Reshaping The Theology and Praxis of Inculturation through Interreligious Dialogue Between The Catholic Church and African Traditional Religion in Igboland, Nigeria

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RESHAPING THE THEOLOGY AND PRAXIS OF INCULTURATION THROUGH
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND AFRICAN
TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN IGBOLAND, NIGERIA

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By
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RESHAPING THE THEOLOGY AND PRAXIS OF INCULTURATION THROUGH
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND AFRICAN
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Prior to the advent of Christianity in Igboland, the people practiced Igbo Traditional Religion. They believed in a Supreme Being (Chukwu/Chineke) who has other smaller deities as messengers including Ala/Ani the most powerful deity on earth. They revered their ancestors, who, they believe, still relate to and communicate with the living. Thus, the concept of God as ultimate reality is a dynamic existential aspect of Igbo world-view. Categorically speaking, it was short-sighted for the European missionaries to claim that Igbo people had no knowledge of God or lacked religion before the introduction of Christianity in Igboland in the nineteenth century. The missionaries presented Christianity in Igboland as a superior religion, presuming that the concept of God had previously been absent from Igbo culture.

This dissertation investigates the European missionary claim to have introduced God and religion into Africa, and into Igboland in particular, and to argue that the missionaries who came
to Igboland to introduce a foreign religion failed to dialogue with the existing Igbo Traditional Religion and culture. Theologically, when the Christian faith interacts with culture so that the message of the gospel becomes incarnated in that culture, the result is inculturation. This process of inculturation has its foundations in the Incarnation of the Word of God as described in the Gospel of John. Hence, the bishops of Africa and Madagascar, during the Synod of 1974, wisely opted for the incarnation model as opposed to “adaptation,” which they termed outdated for evangelization.

This dissertation argues that the praxis of inculturation in the Church in Igboland today is yet to be realized, as Igbo cultural values began to fade away when Christianity entered the country. The Church in Igboland wears a foreign look and has yet to develop its own liturgical rite. Existentially, liturgical celebration in the Church in Igboland today retains most of the European ways of worship brought by the expatriate missionaries. The cultural and religious practices in Igboland before the advent of Christianity were negatively labelled as pagan, diabolic, superstitious, and satanic by the missionaries. Thus, interreligious dialogue between the incoming Christian religion and Igbo Traditional Religion was neglected. However, the dynamics of a given faith meeting a new culture or another religion require interreligious dialogue between the two. The result of dialogue is mutual understanding, which is strengthened through respect for each religion and culture.

With a thorough examination of several documents from Vatican II and from Popes Paul VI and John Paul II, this dissertation maintains that the Church at Vatican II opened up to inclusiveness more than ever before. This openness of Vatican II reflects the fact that religious liberty and pluralism are existential facts, though salvation in Christ is for all peoples. Igbo Traditional Religion is a religion like others and should be recognized as such. Several practical
proposals are presented that could help the process of inculturation in Igboland: a) interreligious dialogue must be employed between the Church and Igbo Traditional Religion; b) the sacred objects and cultural values of Igbo origin could be used to facilitate an Igbo Church; c) the Church in Igboland could understand the values Igbo people attach to their culture and make use of them for proper inculturation; d) the Igbo traditional pattern of prayer be considered for possible inculturation into the Church in Igboland to suit the people’s cultural context; e) that the African mode of worship, which is dynamic and expressive with bodily movements that express joy, be incorporated in developing a distinctively Igbo liturgy. Further research is recommended to ensure a continuous process of learning. Hence, this reshaping exercise should be evaluated periodically to ensure that full inculturation of the gospel message into the Church in Igboland becomes a reality.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late parents: Mr. William Anyanwu Nwokocha and Mrs. Elizabeth Ubakanwa Anyanwu (nee Ike).

And

My late eldest brother: Mr. Paulinus Enyeribenyum Anyanwu (1947-1994).

And

All the members of Anyanwu Nwokocha’s family of Umudulu Eziama Logara

In Ngor Okpala Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria.
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This work is a potent factor of my endeavors all these years at Duquesne University Pittsburgh, PA, USA. I am grateful to God for favors I received. The Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph have always been by my side and I revere them. Many people also offered me their help to make this a realized project. I pray for God’s abundant blessings upon you all. I thank the entire Anyanwu Nwokocha’s family in Nigeria whose prayers for me worked wonders. I also thank my religious congregation, the Claretian Missionaries East Nigeria Province and USA – Canada Province, for their support through Fr. Rosendo Urrabazo, CMF. I am indebted to the Holy Ghost Congregation (C.S.Sp) of Nigeria through whose institution – Spiritan International School of Theology Attakwu Enugu, I was granted permission to come to USA for my doctoral degree. I thank my colleagues at SIST for their support. My gratitude goes to Dr. George Worgul who secured admission for me at Duquesne University. I also wish to thank Dr. Marinus Chijioke Iwuchukwu who moderated this work. Prof. Elochukwu Eugene Uzukwu who taught me while in Bigard Memorial Seminary Enugu and also continued to be my mentor here in Duquesne. Dr. Anna Floerke Scheid for being both my professor and second reader. I thank Dr. Albert Nous of the University of Pittsburgh who painstakingly read through the entire work. I owe much gratitude to my other professors at Duquesne University faculty of Theology: Dr. Maureen O’Brien, Dr. Marie Baird, Dr. Elizabeth Cochran, Dr. Daniel Scheid, Dr. James Bailey, Dr. Bogdan Bucur and Dr. William Wright. I also thank Fr. David H. Taylor and Fr. Thomas J. Burke, and all the members of St. Charles Lwanga Parish. A note of gratitude to Dr. Greg I. Olikenyi, Dr. Peter Osuji, Prof. James Okoye, C.S.Sp, Fr. Joe Luisi, Mr. Michael J. White, Lady Marion Reynoso, Amber Lasure, M/s Mary Grace and Judy Pratta. May God bless you all.

Cajetan Amaechi Anyanwu.
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INTRODUCTION

1. Background

Pope Francis has touched the hearts of many people in his endeavors to shift the paradigm of traditional practices in the Church today. Such actions call attention to the ways the Gospel needs to transform cultures by way of renewal. The Church\(^1\) is called upon to go out of itself and meet the marginalized in different parts of the globe. Many also see, through the Pope, a renewed Church that requires new ways of engaging in dialogue with cultures. The new ways, which involve dialogue and allowing the Gospel message to touch people significantly in their cultural contexts, are pertinent to the idea of reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation as it pertains to the Church in Igboland today.

To reinforce this dialogue, the Pope exhorts, “I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are.”\(^2\) This exhortation is a challenge geared towards renewing the Church in Igboland because old methods used by early missionaries have not changed much to date. The European missionaries to Igboland did not consider interreligious dialogue as part of their mission strategy, and it is still lacking in practice today. While some Igbo indigenous clergy recognize Igbo traditional religionists, others still look down on them as *Ndị Qọọ mọọ, Ndị na efe aľusi* (idol worshippers), an appellation transmitted by the catechism of the early European missionaries. Following the exhortation of Pope Francis, this situation must be addressed.

Reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation in Igboland should account for people’s cherished cultural values, which were neglected by the early missionaries. Pope Francis affirms,

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\(^1\)The Church, as used herein, is with reference to the Roman Catholic Church. This use will apply to all other uses of this term within the dissertation.

“I dream of a ‘missionary option,’ that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.” Thus, the Church in Igboland needs to de-emphasize the foreign tradition she inherited from European missionaries. Interreligious dialogue should be employed to renew and reshape society, and Igbo cultural values which strengthen Christian faith, should be encouraged.

This new method of re-vitalizing the Igbo Church through reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation will involve genuine interreligious dialogue between Christians and Igbo traditional religionists. This is because, “[d]ialogue also has a central place in relations among the religions. For centuries, even millennia, the various faith traditions have been cultures of isolation, mutually ignorant of one another’s history, culture, beliefs, rituals, their positive contributions to the world, society, and human community.” This lack of understanding of each other’s religion or belief system, requires dialogue. For this reason, the Church in Igboland needs to adopt a new method of evangelization that involves dialogue between Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion. This emphasis on dialogue shows how important the reshaping process is in the Church.

Pope John Paul II also reiterates the idea that “[i]nterreligious dialogue is a part of the church’s evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission ad gentes; indeed, it has special links with

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3Ibid., no. 27.
4Cf. Kwame Bediako. Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa. (Milton Keynes: U.K., Regnum Books International in association with Paternoster, 1999), xvii. It should be noted that while some African theologians such as E. Bolaji Idowu emphasize much on “foreignness” of African Christianity, others such as Kwame Bediako and John S. Mbiti suggest that “… modern African Theology emerges as a theology of African Christian identity.” Hence, the idea of “foreignness” should not override the emergence of a true African Christianity.
that mission and is one of its expressions.”⁶ This proposed interreligious dialogue also tallies with the definition of inculturation by Aylward Shorter as “the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures.”⁷ On this, John Paul II exhorts: “Missionaries, who come from other churches and countries, must immerse themselves in the cultural milieu of those to whom they are sent, moving beyond their own cultural limitations. Hence, they must learn the language of the place in which they work, become familiar with the most important expressions of the local culture, and discover its values through direct experience.”⁸ This is because direct experience of a people’s culture, customs, and belief system through dialogue enhances evangelization and provides empathy and reciprocity for inculturation.

Pope Francis, in this regard, emphasizes the idea that “[i]t is imperative to evangelize cultures in order to inculturate the Gospel. In countries of Catholic tradition, this means encouraging, fostering and reinforcing a richness which already exists. In countries of other religious traditions, or profoundly secularized countries, it will mean sparking new processes for evangelizing culture....”⁹ There is a need to allow cultural dynamism, which gives rise to cultural change, concerning which one author remarks, “Any culture that ceases to change is, in fact, dead.”¹⁰ The Pope stresses that “[w]e must keep in mind … that we are constantly being called to grow. Each culture and social group needs purification and growth.”¹¹ This growth is greatly needed in the entire Church in Igboland, which even now bears the footprints of the early Western missionaries. There is great need for a change so that new ways of doing things will emerge.

⁸ John Paul II. Redemptoris Missio, no. 53.
Though we acknowledge the efforts and sacrifices made by the early missionaries who established churches, schools, hospitals, and other humanitarian services in Igboland. However, it is important to mention that inculturation and effective interreligious dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion did not get much attention. Given the fact that Igboland had its own cultural and religious traditions before the advent of the missionaries, the Igbo ways of doing things needed to be studied and considered for possible inculturation through dialogue. In the old days of European missionary expedition to different parts of the world, especially in Africa, Western culture was imposed on mission areas as the appropriate cultural ethos for Christianization. Shorter remarks that “from late Roman times until our own, a monocultural view of the world held sway among bishops, theologians and thinkers of the Catholic church.”

This monocultural view in particular, was carried over to Africa by the early missionaries, who not only misunderstood African culture but also treated it with disdain. Elochukwu Uzukwu affirms that “[t]his misunderstanding of Africans, their world, cultures, and religions became entrenched in the European tradition, especially from the fifteenth century.”

Along this same line of thought, Toyin Falola argues that the Europeans neglected African cultural values because of “ideological brainwashing based partly on the denial that the African, especially the negro African, has a valid past and an autonomous culture.”

A flashback into the method used by the early European missionaries in Africa reveals that they imposed European culture as the only way to be Christian, thereby underrating the plurality of cultures and religious differences among Africans. The degree to which the

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12 Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 18.
missionaries from Europe looked down on African culture prompted Marinus Iwuchukwu to note, “It is incontrovertible that these foreign evangelizers lacked substantial appreciation and respect for the African traditional religions and in many instances treated African cultural values with condescension.”

In Igboland, the exclusivist method used by the foreign missionaries became inimical to the unity of Igbo people and threatened its peace. According to Felix Ekechi, “One of the consequences of Christian conversion was the inevitable split in the ideological unity of the society. Not only was there now a division in religious persuasion, but conversions fostered sociological splintering of social units, thereby accentuating forces of social and political conflict.” Furthermore, “[t]hey seemed determined to uproot almost totally the African or traditional culture and replace it with the so-called Christian civilization, whatever that meant.” Thus, lack of interreligious dialogue was detrimental to Igbo language and culture. Today, Igbo people feel that their cherished cultural values are at the point of extinction within Church circles. Since non-Christian religions before Vatican II were marginalized during the early European missionary’s era, Jacques Dupuis notes that: “purification of memory is not at all easy. Peoples and religious communities cannot be asked to forget how much they have suffered, even at the hand of Christianity, if not in the extermination of their populations, often in any case to the point of the destruction of their cultural and religious heritage. For them forgetting would be tantamount to betrayal.” Hence, the disappearing Igbo cultural elements in the Church shall not be forgotten.

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17 Ibid, 67.

The Second Vatican Council acknowledges the fact that cultures and religious confessions vary. This marks a turning point from the Church’s former rigid tradition. Iwuchukwu refers to this acknowledgement as “the outstanding positive remarks of Vatican II about the good in all faith traditions, hence honoring the de facto reality of religious pluralism.”\(^{19}\) This singular act of the Second Vatican Council’s acknowledgement of de facto religious pluralism makes interreligious dialogue necessary. “John Paul II seems to be convinced that interreligious dialogue is a part that can promote respect among members of different religions and help to bring peace and harmony to a world torn by conflict and war, poverty, and the destruction of the environment …”\(^{20}\) Basic knowledge of diverse religious traditions also is jeopardized in any society where interreligious dialogue is lacking. The early missionaries lacked full knowledge of African culture and religion.

In an attempt to understand African Traditional Religion, the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI- *Africae Munus* of 2011, highlighted among other things, the need to identify converts from traditional religion to Christianity who could offer a better understanding of African Traditional Religion. According to the document, “This would make it easier to identify points of real divergence.”\(^{21}\) The same document notes, “[t]he problem of ‘dual affiliation’ – to Christianity and to the traditional African religions – remains a challenge. Through profound catechesis and inculturation, the Church in Africa needs to help people to discover the fullness of Gospel values.”\(^{22}\) A critical look at this idea of using converts instead of having

\(^{19}\) Marinos C. Iwuchukwu. *Media Ecology and Religious Pluralism: Engaging Walter Ong and Jacques Dupuis towards Effective Interreligious Dialogue* (Koln, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010), 81. It should be noted that African Traditional Religion was not among the religions mentioned in Vatican II, it is implied in the other religions referred to therein.


