BULLETIN OF ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

Inculturation
Continuity and Change in the African Church

PUBLISHED BY
The Ecumenical Association of Nigerian Theologians
BULLETIN OF ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY
ISSN 0794-8670

Vol. 8: 2, 1996

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PUBLISHED BY
The Ecumenical Association of Nigerian Theologians
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SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Nigeria - N150.00 per issue
- N250.00 per annum
Foreign - US$20 dollars per annum
- US$10 dollars per issue
  (air mail postage included)

Payments overseas: % - Congregazione dello Spirito Santo
Casa Generalizia
Clivo di Cinna, 195,
00136, Roma, Italia.

Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology is published by the Ecumenical Association of Nigerian
Theologians (EANT), Typeset at SIST and Printed in Nigeria by SNAAP Press Ltd., Enugu.

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School of Theology (SIST), P.O. Box 9696, Enugu, Nigeria.
Inculturation - Continuity and Change in the African Church

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Editorial

Inculturation - Continuity and Change in the African Church

The Christian message makes impact in a milieu when it secures adherents from the target society. Whatever may be the levels of adherence, the local culture must in one way or the other be touched. Gospel and Culture must embrace. The entrance of Christianity into sub-Saharan Africa especially from the nineteenth century radically impacted on all aspects of African life. This is because of the close connection between colonisation of the continent and its christianization. Instability or uncertainty was introduced into the market place, into the political arena, into shrines of divinities and into initiation camps. Consequently, sub-Saharan Africa increasingly lost control of its environment. The control of the environment and the establishment of predictability in human life are crucial to the definition of culture. For, "cultures are environments of artifacts and meanings which are shaped to render the life of the human community more immune to the uncertainties of natural conditions, human feelings, and historical events".

African Christians, in the post-colonial period, increasingly question the separation of their culture from their faith in Jesus Christ. In this way they re-appropriate their right to be the originators of their own designs and the projectors or creators of those events which lead to their destiny. This is why inculturation has become such a burning issue within the African Church. This is not surprising because Christianity from its origins is a multicultural phenomenon. In Africa, inculturation has become part of the self understanding of the local Church as self-ministering, self-propagating and self-supporting. It is another way of proclaiming that the Word has effectively pitched Its tent among us. Theologians in Africa are exploring ways and means whereby one may become Christian without being the less African. The entire human and natural resources of Africa are convoked in the response to or reception of the faith. In this dialectics of
acceptance and rejection, imperative in any encounter between Gospel and Culture, faith becomes culture. This is important both for the culture and for the faith. For, “the synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith. A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not fully lived out”.

In this issue of our Bulletin Of Ecumenical Theology we address this question of inculturation. The lead article by Francis Njoku focuses on the models used by African theologians in their search for ways of making the faith become culture. The models Njoku examined include the ancestral model, the staurological, proverbial, and hospitality models. Njoku prefers to work with a new model, the covenant model, because it leads to a happy bonding of African cultures and the Christian gospel. It will further link intimately the interests of ecology and theology. For, among Africans a covenant with humans implicates a pact with the earth.

Benjamin Abotchie Ntreh demonstrates, in his contribution, the layers of culture in the study and interpretation of Scripture. Concentrating on the ritual of throwing dust on one’s head in times of distress, especially at the presence of death, he shows that there has been change and development in the understanding of this particular rite. Initially it symbolised anger and denial or avoidance of the feared evil. Later, especially in the Christian practice, it symbolised the acceptance of the reality of death through which one passes to eternal life.

In his own contribution to this issue, Anthony Ekwunife focuses on the place of culture in the formation of candidates to the catholic priesthood. Limiting his survey to seminaries in Nigeria, during the colonial and post-colonial times, Ekwunife discovers that there is little relevance of the cultural context in the training of the future leaders of the catholic church. Cultural values, he insists, are imperative in seminary formation if these men are to become the directors of inculturation in the Church.

Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, c.s.sp.

Some Indigenous Models In African Theology
And An Ethic Of Inculturation

By

Francis O.C. Njoku, cmf

Introduction

The search for a new theological framework in Africa, is an argument in favour of a widely held opinion that missionary strategy based, in general, on the implantation of Western Christianity into Africa can no longer be upheld. It has become less efficacious in presenting Christianity to Africans.

In this essay I intend to examine a few indigenous theological approaches. I call them indigenous because they are proposed by African theologians as a response to the need for an in-depth inculturation from within.

This article is divided into two parts. Part one will examine some of these models, and part two will address the issue of an ethic of inculturation. Five proposals will be considered, namely, ancestral, staurological, proverbial, and hospitality approaches. Covenant model is the fifth model to which I am inclined. However, I shall not give a detailed discussion of covenant theology in the scriptures or in African culture since I have considered this in a previous article.\(^1\) Leaning on the inspirations of the pact model, I shall suggest an ethic of inculturation.

Part One

What is meant by model or proposal in this article

There is a universal consensus that in talking about inculturation in Africa two realities should be noted, namely, Gospel and African culture. Opinions are, however, varied as to the basis of such meeting or the model under which these realities can adequately be formulated. The words model and proposal shall be substituted for each other in this essay.
Students of Sociology and Social Communication are fond of talking about models. Anthropologists talk of models too. Denis Mcquail and Sven Windahl say models have organising function as a consciously simplified description in a graphic form of a piece or reality that give us a general picture of a range of different particular circumstances. In this sense a model acts as a compass for the student in the research process, albeit the researcher would not pretend that all is in his compass. Although the term model is used in a variety of ways, Louis J. Luzebetak is convinced that it has “a common core of meaning; invariably it refers to a particular perspective from which the real world is being examined and described. From what is said so far one can argue that models are handy theoretical images for empirical application. They are simplified rough drafts but effectively able to call up appropriate mental images that present reality from a particular perspective. It has to be pointed out that no model will pretend to exhaust all aspects of reality. However, some models present their subjects in a more coherent and comprehensible form. It is only on this condition can one model be preferred to the other.

What model do we have in mind when we speak of African theology? Speaking about model in inculcation within the spectrum of African theology is looking for a particular and sound perspective within which African life and response to the Gospel can be summarised and symbolised in faithfulness to the dual heritage of the African Christian. The temptation to reduce types in model as realities should be resisted. Model⁴ in our context is a tentative mind frame which can pave the way for an authentic and synthetic meeting between the Gospel and African culture.

The old missionary strategy is said to have outlived its usefulness because it does not fit contemporary experience of Africans any more. The African infant Christianity must give way to adult Christianity, people claim. The old missionary model was fixated with the concept of implanting Christianity in other cultures outside the West.

Before we proceed to examine the indigenous models however, it is important that we know what the old model with its roots is and
what has gone wrong with it.

Adaptation theology and its historical roots.

The theological content of Western missionary enterprise in Africa has received various names: contact theology, indigenization, adaptation, and so on. Most often the phrase “adaptation theology” is used for every inculturation tentative that has its roots in a theology that merely tries to replace cultural values with what the missionary calls “Christian values”. Adaptation theology is contrasted with Incarnation(al) or contextual theology which is a theology that looks for African rites and Church structures of African inspiration. Incarnational or Critical theology emerges from a sustained critical relationship between Christianity and cultures. A basic dissatisfaction is generally expressed against Adaptation theology that it barely allows the African clergy to assume ecclesial leadership. Although liturgies may be linguistically and musically African, the theological content essentially remains European. Charles Nyamiti tersely refers to adaptation theology as “the application of the general principles of theological renewal to concrete cases, either by an effort to solve particular African problems (e.g., polygamy, ancestral cult)” with Christian principles, or by attempting to adopt African elements into Christian theology. The theological approaches that came as an alternative to adaptation theology through the inspiration of incarnation theology were efforts to go beyond the former and break new grounds.

There is a tendency for the new attempts, in the bid to surpass the obsolete model, to fall prey to the so-called old way of theological thinking (adaptation). The preceding statement does not imply that the alternative models should totally break with adaptation. Adaptation could be seen as one of those initial ports of call on the way to serious inculturation, but the bad news is that we have passed this stage long ago. It is very easy to replace adaptation with a new name as seen in the argument of some of the historical roots of implantation or adaptation theology.

Implantation theology was a theological mind-set hatched in a
particular historical epoch in the life of the Church. According to Segundo, a sociological nature accompanied the spread of the Church. Christendom arose and developed within a socio-cultural context. The Church of that epoch was seen as a place of protection against the unpredictable demands of a totalitarian state and society hence its number increased. Segundo’s reference to the social reality is meant to point out the context in which the institutionalisation of the Church took roots as it tried to contend with the problem of survival and unity in the midst of increasing membership in the absence of its founder. As a human group it stressed the institutional aspects to permit the organisation and control of its members. The fact of this human phenomenon had its own consequences, says Segundo:

The first factor was that new members no longer entered Christianity through personal conversion but rather through simple process of birth. Thus the process of selection effected through a conversion to the faith, with all that this involved in terms of a profound change in human attitudes, was replaced by mere vegetative growth. Conversion gradually came to be the rare exception.  

A further consequence of this was a shift in emphasis on the goal and aim of Christianity. The institution tending to ensure group stability, “introduced a new motive that was paradoxically opposed to the authenticity of the new life lived in freedom of Christ. It tried to reduce the unpredictable elements in its members’ behaviour patterns to established routine forms.” This preoccupation with number and institution was to leave its marks in the Church’s orientation and self-understanding of the time. It concerned itself with preserving the faith and teaching a faith that was almost hereditary at the expense of personal conversion. It became a faith formulated in dogmas adequate to elicit conversion. The Church insisted on uniformity which is naturally a bedrock of institutionalisation. It took up the form of civil organisation in all its ramifications to control and protect its members; it underwent a
transformation from a state of anticipation for God's eschatological kingdom into a Christian society. More still, Christianity became identified with the Western culture, as Segundo observes:

Oneness of faith was no longer seen as isolated phenomenon; it embraced Western culture as a whole. This new element was undoubtedly decisive for the Church theology that was elaborated within the framework of Christendom. The universality of the Church was envisioned in quantitative terms. The chief by-product of this view was that missionary activity ceased to be the task of each and every Christian.  

No wonder reports of pastors in mission fields about great numbers of baptism were seen as signs of growth in Christian faith. Furthermore, pagans became those outside Christendom including the new worlds. Segundo does not deny what might vaguely have been called "inculturation" as a process of adapting cultures to Christian ways. He rather criticises a particular conception of missionary activity nursed by Christendom - an imposing bid for uniformity and numbers. It is evident why missionary activity at this period did not incarnate but began with the westernization of the cultures it met. Cultures outside the West were considered inferior and devilish. Hans Künig refers to the historical development of the Church which became fixated in the Euro-American environment when he declares that,

following the example of Paul, the Church became Greek with the Greek world and Barbarian with the barbarian world. However it has not become Arabic with the Arabs, Black with the Black, Indian with the Indians, or Chinese with the Chinese. Viewed as a whole the Church of Jesus Christ has remained a European-American affair.  

Künig argues for a pluralism of cultural responses which is itself
contingent with the historical life of the Church. Ngindu Mushete re-echoes Küng's concern from within the African setting. The Church has not become African with Africans. Here lies the basic task. The Christian community in Africa is only showing a carbon copy of European model. It is very torpid, lacks originality and creativity. A typical African community is a Church that prays with borrowed words, thinks by proxy and operates by way of Rome, Paris, London and other European capitals. There is then need for an African theology that "attempts to take due account of Africans to whom the faith is addressed. It takes note of Africa's culture, religion and civilisation. It advocates the right of African Christians to ponder Christianity and its truth in their own terms."\(^{14}\) The Gospel needs cultural decoding in order to let Africans give their own response.\(^{15}\) One claim is implicitly common to Küng and Ngindu: theology is not presuppositionless; it is culturally and socially bound. God speaks culturally, so also is theology. Thus African theology "would accept and value the cultural and religious experience of African peoples, and it would attempt to reply to the questions raised by African society and its contemporary development."\(^{16}\)

It was to heed this call for a critical theology and to give an authentic African face to Christianity that popularised the search for indigenous models in African theology. The need for theological pluralism can no longer be ignored. Theological pluralism invites a pluralism of communication rather than of doctrine, but "there is no communication of doctrine except through the rituals, narrative forms, titles, parables and metaphors that are effective in the given (cultural) milieu."\(^{17}\)

**The Ancestor Model**

The most difficult and central problem in creating African theology, according to Charles Nyamiti, consists in the effective adoption of African elements into sacred science. Researches conducted in this area so far tend to stop at the level of comparative study of African religions. These set African and Christian elements side by side without allowing them to coincide
into a theological unity. There is a lack of intrinsic employment of cultural themes that will speak both to Africans and Christians alike. One example of this intrinsic use would be "...the application of the African category of ancestor to Christ (the Ancestor) or to grace (e.g., grace is 'ancestral'), not merely in a figurative or metaphorical sense, but according to the analogy of proportion so as to identify it formally with Christ and grace."  

This is one of those applications of the African elements to Christianity that can be modified and justified, he claims.

The statement that grace is ancestral may be valid but curious. Ancestors intercede for their kin from the spirit world. This constant intercession on behalf of the community makes efficacious the celebration of the community in its relationship with God, humans and the whole cosmic order. However, the identification of Christ with the ancestral category, even according to analogy of proportion, does not seem to go beyond the adaptation model which Nyamiti set out to criticise. One can concede to him that Christ can be called an ancestor, but the argument presented in its favour has much roots in implantation theology. It presumes that Christ/Jesus could be called an ancestor without telling us why he qualifies as ancestor, and under what conditions we must accept him into the category of ancestor. It looks suspicious and leaves the ancestor model to appear like the typology of Origen in the sub-Apostolic period. Like all typologies, it does not explain sufficiently its types. For example, that Christ can be seen to behave like Moses does neither prove that Christ should be identified with Moses, nor does it warrant us to call him the new Moses! What kind of identity that exists between Moses and Christ is simply presumed and not explained. So also is presumed and not proved the identity that is claimed to exist between Jesus and ancestors. The major defect of Nyamiti's ancestor category is the failure to give a strong reason why we should consider Jesus as a member of the ancestral group. Those who are given the name ancestor are men who lived a good life and died at a ripe-old age. Jesus lived a good life but he did not die at a ripe-old age! What reason have we to admit someone who
lived a good life but died young into the category of ancestor? This is a question which Nyamiti failed to address.

