



## Research Article

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## Seed of Christianity in Traditional Igbo (African) Culture: Need for Inculturational Evangelization

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**Abstract:** The Igbo have cultural beliefs and practices that are not removed from their religious life. To attack or destroy one is tantamount to the destruction of the other. The coming of the western Christian missionaries and their colonial allies to Igboland actually rendered severe attacks to the religion – cultural life of the people. This work highlights certain nostalgic values of the Igbo prior to the culture – clash with westernization and shows how the situation could have been avoided by inculturational evangelization. At the end, the study calls for the rich human and natural resources of the Igbo heritage to be maximally tapped and equitably distributed for radical economic emancipation and breakthrough that may give the much-required self-esteem to Africa in the comity of nations.

**Keywords:** Culture, Evangelization, Igbo, Inculturation, Seed of Christianity.

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## INTRODUCTION

Christianity is the religion brought to the earth by Jesus Christ who is the Incarnate Son of God. This religion, though started with the Israelites, is not any culture's original heritage. It has unique tenets that could permeate and embellish any culture of the world that accepts the religion. The western world had the privilege of spreading this religion to many countries of the earth through evangelization and colonialism, such that along the line it is difficult to decipher the limits of evangelization of Christianity and spreading of colonial cultural imperialism in the name of Christianity (Ezeanya & Ajah, 2021; Eze *et al.*, 2021; Ajah *et al.*, 2020; & Ajah & Onyejegbu, 2019). This is very dangerous to the survival of cultural values and religiosity of the evangelized.

Inculturation entails planting the seed of Christianity into the already existing nursery ground provided by the traditional religion of the people being evangelized to ensure a continuous growth rather than a sharp cut from the people's religious history. It is built on the well – accepted principle that there had never been a religionless society known to humankind in history (Ugwuoke *et al.*, 2020; & Ezeanya, 2010). It is also anchored on the understanding that the creator of humans put in them reverence for Him at creation, and different peoples express reverence and worship of God in ways they think proper and appreciate.

The Igbo and almost all Africans alike have cultural beliefs and practices that are not removed from their religious life. To attack or destroy one is tantamount to the destruction of the other. The coming of the western Christian missionaries and their colonial allies to Igboland actually rendered severe attacks to the religion – cultural life of the people. This work highlights certain nostalgic values of the Igbo prior to the culture – clash with westernization and shows how the situation could have been avoided by inculturational evangelization (Eze *et al.*, 2020; Ajah *et al.*, 2020; & Ajah, 2018). It shows the need for conscious efforts at curing the defects already created, since it is never late where there is still life. The Roman Catholic Church is used here in exemplifying the activities of the Church.

## Igbo Religiosity and Worldview vis-à-vis Christianity

A people's worldview is their belief system concerning the relationship between them and spiritual beings that affect their existence. The traditional Igbo society has rich cultural values, highly moral, socio-political and religious sanity that reigned among them prior to the advent of the white-man. It is only with the advent of the white-man that such structures and institutions began to collapse (Ugwuoke *et al.*, 2020; & Nnam *et al.*, 2019). The ignorant white-man wrongly saw the Igbo as a people without a good religion, who needed to be given one. But the Traditional religion of the Igbo has a well coordinated theistic order that is very akin to the religion of the Old Testament of the

Bible, which is the foundation of Christianity. The Igbo value and believe in the Deities of the land alongside the Supreme Being *Chi-ukwu* (or *Chukwu*). The Supreme God (*Chukwu*) is the Creator of the universe (*Chineke*), and he lives in an unapproachable height (*Enu-igwe* or *Enigwe*). He however governs the world through some other lieutenants or minor deities such as *Amadioha m'obu Egbeigwe* (deity of thunderous justice), *Anyanwu na Agbala* (deity of the sun and beauty) and *Ani* or *Ana* (the Earth Deity who rejects evil-doers from standing on her) to mention but a few. Mere mortals may not supplicate directly to the Supreme Being, but do so through the lieutenants. Each community also has other minor or family deities, including the ancestral spirits who have special interest in the affairs of the community, and since they are closer to the Supreme Being, they are communed with in prayer. This Igbo religious arrangement is very similar to the communion of the saints found in Christianity, and could have been a wonderful opportunity for inculturation if the missionaries had cared to make the gospel message have roots in Igbo religious ground.