\(^{22}\) Ibid. No. 93.
dialogue directly with practitioners of African Traditional Religion spells danger. It could jeopardize mutual relationship and mame the exchange of genuine views between Christianity and traditional African religions. The reason is that “… as the church adherents identified with the values of their mentors (Europeans), they began inexorably to turn their backs to omenala (customary practice). Also, as the ranks of the Christians swelled, so also did violations of societal codes of conduct rise. Misguided … fanatical converts often threw caution to the wind.”

The early missionaries seemed ignorant of the fact that religion permeates every aspect of the African/Igbo worldview. It is worthy of note that African Traditional Religion is not a religion of the book. Rather, it is indelibly inscribed in the hearts and minds of the practitioners. It is passed on from one generation to the next, through oral traditions, ritual symbols, burial rites, festivals, and sacrifices at the shrines. It also has moral codes of conduct acceptable in African/Igbo society. This is why direct interreligious dialogue with the practitioners of African Traditional Religion is very necessary today. To ask Igbo converts to Christianity about how Igbo Traditional Religion is practiced is not interreligious dialogue. It is always better to have dialogue directly with the traditional religionists to acquire genuine knowledge of African religion.

Hence, Kwame Bediako complements African pre-Christian history by envisaging a situation wherein African culture will no longer be seen to be marginalized. “I do not wish to make exaggerated claims for the African evidence; the present shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity to the non-Western world involves more than Africa. However, it can be argued that

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the African Christian field… offers quite distinctive opportunities for fresh Christian theological reflection and for new understandings, for example, as to how the Gospel engages with culture.”

Given the Second Vatican Council’s acknowledgement of de facto religious plurality in its declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions, Nostra Aetate, African Traditional Religion should no longer be associated with derogatory names. Such descriptions as “heathen,” “animism,” “pagan,” and “uncivilized” religion have become obsolete. Although African Traditional Religion is not specifically mentioned in any of the Vatican II documents, but, a good number of other papal and sacred congregational documents refer to the pluralistic view of religion and culture. Hence, by extension, African Traditional Religion should be recognized as one of the several authentic world religions today. Direct dialogue with its adherents is of great importance.

Moreover, the Vatican II document Nostra Aetate opened the avenue for the Church to have a positive attitude towards recognizing other non-Christian religions. Therefore, the greatest challenge to the Church in Africa, which is the incarnation of the Gospel message into the African culture, could be easily accomplished through direct interreligious dialogue. The necessity of dialogue between the Church and African traditional religionists stems from the fact that dialogue motivates action. It promotes mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation among human

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27 See Paul VI. “Roman Documents: Africae Terrarum: A Message of Pope Paul VI to the Countries of Africa.” in AFER 10, no. 1 (Jan 1968), 71–84. Pope Paul VI was the first official of the Catholic Church to recognize African Traditional and cultural values. The Pope in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 20, also advises the incorporation of human cultures in evangelization. This recognition corresponds with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council’s document, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2. This is followed up in *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13 and 17, and *Ad Gentes*, no. 22. Pope John Paul II. in *Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in Africa*, nos. 42-43, also acknowledged the profound sense of religious values inherent in African Traditional Religion, which calls for interreligious dialogue. See *Ad Gentes* nos. 9 and 11. See also John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 52-54.
beings. According to Teasdale Wayne, “[w]e are creatures of dialogue just as we are naturally habituated to conversation. It is one of the activities for which we long and that defines us as human beings.”

African traditional religionists are human beings who could be approached for dialogue. The reshaping of, first, the theology and, second, the praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue between the Church and African Traditional Religion in Igboland needs urgent attention. The reason for this clarion call to reshape the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue is to disengage the Church in Igboland from the old-fashioned and exclusivist method of evangelization it inherited from the early European missionaries. This idea forms the motivation for what this thesis intends to accomplish, as well as focusing on today’s African theological perspective. This theological perspective hinges on the use of African values.

A proposed reshaping process, which is community-oriented, underscores an indigenous Igbo way to evangelize, which is African and Christian in all its ramifications. When this is accomplished, it will reaffirm Uzukwu’s assertion that “African cultures and traditions accessed through history will neither be ignored nor romanticized.” Hence, there is need to “look at things twice” and procure a new Igbo evangelization method that befits the Church in Igboland today.

2. Thesis Statement

This dissertation seeks to demonstrate that reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue between the Church and African Traditional Religion in Igboland is an important approach towards new evangelization in Igboland. It will explore why, after many years of the presence of the Church in Igboland, traces of the early European missionaries’ conservative and exclusivist method of evangelization persists. For this reason, the

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28 Teasdale, Catholicism in Dialogue, p. 9.
29 Uzukwu, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, 8.
Church in Igboland is behind schedule in the process of interreligious dialogue and inculturation. It will also explore the reasons why little or no attention has been paid to developing interreligious dialogue. The use of dialogue should have stimulated deep research aimed at inculturating Igbo-cherished values in the Church. This thesis will answer the questions such as the following: Does interreligious dialogue and inculturation not concern the Church in Igboland? When shall the Church in Igboland begin using genuine Igbo cultural elements such as, the palm wine, *omu nkwu*, or kola nut, in its liturgy? These and many other pertinent questions still linger in people’s minds.

Therefore, this dissertation proposes that something needs to be done to reinstate certain positive Igbo cultural heritage, dignity, and value which will make the Church in Igboland to become truly African and Christian. To achieve this requires interreligious dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. The concerns of some African authors will be explored to move this project forward. For instance, Chinua Achebe observes that the Igbo people, who used to be one, appear divided by the introduction of foreign religion and culture.\(^{30}\) Again, this dissertation will try to clarify the question as to what aspects of Igbo culture will require interreligious dialogue with the Church to facilitate their process of inculturation within the Church in Igboland.

In this regard, this study suggests that Igbo Christianity today needs to reconsider a revival or reshaping of the liturgical practice inherited from the early European missionaries. Doing so may satisfactorily quench the thirst of Igbo Christians who feel alienated from their native culture. Igbo people love to worship in a vibrant mode with dances, singing of native

\(^{30}\) Chinua Achebe. *Things Fall Apart.* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 176. The author notes that the white man who understands neither Igbo custom nor its language, “…has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.”
songs,\textsuperscript{31} pouring libations with the palm wine, invoking their ancestors, sharing the kola nut, clapping of hands, and using local instruments and symbolic as well as rhythmic gestures structurally made to suit their cultural life. Most of these were not allowed by the early European missionaries, who saw them as being attached to superstitious beliefs.\textsuperscript{32}