An allied concept to the ancestor category is the identification of Jesus as “Proto-Ancestor” Its proponent, Bénézet Bujo, desires to “find a new messianic title for Jesus Christ, and work out a new theological way of speaking of him.” This proposal, which sounds more like a preaching rhetoric than a serious theological argument, I think, stops at the level of adaptation. It suffers from the same deficiency pointed out in Nyamiti.

The Staurological model

Fortunatus Nwachukwu opts for an African theology that is “cosmopolitan”. I guess by using the adjective “cosmopolitan” to qualify theology he does not intend worldly theology in a very banal or pejorative sense but a theology that is at home in Africa and beyond. He implies a theology that can gain acceptance in the mainstream of Christianity as being at once African and biblical. Hence he condemns a solely ‘subsistent’ African theology, and proposes the staurological or the cross model which he justifies under three counts. One, the cross is at the centre of the Christian mystery. Second, Simon of Cyrene (an African) who helped Jesus to carry his cross serves as a typos for a special mission of African thelogy. In his third justification, Nwachukwu confesses that the cross symbol is not found in Africa, but it does not dissuade him from arguing for its relevance. He contends that the experience of suffering in the daily lives of Nigerians (or Africans) makes the cross model attractive. According to him, the cross model unifies. Jesus showed solidarity with people in suffering.

Despite the merits of the cross model, I think that some of its rationalisations in Nwachukwu’s presentation are bound to attract fierce objections. The cross is however not out of place; for no one doubts that the cross is at the centre of the Christian message. Nwachukwu rightly links the cross to suffering, but this does not mean that the Nigerian or African people celebrate suffering as a way of life. Rather they found themselves in situations of suffering. They did not choose to suffer. The relationship between
the African and suffering in whatever historical circumstance is contingent. The cross as a Christian symbol has a value independently of peoples’ historical experience for which such symbol can be genuinely or ideologically evoked. I think what Nwachukwu tries to do with the cross for the Nigerian Christians can still be done with the covenant model. The cross may be integrated into the pact to become a symbol of a broken body for a broken people. Cross, suffering, or death presented as an isolated catechetical symbol for Nigerians is just moralising.

The introduction of the cross as a symbol of unity in African community life, in the form Nwachukwu conceives of it, is like an appendage to the ontological foundation of African communities since he denies that it is found in Africa. Unless he is prepared to demonstrate that this symbol can justifiably be found in African culture, its prospect is dim and prone to be attacked as an imported symbol, although it is a symbol at the centre of Christianity.

Jesus certainly showed solidarity with the suffering and worked to release them from what hinders them from responding to God’s call. He did not endorse suffering as the best possible way of realising God’s project. The cross came when relationship between God and humans was jeopardised. Jesus was a victim of a broken covenant. His body, as I have said, is a broken body for a broken people. In breaking the covenant the conspirators (humans) introduced the cross. Peter’s sermon to the people after the cure of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate clarifies this point.

Men of Israel, why are you so surprised at this? Why are you staring at us as though we had made this man walk by our own power of holiness? It is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestor, who has glorified his servant Jesus whom you handed over and then disowned in the presence of Pilate after he had given his verdict to release him. It was you who accused the Holy and Upright One, you who demanded that a murderer should be released to you while you killed the prince if life. God, however raised him from the dead, and to that fact we are witness, and it is in the
name of Jesus which, through faith in him, has brought back the strength of this man you see here and who is well known to you. 24

Therefore, it was not God who killed Jesus, or introduced the Cross but humans did, although, God foresaw that the cross will be inevitable. In any case, God would always show Himself as God and accomplish his design even as man defaults along the way. The cross is like a double-edged sword. In the sign of the cross we see both the revolt of humans against God and God’s power to deal with such rebellion with the same symbolism introduced by humans! It was human revolt that made the cross a temporary necessity. God could have done without the cross had humans not revolted.

The Proverbial Model

John Egbulefu advocates the “pro-verbial” model of inculturation for a successful inculturation of Christianity in Africa.25 Christianity and African reality, according to him, are cultures. And he accepts that one will give way for the other. This is implied in his reasoning that the insertion of Christian elements into native cultures has to be effected. By this the cultures are then fused, (may be frozen!), and assimilated into Christianity, where they become corrected and transformed.26 The inculturation of the Church’s dogmas is of paramount importance to the pro-verbial model reconstruction. How did the proverbial come about?

Egbulefu finds a huge use made of proverbs in Africa. Leaning on this, he makes a smart theological tinkering thus: the etymology of the word ‘proverb’ is ‘pro-verbum’, meaning ‘for the word’. And when it is interpreted in the context of inculturation, it acquires the sense of “Africa for the Word”. Anything outside of this is syncretistic and contrary to the logic of inculturation system.27

The proverbial model is very attractive because it takes off from a linguistic joke that is at home with some Africans - the use of proverbs. However, such an approach raises some problems about
the understanding of inculturation itself. The swift reduction of Christianity to a culture acts as a boomerang to what is claimed in favour of Christianity. It diminishes the claim of Christianity to be a revelation or divine reality. Culture, as we know, is a product of human interiority and expression - it is a result of human ideas. Thus it is essentially man-made. John Kelly has an incisive remark on this point.

Society and culture are man-made and we must always be aware, both in apprehension and expression, that this is so. Neither society nor culture as they are actually apprehended are in the nature of things. Society and culture are human constructs, subjected to historicity. If culture and Christianity are raised to the same status, how much reasonable ground is left to argue that Christianity still transcends the cultures? There lurks a problem in the blunt identification or merging of Christianity with any culture, unless by inculturation or transformation of cultures we mean a "theological miscegenation", whereby the weaker disappears with time. And if this is implied in the project of inculturation, which I think is not, such a process could be all but dubious. Inculturation is not intended to be a reduction of cultures to one divine reality, that is, a kind of theological monism.

The Christian group can be regarded, from the point of view of sociology, as a culture or better described as a "subculture" because its members constitute a distinct social group with relatively common habits and faith-communion in Jesus. Surely, Egbulefu does not intend this meaning when he claims that Christianity is a culture. Viewed from another perspective, if one must apply the word "culture" to Christianity, it should be in an analogical sense. But the preceding concession does not stand to patch up the loose argument for the proverbial model! When the concept of analogy is applied to culture, the reflection changes from culture to "cultures." No culture is the culture. Every culture is a culture. Undoubtedly, some kind of exchange does take place
among cultures at various levels because cross-cultural pollination is a social phenomenon. Nevertheless, it will be difficult to conclude that the intention of Christian religion is to make people abandon their cultures only to be taught the Church’s dogmas (probably the new culture!) through a “proverbial rote method”

Egbulefu makes a spirited effort to look for a model from within which he thinks must distance itself from any form of syncretism. I respect the fear of Prof. Egbulefu, which could truly be genuine. We are not proposing syncretism as a doctrine to do inculturation. But the history of the Church shows some elements of syncretistic influence. The student in search for a sincere way of bringing about the marriage between Gospel and African culture does not aim at a blunt effort to syncretism. However, it is not a surprise that syncretism may result while one may be searching for the truth about God, humans and the world. Aylward Shorter is right to point out that it is not a question of the reality of syncretism in the Church’s life journey along the centuries but to what degree. He makes a trenchant remark:

There has always been syncretism in the Church, and the question is not how to get rid of it, but how much syncretism can be tolerated. Even in the New Testament communities there were three or four opinions about how to accommodate Judaism within Christianity. Eventually the Jewishness of Jesus was almost lost sight although.29

Elsewhere Shorter further asserts that,

a historic church accumulates a currency or patrimony of cultural elements, either contingent or necessary, which is communicated through acculturation and which survives in great part as a syncretic component in Christianity’s inculturated forms. There is still a dangerous tendency in official church documents to imply that this patrimony is a culture, and even to equate it with a universally significant Euro-American culture. This patrimony includes the residue
of previous inculturation, as well as the outcome of mutual invigoration and enrichment in the contemporary communion of churches. It is a multicultural phenomenon which assists the church in passing "from one kind of clarity to another" in its developing understanding of the faith. It is a naive oversimplification to identify this patrimony with the culture of Europe, even if that culture is seen to be what it is in reality, a complex phenomenon of astonishing diversity.  

There is hardly a perfected and finished model in our search for the truth about God and ourselves. What we call syncretism can be a process of authentic expression. Shorter's words imply that Christianity should show signs of syncretic influence if it must insert itself in the cultures. This is not a new ideology! A shrewd look at missionary Christianity shows that it has been treading along this path in its self-discovering.

The proverbial perspective can be classified as a doctrinal model because of its refusal to bend or 'syncretize'. The 'obsession' with the inculcation of what is thought to be the church's 'dogmas' can stage a kind of power politics that obstructs initiative and progress. Like a doctrinal model of revelation, it is "understood on the analogy of authoritative teaching. God is seen as an infallible teacher who communicates knowledge by speech and writing. The recipients, as pupils, are expected to be attentive and docile." For the doctrinal-p.\overline{\text{e}}verbal theorist, the gospel simply talks, and teaches, and the cultures listen. There is a likely presumption that humans have little or nothing to offer in dialogue. Thus, as it is 'stiff', too powerful but weak to content erring humans before the divine and too scary for humans, it does end in a 'policeman theologising!'. The proverbial model suffers the same defect of the implantation missiological policies. It is very close, in its present formulation, to the ideologies of a police state whose citizens, like those of the Platonic state, are always children. I think, to a great extent, that God likes us to make our own mistakes freely. The knowledge of God through the gospel is a free offer that demands a free and responsible answer. Shorter corroborates this view when
he writes thus.

Primary evangelization follows the path of interreligious dialogue. It seeks to discover what is of God in the cultural and religious traditions of the unevangelized. It looks for signs of the activity of the spirit and for the elements of Christian truth which St. Justin Martyr called 'seed of the word'. It notes the various ways in which the people of these traditions yearn consciously or unconsciously for Christian fulfilment, and it calls them to repentance and conversion. At the appropriate moment, it identifies and names the hitherto unknown Christ, whose spirit has been at work among them. It speaks to the human imaginations about Christ and invites the people to learn about him and consciously to commit themselves in love and freedom to him.32

The Hospitality Model

E. E. Uzukwu argues that cultural distortion notwithstanding, hospitality has remained a constant in African life.33 In the light of this, he proposes a theological model of inculturation based on this central value.

In Africa the stranger is always given a warm welcome. From the very first, he is shown kindness and affection, and is treated as a friend unless, or until, he proves himself otherwise. Uzukwu sees this attitude of friendliness towards the stranger as a favourable precondition for preaching the gospel, and something to be harnessed in the interest of evangelization. For the missionary comes as a stranger, albeit a particular kind of stranger with a message to deliver. And the community, being naturally disposed to hospitality, warmly receives him and is prepared to listen to him. Thus there is a mutual embrace as the missionary sets about making his home among the people.

As he does so, he begins to unfold the gospel message before his guests. Initially, the message may seem as strange as the messenger; but it too, is accorded the treatment meted out to the stranger, and is welcomed in an atmosphere of love and friendship.
In this soil, it is easy for the gospel to take root. For right at the heart of hospitality is an openness and disposition to dialogue. It is essential, however, that this is not to be taken advantage of to the detriment of good relations with the community he has come to serve, Uzukwu warns. The openness must be on both sides, and the missionary too must practice hospitality. Should he attempt to impose his message, or be perceived as wishing to do so, and show insufficient respect for the traditions of the people, he may well run into opposition and rejection. No wonder Uzukwu says "hospitality is double edged: it constitutes a threat and luck." To say that hospitality is double edged sounds a bit contradictory. Either it is hospitality or it is not! Hospitality is intrinsically a positive value and to blend it with new elements like threat or luck, does not sound quite right. However, what Uzukwu has in mind is the necessity of dialogue in an atmosphere of encounter. Imposition or prejudice of any kind can upset the whole environment of meeting, and can blur or obscure the good value each party may be trying to contribute. According to Uzukwu, therefore, "the demonstration in dialogue reduces the aggression of the hosts who would regard the guest’s contribution as more of a threat than a good fortune."

If on the other hand there is mutual kindness and affection, and the dialogue remains open, this will lead to self-reflection on the part of the people and eventually, perhaps, to conversion. The high point in this process expresses itself in a confession by the community that the gospel message offers a better key to life’s riddles. Then the community is led to the end of an era in its life process.

It should not be forgotten, however, that the hospitality that has opened the way for the gospel is a spiritual value. It too is good news, and the people’s own good news finds its place in the wider framework of the gospel.

Hospitality model has good insights but I think we should not parade it as a totally African phenomenon. It is true that Africans are hospitable. Other people are, too. There are even more reasons to question African hospitality. There are records of brutality or
hostility emitted to people outside of one's clan and to early missionaries. The present state of affairs in the continent could be all but hospitable to its citizens or strangers! When this so called hospitality is closely examined, it could be a personal feeling of some good hearted individuals who are found in various degrees in every culture amid the general attitude of suspicion shown towards strangers than a general cultural attitude.