The early missionaries that brought Christianity to the Black – Africans' soil wrongly attacked and condemned the socio - religious worldview of the *natives* as generally bad and sinful. They likened the religious objects to fetishism and understood the traditional religion either as the worship of Satan, totemism or idolatry. The adherents of Christianity joined forces with the missionaries in destroying the traditional religious foundation (Ajah *et al.*, 2021; & Ajah *et al.*, 2020). Consequently the masquerade cult and other structures that portrayed the socio-religious mystery of the society began to lose their traditional flavour and relevance. The remote effect is that some *wiser than thou* Africans began to emulate everything *White* as the ideal and superior, and relegating anything African as negative and inferior. This biased indoctrination laid the counter foundation that sees to general and continuous overturn of African values and ingenuity for the western. Onwubiko (1988: 18) remarked of the African masquerades as follows:

After arrival of European, African treated them as strangers and mysterious creature. So African treated him as spirit for his deeds. The Igbo clearly said: 'Bakee wu agbara' which literally means, the White-man is a spirit. In the same manner, the Efik said 'Mbakara edi Ekpo' which means white- man is a spirit. Therefore, the Igbo and the Efik whose life, in various ways was a continuous attempt to imitate and be a spirit – the 'Mmanwu' and 'Ekpo' masquerade factor in Igbo and Efik land automatically switched over to imitating and becoming the White-man.

Since the White-man had succeeded in converting the Black-man, the Black-man's religion and

culture started a sorry, watering down journey that has today almost stifled all his creative potentials. His enormous wealth of Arts and Architecture became things of the past as they had been reckoned and classed by the white-man as totems, representing idol worship, signaling an option for hell fire and hence sinful. Maybe the missionaries were still perpetuating the use of Christianity as the instrument of colonization, the approach of which highlighted uniformity or unicity of thought and practice for Church unity, and down-played the elements of inculturation and incarnation of the gospel message within the evangelized cultures in the thrust of missionary activities. The Good News or the gospel message was wrongly made synonymous with the culture and value system of the missionaries at the service of the colonialists; in total neglect and scorn of the values of the people they derogatorily called *natives*. It is only with the new dispensation supplied by the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church that emphasis is now made on the need to respect the values and cultures of the evangelized and seek ways of identifying Christian values in them for better incarnation of the gospel in their land. The document of the Second Vatican Council on the relation of the Church to Non-Christian religions edited by Flannery (1988: *Nostra Aetate*, 2) aptly highlighted this when it says:

Throughout history even to the present day, there is found among different peoples a certain awareness of a hidden power, which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life. At times there is present even a recognition of a supreme being, or still more of a Father. This awareness and recognition results in a way of life that is imbued with a deep religious sense.... Other religions which are found throughout the world attempt in their own ways to calm the hearts of men by outlining a programme of life covering doctrine, moral precepts and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions.

The bearers of Christianity were then wrong in their categorical condemnation of everything African. The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II (1995: 81), strongly upholds the above view of the Council, maintaining that what we have in different cultures contain in a way some seeds of the gospel. In his words: "The words of the Council recall the conviction, long rooted in the tradition, of the existence of the so – called *semina verbi* (seed of the word), present in all religions." The root of the gospel seed being planted already in different cultures can also be discovered in several other aspects of the African cultures as may be seen in the next consideration on the traditional practice of ancestor veneration.

### Christology of Igbo Ancestor Veneration

Ancestors play a strong uniting role of inestimable value in the socio – political and religious life of Ndigbo. Ancestors are those who had lived out a life of probity in the eyes of the people and enjoyed the kudos of all and sundry through their holiness and honesty. They were also rewarded by the deities with all the good things for which people aspire to live a good life. The ancestors are the pride and refuge of each community in their relation to the deities, as they are believed to be with the deities, and hence can intercede for their people with them. They are being implored upon to help mortals avert the anger of the beings of the great beyond and to signal to them on the impending danger or catastrophe that might come their way. Having been members of their family and still having their good at heart the ancestors do everything to make sure that their families on earth do not go into extinction or be scorned at. That is why the people always feed the ancestors symbolically whenever they eat so as to make sure they are well fed as to have strength and be encouraged to do their job more efficiently. Each morning the elder of the house goes to the *Obi* (meeting place between the living and dead members of the family) and prays, always re-enacting the communion between the living and the dead. After the prayer he breaks the kolanut and pours libation signifying the communion food and drink shared by the living and the dead in an eternal continuum. In this way the bond of unity is perpetually strengthened and nourished.

Each person born into the Igbo family struggles to be accepted into the noble class of ancestors at death. That is why people strive to live well on earth since evil men no matter how old they lived are never accepted as ancestors. The choice is not made by humans but by the deities and communicated to humans (Ezeanya & Ajah, 2021; Eze *et al.*, 2021; Ajah *et al.*, 2020; & Ajah & Onyejegbu, 2019). Ancestor ship became a watershed of joy and hope for Ndigbo. The people are convinced that they have elder siblings and parents at the domain of the holy and powerful immortals that are concerned for their good and protect them against all aggression. It is based on this that the choice of anybody to minister to the ancestors in a special way as a priest is seen as a privileged position and vocation as he is elevated to the status of intermediary between the mortals and the immortals. With the coming of the white-man's religion the intercourse between Ndigbo and their ancestors was carefully targeted and destroyed without any reference to its likeness to the teaching and life and practice of the Church. The bearers of Christianity out-rightly condemned this as partnership with the cult of demons and insisted that as a *sine qua non* those to embrace the Christian faith must cut their entire link with the ancestors. This waters down the Christian faith of the evangelized as they strongly believe in the reality of the ancestors. They may then pay allegiance to the teaching of the Church during the day, and at night or secretly

consult the oracles to hear from the ancestors. It shows that the practice still cries out for inculturational rehabilitation for a greater meaningful progress. According to Schineller (1990: 87):

In a society characterized by strong ties and respect for ancestors, should we not emphasize with Saint Paul that Jesus Christ was the first to rise from the dead and hence can be considered our proto – ancestor? Giving Jesus the title 'ancestor' fits in very well with African understanding. It means that he is for us an elder in the community, an intercessor or mediator between God and humanity, one who guards and protects the human community.