Further important reasons for undertaking this thesis include clarifying the polemics that surround the theology and praxis of inculturation and interreligious dialogue among theologians of this era. For instance, while most authors argue that inculturation and dialogue found no place among the early Western missionaries to Igboland, others like John P. Jordan argue that Fr. Shanahan worked hard towards inculturation in Igboland.\textsuperscript{33} Some authors regard this as an unfounded exaggeration. The reason was that Jordan did not use the term Inculturation directly, he rather employed the term, “Key” which Shanahan sought insistently. He wondered if the use of the school which the Igbo people loved so much and sent their children in numbers would “provide the key that would open the heart of the Ibo to the grace of God?”\textsuperscript{34} Along this same line of thought, Father Zappa of the Society for African Missions (SMA), while in Western Igboland, “constantly encouraged his fellow French-speaking missionaries to learn the Igbo language so that they could preach to Africans in the language they would understand. It was for this very reason that he wrote an Igbo-French dictionary, \textit{Dictionaire ibo-français}, which he based on the Ika-Igbo dialect.”\textsuperscript{35}

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  \item \textsuperscript{31} Cf. Patrick Chukwudezie Chibuko. \textit{Keeping the Liturgy Alive: An Anglophone West African Experience.} (Frankfurt am Main: IKO-Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2003), 56. The author describes how the offertory procession is accompanied by “singing, hand-clapping, and dancing” during Igbo liturgical assembly.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} John P. Jordan. \textit{Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria.} (Dublin: Clonmore & Reynolds, 1953), 31. The author gives credence to Shanahan thus: “He contacted the people on every possible occasion, learning their language, interesting himself in their problems, and seeking an understanding of their customs.”
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
should also be recalled that the French Holy Ghost missionaries to Igboland, through Father Aimé Ganot, encouraged Igbo language. “The *Grammaire Ibo* was published by Fr. Aimé Ganot, a French national and one of the earliest members of the congregation of the Holy Spirit and Immaculate Heart of Mary stationed at Onitsha. Ganot was not only a committed missionary, but also one of the best-trained linguists of his missionary team.”

Thus, the arguments both for and against early missionary attempts toward inculturation and interreligious dialogue will be discussed. This dissertation will show how the Church in Igboland has become a home for incarnating the Gospel message. It will demonstrate how African/Igbo cultural values, such as Igbo hospitality, team-spirit, and unity of purpose, should contribute to the growth of the Church in Igboland as well as that of the universal Church. An Igbo saying goes: “*aka nri kwo aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwo aka nri*” This tallies with what Robert Schreiter says: the global Church should collaborate with the local Church. The emphasis here is unity in diversity, which promote a contextualized creative vision for the benefit of humanity. This dissertation will attempt to show that the local Church in Igboland, though it be unique, yet is one with the universal Church. Uzukwu stressed this idea while recounting the ecclesiology of St. Cyprian of Carthage. Using *Nostra Aetate* and other conciliar and post-conciliar documents

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36 Ibid. It is worthy of note that, “The first Francophone missionaries to work among the Igbo people of Nigeria (through Fr. Aimé Ganot), published three important reference books on Igbo language, namely: 1) an Igbo grammar, (*Grammaire Ibo*) in 1899, an English, *Ibo and French Dictionary* in 1904, and an Igbo-French Dictionary (*Dictionnaire ibo-français*) published in 1907.” Although there some errors and inaccuracies, indeed, Ganot was the first linguist to produce Igbo tones and sound system.

37 “If the right hand washes the left, the left hand washes the right in turn.”

38 Cf. Robert J. Schreiter. *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), ix. Here the author reiterates the fact that “[t]heology must find ways of embracing both the global and the local if it is to be a faithful and credible voice for belief.”

that emphasize the Church’s relationship with non-Christian religions, this dissertation adds its voice to the clarion call by many writers to reshape the Church in Igboland today.

Interreligious Dialogue and Inculturation

The motive for situating this dissertation within the Igbo cultural context is three-fold. First, Igboland is located within the southeastern part of Nigeria, West Africa. Some doubt whether the early European missionaries made attempts to study Igbo culture properly or not. Some authors like Toyin have alluded to early Europeans’ lack of in-depth study of Igbo culture. Elizabeth Isichei lends credence to this claim by affirming that some parts of Igboland were yet unexplored up till 1906 by Europeans. This could be attributed to the colonial rule and the bias of the early Western missionaries, who doubted the authenticity of the culture and religious creed of the indigenous Igbo people.

For this reason, certain Igbo cultural and ritual ceremonies, were regarded as pastoral obstacles to the Church in some parts of Igboland. It should be remarked that some of these issues have been overtaken by time in many parts of Igboland today. However, the missionaries isolated
the Igbo converts to Christianity from their normal village life. The converts were meant to live in isolated Christian villages and were practically cut off from their natural families. They were made to accept foreign European names for baptism and were taught European languages and culture to the detriment of the vernacular and local culture. Names of some Igbo places were anglicized for easy pronunciation by the missionaries. These anglicized Igbo places and names are spelt that way till today. This exclusivist method of evangelization undermined interreligious dialogue between Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion and resulted in the absence of inculturation.

Second, a long queue of African theologians and thinkers hold diverse views about the possibility of interreligious dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. Some seem to be progressively in favor of interreligious dialogue, whereas others are vehemently opposed to it, holding that it gives rise to religious pluralism.

Third, this dissertation will explore concerns over the religious superiority that European missionaries to Igboland apparently felt. The missionaries not only portrayed their European culture as superior, they also designated African Traditional Religion as heathen and primitive, and labeled it “pagan” and “animistic.” They treated African religious and cultural values with bias and disrespect. In their bias, the European missionaries viewed Igbo Traditional Religion as something diabolically prone to witchcraft and nothing more. This derogatory labeling alienated the indigenous Igbo Traditional Religionists and made interreligious dialogue and inculturation

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44 The new Igbo converts to Christianity were mainly ex-slaves and outcasts.
45 Cf. G. E. k. Ofomata. (ed.,). A Survey of the Igbo Nation, 1. The author gives examples of anglicized Igbo place names: Ọkụ na is rendered Awkunanaw, Owere is rendered Owerri.
46 cf. Paul VI. Africae Terrarum, no. 7. Here the Pope cautions against the use of the term “animistic” to designate African traditional and religious values because African Traditional Religion goes beyond this term.
difficult. For this reason, Pope John Paul II, in *Ecclesia in Africa*, vehemently exhorts Christians to hold African Traditional Religionists in high esteem. The Pope also advised that courses in African Traditional Religion should be introduced in the institutions run by the Church.

Therefore, interreligious dialogue and the theology and praxis of inculturation in Africa as they relate to the Igbo cultural context require prompt attention, which will lead to relating Igbo Christian life situations with the realities already inherent in its religious environment. Hence, the aim of *Nostra Aetate* from the Second Vatican Council—to facilitate interreligious dialogue—can be realized through this process.

To renew or reshape the old exclusivist ways of evangelization in Igboland, the concerned parties need to come together in dialogue. Today humans live in a global village and can easily communicate with each other. If this is so, interreligious dialogue becomes necessary as it will bridge the dichotomy between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. Lack of dialogue often gives rise to misunderstanding and bias. Interreligious dialogue will lead to a better understanding of African theology and will make meaningful impact on Western theologians as they engage others in conversation.

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49 Cf. Rogers Haight. *The Experience and Language of Grace*. (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 162. In this direction, Roger Haight argues that “every particular understanding of Christianity is and should be deeply incarnated or inculturated in the particular situation of the people out of which it emerges and which it seeks to address.”