On the whole, however, I adopt hospitality as a gospel attitude of acceptance and communal fraternity. It is very enriching; it has infinite merits in terms of creating a solid foundation for dialogue and Christian growth. However, hospitality in Uzukwu's understanding has an added element that is aggressive too. The stranger would have to be met with luck or threat. We have pointed out why it is a contradiction in terms to speak of hospitality as double edged. Uzukwu is understood to stress the need of dialogue and good disposition on the part of the guest so that he will not meet with rejection of his message. But this concession does not excuse his hospitable encounter from the accusation that it is dangerously dualistic. It depends on the unpredictable disposition of either the stranger/missionary or the host. The reaction of the host, or the increase or decrease of aggressiveness or acceptance, depends on how the guest presents his message. He has to gamble through the slippery grounds of the dialectics of people's emotions. In any case, it will be unfortunate to stake the gospel and the respect for the human person on mere caprices and passions of people! Both host and guest abide with an uninsured risk. In their first encounter, there is a potential danger that they see each other as things to be manipulated. And if ever they come closer to appreciating each other's worth, it is just somebody meeting some one. They are still far from having a common basis for encounter that can at least guarantee some primitive rights, even if the content of such a right be vague at first encounter. Since it is a situation of either/or - luck or threat- then the changes of a philosophy of right that predates the encounter or springs from the mere encounter of human persons are dim indeed.

Well, we do not want to distract with this the other side of the
instinctive reaction towards the stranger; it is enough to indicate that we shall take hospitality as a good condition for encounter and assume it as covenant attitude.

**PART TWO**

*Suggested Mind-Set for the Project of Inculturation*

Knowledge is relational. This bespeaks intentionality in the situation of the knower and the known. The subject knows the object without becoming the object or dissolving in the object, no less than the object disappearing in the main stream of knowledge. Even contemporary epistemology in addition to intentionality has adopted almost the religious term of 'indwelling' to describe the knowledge situation. Colin Gunton underscores this when he say that “We do not contemplate reality from the outside, from a godlike distance -objectivism- but we indwell the world as part of it. All knowledge arises out of, and is a function of relation.”

The relationality is not the fusion of one element into the other, but a mutual responsive action where the subject and the object become present to each other in an intentional way. They indwell in each other. Gunton has this further remark to make:

Professor T.F. Torrance has suggested that the metaphor of indwelling takes its origin from its use in St. John’s gospel, where the son indwells the Father, believers indwell Christ, then the Spirit indwells them. If that is so, then we have already before us one example of the historical impact of the gospel on our culture.

In this sense, indwelling becomes an epistemological or theological metaphor. The way the subject and object indwell in each other can be seen to be the way God, Christ or the Christian message indwells in our world. ‘Indwelling in’ or ‘to dwell’ is always to indwell or dwell in something, for example, a world. Here we touch the mystery of incarnation - that God indwells or dwells in our world. Hence it is often argued that inculturation has
to be modeled on incarnation.

Without trying to make a categorical assertion that inculturation is synonymous with incarnation, we can say, by approximation, that inculturation is a form of incarnation, since in inculturation we are attempting to make the gospel to indwell in a culture. If this intuition is correct, then inculturation is an indwelling in a world. This world is a necessity for indwelling to take place otherwise we cannot inculturate or logically incarnate. The world or creation is very necessary for the work of redemption (that is, an indwelling incarnation) to be effected. So also we need human beings and cultures in order to inculturate. The word ‘necessity’ used in this context does not imply a strict philosophical determinism but a condition for the freedom of indwelling itself. It means a world without which there will neither be place nor space to act or to exercise. There is no freedom or expression or manifestation without a precedent necessity (i.e., world) and to deny this amounts to denial of a world within which freedom is exercised and realised. Logically Christ would not have come if there was no creation, no world - in short no human beings. Christ came to save humans already living in their life-world or culture. How would the gospel, for example, be addressed to Africans if there are no Africans! From this, we can generalise in saying there is no gospel if there are no persons.

We take it that when it is said that Christ or the gospel speaks to the culture that it is a metaphoric way of saying that the gospel addresses persons. Culture does not exist out there. What we address in front of us is the human person. Culture is only an expression of man (himself) in trying to live his life. It has a personal aspect in so far as it is ‘the person’ in the culture and in the production of culture that is addressed. Gospel is firstly addressed to human beings who are Africans and can become Christian. The African who can become a Christian is a person. The gospel is the person of Christ. There is then this common personhood that creates the world of encounter between the parties involved. Both the addressee and the addresser are persons. It is a kind of world for meeting. Culture is not something out there but it
is the person who stands before me in his/her yesterday, today and tomorrow - in his/her totality. Personhood is the common world of meeting. Perhaps to say that the gospel addresses cultures is an improper way of saying that the gospel addresses persons.

The missionary (or the gospel) meets people already dwelling in their world. S/he comes to dwell with them. The recognition of common personhood is not immediately factual, but reveals itself to the intuiting conscience. Personhood as a common humanity is not coextensive with temporal facts but it can be materialised in the temporal and social facts that come to bear on interpersonal relationship. It needs to be intuited by, or revealed to the host and the guest that they have something in common, which is not caused by any of them, though depends on either of them for its flourishing. The intuition of their common humanity is enough to suspend Uzukwu’s ‘luck-threat’ condition. Humanity crucified and glorified is their humanity. We see the cross as a sign of broken and repaired relationship thus giving hope that all relationships are capable of being rebuilt. In this way Nwachukwu’s staurological model fits into its evangelical setting.

Humanity is to be recognised even before the encounter began, though the preoccupation of each party is the protection of this in the process of inter subjective relationship, thus the need for an alliance.

The Covenant Model

As I said at the beginning of this article, I have explored in a previous article how a theological marriage can be formulated between the gospel and African culture under the spirit of communion. For this reason I would not go deep into exploring the concept ‘covenant’ be it in the Scriptures or in the African setting. However, a very brief summary of major contention regarding the covenant model can be highlighted.

The idea of covenant can be used to construct a bridge between the twofold heritage of the African Christian. The term ‘covenant’ both in biblical and extra biblical sources connotes the idea of agreement, a contract strongly binding on the parties involved to
Some Indigenous Models in African Theology

keep the terms of the pact. G. E. Mendenhall summarises the basic element of pact when he defines covenant as a "solemn promise made binding by oath, which may be either verbal formula or a symbolic action. Such an action or formula is recognised by the parties as the formal act which binds the actor to fulfil his promise." The word berith is used by the OT to translate the relationship between Yahweh and Israel. Its English equivalent is oath or testimony. The LXX and NT render the Hebrew berith as diatheke which means last will or testament.

The OT is full of accounts of simple covenants between men, for example the pact between Jabesh Gilead and Nahash, (I Sam. 11:1); covenants between equals, for instance the agreement between Jacob and Laban, (Gen. 31:44). There are covenants between unequals for example, the covenant between Abraham and God (Gen. 15); between the people of Israel and Yahweh at Mount Sinai, (Ex. 19 - 24). There was also God’s oath to David to stabilise the Israelite dynasty to him and his descendants, hence Jesus’ genealogy in the NT is traced to the dynasty of David, (Mt. 1). Great prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Ezra and Nehemiah, in their various teachings, encapsulate the idea of God’s covenant with his people.

In the NT we see that both the Pauline (I Cor. 11:24-25; Lk. 22:17-25) and Petrine (Mt. 26:26-28; Mk. 14:22-25) traditions accept that the Eucharistic words embody covenant overtones. The blood of the lamb that was used to ratify the covenant between God and Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai is seen as prefiguring in the NT the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The new covenant which Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34) talks about becomes fulfilled and perfected in Christ. Jesus is the Christ of God through whom creation was made and is being sustained. With his life, passion, death and resurrection Jesus reconciles humans to God, thereby restoring the relationship that was severed when humans disobeyed in the old dispensation. His blood shed on the cross established peace between heaven and earth, (Col. 1:15-20). From this perspective, Jesus comes to be seen and venerated as a covenanted personality, a ‘trans-cosmic man’ in whom the fullness of divinity
dwells.\(^4^0\) As a cosmic individual he brings an end to acts of violence and spilling of blood. In and by Jesus, the human person is constituted as a sacred entity who also posits the self as a covenanted unity in Christian parlance in particular and the universe in general.

A similar reasoning can be constructed from the point of view of African culture. The idea of humans as a covenanted or communal unity is not foreign to the African experience. This cosmic unity is lived in the community. Many students of African cultural history bear witness to this cultural phenomenon: the Africans’ attachment to community life. The community is a life-world where I am because we are:

in the African communal world, the important elements of individual consciousness are widely shared in the community. These shared elements (beliefs, ideas, feelings, sentiments, fears), constitute the consciousness of the epoch. The community is a self-world and it demands an undivided union with others. Existence apart form the community or the universe of life-force is unthinkable. From the common effort to master the environment arise cultural creativities.\(^4^1\)

Testifying to the African communal living, Swailer Sidhom argues that existence in relations sums up the pattern of the African way of life. This encompasses within it a great deal, practically the whole universe. The African maintains a vital relationship with nature, God, the deities, ancestors, the tribe the clan, the extended family and him-/herself.\(^4^2\)

The idea of communion is closely linked with covenant for the motif of covenant is essentially communion in the same life and meaning. No wonder the Igbo word for covenant is *Igba-ndu* which means mating or communion of life. Thus mercy Amba Oduyoye declares that covenant making is a characteristic of African life.\(^4^3\) Through alliance even strangers come to see themselves as “blood relatives”, thereby assuring the sacredness of all in a common paternity/maternity and brotherhood. It is amazing
to read the following words uttered in an occasion of an African covenant:

As we have now become friends, let the stomach of whoever cheats his friend, swell. When I visit you, at any time, you will not me send away. If I become poor you will not discard me. We will never do anything to harm each other, or to harm any of our relatives and friends. May our ancestors be out witness. May God ratify our friendship, our brotherhood.44

On the basis of these intimations, I maintain that the idea of covenant is common to both the Christian and African traditions. It can be an invaluable tool in constructing an inculturation praxis and catechism. The pact model arrests any prejudice that might arise and insures any legitimate fear or preoccupation in the world of meeting. The gospel knows of alliance. Africans know of it too. Thus the reality of an alliance is not foreign both to the guest and host, in Uzukwu’s hospitality model. The conditions of alliance determine the ethic of encounter which is nourished by communal living and friendship.

The Advantage of the Covenant Model

It is not pretended that the covenant model should be the only feasible model; but among the present models proposed in which inculturation could be summed up, it appears to stand a better advantage, if we must speak of a theology or philosophy of right in African socio-religious life and the world at large. There are social aspects of the pact that impact the political environment under which we live and theologise. The alliance proposal is important if a theology of ecology is to be expounded; if an integral and respectful view of the human person is to be noted; if we must argue for an objective life or coexistence ethics; if a dialogue relationship has to be maintained between African culture and the gospel; if life as a whole must be lived in harmony and dialogue with God, humans and nature. If all men and women are sons and daughters, brothers and sisters under the fatherhood of the same
all-powerful and all-caring God, they must feel themselves committed to a certain norm of love, be it social or religious, from which they must bind themselves and relate to one another.

The new ethic is truly human because it issues from the phenomenon of human existence, and quite supernatural because it transcends individual subjects in the world of encounter. Going back to biblical roots, we hope to discover the same message for all. It is charged with the message of a new brotherhood and springs from a commitment of love that is communally ethical. The intuition of Shorter is brilliantly expressed when he remarks that,

Religion is by definition a cultural phenomenon, and the gospel is basically a way of life that is lived in accordance with diverse cultures. Since culture is always the property of a community and serves to give the community identity, it follows that religious conversion has a community dimension. This is especially true in the case of Christian evangelization, which derives its success and efficacy from interpersonal and community relationships, and which preaches a community ethic based on fraternal love. Christian conversion is therefore never a purely individual and intellectual journey. On the one hand, the community invites the individual to join with it in common witness and worship; and on the other hand, the individual takes the step of joining the community which issues the invitation.45

When people feel secure in the hands of God and of one another by a means of social and religious alliance, they are no longer strangers to each other, and the new brotherhood emerges as part of their nature. (This is perhaps the new theological utopia!) Laws then 'disappear' into love and rights are manifested as commitment of love and joy in seeing that these same rights are highly realised and protected. Thus everyone has a space for autodetermination and self-transcendence.

The laws that guide the conduct of dialogue partners or the
community develop from within and are not imposed from the outside. In this environment, persons and communities develop in their authenticity. As persons and human community, they are not outside the communion of common humanity yet they are not carbon copies of other communities or persons, for their rules or laws emerge, and are nursed, from within their environment. This is the new model African church we would like to see come to life. Writing about law and structures of a culturally polycentric communion Shorter assets:

Law, as opposed to legalism, is both healthy and necessary in the church. It upholds people's rights and defines their duties. The new model of church communion, however, cannot tolerate a universal Canon Law that reflects an outmoded paradigm of mission. The new model is inconsistent with an invasive law that subverts local cultures, produces cultural parallelism, or contributes to an ongoing cultural aggression by the West. As matters stand now, the universal law of the church is used as an instrument for blocking effective evangelization and hindering the progress of inculturation. Obviously, this must be changed in a culturally polycentric church.\(^{46}\)

On a wider scale these attendant rights or laws are positive not in the sense of something commanded by the superior to the inferior or law as a positive fact divorced from morality. They are positive in the sense that they are a product of the phenomenological experience of dialogue partners. They are discovered by the partners themselves and are manifested as criteria of conduct for a reciprocal relationship. Their rules are children of their experience and not imported or imposed from outside. This is arrived at through a deconstructed situation which does not ignore the belief-aspirations of the dialogue partners.

One needs to warn that the contextualization of community experience for a better gospel response should not be mistaken for an ethnocentric theology. When we begin with a community's
experience we may be surprised to discover that its experiences are not totally dissimilar to human experience of the divine in general. Every community experience, as a human experience, is at once ‘subjective’ and ‘universalizable’ as an authentic religious encounter of religious men and women. Both religious experiences that can be particularised and those that can be universalized derive from common humanity as a basic human experience of the Holy which is discovered by men and women in dialogue with the Divine.