Once the bearers of Christianity cut off the taproot of ancestor veneration in Igbo culture, all other spheres of the cultural life started falling apart too. This, however, did not prevent the people from believing in ancestors even as they become Christians, rather it loosened the strength of their bond both with the traditional religious values and Christianity to a wishy – washy mediocrity. They became like the proverbial bat that is neither a bird nor a mammal because of the serious attack from, and clash with the white-man's poor orientation, and they had taken the white-man as superior and his values always swallowed line, hook and sinker. The *Ofo* and *Okpensi* (hereditary insignia of authority and order) which united the people with the ancestors and made them aspire towards the ancestors' holiness, and which bound the elders to perpetual honesty and justice in settling disputes, were out-rightly condemned and abolished without some substitutes. The fear of the anger of the deities and the ancestors, which helped in keeping people's negative nature in check, was fought against by the white-man with every possible tool and removed from the hearts of the evangelized. Consequently laxity and hooliganism set in. With this some dissident individuals found refuge in lawlessness and fearlessness of the wrath of the divine since the mercy of the God of Christianity was *scandalously* highlighted that it was believed and often said that the Christian God rarely punishes. The Christian option of sacramental confession of sin even in horrible acts of *Nsoani* or *Alu* (things abhorred by *Ani* - the Earth Deity - or abominations) does not deter people from sin as the fear of the anger of the ancestors and the retribution of *Ani* does. An inculturational and incarnational evangelization would have structured sacramental confession among the evangelized to tally with their traditional fear of the retribution of the deities of the land so as to get the same effect of fear of sin in Christianity as in the Traditional religion. This would have ensured a better and morally sound society.

The youth on their own part grow up not knowing about *Omenani* (tradition) and live in the atmosphere of destructive freedom. In perpetuation of this ugly situation the school system came up promising to lead the people out of their *superstitious beliefs and*

*paganism*. A child going to the mission schools learnt to give a conditional obedience to elders *in things that are not contrary to the faith*, which included many traditional values – a thing unheard of prior to the advent of the missionaries. The *magna silentia* (great silence) for instance, which was taught in those days, which still survives in the seminaries and religious houses today, entails that nobody should talk as from the end of night prayer till after Mass and breakfast of the next day so as to better commune with God in silent reflection. With this license children will be obeying the *will of God* and be despising the *devilish temptation* of the elders who may object to not being greeted early in the morning before leaving the house or when met on the road. The teachers of the new faith had told them that their history, tradition and culture were inferior and should be rejected with the western way of life, which they made the Christian message. They had learnt that elders may be disobeyed in defense of the faith, and it is obvious that any action done in loyalty to religious belief is difficult to be changed, and when some western values are inculcated in the youths in the name of Christianity, such cultures are upheld religiously, and the indoctrinated will readily die than deviate from them.

#### **Condemned Igbo Values: Loyalty to Christianity or Westernization?**

The problem here is how to decipher what is the core principle of faith or the Good News, and separating it from the cultural value of the colonialists as it attacks the basic foundation of the traditional Igbo morality and discipline. Until the Igbo, and indeed all Africans, are able to separate western culture from Christian values in practically all spheres of their life they may continue to languish in the dungeon of neo colonization, the grassroots and the elite of today's Africa alike. A singular action of Bishop Shanahan as the Apostolic Prefect of the Lower Niger Mission (which comprised the whole of South-East and South-South regions and beyond, of the present day Nigeria) was a turning point in the history of Christianity in the region till date. As such, the year 1915 was very remarkable in the annals of the Lower Niger Mission. It was when Bishop Shanahan, who was the Apostolic Prefect of the Lower Niger prefecture called the first general congress of all Catholics of the prefecture to give them instructions on the way forward. As Obi (1985:147) narrated it:

The Congress condemned a group of local titles, and those secret societies that gave their members religious, social, political and economic influence if it was proved that the acts of such societies were immoral. It denounced the Muo or the Masqueraders Society.... It proscribed the pagan custom of handing over girls under age to young men, who under pretext of marrying them, abused the unfortunate creatures. Infant betrothal and child marriages were openly condemned....

The Congress took place at Onitsha. Thirty-five principal stations and substations sent representatives to the Congress. Resolutions to drive home the points discussed were made as follows: No Christian should be initiated into the Muo masqueraders secret society nor participate in Muo public dances and processions. No Christian may take the Ozo and other titles since these tended to promote division between the slave and the free-born and to keep alive oppression of the poor. No Christian should contract marriage in the traditional fashion.