50 Leonard Swidler. “Humankind from the Age of Monologue to the Age of Global Dialogue.” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47, no. 3 (Summer 2012): 464. Here, Swidler maintains that “humankind at the beginning of the Third Millennium is leaving behind the from-the-beginning ‘Age of Monologue’ and inchoatively entering the ‘Age of Global Dialogue.’”

51 Ibid., 465. The author asserts that “[i]n the past, during the Age of Divergence, we could live in isolation from and ignore each other. Now, in the Age of Convergence, we are forced to live in one world, which is increasingly a global village. We cannot ignore the other, the different.”

In the context of interreligious dialogue, no religion can claim superiority over other cultures and religious confessions. Rather, those involved establish mutual respect, peace, and a mutual understanding of what each religion holds supreme.\textsuperscript{53} Interreligious dialogue does not always imply conversion, but if one is convinced about the truth in another religion, conversion and correction of certain biases might be possible. This implies that, “Encounter with traditional religion, therefore, means Christianity permeating the culture and allowing itself, thereby, to be enriched in its attempt to evangelize it. This enrichment can take on many forms…”\textsuperscript{54}

Given these circumstances, African Traditional Religious practitioners would be emboldened to discuss their religious beliefs in the external forum through dialogue and the process of inculturation.\textsuperscript{55} In this sense, the Church in Igboland today, if it fully embraces inculturation through dialogue, would not be a house divided against itself. Rather, it would be a unique local Church in communion with the universal Church.

One might be inclined to ask major questions concerning the possibility of interreligious dialogue between the Church and African Traditional Religion in Igboland in the face of their persistent differences? These differences should constitute the major points for genuine interreligious dialogue. The mistake made by the early European missionaries who arrived Igboland, was that they did not study Igbo language and cultural values properly. They omitted having dialogue with the people about their culture. Although Fr. Ganot produced the Igbo

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 212. On this, Taylor writes that “[t]he object of this dialogue is understanding and appreciation, leading to further reflection upon the implication for one’s own position of the convictions and sensitivities of the other traditions.”


\textsuperscript{55} Cf. Stephen B. Bevans and Jeffrey Gros. Evangelization and Religious Freedom, 110. It is stated here that the first topic on the agenda of the 1994 Africa Bishops Synod was “An Inculturated African theology.”
grammar (Grammaire Ibo) in 1899, it was meant to be used to teach basic Igbo to French missionaries coming to Igboland. Nevertheless, in the name of Christianity, there was massive destruction of the traditional worshiping shrines and artifacts of the indigenous Igbo people by the colonialists. Ekechi remarks that “Christianity has obviously disturbed the traditional order of society. Much of its impact is unquestionably negative and destructive. On the other hand, it must be said that some of the changes brought about by the missionaries were worthwhile and beneficial.”56 As Isichei affirms, many Igbo religious objects were vandalized and taken to European museums, where they are used for tourist exhibitions.57 This attitude implies that the artifacts produced in Africa became useful in Europe but useless to Africans who produced them. In other words, African culture holds something good for foreigners, but the missionaries and their colonial cohorts stopped Africans from using them.

Reasons for Inculturation

To this day, some Igbo indigenous bishops and priests who have taken the positions formerly occupied by the European missionaries pastorally and ideologically perpetuate the same bias against African Traditional Religion. Therefore, this dissertation will reiterate the urgent need for liturgical inculturation, which will enable Igbo cultural values to be reinstated within the Church in Igboland. If artifacts produced in Igboland are useful in Europe, they should equally be useful in Africa. Therefore, inculturation of African values in the Igbo Church is urgently needed.

Although some authors have written on “liturgical inculturation,” their effort need to be strengthened and re-emphasized all the more. It needs to be addressed again to underscore the fact that the reshaping of the liturgical practice inherited from the early missionaries by the Igbo Church

is very important. It will also make the process of inculturation and interreligious dialogue at the
glass root levels of Igbo religiosity very plausible. Igbo Christians would have a sense of belonging
because their cultural values are used to communicate the Gospel message to them. They would
welcome the use of their cultural elements more than foreign objects of worship.

It should be recalled that Igbo Traditional Religion has been handed down from ancestors
to their offspring as a way of life. The creed and the procedures are learned by heart and
communicated by way of signs and symbols that are not recorded in any book. In fact, most of
the Igbo religious world-view is expressed in festivals, ritual sacrifices, marriage ceremonies, title
awards, naming ceremonies, burial rites, market days of the week, and seasons of the year. These
patterns were not easily understood by the European missionaries, and this lack of knowledge led
to their application of derogatory names to African/Igbo Traditional Religion.

3. Methodology and Literature Review

Both theoretical and practical pastoral approaches are examined in this dissertation. It
critically analyzes the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue as it
applies within the Church in Igbo cultural context. Hence, the practical pastoral approach is
contextual—that is, applying textual sources within lived experiences of the Church in Igboland.
Interreligious dialogue is applied to facilitate the process of inculturation and to locate it within
Igbo cultural and religious contexts. This approach enables the researcher to make a theoretical
survey of the historical development of inculturation within Church circles and to trace briefly the
history of the coming of the Western missionaries to Africa and to Igboland, in particular. Along

the same lines also, it is a practical approach aimed at analyzing the texts dealing with inculturation and interreligious dialogue and situating the outcome within Igboland as a concrete local environment.

Because inculturation deals with the interaction between faith and culture, it requires interreligious dialogue, which calls for respect and recognition of each religion, to make the reshaping process a reality in Igboland. The reason for applying interreligious dialogue to aid inculturation in this reshaping process is to re-affirm the assertion by Uzukwu that “[w]hat is not multiple does not exist. Ideas of twin-ness, duality, relatedness and ambivalence dominate West African religion and anthropology.” The author goes further: “I will illustrate from the Igbo world and system of thought the relevance of duality, flexibility and relationality. The wisdom saying *ife kwulu ife akwudebe ya* (something stands and something else stands beside it) consecrates relationality and maintains a clear distance from absolutism. Igbo and West Africans approach reality in a flexible, malleable, and relational way.” Since this is true of the Igbo and West African approach to reality, interreligious dialogue and inculturation are needed for sufficiently accompanying each other in reshaping the old method of evangelism in the region.

The Second Vatican Council has broken the cord of religious exclusivism. Hence, this dissertation uses this development to demonstrate that non-Christian religions have been given the chance to have interreligious dialogue with Christianity. Doing so requires analyzing the Council’s documents that recognize the plurality of religion and cultures. As implied here,
the dissertation explores new ways of reshaping the theological method used by the early European
evangelizers in Igboland. The new way would involve reviving liturgical practice by employing
some positive Igbo ritual elements such as: ofo, and omu nkwu, in the Church in Igboland.

This is a radical breakthrough which must be made to work effectively because, in the view
of Celestine Obi, “… it is strange and humiliating that West Africa received the true faith in the
context of colonization and a dehumanizing phenomenon like the slave trade.”63 Bediako also
confirms: “… it was generally the case that well into the second century people of the lower and
depressed classes predominated in the Christian community.”64 This is an indication that Igbo
culture, which appears neglected in the Church must be utilized. This task of reinstating Igbo
culture within the Church in Igboland should be carried out by Igbo indigenous clergy and
religious, as well as the laity, through interreligious dialogue leading to inculturation.