A philosophical point can be made in this line regarding the community and the missionary. The host and the stranger share a common humanity or personality which is the first ground of their meeting. This ‘dialogal positivity’, or personality is *a priori* because it derives from a common humanity that antedates a partner’s individually isolated claims, because it emerges from a common humanity belonging to none exclusively. It is *a priori* and constitutes a horizon of value and stands out as irreducible essences of personality and love. As the condition of possibility for meeting and dialogue, the common humanity argues for a metaphysics of ‘primitive’ right that guarantees respect for the persons in dialogue situation. The communication journey and dialogue are as a result of a co-operative effort. Not only that life and security are ensured, the other (whoever he is) has a space already to develop, to be himself, and to share his message. The host also has the right to listen and to be listened to.

*Pact, Reconciliation and Harmony with the Earth*

Problems do result in a covenant situation. When encounters take place in dialogue, as human beings, drift away from their interpersonal and ritual commitments, they have something to fall back on: a conscience, a witness or a guarantor. They can avail themselves of the infinite possibility of renewals, re-enactments and re-commitment to the initial cause; for they are not gods. The covenant ideal recognises human weakness and insures the attendant risks in their humanness. In this way, we say that the pact model is robust in making allowance for the legitimate claims,
pretences and possibilities that can crop up within the communication situation. The many ethical and juridical features of man as a subject in word and action are, to a large extent, recognised in their predictable possibility. Like other peoples, Africans know that there is an infinite possibility for breaking a covenant and an infinite possibility for dialogue, appeasement and pacification.

The horizon of the covenant model extends further. To the African, a covenant with a human being is a covenant directly or indirectly with the earth. An offence against a human person also contradicts one's relationship with God and earth. It is interesting to feel the preoccupation for interdependent nature of the earth, our home, in the *Earth Summit* in Rio de Janerio [Brazil, June 1992]. Of the twenty-seven declaratory articles on Environment and Development, article one reads: “Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature.” Michael Grubb et al point out the criticism against the conference for not insisting much on a serious sustainable development ethic that should recognise the intrinsic value of the natural world, irrespective of its value to human beings. However, at least, it suffices that the *Summit* was aware that any mishandling of the earth rebounds on man hence the integrative view of development called by the participants at Rio de Janerio.

Long before the Summit, the Church has been hammering on reconciliation, a salvation that has to be integral and holistic. Francis A. Sullivan articulates: “it is this concept of salvation, as embracing both communion with God and the achieving of unity and justice among all the people in this world that recent official documents of the Catholic church have described as integral salvation.”

The call to integral living extends to technology, which is human self-expression. This human self-expression can no longer ignore the human dignity, rationality and the destiny. Thus, technology - a human activity in a material universe, that is, a sensible manipulation of nature - cannot shy away from blending the
material with the spiritual in an integral whole. Technology has no rationality except in relation to human destiny and good. Hence M. I. Nwoko rightly argues that technology has to face ontology, ethics and ecology in discussion. Technology is ambiguous if it is left to criticise itself. Any model of theology, be it Christological or covenantal that ignores ecology and creative stewardship, will not be doing any good to human life. Models of power and domination theology are very much controverted and should be regarded as obsolete. Process theologians have given us an inspiration of another side of God in relation to creation. Denis Carrol says:

Rather than stand over and against creation, God enters it, is part of it, draws it upwards and forwards. All things have their inner (conative) and their outer (quantitative) aspects. They retain their freedom and their purposiveness even in their relation to God. God is the persuasive lure of their inner life. In this view, God feels with the universe in its pain, in its failure, in its joy. Not only does God give life and love, God is responsive to that life and love.  

It is this broadened concept of God that our proposed theology can give adequate consideration to new ecological problems to which irresponsible handling of environment exposes us. Covenantal model will be sympathetic with the African religious and political situation. In the present scheme of things, no sane visionary will predict that all Africans can belong to the same religious faith. All may acknowledge a power above called God, though they remain African Traditional Religionists, Christians, Moslems, Buddhists, Hindus, etc., in the African environment. They can disagree on the way to the Ultimate because such a ‘Big Truth,’ I think, cannot be exhausted by one way, but everyone has the right to live and to coexist; a pact is called for in this regard. If they become more attentive, they may discover to their surprise that the God of peace and love has always been there at the foundation of their life and coexistence. The right of religious freedom that is, believing
differently in God and remaining brothers/sisters\(^4\) does not argue against the covenant model but leaves room for mutual interaction in which people freely discover the ‘contagious’ Good News of the dialogue partner. Then, they can say from their hearts to the partner-guest, you are indeed a friend, we believe you; you have the message of eternal life. The faith-community confesses thus: “You are truly the Way and the Truth and the Life.” Perhaps, we all come to make the same confession, having achieved listening to what God is saying to us, through us, and through the stranger; and what we as a whole are saying to ourselves! The Gospel is not simply a question of words or of doctrinal propositions but essentially a way of life - a praxis, which is to be lived by people.

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4. J. U. Young, Black And African Theology/Siblings or Distant Cousins (New York: Orbis Books Maryknoll, 1986), 70


8. See J. U. Young, Ibid., 70. There seems to be no general agreement as to what precisely is incarnational theology. Nevertheless, it is understood as modelled on God who came to dwell among us in the man - Jesus.


11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 46


17. See Aylward Shorter, Evangelization and Culture, 119.


26 *Ibid.*, 27-29
27 *Ibid.*, 35
30 A. Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture*, 93.
40 *Ibid.*, 53
44 Anatole Byaruhanga Akiki, “African Traditional Religious Values are to be used as a force for human development” in *African Theology in Progress* vol. 2, eds. J.T. Agbasiere and B.M. Zabajungu, AMECEA Publications, 56-57
45 A. Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture*, 57.
"Dust To Dust, Earth To Earth, Ashes To Ashes"
- Origins Of A Christian Practice

By

Benjamin Abotchie Ntreh

Introduction

The expression of grief and pain occurs in the life and affairs of all humans. The biblical records give us elaborate accounts on the expressions of grief and pain among the predecessors of Christians, that is the Jews. Israel mourned for their plundered nation (Jer. 4:27-28); they were asked to mourn for the natural calamities that plagued their land (Joel 1:8-12); they mourned at the judgement of Yahweh against the nation (Hos. 4:13); Israel also mourned for the dead in their midst (e.g. Num. 20:29; Deut 34:8).

This paper will be restricted to the mourning for the dead. However, since there are so many elements in the mourning rituals, I will concentrate on one aspect of the mourning ritual for the dead in ancient Israel - the conceptual practice of pouring of dust/earth/ashes upon the head during the mourning ceremonies.

During burial ceremonies in the Christian church through the ages, the words “dust to dust, earth to earth, ashes to ashes” are used for committing the dead to the earth. The purpose of the paper is to explore the origin and meaning of these words, which have become standard for Christian burial today. In this paper I am led to appeal to the predecessors of Christianity, that is Judaism of ancient Israel, for the origin and meaning of the formula. I will do this because Christians claim to be adherents to both the New Testament and the Jewish Bible - that is the Old Testament.

Dust in the ancient Near East and Israel

It is appropriate at this point to look at the concept of “dust/earth/ashes” and “head” in the ancient Near East and Israel, in order to understand the world-view out of which the practice of
putting dust upon the head emerged. This would also help us to understand the practice of the Christian committal of the dead itself.

The Hebrew scriptures have at least four words that have been translated “dust” in the English bibles. Some of these words are, bg (Exod. 9:9; RSV, NEB, JB); and dg (2 Chr. 34:4; RSV, JB); pr (Gen. 2:7; RSV, NEB, JB); and shg (Isaiah 41:2; RSV, NEB, JB).

Israel’s historical traditions would like us to understand the essence of pr, “dust”. The Yahwistic writer whose work is dated to about the tenth century BCE ², writes that human beings were created from pr, “dust”, of adamah - ground/earth (Gen. 2:7). Von Rad, writing on the relations between the body formed and the breath - the ability to breathe - put in it, says that the distinction here is not merely between body and soul, because no such distinction exists in ancient Israel, but more realistically, between body and life³. There seems to be a word-play on “dust” and “ground/earth” here. On this issue Claus Westermann writes:

The word-play can indicate what pr says more clearly, namely that the person with its limitations is a creature belonging to the earth. 3:19 says both “you are dust and to dust shall you return” and “till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken” so we can take it as certain that both words in 3:19 and 2:7 refer to the limitation of a person’s earthly existence.⁴

Whereas the interplay of words is clear here the second “dust” in Gen. 3:19 is a reference to the underworld, which makes its parallel “ground” in Gen. 2:7 take on the same connotation. H. Gunkel’s words were much sharper on the issue. He writes, “Man is created from the ground and is called to till the ground and he returns to the ground when he dies.”⁵

It is clear from the above review that in ancient Israel the end of human life is seen as a return to “dust/earth” i.e., mother-earth - sheol - out of which his body was moulded.

This notion of “dust” as the substance out of which the human
body was moulded is different from that of Israel's neighbours. For example, in one Sumerian mythology clay was the substance used to form the human body. This finds parallel in Job 10:8-9; Isaiah 29:16; 45:9 and 64:9. And a Mesopotamian myth also speaks of the formation of the human body from a mixture of the blood of Kingu and earth.

The parallel between the view of ancient Israel and that of her neighbours lies in the imagery of creation of human beings - i.e., God is seen as a potter at work. This is how far the parallel goes since dust, pr, is not a good material for modelling, whereas it is much easier to make models out of clay. Thus the Israelite imagery shows that humanity is frail and ephemeral.

Another imagery of dust in the ancient Near East is the notion of dust as the abode of the dead. An Akkadian myth tells of the descent of Ishtar to the netherworld.

In the ancient Near East Adamah, “earth” as synonymous to pr “dust”, has also been seen to be closely related to the place of the dead, sheol. One Ugaritic text reads: “come not near to Mot son of El; let him not make you like a sheep in his mouth....” The book of Numbers speaks of the earth in the same manner. Num. 16:30 reads, “If the earth [adamah] opens its mouth and swallowed them up, and they go down alive into sheol”. The fact that the earth is the place that humans go when they die is also expressed in Ps. 146:4 and other passages.

It must be mentioned that in Israel dust is poured on the head as a sign of grief. It is therefore necessary to understand what the “head” stands for in order to understand the full meaning of this mourning ritual.

“Head” In The History Of Religions

Studies in history of religions have shown that the head is very important in many religions. Many myths reveal this importance and religious value of the head through symbolism. Michel Meslin writes, “whatever the exact meaning of these myths and rites ascribed to the head, they all rest on the common, and certainly very ancient, valorisation, that must not be over-intellectualised”.
J. A. MacCouloch also writes:

The head with its many apertures - nose, mouth, ears, sutures of skull - is a chief spirit-entry, either for a divine spirit or a god (as in process of inspiration) or for evil spirit.... in many cases the head is thought to be the soul or life.

Furthermore, J. R. Price notes, "In the OT gestures and expression involving the head had great symbolic significance". Included in these gestures and expressions are bowing down the head in prayer (Ps. 35:13); worshipping (Gen. 24:26, 48.; Exod: 4:31). Blessings are conferred on the head (Gen. 48:14; 49:26; Prov. 10:6; 11:26); installation of priests and kings involved crowning and anointing the head with oil (Exod. 29:6f; Lev. 8:9, 12; 1 Sam. 10:1; 2 Kgs. 9:3, 6); and putting of dust, ashes and earth on the head during mourning (e.g. Lev. 10:6; Josh. 7:6; 1 Sam 4:12; 2 Sam. 1:2; 13:19).

Texts that tell of El and Anat pouring dust upon their heads suggest that the head has some symbolic meaning in the ancient Near East and Israel as it has in most primal societies.

From this background of the knowledge of the notions of dust and head in the ancient Near East and Israel, I will illuminate the specific significance of the concept of pouring of dust on one's head in the Bible and demonstrate how the symbolism has been modified in Christian practice today i.e., throwing of dust on the coffin during internment of the dead.

The Practice In The Old Testament

The writer of the book of Job tells us in chapter 2:12 that when Job's friends came to mourn with him, on account of the death of his children and the loss of his personal health, they sprinkled dust upon their heads. The book of Job shares the notion that dust serves as the metaphor for that from which humans were created and to which they would return when they die (E.g. Job 4:19; 10:9; 40:13).
The text in Job 2:12b reads, “And they rent each one his garment and they threw dust upon their heads towards heaven”. E Dhorme has argued that the reading in the Masoretic text (MT) is a combination of two variant readings - “upon their heads” and “towards heaven”. This is supported by the fact that the LXX does not have ḫσμγμ - “towards heaven” in its Vorlage. Dhorme therefore omits it from his translation. For the sake of the argument in this paper I will use the canonical text, that is the MT.

The friends of Job who came to mourn with him rent their clothes and put dust upon their heads. It is significant to note, that Job himself did not put dust on his head. This may be due to the fact that he totally accepted the event of the death of his children as normal (Job 1:20; 20:10).

In the ancient Near East one is reminded of El's lament over Baal. Among other things El tears his garments and scatters ashes and dust on his head. The whole cry of El and the gestures that accompanied it suggest either utter frustration in the face of death or an apparent fear of the fact of death. El's words are, “Baal is dead: what will become of the people of the sons of Dagon? What will become of the many?”

Friedrich Horst rightly relates El's lament and scattering of dust on his head to the practice in the book of Job. In that same direction Walter L. Michel has pointed out, “The words rs and pr occur together also in other biblical passages and in Ugaritic.”

