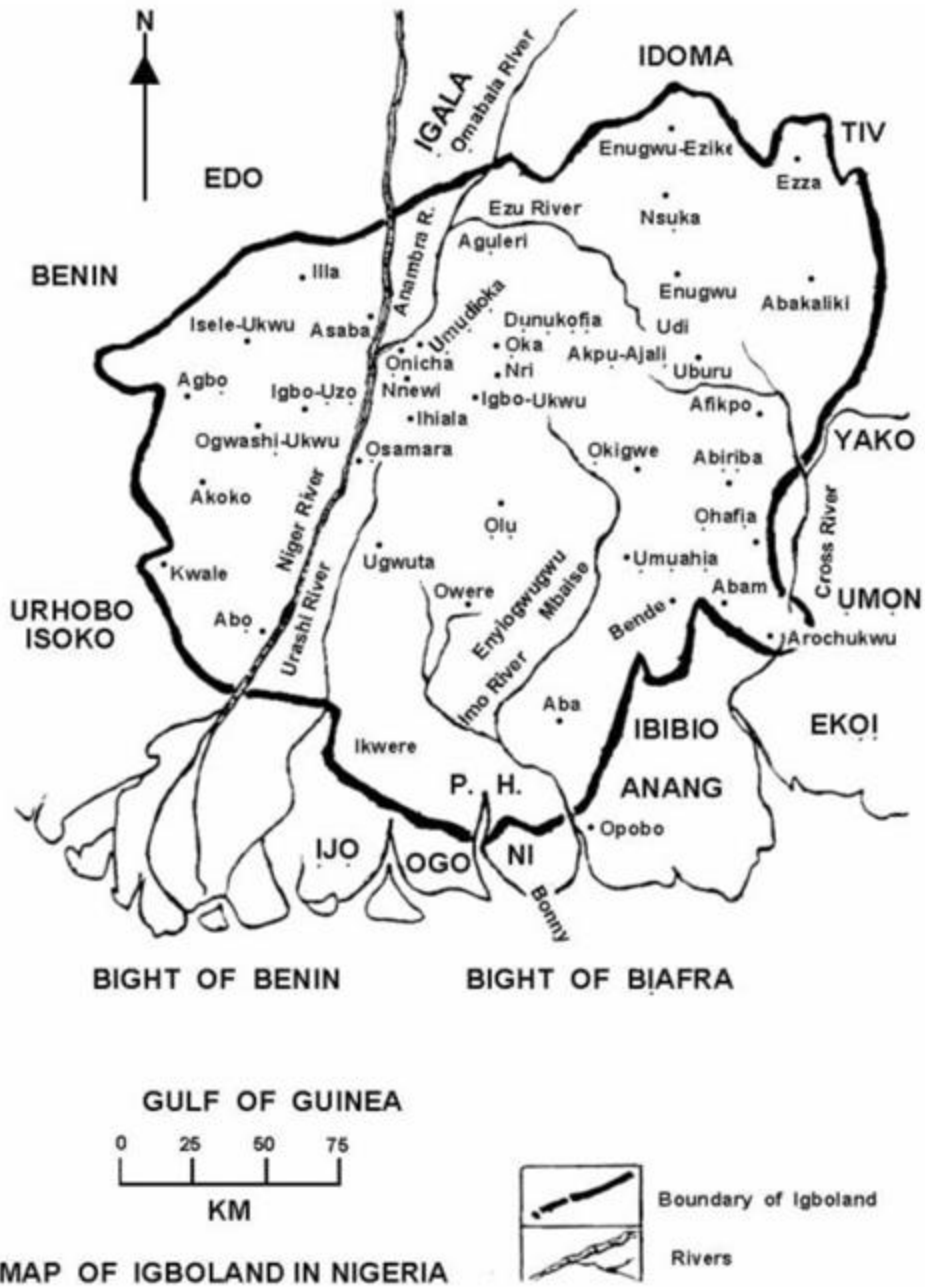
## Appendix I: Map of Africa



## Appendix II: Map of Nigeria



Appendix III: Map of the Igboland





**Appendix IV: Pictures of Kola nut tree and nuts.**





## **Appendix V**

### **My Poem on Eco-lamentation**

To God is the earth and its content.  
We represent a portion of its existence  
God alone can complete our existence  
For life is complete only in God's presence

The beauty of creation lies in the diversity  
Each of the creatures in its variety  
Working hard to express its loyalty  
Affirming God's presence and majesty

We humans are most vulnerable  
Relying on others to keep stable  
Hoping that each will always be reliable  
To help us in the way they are able

We mostly take without giving  
We constantly consume without replenishing  
Making little the joy we are given  
Not minding what is given

Our attitude has annoyed the Creator  
Which has affected all creation  
It is now expressed in their reactions  
Revolting against our actions

Let us rise to express our sorrow  
Throwing away our arrogance  
Learning from God an excellent way to follow  
Entrusting in God's guidance.  
Amen!

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