With the above assertions in view, this dissertation endeavors to proffer the use of
interreligious dialogue as a major tool for cooperation and mutual co-existence between
Christianity and African Traditional Religion in the Igbo region. Thus, intensive library research
of literary texts written by both African and non-African theologians on both inculturation and
interreligious dialogue are used. The positions of the authors who argue for and against the opinion
that the missionaries neglected Igbo culture are presented as well.

In this dissertation, an effort is made to demonstrate that four different forms of dialogue
(discussion of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, and dialogue of religious

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63 Obi, ed., A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church, 3.
64 Kwame Bediako. Theology and Identity., 19, 51 notes 35. The author also cited, Origen’s Contra Celsum, 1.27;
8.75, and other Christian writers as acknowledging this fact. Cf. Justin, 1 Apology, 60; 2 Apology, 10; Tatian,
Oration, 32-33. “Tertullian makes special mention of the presence of poor Christians at the community meals
(Apology, 39, 14-19).”
experience) are necessary for reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation in Igboland. The daily life experiences of Igbo people who practice different religions but interact with Christians by sharing a common social environment are examined in their Igbo cultural contexts. Their resolve to interact and share in community affairs would encourage good neighborliness, which facilitates dialogue of action.

In the analytical process, Christianity is in a good position to study African Traditional Religion in depth and to savor the rich moral and spiritual values inherent in it to work toward a more practical application of the Gospel message into the Igbo society. Through the practical application of the dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of religious experience, and dialogue of theological exchange, the Igbo traditional religionists and Christians living in the same area might experience peace, unity, and mutual understanding of each other’s cultural values.

The method used here also involves the clarification of certain terms, such as culture, inculturation, and their cognates, as they pertain to African/Igbo traditional religious practices. An historical excursus is offered, which involves an examination of the early moves made by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Church to engage in dialogue with non-Christian religions since the Vatican II era. Papal efforts to facilitate interreligious dialogue between Christianity and African Traditional Religion are also explored, starting with the more recent popes: Paul VI, John Paul II, and Pope Francis. This dissertation also seeks to establish that the inculturation of Christian values within the African cultural milieu would enhance and encourage inclusive interfaith dialogue.

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The Church’s liturgy gathers the children of God together as a community and gives rise to active participation of the faithful. In the same manner, the Igbo gathering for reconciliation and covenant/peace-making – *Igba Ndu*, or *Ala di Nma*, which brings waring people together—helps to restore peace and unity among the Igbo. This dissertation uses this Igbo concept of the peaceful gathering for reconciliation and covenant/peace-making – *Igba Ndu* or *Ala di Nma*, to improve interpersonal dialogue and to facilitate the process of gainful inculturation.

Literature Review

The literature review addresses the concerns of most African and other theological, ethnographic, sociological, and historical authors, and their publications on African/Igbo cultural/religious life and values. For instance, the book, *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, edited by G. E. K. Ofomata with many erudite contributors of Igbo extraction forms a compendium of what Igbo ethnologic and geographic origin, history and world-view contain. It eulogizes Igbo cultural, religious, socio-economic and socio-political life by introducing the reader into the broad spectrum of Igbo environment. Hence, Ofomata and all the other contributors exhibited great potentials of mastery of the Igbo society as sons/daughters of the soil in contrast to foreign authors on Igbo subject-matter. John A. Umeh’s book, *After God is Dibia: Igbo Cosmology, Divination & Sacred Science in Nigeria* - Volumes 1 & 2, portray Igbo concept of the diviner or *Dibia* as one whose knowledge about God, divinities and ancestors surpasses the ordinary human’s knowledge about them. The *Dibia* is mystically and mysteriously endowed with wisdom and power such that whatever he/she says takes effect. The *Dibia* through oral invocation of the divine, mystically creates sacred things and commands spiritual powers. The book is a testimony to the fact that Igbos
had genuine religion and knowledge about God, the divinities and ancestors before the advent of expatriate missionaries to Igboland.

Francis Arinze’s *Sacrifice in Ibo Traditional Religion* presents Igbo ways of worshipping God through the ancestors and the deities in their native religion. Although certain things have changed with time, this religion is still professed by some Igbo people today. The book uniquely portrays the belief systems, Joyful and joyless ritual sacrifices, socio-cultural nuances, priestly orientations, and seasonal festivities of the Igbo people. On another note, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, tries to buttress the determination of African people to assert their cultural heritage before the colonial authorities. The Igbo tribe is seen to be brave and self-assertive even in the face of ambiguous anthropologies of the colonialists. *Things Fall Apart* is a masterpiece in expressing Igbo culture and traditional values. The book relentlessly opens the understanding of the Igbo culture, customs, and traditions and reveals the Igbo as an outstanding group that could not be daunted by colonial socio-political domination. Hence, most of the Igbo cultural rituals and festivals Achebe narrates in the book, such as: the breaking of the kola nut, the New Yam festival or the masquerade cult, could today become concrete values of inculturation through dialogue in the Igbo Church.

Another book that discovered most Igbo ornaments used ever before the encounter with the missionaries is: *Igbo-Ukwu: An Account of Archeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria*, in two volumes, by Thurstan Shaw. The discoveries are an eye-opener to the treasures hidden in clay by Igbo-Ukwu fore-bearers and the importance of Nri Kingdom from where Igbo people trace the origin of their rituals and worshipping style. On the same realm is, *An Igbo Civilization: Nri Kingdom & Hegemony* by M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu. “The book places emphasis on the
diachronic and synchronic study of Nri culture and its civilization.”66 It situates Nri Kingdom as an important cultural area of Igboland from where discoveries of bronze deposits of antiquity were excavated. The significance of Nri hegemony is seen in its influence on the ritualization of the state and political system throughout Igboland. The authentication of title holding and crowning of kings in most parts of Igboland was ratified by people from Nri in the good old days.

Another very outstanding ethnographic and anthropological piece is, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, by Joseph-Thérèse Agbasiere. The book gives the socio-political and religious status of Igbo women and cosmologically makes known the Igbo idea of person, traditional rites of marriage and widowhood. The Igbo ideology of lineage, authority and position of women received unbiased attention by the author. Ifi Amadiume also followed along this line of thought in the book, *Daughters of the Goddess, Daughters of Imperialism: African Women struggle for Culture, Power and Democracy*. The author proposes a genuine commitment to gender equality in relation to the ideal communal collective culture that marked African traditional matriarchal heritage. Hence, the contradictory corrupt and oppressive culture of imperialism which engulfed the contemporary society should be checked to enhance human dignity and freedom.