The instances in the OT in which people scatter dust/earth upon their heads are almost always related to the rending of clothes - a demonstration of frustration and despair (Josh. 7:6; 1 Sam. 4:12; 15:32; Ezek. 27:30; Lam. 2:10; Job 2:12). Both the rending of clothes and scattering of dust upon one's head occur as expressions of extreme grief and pain of the individual and/or the nation.

In fact apart from Job 2:12 none of the references to the pouring of dust/earth on the head is a direct reference to mourning for the dead. There is no record in Israel's recollection in which the practice of putting dust on the head is connected strictly to mourning the dead (e.g. Gen. 23:50; Numb. 20; Deut. 34; Judith 16; Matthew 2; Mark 5). It is important therefore to thoroughly
understand the meaning of Job 2:12.

Traditional Explanation

Understanding of settings in which people put dust upon their heads will be very helpful in understanding the concept as it was practised in Job 2:12. For one thing, although the practice in Joshua may be dated to the pre-monarchic era, the book itself is written by the Deuteronomist, whose final work is dated to the sixth century BCE (2 Kings 25:27; the 37th year of the exile of Jehoiachim would be around 562-560)\textsuperscript{16}. The same applies to the cases in 1 Sam. 4:12-15:3, which are attributed to the same writer. Ezekiel and Lamentation are also dated to the sixth century. Thus the contemporaries of the writer of Job share with him the fact that the practice of pouring of dust on the head is an expression of deathly and appalling events.

In chapter one of the book of Job the reader is made to see Job as one who was perfect, even in the sight of God - He was "blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). In the world view of the writer, therefore, a misfortune of the magnitude that Job endured should never have come upon him. However in spite of Job's righteousness, he lost all seven sons and three daughters, property, and his own personal health (Job 1:18-19).

When Job's friends came to condole with and comfort him, they were appalled by the sight of him. In addition to other mourning rites they poured dust upon their heads (Job 2:12). Having lost all his sons and daughters, Job was left without an heir. Furthermore, his whole body was afflicted with sores (Job 1:18-19. 27). Job's friends were so appalled and horrified that they sat in silence as a common practice in which the mourners are expected to pen their mouths first (Babylonian Talmud). These gestures by themselves do not explain the meaning of pouring dust upon the head.

Scholars have tried to find the meaning of this conceptual practice of pouring of dust on the head by looking at the source of the dust. W. Robertson Smith has suggested that "the dust strewn on the heads is primarily the dust from the grave"\textsuperscript{17} Morris
Jastrow Jr. referring to the \textit{Babylonian Stele of Vultures} on which people are seen carrying baskets and climbing a burial mound, has argued that the practice has to do with burial rites.\textsuperscript{18} Thus while for Smith the dust is from the grave, for Jastrow it is carried to the grave, but that when the earth was no longer necessary for covering the grave, due to changes in burial practices, the earth was still put on the head. Maurice H. Farbridge rightly accepts Jastrow’s explanation and goes on to say that was the reason why people wallowed in ashes (\textit{pr}). But on the issue of putting of dust/earth on the head de Ward writes:

The use of earth or ash in all types of mourning rites is widespread, its original motives obscure. In moments of disaster, it may have been a dramatic reaction to shock; in funeral customs the dust may have been taken from the grave, the ash from the pyre, in some kind of covenant with the dead; or the motive may have to seek anonymity at times of numinous portents.\textsuperscript{19}

These scholars have gone further than most recent scholars, who are content to end on the point that the practice of pouring dust on the head is a mourning practice and simply an expression of grief.\textsuperscript{20} This explanation does not really tell the reader the meaning of the conceptual practice of pouring dust on one’s head in contrast to other mourning rites. It is therefore important to evaluate this traditional explanation, and then make suggestions for new ways of interpretation.

\textit{Evaluation Of The Traditional Explanation}

I have already pointed out that the plausible explanation of Jastrow and Smith do not quite give us all the tools to explain the practice as it is found in ancient Israel. Smith argues and comes to the conclusion that the dust poured on the head comes from the grave. Jastrow, curious about why the dust was put on the head, found the answer in the \textit{Stele of Vultures}. On the stele are attendants carrying baskets on their heads, and climbing a mound
on which are rows of corpses. Jastrow understands from this stele that the baskets contain earth which was needed to cover the grave, but that when burial practices changed and the earth was no longer needed, the practice of having earth on the head became a mourning ritual.21

My response to Smith’s explanation is that it gives a very different picture from what one sees in the OT. In none of the passages in the OT about the pouring of dust/earth on the head, is there a mention of grave or burial mound (Jos. 7:6; 1 Sam 4:12; 2 Sam. 1:2; 15:32):

While the date of the stele used by Jastrow is not available to me, the date of the practice of pouring of dust on the head by El upon the death of Baal22 suggests that the practice under consideration is itself very old, and is not a mere development of the practice of carrying of earth to cover the grave after burial. In the light of this criticism, a new explanation is called for.

A New Explanation

The practice of pouring of dust upon one’s head as a mourning rite is not the only gesture made in mourning. It always happens in connection with other mourning rites. This makes it all the more difficult to isolate the practice for a study.

I agree with Habel when he goes beyond most scholars to suggest that the practice in Job 2:12 has so much to do with the friends of Job identifying with him. His own words are, “They are one with the dust of death and one with Job in his disease”.23 However, according to the priestly writer, a contemporary of the writer of Job, any contact with the dead defiles the person (see Lev. 21:1; Numb. 19:11-19).24 The command that Jeremiah should not enter the house of mourning may be because he may be defiled if he goes there (Jer. 16:5). Still, Habel’s explanation does not tell us why dust is put on the head.

To get a better a understanding of the concept of pouring of dust upon the head, the reader has to go back to the account of El’s lament over Baal cited earlier. Line 25 of the Ugaritic text is translated, “I (too) will follow Baal and descend into the earth”25.
Two things suggest to me that the Ugaritic text might lead us to understand this practice under review. First, one Ugaritic text has been seen as parallel to the story of Job. Secondly, both the Ugaritic text and the book of Job have the records for the practice of pouring of dust upon the head.

In Job 2:12, as well as the other biblical references to the practice of pouring of dust on the head, it is human beings who perform the action, and in none of the biblical texts is there a clear suggestion of the desire to go to the dead. However, from what we know about Israel’s view of dust, as the origin and destiny of humans, it seems that equation can be made. Passages in the book of Job express the understanding of dust as the origin and destiny of humans (Job 4:19; 7:21; 10:9; 17:16; 40:13).

Thus, just as El put dust on his head and expressed the fear of or desire to go into the underworld, so does the gesture of putting dust on the head itself, in Israel, express the desire to go into the underworld. The point that pr - dust - in the OT is the place of the dead has been argued. It is this dust of the abode of the dead that is put on the head, the epitome of human life. Thus we can say that the gesture of putting dust upon the head is self-burial in the face of death or deathly situation(s). This suggests that the act is performed with the hope that it [Death] will not recognise him/her. This is what de Ward means when she makes reference to the act as a means “to seek anonymity at times of numinous portents.” This idea is that the potency of death is felt so greatly at the death of a person. Thus for a person to escape the blow of death one has to identify oneself with the dead. Therefore the friends of Job are, by this gesture, identifying themselves with the deathly situation of Job (Job 2:10). They were, by this gesture burying themselves. Furthermore, Job’s friends threw dust into the air.

As I have pointed out earlier hsmymh - “towards heaven” has been seen by Dhorme as alternate reading. And so following the LXX which does not have it in its Vorlage, he omits to translate it. Marvin Pope, on the other hand, thinks that hsmymh - “heavenwards” may be the result of a misreading of hasmen - “appalled”. The problem with Pope’s suggestion here is that it
does not give account of the last letter “h” in hsmymh. I think the MT reading, difficult as it is, was meant to convey a particular notion of thought. There is one other reference in the OT where pr - “dust”, is thrown into the air - i.e., heavenward to God. This other occasion was when David and his men were fleeing from the city of Jerusalem in the face of the revolt by Absalom (2 Sam. 16:13). Shimei threw stones and dust in rage at David. I think the writer of the book of Job is expressing the same concept of throwing dust as his contemporary, the Deuteronomist, has ascribed to Shimei. If my argument here is accepted, then, I can conclude that in Job 2:12, Job’s friends, in addition to being appalled at the sight of Job, were, at least at this initial stage, enraged at God for what had happened to Job.

C. Houtman recognises the possibility of this interpretation but opts to see the gesture of throwing of dust into the air as an appeal to God against the offenders of Job. Houtman claims Acts 22:23 as support for his suggestion. I do not see the purpose for rejecting 2 Sam. 16:13, whose writer is a contemporary to the writer of the book of Job, for Acts of the Apostles which was written at least seven centuries later. In 2 Sam. 16:13 the substance thrown was pr (LXX chous) and in Acts 22:23, it is Koniortos. It is possible to see Koniortos and chous as synonymous. However, it is significant that two different words are used.

Houtman’s suggestion may be questioned because he refuses to accept the interpretation that the gesture of throwing dust into the air was out of rage, as he does not understand how a frail human could be that defiant before the power of God. Houtman’s problem here is that of modern people. Ancient Israel did not see complaints and challenges made at God as abnormal. The Psalms abound in testimony to this fact (e.g. Ps. 74; 79;80, etc.).

Again, NT scholars do not understand the gesture of throwing dust in Acts 22:23 as an appeal to God against Paul. Rather, the gesture is understood as part of the rage against him - Paul.

Furthermore, from the canonical point of view, I see the author of the book of Job developing a plot to show the contrast between the characters in the epilogue and the dialogue. This point has often
been overlooked. However, if the gesture of throwing dust on one's head is to be understood, then one can see that it is not only Job whose character was changed from the pious, in the epilogue, to the outrageous in the dialogue, but his friends also changed. Here, in the epilogue, Job accepts his calamity as natural (Job 1:21), but the initial reaction of his friends was that of outrage that he should lose everything and in addition have sores on his whole body. In contrast, in the dialogue, however, it is Job who is enraged at God, but his friends hold the view that God is just in all ways, as far as Job's suffering was concerned.

It can thus be concluded that the act of throwing dust on the head is an expression of rage in the face of death and deathly situations. It is also a sign of self-burial through which the person who performs the action seeks to disguise himself from the shackles of death. These expressions seem to be present in Job 2:12.

**Intertestamental And New Testament Periods**

In this section I will briefly look at the pouring of *chous*, "dust", on the head in a couple of intertestamental writings and in the NT to help understand the evolution of the practice to the present day Christian practice.

**The Apocrypha**

The practice of pouring dust on one's head occurs in the Jewish writings which are called the Apocrypha (1 Mac 11:71; 2 Mac. 10:25; 14:15). It is important to note that as late as the second century BCE dust as a substance out of which humans were created and to which they return after death persisted (Sir 33:10; 41:10; Tobit 3:6; 1 Mac 2:63)

In 1 Mac 11:71, Jonathan tore his garment and put dust on his head as first reaction of having fled in the face of an enemy. In 2 Maccabees (dated around 124 BCE), there are two examples of the practice of putting dust on the head. In the first, Judas Maccabeus and his followers sprinkled earth on their heads and put sackcloth around their waists (2 Mac. 10:25 - 26). Here, the practice was the result of fear of an impending defeat in the face of a great enemy
army. The second record of the practice is with reference to a response of the Jews to the news of the unexpected attack of Nicanor and his army (2 Mac. 14:15).

In none of the above cited cases is the practice connected with mourning for the dead as such. However, the symbolism is the same as when the practice is connected with mourning for the dead. If my explanation of the symbolism of putting of dust on the head in the OT is acceptable, then it would be right to say that in these practices in the Apocrypha, the Jews were expressing that they would rather be dead than see their army defeated or Jerusalem taken by Gentile forces.

*The New Testament*

The Greek word *chous* translated “dust” in the NT occurs twice in the accusative form (Mark 6:11; Rev. 18:19), and the adjective *choikos*, “earthy”, “dusty”, occurs three times in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (15:47 - 49). My interest in these occurrences in the NT is restricted to that in Rev. 18:19 and what it might have to do with 1 Cor. 15:47-49 - as far as the gesture under discussion is concerned.

In 1 Cor. 15:47 - 49, Paul, writing in the first century CE in Ephesus, uses *choikos*, “earthy”, “dusty”, to describe the first human who was prone to die (v. 47). My suspicion is that there is a close connection between the use of *choikos* in 1 Corinthians with the occurrence of *chous* in Rev. 18:19. John, the writer of the book of Revelations, may not have known Paul. However, it is interesting that writing some forty years after 1 Corinthians, John addressed his letter to the Christian communities in the same Greek-speaking world from which Paul wrote to the Corinthians and used *chous* which suggests a connection to Paul’s. What is important here is that John describes the mourners of fallen Babylon as throwing dust on their heads (Rev. 18:19). The text in the book of Revelations reminds the reader of a similar prediction in Ezek. 27:30. I do not think that John was merely recalling Ezekiel’s prophecy. The meaning of the practice in Rev. 18:19 may be unintelligible to the outsider, but the recipients surely do
have the necessary tools to understand what John was describing in Revelations 18. However, it is highly probable that the practice is merely an expression of deep grief and pain. It is almost impossible to see the account in Revelations in many other ways than that the mourners of the great city preferred death to seeing all the wealth of the city go into ruins.

**The Christian Practice**

It is important to note that the gesture of throwing dust as it has come down to us in the Christian Church today is different from what we have in the Bible. Unlike the practice in the Bible where the dust is put on the head of the mourner, in Christian practice today the dust is put on the coffin of the dead. For example, during the committal of the dead the minister/pastor/priest throws dust on the coffin whilst praying in words that go like these, "Forasmuch as it has pleased Almighty God to take unto Himself our brother/sister here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes and dust to dust...".  