This regulation eventually sparked off a serious culture clash between the purported Christianity preached by the white-man and Igbo traditional institutions, whereas those pronouncements are not core Christian message but only cultural practices of the western colonialists, which their missionary allies imposed on the colonised in the guise of evangelization. Followers of Christianity were then relieved of their socio-cultural and religious obligations to their native culture. The Christians who now wrongly saw masquerading as diabolic and contrary to the Christian faith lost due respect accorded to the masquerade. Being backed by the protection of the missionaries and their allied colonialists the traditional crime of *ita-Mmanwu* (desecration of a masquerade) which was never tolerated in Igboland was thrown to the dust in the hands of the Christian converts without any consequences as the white-man was ready to protect them with the colonial might.

The elitist group of the *Nze na Ozo* institution was banned among Christians as a classless society was targeted to be formed where titled men would be one with slaves and outcasts, yet in the white-man's land they did not have the classless society but honour their leaders. The leadership role of the *Nze na Ozo* titled men, and the honesty and justice in settlement of disputes for which they were known through the ritual of *Ika-mma-n'ile* (consecration of the tongue for honesty) was dethroned. Marriage, along the same line was removed from the domain of the culture to the exclusive religious rites of the missionaries and the statutes of the colonialists. These were unfortunately carried out without any sense of dialogue with the stakeholders of the communities nor with proper knowledge of the values represented by such condemned practices. Among other things, early marriage in Igboland was a guard against promiscuity in the youth.

The Igbo today still find it difficult to throw away entirely the Traditional marriage but rather combine it with Church wedding – wrongly thinking the later (Church wedding) to be the main marriage ceremony. It is an absurdity in civil law to contract two different marriages at the same time by the same

couple. Unfortunately to Christianity in Nigeria today, the Church wedding that does not adhere to the requirements of Statutory Marriage Law is only regarded as Church blessing and not marriage, while the Customary Marriage enjoys full rights as Marriage in Civil Law. It provides the saving grace from criminal prosecution to the Church wedding that does not adhere to statutory requirements.

The *Mmanwu* (masquerade) institution in Igboland used to be a strong force to reckon with in disciplinary and entertainment matters. Originally it was taken to be a representation of the spirit of the ancestors, so that the ancestors talk to us through this forum or medium. If any member of the land went contrary to the law in any way, *mmanwu* could be sent to discipline him according to the degree of his offence. *Mmanwu*, then, could not go for an unjust cause. Certain social works needed communal efforts of the class of people to whom they were assigned. Works like clearing the public roads, structuring the source of drinking water in such a way that animals or visitors may not go in to disturb and foul it, construction of markets and mending or reconstructing shades at meeting squares or similar places of public interest etc, needed to be attended to in accordance with the communal division of labour. Such activities needed the participation of all concerned: it could be the one assigned to young men or to an age group or to any other group. Whoever for one reason or the other could not make it to contribute his quota to the public good was expected to excuse himself officially through any person that was available. Genuine excuses were always honoured, but those who absented themselves without any genuine reason were expected to pay some fine ranging from a little money or a tuber of yam, as the case may be, to putting some animals and other prescribed items to the public treasury.

The *mmanwu* leads the delegation of the enforcement of this contributive justice as it represented the mouth of the ancestors calling on their children to be hard working, honest and responsible for the common good. That is why any attack directed against the *mmanwu* by any human being attracted the severest punishment from the community. *Ita mmanwu* or *imelu mmanwu* (defying the masquerade) had no court of appeal as the judgment was always in favour of the *mmanwu*. The ancestors cannot err. At cultural and commemorative festivals like new yam festival, new moon, moon light recreations et cetera *mmanwu* entertain the people, keeping both the old and young in a perpetual youthful mood with joy. *Mmanwu* always signaled the advent of any major festivity and also declared it ended. For *mmanwu* not to appear at any communal ceremony indicated the absence of the deities and the ancestors; and that alone vitiates such a gathering. Of course no one thought of the possibility of the absence of *mmanwu* at the required communal festivities. Hence the *mmanwu* is both a religious and

social institution and remains sacrosanct among the people. The bearers of Christianity condemned the *mmanwu* cult as idolatry and the converts (especially youths) discarded it without reflection in accordance with the white-man's teaching. Consequently the order which was maintained through *mmanwu* – such as seeing that people join in community works like clearing of drinking water sources, construction or clearing of market squares, shrines and so on, as mentioned earlier – became a thing of history.