In an article entitled: “Religious Concepts in West African Cosmogonies: A Problem of Interpretation,” Emefie Ikenga-Metuh explains the theories about the origin of the universe. The write-up reiterates the idea that cosmogonic myths or myths of creation provide sources for traditional African religious belief. “However, greater difficulty and disagreement are encountered when it comes to the interpretation of these traditional African religious concepts.”67 Kwame Bediako’s books: *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian thought in the*

Second Century and in Modern Africa, and Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion, de-emphasizes the foreignness of Christianity by buttressing the indigeneity of African Christianity captured in African faith confession. Just as the Greco-Roman culture aided the starting point of Christianity, so also, African Traditional Religion and culture have impacted Christianity to become more African than foreign.

John Mbiti disposes the reader to appreciate what African Religion can offer and how the foundation of African Religion is laid by nature itself. In his books: African Religions and Philosophy, and Concepts of God in Africa, it is observed that every aspect of nature, man, plants and mountains are avenues to encounter God and the spirits. Hence, African Christianity is part of African cultural ambience and should not be a foreign enterprise. E. Bolaji Idowu’s book, African Traditional Religion: A Definition, gives a thorough treatment of African Religious practices. While Bediao and Mbiti portrayed the positive aspects of African Christianity, Idowu emphasizes more of the foreignness of Christianity in Africa. Hence, African pre-Christian history enjoys more originality than African Christianity.

In addressing the history of the relationship between the Igbo and the Europeans, Elizabeth Isichei narrates the encounter between the Igbo people and the early Europeans to Igboland. This encounter marked a turning point in Igbo culture and history. The book also traces the genesis of the isolationist method of the early European missionaries to Igboland. Charles Ebelebe on his part sees the Igbo Church as foreign and lacking in inculturation. While the effort

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of the early missionaries is highly commendable, they failed to adequately propagate inculturation due to their inefficiency in mastering Igbo language and culture.

In terms of addressing the existing situation to work toward inculturation, Aylward Shorter, in the book, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, provides a ready-made answer for the attempt to introduce inculturation into the Church in Africa. The book attempts to give definitions of culture and inculturation and traces the genesis of inculturation in the papal and conciliar documents. To illustrate a concrete proposal of an Igbo cultural value for inculturation in the Church in Igboland, Christopher Ejizu’s book: *Ofo: Igbo Ritual Symbol*, buttresses the main cultural value required for inculturation in the Igbo Church. The same *Ofo* symbolism is elaborately discussed in M.M. Green’s, *An Ibo Village Affair* and by Cyril Okorocha, Raymond Arazu and others. Herbert M. Cole also made an extensive field-study of *Mbari* culture in the book: *Mbari Art and Life Among the Owerri Igbo*. This book written by a famous art historian marks a turning point in the ritual process of building an *Mbari* house by Owerri people of Nigeria. The ecological, socio-cultural and religious worshipping style of Owerri people of Igboland were examined through the picturesque art of *Mbari*. The ritual and purifying intricacies involved in the building process of an *Mbari* house are laid bare in the book as a festival of beauty. This could be compared with the building of grottos of the saints in Christianity today.

Augustine Onyeneke gives the symbolism of *Omu* as an item for inculturation in the Igbo Church. In an article entitled: “Igbo inculturation initiatives: the Omu liturgical use.” The author ranks *Omu* as a unique Igbo ritual symbol that could be used in the process of Igbo liturgical inculturation. According to the author, the *Omu* has the potentials for a Christian liturgy that would be seen as belonging fully to the Igbo culture.72 O. U. Kalu’s article, “Igbo Traditional Religious

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“Systems” in *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, places Igbo Traditional Religion in its proper perspective as worthy of respect. Kalu gives the practical and structural definitions of sacred spaces/places and objects of Igbo religious rituals. The article also enumerates Igbo belief system, Igbo concept of time and calendar of events and ritual festivities, the place of the divinities, deities and ancestors in Igbo religious practice and liturgy during sacrificial rites of passage and life after death.

Elochukwu Uzukwu’s book: *Worship as Body Language: Introduction to Christian Worship: An African Orientation*, specifically addresses worship as ritual and symbolically inherent in human gestural behavior. Hence, the Igbo bodily gestures of singing, clapping and dancing are expressions of bodily ritual language that could lead towards the inculturation of Christianity in Igboland. In another book: *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style*, Uzukwu critically examines the relationship between West African culture and their mode of religious worship in relation to European Christianity. Uzukwu affirms that the European ignorance of African culture and religious practice and lack of dialogue gave rise to the derogatory names they associated with African Traditional Religion. The book is anchored in methodologies that explain what Igbo people and West Africans believe and practice. It gives the background for the ideas of duality, relatedness, and twinnness, which are core models for the traditional Igbo approach to reality: that is, nothing stands alone; something else must stand close to whatever is standing for its survival. Hence, inculturation and interreligious dialogue can stand side by side.

Another important book by Uzukwu is, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*. This book presents the ecclesiology of Saint Cyprian, who desired that the Church in Africa could be autonomous, yet in communion with the universal Church. The author underscores the theological model of unity in diversity which makes the Church at home in every
culture, leading to the process of inculturation. The Igbo have a way of reconciling divided people and restoring peace and harmony in the society. Uzukwu brings the Igbo use of *Igba Ndu* – (covenant) to buttress an important area of inculturation between Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion. In the article, “Reconciliation and Inculturation: A Nigerian (Igbo) Orientation,” certain agreement is reached such that each party owes responsibility to protect the integrity of the other. The Christian party involved in this process swears by the Bible while the traditional religionist swears by the cult symbol. This process of covenant making also known in some parts of Igboland as *Ala di Nma* reunites waring families and friends in a peaceful manner.

In another book: *Liturgy: Truly Christian Truly African*, Uzukwu gives a comprehensive account of African creative initiatives towards developing an African liturgical rite. The initiative started from Cameroun and culminated in the Zairean liturgical rite. West Africans need to follow such creative initiatives that could one day become liturgical practice which is truly Christian and truly African. The Church in Igboland needs to be African, yet in union with the universal Church. The book, *Liturgical Inculturation: An Authentic African Response*, by Patrick Chibuko, sees worship and the Eucharist as powerful avenues that reassert human freedom against political and satanic powers. The book proposes certain Igbo celebrations that could match inculturation such as, rites of marriage, naming ceremony as compared to the rite of infant baptism. Hence, Chibuko’s book: *Igbo Christian Rite of Marriage: A Proposed Rite for Study and Celebration*, underscores the importance of Igbo marriage rite.

Laurenti Magesa offers some required models for effecting significant changes in the method employed by the early European missionaries to Africa. Magesa believes that mission entails understanding the culture of the local people where missionaries are sent to evangelize.

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Where this is lacking, the introduction of European culture as the model of evangelization will lose its authenticity. In recent times, new things have evolved that require modern ways and systems of going about them. The Church in Igboland needs a new evangelization method which starts from interreligious dialogue and proceeds to inculturation.

While most authors argue that the early missionaries neglected the inculturation of important Igbo cultural values into the Church in Igboland, some other writers have argued to the contrary. John P. Jordan’s book: Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria, presents an essentially favorable view of the missionaries. Jordan employs the very words of Joseph Shanahan, who used education as the “key” which opens the Ibo heart to the grace of God. Despite many obstacles, success was achieved through the school evangelization method. This will be useful to this work.