It is therefore clear from the foregoing that the meaning in the practice of the church today is different from that found in the Bible. On one hand, in the Bible as we have seen in the above sections, the dust is poured on the heads of the mourners to show their association with death and the dead, and thus a wish rather to be dead than alive in the face of death and deathly situations. On the other hand, in the Christian practice the dust is put on the dead (i.e., on the coffin). The practice of the church today suggests an acceptance of death as a fact of life. Furthermore, death is seen as a means to greater life. This is clear in the committal prayer which continues, "...in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (PCG 29). Thus the Christian church, by its practice today, does accept death as the inevitable end of all humans. However, Christians look beyond the grave as the ultimate destination of humans after death. The Christian, today, by this practice holds that death is a reward, a means to be with Christ Jesus. Thus death becomes a very welcome event.
"Dust to Dust, Earth to Earth, Ashes to Ashes"

Conclusion

We have seen from its origins that the practice of pouring dust on the head, during mourning, first started as a denial of the fact of death, but it was later extended to any undesired situation of pain and grief. The practice of pouring dust on one’s head is an attempt to disguise oneself in the face of death. So that death is not able to recognise the person upon whom the dust is poured. This practice contains elements of magic.

However, today, it has undergone considerable changes in the Christian church in which instead of putting the dust on one’s own head, the officiating clergy, at the committal of the dead to the ground, puts the dust on the coffin in the grave with the words, “We now commit this body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, until our Lord Jesus Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead.” These words express the Christian conviction that there is life beyond the grave. That is a life with Christ and therefore a gainful thing (1 Cor. 15; Rom 8:38-39).

1 For further studies on the mourning rituals in ancient Israel, read the two articles by Aileen de Ward, “Mourning Customs in 1, 2 Samuel” Journal of Jewish Studies 23 (1972) 1-29; and “Mourning Customs in 1, 2 Samuel II” Journal of Jewish Studies 23 (1972) 145-166. De Ward identifies twelve elements in Jewish mourning rituals.
2 Gerhard von Rad, 1961, 25
5 As quoted by Westermann, p. 206
7 Beyerlin, pp. 81-82
10 As cited by MacCouloch p. 532
13 Beyerlin, pp. 215-216.
18 Morris Jastrow, Jr., *Dust, Earth and Ashes as Symbols among the ancient Hebrews*. JAOS 20 (1899) 133 - 150. p. 141f
19 Eileen de Ward, “Mourning Customs in 1 & 2 Samuel” *JJS* 23 (1972) 1 - 27, p. 8; also her “Mourning Customs in 1 & 2 Samuel”, *JJS* 23 (1972), 145 - 166.
21 Jastrow, p. 141-42.
23 Habel, 1985, p. 97.
25 Beyerlin, p. 216
26 Beyerlin, p. 223
27 de Ward, p. 8
31 Jastrow, pp. 147-148 31 For further studies on the mourning rituals in ancient Israel, read the two articles by Aileen de Ward, “Mourning Customs in 1, 2 Samuel” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 23 (1972) 1-29; and “Mourning Customs in 1, 2 Samuel II” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 23 (1972) 145-166. De Ward identifies twelve elements in Jewish mourning rituals.
31 Gerhard von Rad, 1961, 25
31 As quoted by Westermann, p. 206
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31 As cited by MacCulloch p. 532
31 Beyerlin, pp. 215-216.
31 Morris Jastrow, Jr., *Dust, Earth and Ashes as Symbols among the ancient Hebrews*. JAOS 20 (1899) 133 -150. p. 141f
31 Eileen de Ward, “Mourning Customs in 1 & 2 Samuel”, *JJS* 23 (1972) 1 - 27, p. 8; also her “Mourning Customs in 1 & 2 Samuel”, *JJS* 23 (1972), 145 - 166.
31 Jastrow, p. 141-142.
31 Habel, 1985, p. 97.
31 Beyerlin, p. 216
31 Beyerlin, p. 223
31 de Ward, p. 8
31 C. Houtman, Zu *Hiob* 2:12, *ZAW* 90 (1978
African Traditional Values and Formation in Catholic Seminaries of Nigeria

By

A. N. O. Ekwunife c.s.sp.

The focus of this paper is three pronged: First of all it will critically examine the Western styled priestly formation in time perspective within the Nigerian context. Secondly, it will identify some of the relevant resilient dynamic African traditional values for the integral formation of Catholic Seminarians in Nigerian context. Thirdly, it will make some suggestions in the light of modern Nigerian situation for a wholesome formation of Seminarians at all levels.

Definition of Terms

The topic of this paper calls for clarification of certain terms which will feature in this essay. Such terms include: African traditional values; Western styled priestly formation; continuities and discontinuities.

African traditional values in the context of this essay means the worth which traditional Africans place on certain outlook on life, things, places, human behaviour, social interactions and their attendant institutions. To evaluate presupposes a choice between alternatives. For example it was the value Ezeulu of Arrow of God placed on his vocation as the Chief priest of Ulu that made him reject the white man's lucrative job. If the British representative at that time - Mr. Clarke - could not understand Ezeulu's philosophy of life, it was because the two of them were being guided by two opposing values: Western European value with its emphasis on cash economy and material prestige on the one hand, and African traditional value of sincerity of commitment to a sacred cause even in the midst of stark poverty.

Tradition here does not mean something that is static or immobile. Rather, it is something that is not only rooted in the
African soil from time immemorial, but also dynamically handed to each generation in the light of new experiences through the dialectical processes of continuities and discontinuities. Tradition in the African context is dynamic. It is subject to change by collective consent; and change is ritually ratified after consultations with super-human beings and their human representatives - the ritual elders. The Igbo of Southern Nigeria call tradition - *Omenani* [or *Omanala* or *Odinan*i]. According to Ilogu.\(^2\)

Omenani is the means by which the social ethos is measured, the values of the society are continued from one generation to another and the processes of socialisation through education of the young ones are facilitated.

Hence, one may describe African traditional values as the worth which traditional Africans, from time immemorial attach to certain outlook on life, places, things, human behaviour, social interactions and institutions. This worth is handed over from one generation to another by means of socialisation; re-interpreted for each generation in the light of new experiences through the dialectical processes of continuities and discontinuities.

Western styled priestly formation means a type of formation that is given to aspirants to the Catholic priesthood which is thoroughly inspired and informed by Western culture. In other words, it is a type of formation that is informed by the totality of Western life patterns: language, art, morals, laws, customs, knowledge, beliefs, philosophy and so on. In short, it is propped up by Western world view\(^3\) and biased towards African traditional religious culture.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary\(^4\) defined formation as "Forming, being formed; arrangements of parts, structure, (Mil.) disposition of troops". The above definition does not bring out the inherent dynamism in seminary formation. Formation should not be a casting into an already made mould. Rather it should be an ongoing process of helping a candidate respond totally to his/her environment in accordance with a clear mapped goal or objective
of an institution.
Continuities and discontinuities are dialectics of unmasking the truths behind tradition. It is a way of saying that seminary formation today has its roots in the past. For Christians, especially the Catholics, one may trace its origins from the time of our Lord - the Formator of all formators - via the Apostolic period through Trent to modern times. The resilient element in these periods are continuities while the changeable or adaptable elements should be identified as discontinuities. The practical illustrations of these dialectics will feature in the course of this essay.

*Experience of Priestly Formation in Nigeria.*

Our reflections in this end and subsequent sections of this work will be centred on the basic assumption that the primary goal of formation in Catholic seminaries is to produce men who will be fully equipped to be fitting instruments of the unique pastor - Jesus Christ - for evangelization of humanity within the Church. In other words, the goal is to train capable men, who, in response to the attractions of God’s grace, will be future co-leaders with their Bishops and Superiors in the Church in teaching, sanctifying and ruling the people of God as well as evangelising the entire world. The importance of formation in Catholic seminaries was recently stressed by Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation to the Bishops, Clergy and Faithful. He observed among other things that:

The ‘seminary’ in its different forms and analogously the ‘house’ of formation for religious priests, more than a place, a material space, should be a spiritual place, a way of life, an atmosphere that fosters and ensures a process of formation, so that the person who is called to the priesthood by God may become with sacrament of Orders, a living image of Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd of the Church.⁵

From this Papal observation, one can conveniently decode that Catholic priestly formation should produce men who, in every way will be “a living image of Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd”; Jesus
Christ, the Formator of all ages "who is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be for ever" (Heb. 18:8). From the point of view that seminary formation in any age should reflect this image of Christ, the element of continuities is maintained. However, from the point of view that Jesus of yesterday has to be relevant today and to future generations, there is bound to be discontinuities in seminary formation.

The basic question to be addressed in this section is how have the Nigerian seminaries reflected these elements of continuities and discontinuities in the formation of Nigerian priests.

A meticulous reading of the four gospels will reveal these characteristics in Jesus formation of the Apostles: great intimacy with the group; acquaintance with the contemporary culture; serious concern about their spiritual, religious, moral, social and economic welfare; creation of team spirit and co-operation among them. For example, in his sermon on the mount as recounted by Matthew the evangelist, Jesus addressed the religious cultural issues of his people (Mt. 5-7). His fundamental attitude towards the traditional teaching, beliefs and customs of the Jews signals what should be the attitude of formators in Nigerian seminaries towards traditional African beliefs, practices, values and customs. For as our Lord vouched in his great sermon: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the laws or the prophets. I have come not to abolish [continuities] but to complete them" [discontinuities] (Mt. 5:17). In the concrete applications of this vital principle to specific issues, Jesus moved from the known (cultural outlook) to the unknown (God’s total outlook) (cf. Mt. 5:21-48). He taught his apostles to adopt the same attitude as his ambassadors throughout the world (Mt. 28:18-20). In short, Christ’s formation of his future ambassadors was culture bound as well as pastorally oriented. No wonder the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council exhorted the Episcopal Conference of each region to ensure that in the programme for formation:

the general regulations will be adapted to the circumstances of time and place, so that priestly training will always
answer the pastoral requirements of the particular area in which the ministry is to be exercised.\textsuperscript{6}

Our task is to examine critically how far these cultural and pastoral orientations have featured in the formation of priests in Nigerian seminaries.

*Experiments in Seminary Formation in Nigeria*

Three epochs seem to punctuate the history of seminary formation in Nigeria. These are: The early beginnings - 1930-1960; The Intermediate period or Post independent period - 1960-1980 and modern period - 1980 and beyond. We will examine briefly the salient characteristics of each period with an eye on the topic of this paper. Concrete illustrations of the salient features of seminary formation in these epochs will be taken from seminaries (major and minor) in Igbo culture areas - the familiar base of the writer. We are convinced that any generalisation from such a vantage point applies with little variations to what obtains in other Catholic seminaries throughout Nigeria and even the whole of Africa.

*The Early Beginnings 1930-1960*

From the scanty literature materials available to the writer and from the interview granted to him by one of the pioneers\textsuperscript{7} of this early period the following features characterise this period in seminary formation: isolationism coupled with over-cautious selectivism and instant dismissal; paucity in number; foreignness of the general curriculum; unquestionable obedience. Finally, the spiritual orientations were purely devotional without depth theology to prop them.

For the sake of brevity, we will concentrate on the first feature of formation in this early stage - isolationism. Right from the time of their entry into the seminary till their ordination day, the seminarians were most of the time isolated from their people, their traditional cultures and institutions. Instead, they were drugged with foreign cultures and manners. Their formators were mostly foreign missionaries, who, though highly sincere and dedicated to
their duties could only give what they have with their biases about anything African. Hence, seminarians were trained to be so efficient in speaking English and Latin, but highly deficient in their native languages; efficient in imitating foreign cultures and manners of their formators and deficient in studying the African religious culture in which they were nurtured before their entry into the seminary. Indeed they were trained consciously and unconsciously to despise the very cultures where they will work after their ordination. With this negative attitude towards their environment, one wonders how pastorally effective these great pioneer priests will be toward inculturation of the gospel message in African soil.

On the prevailing thought orientations and attitude of formators at this period towards the seminarians, the historian - Casimir I. Eke observes:

The history of the pioneer Igbo seminarian is one of heroic tenacity and humility in the face of great difficulties. For these pioneer seminarians, the most painful test come not from external circumstances; family opposition, Igbariam mosquitoes, painful manual work, inadequate teaching, but from the deep ambivalence with which they were viewed by the expatriate missionaries - an attitude that helped to retard the early growth of the seminary.  

The epitome of the beneficiaries in this formation in foreign mould seems to be our beloved late Bishop John Cross Anyogu - First Bishop of Enugu, (1962-1967). He was ordained a priest in 1930. This writer recalls his brief experiences of this great man and sums them up thus: “He was in every inch an Irish/English man with an African skin.”

As regards the overall assessment of this era in the formation of seminarians in Nigeria, it seems that the formation is lacking in contextual orientation. The failure of the formators to reckon with the cultural environment of the seminarians certainly had repercussions on the pastoral out-reach of these pioneer dedicated
African priests. In short, seminarians of this epoch did not receive an integral formation in the estimation of this writer.

The Intermediate or Post Independence Period 1960-1980

The characteristic notes of this period in seminary formation in Nigeria are indigenization, vocation boom, structural growth and minimal positive attitude towards African religious culture. Incidentally this writer is one of the beneficiaries of seminary formation within this period especially between 1962-1970. His experiences as a seminarian during this period could be better described in terms of “mixed-whole”. Mixed-whole in the sense of contradictory experiences of what should be and what actually is. For example, while the idea of indigenization of Church liturgy is in the offing, the very people who were being formed to carry out the necessary reform were meant to believe that the ideal liturgy is the one set in either English or Latin mould. While regimented discipline is enforced and blind obedience elicited, individual initiatives and creativity were smothered. While cultural adaptation and African theology were in vogue especially after Vatican II and the Nigerian civil war, in the seminary the climate remains the same: as it was in Europe so should it be in Nigeria now and for ever. This writer received some of his philosophical lectures in Latin language. Our main textbook then was “Di Napoli”. Often the professors used English for illustrative purposes. There was little or no effort to correlate the African experiences of the seminarians with the seminary curriculum.