Community efforts and creativity crumbled; moonlight recreation (*egwu-onwa*) which provided occasion for relaxation and reconciliation of trivial differences, and which built up solidarity and enhanced creativity among the people through the wonderful exhibitions that were brandished is today a forgotten issue. In its place the white-man's television movies and the internet are presented, and through them unguarded freedom that leads to worldly excesses and spiritual morbidity are imbibed. With situations like the youth empowerment through western education, as in the case of the *magna silentia* (great silence) whereby the youth can by-pass elders early in the morning without greeting them, and other forced humiliations of the Igbo value systems, the ground was set for an endless collapse of traditional Igbo cultures to the bottomless pit of history. The white-man threw away with the left hand, like old dross, whatever practice of the people that was alien to him and which he never cared to understand. The gap of individualism and '*I alonism*' (selfishness) kept on widening. The people were carefully separated from their noble history and tradition, team work and community spirit received some euthanasia, and *to the glory of God* the isolated personality of the white-man is being enthroned.

### **The Monkey's Salvation for the Fish**

Certain practices contrary to right reason and repulsive to the Igbo morality and social sanity were isolated as *Alu* (*Aru*) or *Nsoani*, and received the severest of punishments to deter people from immoral and inhuman way of living. The cleansing ritual of the culprit of *Alu* was long and tedious, and hence it was rarely heard that any person committed *Alu* in traditional Igbo society. The Christian trivialization or rather reduction of the social consequences of *Alu* and *Nsoani* (abominations) in Igboland greatly scandalized the Igbo man. The same is the case in other African cultures since they go contrary to the demands of *Omenani* (tradition). On this Nwala (1985: 146) has this to say:

The highest elements of *Omenala* relate to those fundamental rules of human and cosmic intercourse. They include (a) Duties towards the deities, the ancestors and the community in general. (b) Duty towards individual fellow human beings... failure to observe these high principles is criminal. In traditional terms it is abomination 'Nso – ala'. It is 'ime Aru', i.e. to

commit a crime which is punishable by the community.

Deeds that are cultural abominations are not taken lightly in traditional Igbo society. To say the least, they are viewed as being beyond human mercy as the offences also connected the deities, the ancestors and the entire community. That is why everybody is always afraid when *Alu* or *Nsoani* is committed because the anger of the deities if not averted could even extend to other members of the community. It is the deities and the ancestors who lease out the penalty through human agents, and subsequently the respective penalties for the respective crimes could also be administered by humans with the correspondent remedy. Depending on the quality and magnitude of the offence the culprit is called to book (Anthony, Obasi, Obi, Ajah, Okpan, Onyejebu, Obiwulu & Onwuama, 2021; Areh, Onwuama & Ajah, 2020). According to Nwala (1985: 147) "Sanctions range from death, selling into slavery, banishment, ostracism, propitiatory sacrifices, to simple apology and doing some work to appease the anger and assuage the feelings of the man wronged." This created a great sense of moral consciousness in the people and kept them together as brothers. The killing of a kinsman is an example in this regard. As Onwubiko (1988: 29) has it:

If a man conscientiously killed another man within the community, he was killed himself. But if he killed a kinsman inadvertently, he was exiled for some long period.... In many (African) tribes the killing of a kinsman the antithesis of caring for him, was not only a crime but also an abomination. After the murderer had been executed, his family would have to perform sacrifices and rites to remove the stain of evil and ward off the anger of the gods.

Ndigbo carefully perform the rite of cleansing the community after sanctioning the culprit that committed *Alu* in view of the communal effect of sin. It may be recounted in the Bible what happened in 2 Samuel chapter 24 when king David sinned by counting the men of Israel able to take arms and defend the country, which was seen as depending on human valour rather than Yahweh for the salvation of God's people. The whole nation was to receive the wrath of God because of the sin of the king. Three penalties were tabled before him by Yahweh to choose from: Seven years of famine to visit the whole nation, or to flee from an attacking enemy for three months (the whole nation invariably being in tumult), or three days of pestilence to scourge the whole nation. When he eventually chose pestilence, counting on Yahweh's mercy to relent and have pity, the whole nation began to bear the consequences of the sin. When Yahweh eventually took pity on them and wanted to stop the already devastating effects of the pestilence He demanded an appeasement sacrifice at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

The cleansing ritual among Ndigbo after *Aru* is committed is aimed at cooling off the land that had been made hot by the crime or abomination of the member of the community. Often the offender is made to run away from the land for some time to facilitate the cooling off. This is because to have wronged the Earth Deity, *Ani*, through what it abhors (*Nsoani*) and still stand on it when her anger is still hot, is like pouring petrol to fire in a bid to quench it. After the whole ritual of cosmicization or restoration of the defiled land, a tree of peace is often planted to signify a happy reunion with the deities and the ancestors. With the Christianity preached by the white-man a person who had committed *Aru* and *Nsoani* could easily get free by simply confessing them secretly to a priest in the sacrament of reconciliation and is told he/she is freed from it under the mercy of God. There is the feeling here that the horizontal – man to man – reconciliation which should be a prelude to the vertical one – man and God – suffers a lot of shortcomings in the Christianity preached by the white-man as opposed to the Igbo appeal to retributive justice.

Ndigbo also see a religious *reductionism* in this Christianity whereby a simple hidden act of the confessional could be said to have sufficed for great atrocities of *Alu* and *Nsoani*. This makes the traditional Onyeigbo to suspect Christianity and its adherents as to whether they are really serious in their relationship with God. When eventually the outcasts and defilers of the land found refuge in the Church the followers of the traditional religion tend to conclude that Christianity had actually come to water down the noble cultures of the Igbo society. Nothing would have prevented the Church from patterning the sacrament of reconciliation in line with the discipline of the Igbo traditional rite of reconciliation if not for the superiority complex of the white-man bearer of Christianity who patterned the discipline of the sacrament of reconciliation in line with western easy way of life. However, the comparison between Africanity and Christianity given by Chidili (1993: 70) is quite significant in this context:

The essential qualities of African community spirit, Hospitality, Religious and Educational spirit, which are best summarized as love is the main theme of Christian message. The difference then is that while the Christians are just preaching their own as a new theme, Africans are born with it, deeply buried in their blood. The Christians have love written on paper but love is the material with which Africans are made, therefore we live and behave love.

There is never a culture known to be generally good or totally bad either in their cultural practice or in their religious orientation. The voice of God innate in man always leads him to the reality that what is good is good and what is bad is bad. There can only be a cultural difference in the appreciation and

understanding of each particular act or another. That is the aspect that Christianity intends to universalize in reference to the mind of Jesus Christ who is a perfect God and a perfect man. For the work of evangelization to be successful it must start with the appreciation of each people's response to the universal love for good living and holiness. Their eschatological vision and teleological activities for the attainment of the goal must be carefully respected, as they constitute the substance that forms the moral man. The Church's instrument of inculturation for evangelization targets the goal of valuing each culture for what it contains, and then instituting inter cultural dialogues between the Christian values and the local values in context, because wherever dialogue stops, there suspicion starts. An equitable level ground devoid of all bias and superiority complex is needed for a meaningful dialogue. Chidili (1993: 132-133) expounded the desired effect of this dialogue when he wrote:

Our quest for deep knowledge has helped us to clear both religions of serious destructive accusations. Africinity has been cleared on the one hand of being heathenistic, paganistic, animistic, fetish and all other derogatory appellations heaped on it by the early missionaries and Anthropologists. We have discovered that it is a true religion, worshipping one God and indeed preaching authentic morality. Christianity on the other hand has been cleared of being the harbinger of immorality and disgruntled element that scattered the African society. We have discovered now that she is preaching nothing but African authentic morality, peace and tranquility. Thus the two religions Africinity and Christianity are partners in progress.

The above submission is true only in consideration of the fact that the message of the Christian faith stands independent of the western imperial garb given it by the early missionaries. The colonialists and the white Christian missionaries had a common disposition of heaping their western cultural imperialism on the besieged and helpless Africans, such that the Christianity they preached is not the unalloyed message but the one greatly alloyed with cultural imperialism. Of course we notice that it was not essentially the Christian message that did the great harm to Igbo values, but mainly the white-man bearers of the faith, just as Iwe (Nd: 27) remarked:

By cultural clash it is not meant here that the principles of Christianity as a religion are opposed to the authentic and honest values of African culture. Cultural clash here must be understood as the conflict between the Western cultural vessel in which Christianity has been conveyed to Africa and the authentic values and honest institutions of the African culture.

Iwe (Nd: 25-28) highlighted certain features that characterized the culture clash between Christianity and the Traditional Religions of Africans. He noted that the encounter of Africa with Christianity is as old as Christianity itself, just as one could reflect on the incident of the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch by the Apostle Philip, the flourishing of Christianity in Carthage, Alexandria and Ethiopia in North Africa as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, and the presence of Christianity in Congo and Benin kingdoms at the 15<sup>th</sup> century through the work of the Portuguese missionaries. These contacts had been going on before those of the later 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries that chiefly affected West African region and Igboland in particular. Another point of note is that no African nation applied to be Christianized so as to fill some religious vacuum; instead the missionaries with the collaboration of the colonial masters brought Christianity to the doorsteps of the different African peoples.

The hospitality towards the missionaries and deep sense of religion of the Africans enhanced some mutual relationships among the two parties, and subsequently the unzipping of the missionary haversack saw to the cultural humiliation of African values. As a matter of fact it was a whole drama of the strangler turning to be the saviour, the inhuman face of the slave merchants from the west when seriously rejected turned to colonialism in the guise of bringing *civilization*, and subsequently Christianity. Obi (1985: 3) aptly captured this when he wrote:

The other face of the coin is the human element in the missionary history of Eastern Nigeria. Just as Salvation history has to do with the descent of God in human form into human life, so also the history of evangelization involves human beings, human events, some noble, some humiliating. For instance, it is strange and humiliating that West Africa received the true Faith in the context of colonization and a dehumanizing phenomenon like the slave trade... The inhuman trafficking in human lives went on for over three hundred years during which a large population of black Africans was transported to Europe, the United States and Central and South America. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Eastern Nigeria alone supplied 20,000 slaves a year. It is equally on record that the Igbo, as a race, suffered most during the slave trade.