The point that should not be forgotten by readers of this article is that even though on paper indigenization was in vogue at this period of seminary formation, in reality the seminarians were meant to believe the contrary. Continuities in formation were sought along what was erroneously regarded as ideal - classical training in Latin, English and foreign customs, while discontinuities were perhaps sought in expansion of seminaries, structural building and recruiting more seminarians for training.

With regard to the Igbo flair for Latin liturgy and foreign manners, Ozigbo advanced two reasons: Igbo love for the exotic...
and "the tradition but 'mythical' belief that Latin is the 'language' of the Church." Some of his concluding remarks in this regard are worth noting:

The genuine religious interests of the Igbo Church have been made to suffer because of the misleading administrative jargon and metaphor that regarded Latin as "the language of the church". The Christian Church is Catholic with a unity in diversity rather than a conformity.

Our view here is that if seminarians are trained to regard any foreign culture as ideal, they will not, after their ordination, be an effective leaven in their pastoral duties towards Nigerian society. The active concern for the poor and marginalized of the society, the permeation of the Gospel message into "...many different issues of family life, fundamental human rights and duties, justice and peace, development and liberation, culture and learning", which the present Pope enjoined in his allocution to priests and Seminarians of Nigeria at Enugu cannot be implemented when formation in our seminaries is given a wrong twist in cultural values.

Modern Period - 1980 And Beyond

This period seems to be the most viable period in the history of seminary formation in Nigeria judging from the number of minor and major seminaries which mushroomed the whole country. Perhaps the best way of illustrating this staggering numerical growth is to reproduce the statistical data of admissions theology students into Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu between 1976/77 and 1980/81 academic session when the philosophy campus was temporarily separated from the Theology Faculty. The data is lifted from one of the historical accounts of the Catholic Church in Nigeria.
The above table shows a steady growth in the number of ordinations to the priesthood in one of the major seminaries in Nigeria. If we add this number to those ordained in other major seminaries in the country at the time one would certainly appreciate the immense efforts of both the missionaries and ordained native clergy. In an epilogue to the centenary history of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria, the editor saw the finger of God in this phenomenal growth of both the local clergy, religious and laity. He added,

The people who had been in darkness have indeed seen a great light. Responses to the Gospel message have witnessed a fervour and tenacity that astonished the very missionaries themselves. Perhaps the people discovered in Christianity, what seemed to be lacking in their traditional religions.14

From the above citation this writer could decode the attitude of both formators and their seminarians in the 1980s towards the traditional religion and the culture that sustained it. It was largely a negative attitude since the people were viewed as being in darkness. Hence, even though the formators from 1980 and beyond
in Nigerian seminaries were largely indigenous clergy-men, the quality of formation seems to be devoid of deep cultural orientation which will encourage dialogue with African traditional religion and culture. This observation is buttressed by the fact that on 25 March, 1988, the President of the Secretariat, Non-Christian Religions Vatican City, issued a letter to the Episcopal Conferences in Africa and Madagascar for the inclusion of the study of African Traditional Religion in the Seminary curriculum. The letter was certainly an innovation in the history of Seminary Formation in Africa especially in Nigeria. It signalled a positive step to remedy the negative in-built attitude to traditional African culture and its religion which may perhaps take centuries to erase. The question now is: how far has this instruction been taken seriously in our seminaries? It is doubtful whether the study of African traditional religion has found its way in the curriculum of junior seminaries in Nigeria. In our major seminaries some give it attention for only a semester, others for a session. However, one wonders whether this scanty attention is enough to prepare candidates for a sincere dialogue with their African religious culture.

One may further argue that in our minor and major seminaries, native dances and indigenous liturgies are organised. No one disputes these facts. However, the problem lies in the goal of these activities. The dance in our seminaries is seen as mere cultural exercise without a sacred content. It never occurs to the performers that most traditional dances are celebrations that are associated with sacred realities. As regards the indigenous liturgy in our seminaries, most people view it as a distraction from the so-called “classical liturgy” that is set in polyphonic music.

Hence, it seems that in this modern Africa, priestly formation still retains its ambivalent character. What is needed now is an integrated formation which take cognisance of resilient and relevant African traditional values.
Integrating African Traditional Values into Priestly Formation.

If African seminarians are to have an integrative or holistic formation in African context, certain vital African values should be resuscitated and infused into the curriculum. We examine five of them in the following order: sense of the sacred; corporate existence - *Nwanne* or *umunne*, acute sense of justice; sincerity in one’s commitment to a cause, good leadership. There are many others which could easily be identified. For example, Francis Cardinal Arinze in the letter we previously cited identified six of these African values: “sense of the sacred, respect for life, sense of community, family spiritual vision of life, authority as sacred and symbolism in religious worship”.  

Idowu associated many of these African values with the Yoruba concept of *iwa* (character). Indeed there is hardly any good textbook on African traditional religion that does not reflect on some African moral values. We briefly examine the values we enumerated which we consider vital for the modern formation of Catholic seminarians.

**Sense of the Sacred:**

The sacred in African traditional conception is not so much a category that is opposed to the profane as a way of looking at reality in its wholeness. For traditional Africans the entire cosmos is sacred when viewed in its totality, invisible and visible. Ontologically, the invisible penetrates the visible by a unique Being - God known in various African ethnic languages as: *Chukwu, Osebuluwa, Chineke, Ezechitoke Abiama* (Igbo), *Olodumare* (Yoruba) *Kwot* (Nuer), *Sako* (Nupe), *Onyame* (Ghana), *Mawu* (Fon), *Ngewo* (Mende) and so on. All realities - invisible (divinities, ancestors, spirits) and visible (man, animals and inanimate objects) become sacred when viewed in their total relationship to the unique wholeness of God. Thus the individual in a society is sacred from the perspective of his/her relationships with the totality of beings around him. The African family is sacred because it reflects wholeness is unity of being. Certain persons, objects and places are sacred because they manifest this wholeness of being either symbolically or in actuality. Thus a
masked figure is sacred on account of its relationship to the invisible sacred reality it is representing. Certain trees are sacred either on account of their structure or their mode of existence which reflect life in its totality. Human speech becomes sacred when viewed in its relationship to the speaker and the totality of African beings. Newell S. Booth Jr. was certainly right in observing that: "In Africa the sacred is manifested not so much by separation as by unity."\(^{18}\) Places and things are sacred in so far as they reflect the unity of beings which they symbolise.

It is significant to note that the sacred for the Africans is not only associated with power. It is associated with the highest values in human life - honesty, justice, gentleness, patience, endurance, perseverance, sincerity in one's word and so on. A sacred person is expected to mirror these values. Take for example, the concept of Onyishi (the eldest man of the village or clan in Nsukka subculture area of Igboland). He wields spiritual power on account of his relationship with the invisible ancestors of the clan. However, he is expected to mirror most of the ancestral virtues and values in his code of conduct - honesty, truth, justice, i.e. fairness to all the members of the clan and so on. This writer gathered from informants that he normally lives apart in a house jointly built by the members of the clan and sustains himself with fruits from the common ancestral land which he cultivates till his death.

The attitude of people to the sacred is generally to keep a respectful distance without severing complete relationship. The sacred generally attracts and repels to borrow a leaf from Rudolf Otto. To maintain cordial relationship with the sacred implies the observance of certain code of conduct on the part of man. It seems in Igbo culture area, this respectful distance is best translated by the word "Nso" - taboo; while the sacred in general is translated as "Aso". When a taboo is broken, it becomes "alu" - abomination or pollution. However if this taboo is directed against the land divinity it becomes nso ala (pollution against the land divinity). Ritual cleansing either through confession of guilt with appropriate sacrifices is made to restore the "Aso" of the culprit. Often the diviner gives the directive on how to remove the abomination.
This consideration of African sense of sacred has its far-reaching consequences in modern formation of Catholic seminarians. First, it will lead to the attitude of deep respect for the things of God and anything associated with God - the liturgy, devotions, studies and so on. It will further lead to great appreciation of the value of the human person. Of all creatures in the African visible universe, the most sacred being is the human. That is why crimes like murder, abortion, calumny and destruction, wanton destruction of neighbour's property and so on are Nso (taboo), since to be involved in any of these is to pollute the aso (sacredness) of the society. The human person is sacred because of his/her vital link with transcendental realities of this world in its wholeness (Aso).

Some of the ways through which Africans internalise the sense of the sacred and the sacredness of humans include: worship, covenants with divinities and fellow humans; oath taking, sacrifices, prayers, initiation ceremonies and periodic festivals.

The resuscitation of the sense of the sacred in seminary formation will help priests in their apostolic and pastoral duties to respect the sacred of non-Christian religions in order to dialogue with non-Christians on the need for respecting Christian sacred values.

*Corporate Existence, “Nwanne, Umunne, Umunna”*

The sense of the sacred is concretely manifested through the African concept of corporate existence which one may translate into Igbo as *Nwanne, Umunna*. The term *Nwanne* has many connotations. In one sense it means children of the same parents (*Umunne*). In another sense it applies to half brothers and sisters in a polygamous family. At another level it stands for the extended families of a putative ancestor. By extension it applies to people from the same town, area and circumscription. At another level, distant relations become *Nwanne* by virtue of one covenant or common interests. Our view here is that the concept of *Nwanne* is an abstract way of describing corporate relationship. Mbiti seems to have exaggerated in subsuming the individual into the corporate existence of African society. The individual remains an autonomous person in the African view and acts responsibly.
However, his or her actions are governed by what may be regarded as communal sense. S/He takes account of the general aspirations, values and customs of the community to which s/he belongs before making a personal decision on what to do. It is to be observed that African general aspirations and values are ultimately rooted in transcendence - the sacred in its totality. Perhaps, it is in this sense that this affirmation of John V. Taylor becomes apposite.

The sense of the personal totality of all beings, and of a humanity which embraces the living, the dead and the divinities, fills the background of the primal world-view... This is the context in which an African learns to say, I am because I participate. To him the individual is always an abstraction; man is a family. 19

In the organisation of Catholic seminaries in Africa with particular reference to Nigeria, the sense of community aspirations and values should be given top priority. It should cut across ethnic and social boundaries [cf. the concept of neighbour as found in Luke 10:29-37]. The seminary should be a school where the traditional African family and neighbourly spirit is nurtured and sustained. However, this sense of community cannot be fully sustained without a deep sense of justice.

**African Acute Sense of Justice:**

It may not be an exaggeration to say that at the hub of human interactions in Africa is the virtue of justice. Justice for the Africans is more than the Aristotelian idea of giving each one his/her due. In an earlier essay I reflected on this pragmatic virtue with reference to Igbo culture area of Nigeria20. Briefly, justice for the Igbo means “Ikwuba aka oto” (literally - keeping the hand straight) in the society. The straight hand is a metaphoric way of saying “Say the truth without fear or favour; give to everyone what s/he is supposed to have; maintain fair relationship with your neighbour; never tilt the balance in ontological relationships and so on”. The Igbo Ofo ritual is one of the ways through which social
control is ritually effected and internalised. Traditional wielders of sacred authority like priests, diviners, elders of ali shades and so on use it to validate their sincerity in discharging their duties. People respect them when they find them truthful and sincere. They become real fathers of the society.  

The consciousness of the sense of justice should be created among formators and seminarians in Nigerian seminaries. The idea of "leave all judgements to God" when an injustice is perpetrated looks like a theological hermeneutical miscarriage. It is significant to recall once more that one of the key concerns of priests as enumerated by Pope John Paul II in his allocution to priests and Seminarians of Nigeria at Enugu (1982) should be "justice and peace". Peace cannot exist where justice is vitiated. African seminary formators should give their students practical orientation to this African sense of justice as a value.

**Sincerity in One’s Commitment to a Cause:**

The value Africans attach to sincerity in one’s words and pledge cannot be over-emphasised. It is a virtue allied to justice. Hence the Igbo often say that *Oji ofo na Ogu* (He is with ofo and Ogu i.e. justice, truth and sincerity). Ogu is often symbolised by a knotted tender palm frond (*Omu*). Reflections on various symbolism of Ogu is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, our concern is to point out that Africans cherish someone who is always truthful and who stands by his/her word no matter the odds. Such a fellow is entrusted with community responsibility and leadership. People need him/her especially when the going is rough. Often s/he goes with these praise names: *Onye Ezi Okwu* (truthful person), *Onye aka ya kwu oto* (a just person); *Akwaa akwulu* (one who perseveres in the face of difficulties).

In our seminaries, the formators should encourage students to air their views sincerely without fear of expulsion. They should encourage them to be true to themselves. A situation where an atmosphere of insecurity and threat is created is unfavourable for concrete manifestation of this virtue of sincerity as a value. The Igbo idea of covenant (*Igba Ndu*) with either divinities or with
fellow humans in the society are based mainly on this virtue of sincerity in one’s pledge. Priests and seminarians in Nigeria need this virtue badly in modern Africa where the cult of hypocrisy is gaining currency.

Good Leadership:

Our brief reflections in this sub-section starts with the presupposition that the end product of formation in our seminaries is an integrated mature priest - the equivalent of Onyishi in Nsukka sub-culture area or Atama or Eze Mmuo (King in the management of spiritual reality). This presupposes that he is quite conversant with traditional African values which make for good leadership. Some of them we have examined in this paper. In the light of the gospel message, he enlarges, interiorizes and practicalizes these values. In doing so, he imitates the shepherd who came not to destroy completely African traditional resilient values but to complete and fulfil them.