Obi (1985: 3-15) in his history went further to reveal how anti-slavery movements also began in some Western countries before the official decree of abolition came up in 1807.

By 1841, the abolitionists were advocating taking the campaign inside Africa itself and seeking to regenerate the continent 'by the Bible and the Plough'. They saw this as the

only way to end the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and to make amends to 'downtrodden' Africa for the many wrongs Europe had done her.

The chosen approach to this was the missionary activities that ensued. The emancipated slaves joined the western missionaries in the first thrusts of the missionary activities and aided the spread of Christianity in the already dehumanized areas. With the missionary activity fully put in place, what was designed to be an emancipation and regeneration of the downtrodden through evangelization turned out to be another form of alienation through the frontal attacks on the traditional values of the people; and the purported sound morality and civilization it promised became more and more alienated from reality. An elderly man who had continued to be faithful to the Igbo Traditional Religion into which he was born, when preached unto becoming a Christian refused the invitation on the ground that Christian adherence is only a safe haven for malicious people who could not stand the high moral demands of the traditional African values. Such people, he said, ran into the tutelage of the white-man who had no respect either for the demands of sound morality or for the superior disciplines of the ancestors (Enweonwu, Ugwu, Areh, Onyejebu & Ajah 2021; Nnam, Effiong, Iloma, Terfa & Ajah, 2021; Nnamani, Ilo, Onyejebu, Ajah, Onwuama, Obiwulu & Nzeakor, 2021). Igbo Culture actually suffered some violence and crisis from foreign influence that could have been avoided were reasonable caution taken when it was presented with the Christian faith. Such situations could lead to resistance to culture change which some may wrongly liken to denial of the true faith, but which a more reasonable analysis could be shown to be inevitable for any *honest* people. Onwubiko (1994: 129) pointed this out when he said:

Resistance to culture change has been part of the violence in Africa especially on the socio – spiritual level. People have seen their world view challenged without proper substitution and in some cases the damages are so fast that some have seen their cultural values collapse and fall apart, some, in consequence, have instituted themselves into a block of cultural immobility resulting into violent relationship between Christians and non – Christians, on matters of traditional practices based on African Traditional Religion.

Africa seems to be seen by the westerners as a continent without a self-designed future, but has to be blown about by the wind of change. The scramble for Africa by the Western countries who saw the continent as inhabited by a people without law, sound morality or rational religion, and whose history has to be written by them, the white-men, is a notorious presumption ill informed by greed and selfishness. Based on that ridiculous presumption, African values were not considered either by the missionaries that brought

Christianity or by the colonialists that shaped the people's political system and government. This put more confusion than give a focus to the African strive for self-actualization and socio-political and religious stability. Stagnancy is the resultant effect, and where any sign of growth is noticed it is always a stunted one. Iwe (Nd: 27) highlighted this when he observed:

The early planters of Christianity did not seek to enter into the thought world and patterns of the Africans, into their religious psychology; their ethos and ethical conceptions and values. Struck and shocked by those gross and transient aspects of our culture, the missionaries shuddered and glossed over the positive merits of our cultural institutions. "What struck them, undoubtedly, was the darkness of the continent: Its lack of religion and sound morals, its ignorance, its general pitiful condition made worse by the barbarity of the slave trade..."...the Christian missionaries in their invincible if inculpable anthropological ignorance of the Africans, conceived or seemed to have conceived their mission as that of imparting not only the Christian religion but also culture and civilization – and the Western civilization precisely. The missionaries were convinced of the immense superiority of the Western culture which Africa, as a cultural "tabula rasa", must wholly absorb if it is to be rescued from the claws of paganism, savagery, barbarism and superstition.

The nature of faith is such that the faithful is exhorted to embrace the principles and practices offered to him without questioning certain details that defeat his comprehension. The teaching on mysteries substantiates this in the Christian religion, such that Ndigbo could not have been reckoned faithful were they given to critical rationalization over what was given to them as the Christian message. That is why all the accusing fingers are on the Christian religion based on what was taught by the missionaries. Of course faith comes by hearing (Romans 10: 17).

The foregoing analysis obviously presents Igbo values as quite noble and naturally beautiful, such that the vessels that brought Christianity really disrupted the peace of Igbo society. Their activities may be likened to the monkey's salvation for the fish, whereby the monkey was sitting on a tree branch on a river bank watching a flying fish as it flew up and down in the river. Thinking that the fish was drowning the monkey jumped into the river, caught the fish and kept it on the tree for safety. The safety of the fish on a tree branch is surer than the safety of the Africans in the Christianity packaged by the westerners for them.

On the other hand, there are certain changes from the western bearers of Christianity that actually



helped in the higher refinement of the Igbo culture, which honest critique needs not overlook. We discover this especially in the area of poor judgment of value in the killing of twins. Yet we find out that when people are confronted with love, which is the basic principle of Christianity, it is rarely rejected; such that Ndigbo immediately stopped killing twins on sober reflection on the content of the message but racial discrimination in western countries still persists till date. It could also be said that the Igbo gained in the sphere of western literacy style if not for the brain – washing and brain – drain that accompanied the white-man’s *Greek gifts*. Pope John Paul II (1982: 22) insistently opted for proper inculturation of the gospel message in different cultures for a correction of the damage already done by the missionaries. This was made clear in his message to Nigerians during his pastoral visit in 1982. He made a good judgment of the issue at hand when he said:

An important aspect of your own evangelizing role is the whole dimension of the inculturation of the gospel into the lives of your people... The Church truly respects the culture of each people. In offering the Gospel message, the Church does not intend to destroy or to abolish what is good and beautiful. In fact she recognizes many cultural values and through the power of the Gospel purifies and takes into Christian worship certain elements of a people’s customs. The Church comes to bring Christ; she does not come to bring the culture of another race. Evangelization aims at penetrating and elevating culture by the power of the Gospel.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

We echo the Holy Father in saying that the mission of Christianity is to incarnate Christ into every culture rather than suppressing a culture with another people’s culture, which is the error of the white-man bearers of the Christian religion to Black Africa. A stitch in time saves nine. It is not necessary to stand and cry over spilt milk for it may not be the solution to the problem. Instead, as the cultural damage has been done, all hands have to be on deck to seek how to make repairs. This may be done through a rapid re-orientation of Ndigbo on their good cultural values that had hitherto been submerged under the hostile western culture and the need to revitalize them in better forms for socio-religious growth. Seminars, conferences, workshops and audio-visual jingles can be of help in this regard.

The Igbo elite groups need to have a rethink as to knowing their obligation towards the people to lead them to the promise land. To be fit for this exercise they have to eschew their undue inclination to milking their subjects to satisfy their selfish desires. They shall aim at promoting among the people a culture of hard work and creativity already watered down by the cultural clash.

Reward of excellence, both intellectual and technological, enhances a well-focused lifestyle. Since the price of liberty is eternal vigilance, Igbo leaders should devise means of being truly independent of the colonial rule or influence that now wears the mask of foreign aids to perpetuate neo-colonialism. They should go back to the traditional Igbo practice that goes with accountability and probity in office as a demand of the deities for service to humanity.

The rich human and natural resources of the Igbo heritage should be maximally tapped and equitably distributed for radical economic emancipation and breakthrough that may give the much-required self-esteem to Africa in the comity of nations. The much accumulation of foreign debts in pursuit of unnecessary foreign values like armament and contraceptives should be redeemed with the beautiful African heritage of brotherly love, communal approach to conflict-resolution, and perpetual openness to fecundity with its correspondent fellow-feeling in the training and education of children.

The same formal education that provided avenue for deviation from the good Igbo cultural values should also be used to restore them to even better forms. The Church in Igboland, now manned generally by indigenous hierarchy, should be given the chance in education to lead the people back to the nostalgic standards of the olden days when sound morality, social stability and economic strength were blossoming.

More practically it is necessary to seek means of revolutionizing the changes needed so that those who could not read may see certain radical changes and ask questions. The answers will then make them understand the revolution. For instance the conference of Bishops may decide to redesign the clothing of Priests and the Religious to look African rather than the soutane, which is the clothing of the noblemen of ancient Rome or the Sisters’ habit that estrange them from the rest of the faithful. Although the Church hierarchy is already comfortable with the western garb which the people already take as heavenly clothing, as the white-men meant it to be, a change from the status quo will signal the readiness for the much needed inculturation and incarnation of the gospel message and a conscious readiness for reform.

From another angle, there could be a move to replace the Altar wine used for consecration at Mass, which is still imported from western countries till date, with the locally produced palm-wine. The Lord Jesus Christ who initiated the sacred rite used the available wine for it. If He had visited Igbo-land for the consecration He would have as well used the local wine of the people. If the Church in Nigeria begins to use palm-wine for consecration it may come to be that all who receive the Holy Communion may be able to receive it in both species of body and blood more

regularly as there will be abundant supply of palm-wine. It will also create more jobs for the people and wine tapping will be revived.

Moreover, the problems both logistically and financially associated with finishing the traditional marriage and starting that of Church wedding may be overcome if the Priest would simply visit the home of the bride at *Igbankwu Nwanyi*, traditional marriage and give his blessing. The ecclesiastical requirements for a valid marriage is always far met during the long process it takes to marry traditionally in Igboland, such that insisting on the couple to come over to the Church for another process may be likened to a sign of shortsightedness, lack of courage to effect a necessary change or comfort in wearing the yoke of slavery.

The legislators at the different tiers of government should be groomed on African values to legislate in such a way as to uplift the glory of the African race in the light of sound morality and social peace. They should stop thinking that they do well only when they pattern their legislations and activities in line with what they emulate from western countries. The Igbo, and indeed all Africans should strive to be original and courageous in doing what is right. Inferiority complex and copycat syndrome kill African identity in Africans. Whatever can be done should be started urgently.

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