3 The issue of world-views with special reference to Igbo culture area, has in recent times been examined by scholars like Kalu (1978), Metuh (1981), Nwoga (1986), Chinua Achebe (1986), Ifesieh (1989) and Ekunife (1990) to mention but a few. For example, Metuh in God and Man in African Religion (1981:48) defined people’s world view as: “the complex of their beliefs and attitudes concerning the origin, nature, structure of the universe and the interaction of the beings - with particular reference to man.” In an essay entitled “African Traditional Thought and Western Science” which appeared in Africa 37, Nos. 1 and 2 (1967), Robin Horton, made an illuminating contrast between what he considered Western Scientific Outlook and African Traditional Outlook
This writer was privileged to interview very Rev. Fr. N. Orakwudo c.s.sp. - one of the surviving members of this period. He revealed that he came to C.K.C. Onitsha as a Seminarian in 1934. By then, the Seminary has moved from its former base, Igboariam to St. Charles Onitsha. His experiences are incorporated in our reflections in this section.


Ibid., p. 38.

Pope John Paul II, “The Priest should be the leaven in the Nigerian Society of today”, L’Osservatore Romano (Special Edition in English), (March - April, 1982), pp. 11-12.


C. A. Obi et al., op. cit., p. 393.


Ibid., p. 15

E. Boleji Idowu, Olohumare: God In Yoruba Belief (Longman, 1962-1970), p. 154. In his view iwa, is the very stuff which makes life a joy because it is pleasing to God. It is therefore stressed that good character must be the dominant feature of a person’s life.


BOOK REVIEW


The book is divided into three parts and six chapters. The last portion devoted to conclusions and implications summarised the entire efforts of the author.

In the general introduction the author sets out to delineate his areas of attention. His main concern is with the sacrament of reconciliation. In the light of the renewal set forth by Vatican II, the author tries to see how this spirit of aggiornamento could be seen to reflect on the sacrament of reconciliation which as he observed, has almost fallen into abuse or disuse as its real meaning, content and application is shrouded in crisis.

Such is the general state of the sacrament of reconciliation but our author is going to examine this crisis as it is felt in the Igbo context. According to him the fact that many in Igboland still patronise the confessional is no sign that the sacrament of reconciliation is not undergoing ‘identity crisis’ in the area. He observes, and rightly so, that many frequent the sacrament without knowing what it really means while others go without relish. For him the basic problem with the sacrament can be located in the alienation of the people from their traditional and cultural values and symbols. While noting that symbols find their meaning and function within each culture and while not denying that people can be brought to appreciate symbols outside their cultural milieu, the author exposes the futility of presenting a symbol to a people which ultimately does not speak to them. In this light, it is better to refer to symbols that would make meaning to the people even if this symbol is outside what the church is already used to. He cites the Second Vatican Council’s recognition that elements of sanctification can be found outside the church. It is on the strength of this that the author wishes to present the Igbo traditional concept of corporate personality and its implications for the Christian understanding of reconciliation.

The Igbo anthropology lays great emphasis on the community. The Igbo while recognising the autonomy of the individual also believe that humans live in the community, by the community and for the community. As the community shares in the good deeds and fortunes of the individuals, so also is it believed that the evil of an individual can cause disequilibrium in the network of connections that bind the community together - a network which includes the living, the ancestors, the deities and even the environment.

Reconciliation in the Igbo traditional setting involves both the individual and the active participation of the community. For the sacrament of reconciliation to make more meaning in the Igbo church, the author argues that we cannot afford to overlook this community-oriented anthropology. The slant of the entire work therefore is inculturation or incarnation. We now examine the chapters briefly.

In his review of the Igbo world view, in the first chapter, the author highlighted Igbo religious outlook, the concept of community and corporate personality, cult
of ancestors, Igbo hospitality and generosity. He concludes the chapter with a brief but general reflection on Igbo culture, tradition and language. The author makes a vital point by observing that the key to this world view is religion. The sense of the sacred pervades every aspect of Igbo life-experience; and that is why traditional Igbo setting has no atheists.

Having laid the foundation for his work in the first chapter, the author went ahead to explore, in Chapter two, the Igbo understanding of sin and reconciliation. He establishes that the Igbo have a sense of right and wrong; and this moral sense is universal to humanity. The accusation that the Igbo belong to fear-oriented societies - without any real sense of sin - is thus unfounded The author argues strongly that while fear may contribute to a people's awareness of sin - which of course is not limited to the Igbo - there is no ground whatsoever to assert that some people are ultimately bereft of the sense of sin.

The author also pointed out that the Igbo had the sense of light and serious offences before the coming of Christianity. As an example, he drew up a list of light and serious offences. However some of the offences in his list of light offences can be considered serious in some parts of Igbo land. The author also went into an exploration of Igbo sacrificial practices and rituals of reconciliation. In his evaluation of the Igbo ritual of reconciliation the author writes:

All Igbo efforts towards cleansing and warding-off rituals are directed not towards the cause of sin or any effort to cleanse oneself. This is one of the defects in Igbo traditional system of reconciliation (P. 82).

And still talking about the deficiencies of the traditional system of reconciliation he writes: "It emphasises more the aspect of restoration of order, the establishment of social and cosmic balance that has been upset. In order words, the personal restoration, the sincere desire for conversion at the personal level is left out" (P. 287). There seems to be some exaggeration in the above statements. I would certainly think that the Igbo system of reconciliation is concerned both with the possible effects of sin as well as the person of the sinner. The simple fact that the community frowns at certain acts (regarded as sins) and has instituted a system for cleansing and reconciliation is in itself an invitation to personal conversion. The manner and rate in which this personal conversion is effected or rather appropriated will always remain ultimately with the individual and not a function of the community as such. Above all, the ultimate aim of the Igbo ritual of reconciliation is to discourage sin. Thus it will be unfair to characterise it as directed only to warding-off the anger of the gods and establishing equilibrium in the order of things.

Having explored the Igbo notion of sin and reconciliation, the author undertakes a survey of the biblical conception of sin and reconciliation. After examining the various Hebrew terms that are used in characterising sin, the author tried to point out similarities and differences between Igbo and Hebrew understanding of sin.
Reconciliation in the OT involves a variety of ritual prescriptions while in the NT this is basically seen as turning to Christ who has conquered sin and has reconciled the world to himself and his father. While the NT recognises the reality of sin in the Christian Communities and has references about reconciling people, it has no developed ritual of reconciliation. This leads the author to explore, in Chapter Four, the historical development of the practice of reconciliation. The NT has no systematic rite of reconciliation, so also the first century. From the 3rd to the 7th century, we began to get some systematic formulae of reconciliation. Because of the rigorism associated with this ancient rites, they fell out of use and were replaced by Tariff Penance which originated with the Irish monks. There was yet another formula which while retaining the Irish private confession also allowed for public penance.

While Vatican II called for the revision of the sacrament of reconciliation without giving specific guidelines it has been recognised that underlying this call is a certain concern to recapture the social dimension of sin and the role of the whole church in reconciling penitents. The new Ordo Paenitentiae is an outcome of that vision. While attempts were made to bring in the communal dimension of reconciliation, there is an indication that preference is still given to private practice.

The author made an important connection between the sacrament of reconciliation and salvation history. Thus reconciliation is connected with other symbolic actions of the church (especially baptism and Eucharist), and ultimately with Christ. He also favours dropping the traditional categorisation of sin into Venial and Mortal as these terms are heavily loaded with legalistic overtones. While not levelling the gravity of all sins, he observes that all sin is ultimately a rejection of God.

In conclusion the author argues that the historical survey which he has done has shown that there were diverse ways in which reconciliation was practised. Consequently, there is nothing wrong in having a plurality of forms of reconciliation as they may be suitable to the various ecclesial contexts.

The crisis in the sacrament of reconciliation follows the historical survey. Some of the possible causes include, the renewed recognition of the social dimension of sin, loss of the deeper meaning of reconciliation as a result of a reductionist association of confession with receiving communion at mass, the challenges posed by the ongoing understanding of the Christian faith etc. The crisis in reconciliation can also be understood in the wider context of the renewal understanding of sacramentology - an understanding which sees sacramentology from the perspective of the humane sciences, particularly, psychology and anthropology.

Identifying the possible causes of the crisis in the sacrament of reconciliation, naturally leads the author to argue that the Igbo have also problems of alienation with regard to the sacrament. Inculturation is the only suitable option. The author makes a valid point by observing that this alienation is felt not only in the sacrament of reconciliation but also in the other spheres of life of the Igbo
Church.

In the concluding chapter the author attempts an articulation of a renewed Igbo Christian ritual of reconciliation. This flows from his conviction that the survival of this sacrament in Igboland and the future of Christianity generally in Igboland and Africa as a whole depends on the project of inculturation. He observed that inculturation is not new in Christianity as Christianity right from the time it left the Hebraic world has been interacting and borrowing from other world cultures. The first task in the project of inculturation is to heal the wounded psyche of the Igbo and Africans which has been damaged as a result of long experience of slavery, colonialism and other forms of oppression. This will restore the confidence of Africans in themselves and their traditional world view. To show that he was not merely speculating, he drew up a proposed Igbo Christian rite of reconciliation.

The work under review is indeed scholarly going by the number of authorities called into service by the author to buttress his points. It is to the credit of the author that while sticking to his theme he was able to address other contemporary theological issues and relate them to his chosen theme when necessary. The author cited frequently the Council of Chalon (pp. 166, 169, 175). Two opposing views were attributed to this council. One is left to wonder how this council could have contradicted itself. But the author did not explain this discrepancy. Secondly the author dated the council at 813 (pp. 166, +75) and on page 169 he asserted that the council took place barely sixty years after 589. It is not clear how he arrived at this calculation. Apart from these and few cases of misspelling (perhaps typographical errors), the work is superb and it is one which anybody interested in the project of inculturation generally and the renewal of the sacrament of reconciliation in particular should endeavour to read.

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There are varied conceptions of reality among different peoples and cultures. This is particularly so about God and his relationship with the world. The Jews conceive God in the context of history and relationship. Immanence and transcendence are conceived in their mutual inclusiveness. God is one who can suffer or change his ways. And so he is represented in anthropomorphic and relational terms. On the other hand, Greek philosophers emphasise the discontinuity between God and the world. For them, God cannot experience
change, suffering or other passions.

The coming together of these two traditions in Christianity gave birth to a conception of God with incompatible attributes, a God who is passible and impassable. Gradually, and for a long period, Christian theology gave priority to the Greek tradition and as such was very hesitant to affirm that God can suffer. However, today, in modern pluralistic theologies, it has become almost a global experience that the affirmation of divine suffering is a favoured presupposition in Christian God-talk. This renewed claim that God can suffer is indicative of a shift in the whole of Christian conception of and theological propositions about God.

In this book, Nnamani sets out to explore this shift and by so doing also exposes the struggle to harmonise these contrasting attributes of God in the classical, modern-Western and Third World theologies.

His probe into the history of this struggle right from the New Testament period to the Reformation reveals that the question of divine suffering is not new. What is new is the central position which it now occupies in Christian God-talk. According to him, there exists in the West a systematic treatment of the theme of divine suffering. There, the kenotic motif - the idea of Christ who emptied himself to become human - set forth in a Trinitarian framework is the principle with which the discussion is carried on. And to accentuate this, he reviews the works of three prominent theologians which typify the Western contribution to the theme of divine suffering.

In the Third World, Nnamani observes, we may not find a systematic presentation of the theology of divine suffering. But that does not mean that this issue is absent. He goes on to show that the affirmation of divine suffering is a presupposition underlying the liberation theologies in Latin America, Black theology in North America and African Christian theologies. For instance, in liberation theology, the logical consequence of its key proposition that God has resolute option for the poor is that God suffers along with the poor.

After an extensive review, Nnamani underlines three important tendencies/positions which can summarise the various attempts made in different epochs and places to explicate the nature of the Christian God with regards to divine suffering. These include, one dimensional affirmation of divine impassibility, an unconditional affirmation of divine possibility and a paradoxical approach to divine impassibility and possibility.

In the author's view, since the nature of God denotes a paradox, only the paradoxical approach would provide the best model of talking about God. God has to be conceived as a being in whose nature, the possibility of suffering and not suffering are compatible.

Nnamani further remarks that even though divine suffering cannot be proved or disproved, it can be deduced from the Bible, the nature of human love, and from the fact of the personal unity between God the Father and the Son. And that in view of these "the possibility of divine suffering must be taken for granted." (Cf. P. 390). And so our question should no longer be whether God suffers but how he suffers. More so, in proffering answers to how God suffers, Nnamani
advocates the use of metaphorical language. For in metaphor, the similarities and differences between the known and the unknown are held in constant tension. Also, the use of metaphorical language in God-talk affords one the advantage of avoiding extremes, the acquisition of new metaphors and the constant evaluation of our operative God-metaphors.

For the sake of precision, Nnamani further focuses on love as the most preferable metaphor which provides the best analogy for the God-world relationship and divine suffering. Love affirms divine suffering since “suffering is an inevitable possibility in a true love especially in the type that is attributable to God.”

Nnamani notes that following from all these, there has again been a shift from the question, ‘who is God’ to ‘where is God’. And this latter question marks the direction of the God-talk today. In effect, the author feels that these shifts are related to the actual concern in our time to measure reality and perfection in terms of relationality rather than substance.

Nnamani, in this book, offers us very rich insights about the reality of God, his relationship with the world, the nature of divine suffering and the necessity of contextual theologies. These insights and the particular way they are presented, betray an author who is at home with philosophy and theology. His choice of words and style of expression make for easy reading and understanding.

We find in this book an appreciation of the diversity of cultures, the world and human passion. These are worthy of God. The author would impose no limits to our list of appropriate God-metaphors but he does not tell us in clear terms how to distinguish ‘appropriate’ from ‘inappropriate’ metaphors. Again, the author seems not to take note of the fact that in trying moments, the sufferer is hardly consoled by the fact that God suffers with him/her. Rather, the question that readily bothers one is, why should God and one suffer at all?

All in all, I find in this book a compelling treatment of the question divine suffering and contextual theology.

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