On the other hand, Eke, Onyewuenyi, and Onyeneke, note that although the missionaries did not cope successfully with the vernacular, Shanahan and his missionaries are portrayed positively by Fr. Jordan “as no iconoclasts, but respecters of the people’s tradition.” This assertion is seen as an exaggeration by most African theologians and scholars. These Spiritan historians think that because the missionaries were using the already existing Igbo name for God, Chukwu, as well as Aja (“Sacrifice”) for the Mass, it was a pedagogic strategy to identify with the people’s culture. Nonetheless, the efforts to publish Igbo dictionary and to give tonality to the Igbo language by Fr. Aimé Ganot, and the Igbo catechism published by Fr. Vogler and welcomed by Fr. Lejeune, won much admiration. M. A. Onwuejeogwu raises the point of how complicated Igbo tonality could be. In the article: “Some Fundamental Problems in the Application of Lexicostatistics in the Study of African Languages,” the author shows the difficulty involved in

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75 Cf. Ibid., 174–175.
giving tonality to an African language, especially Igbo language. This notwithstanding, the missionaries through Fr. Ganot achieved this task. On the contrary, Nicholas Omenka’s book: *The School in the Service of Evangelization*, presents the Shanahan and Paul Biéchy’s era as the moment of drastic decline in promoting the vernacular.76 This notwithstanding, Eddie Okafor’s article, “Francophone Catholic Achievements in Igboland” represents a positive approach by the missionaries who evangelized Igboland and promoted the language. This singular achievement ought to be accepted as a genuine process of preparing for the inculturation of the Gospel in Igbo Church today.

Felix Ekechi in the book: *Tradition and Transformation in Eastern Nigeria: A Sociopolitical History of Owerri and Its Hinterland* 1902-1947, makes a systematic and historical analysis of the sociopolitical changes in Owerri area of Igboland. The book puts in place, oral tradition and other available records of the early missionaries and the colonialists to buttress a historical view of Owerri and its hinterland. The author symbolically looks at the patterns of Igbo culture which were genuine, but became transformed by Western civilization. It also enumerates the positive and negative impacts Western civilization made on Igbo life and culture.

Moreover, *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nigeria*, by Celestine Obi et al, historically presents the rapid growth of the Church in Igboland as founded on the sacrifices and the interred bones of the early missionaries. The book reports that these missionaries labored from Onitsha to Owerri, Calabar to Abakaliki, and Aguleri, Nsugbe to Dekina, to name a few. Though inculturation and interreligious dialogue did not feature much during these earliest days,

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76 Cf. Nicholas I. Omenka. *The School in the Service of Evangelization: The Catholic Educational Impact in Eastern Nigeria 1886-1950*. (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1989), 119-125. The author criticized Fr. Shanahan for encouraging the suppression of the vernacular. “Any attempt, therefore, to develop and popularize a vernacular language to the point of its becoming a match for English was looked upon as detrimental to the Catholic cause. It was against this background that Shanahan regarded the clause in the draft of the 1908 Educational Code which had made the vernacular compulsory for all schools as a deliberate act designed to ‘kill’ Catholic schools.” See Ibid., 191-192.
yet the early missionaries labored to establish the Church in Igboland ever before the Second Vatican Council took place. The successors of the missionaries also recorded zero in inculturation.

The Conciliar documents of the Second Vatican Council—*Ad Gentes*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Nostra Aetate*—encourage inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and religious freedom. These documents present inculturation as a major part of the Church’s mission. The document dealing with the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions, *Nostra Aetate*, succinctly admonishes the faithful, “[t]he Church exhorts its children: prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration [*per colloquia et collaborationem*] with the followers of other religions, and in witness of Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men, as well as the values in their society and culture (NA 2).”77 This passage echoes Pope Paul VI’s *Ecclesiam Suam* which is in line with Pope John XXIII’s aggiornamento. These encyclicals call for the updating and renewing of the Church today. These are resourceful documents for this research.

Hence, to acknowledge, preserve, and promote the values found in a people’s culture through interreligious dialogue helps the process of inculturation. In this regard, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View* by Michael Fitzgerald and John Borelli is a practical guide to approaching interreligious dialogue in all its forms. The book gives a comprehensive analysis of *Nostra Aetate* and other documents of the Second Vatican Council that deal with interreligious dialogue.

Even before Vatican II, the Church exhorted its missionaries not to disrespect or discard people’s cultures. For instance, Paul Gallagher in *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*, quoted an instruction, given in 1659, from the Congregation for the Propagation of the

Faith for early European missionaries to China as follows: “Do not bring any pressure to bear on these people to change their manners, customs, and practices, unless they are contrary to religion and morality, carry faith, which neither despises nor destroys the way of the people, when they are not evil things. On the contrary, faith desires that these traditions be conserved and protected.”

To evangelize effectively calls for interreligious dialogue, which facilitates mutual understanding and respect for the values of other peoples’ cultures, which in turn enhances inculturation. Where conflicts and misunderstanding of issues exist relating to culture and belief systems, dialogue is required to foster reconciliation. In this sense, the use of interreligious dialogue would help the inculturation of cherished African/Igbo cultural values within the Church in Igboland.

Therefore, this dissertation uses numerous textual sources and Vatican II conciliar documents as well as relevant periodicals, and journals. There will be a review of some post conciliar documents dealing with inculturation. The encyclicals of Paul VI and John Paul II and other post-conciliar documents of the Sacred Congregations of the Church will be examined. These documents include Faith and Inculturation: Dialogue and Mission (DM), and Dialogue and Proclamation (DP), which deal thoroughly with interreligious dialogue and inculturation, respectively. All these show the oneness and the unity existing between the local Church and the universal Church. The debate between Ratzinger and Kasper makes the autonomy and unity of the Church very clear, just as it is in Cyprian’s ecclesiology.

To further address interreligious dialogue and religious plurality, numerous books and articles from Marinus Iwuchukwu are consulted, starting with Media Ecology and Religious Pluralism: Engaging Walter Ong and Jacques Dupuis towards Effective Interreligious Dialogue.

This book summarizes all the recommendations of Walter Ong and Jacques Dupuis on the meaning and understanding of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue in modern times. Iwuchukwu’s other books and articles are very important resource materials for this project, especially, “Outside de jure Religious Pluralism no Dialogue...” The paper recommends the use of the forms of dialogue as suitable ways of enhancing harmony in a multi-religious society. Another book by Iwuchukwu that addresses a multi-religious society is *Muslim and Christian Dialogue in Postcolonial Northern Nigeria: The Challenges of Inclusive and Cultural Pluralism*. The book traces the sources of conflicts between Christianity and Islam in Nigeria owing to lack of interreligious dialogue. Peter K. Sarpong wrote an article entitled: “Can Christianity dialogue with African traditional religion?” This article proposes having dialogue directly with the practitioners of African traditional religion. It also argues against the derogatory names which African Traditional Religion is associated with. Other relevant documents as well as Internet sources on the topic will also be used to facilitate the effective actualization of this research.

4. Research Questions

Several questions arise in connection with any effort to clarify relative terms associated with liturgical inculturation. These questions have acted as the guiding principles for researching this dissertation and attempting to arrive at in-depth answers. The questions are grouped into three major categories. Each of them explores aspects of the growth and development of liturgical inculturation in the Igbo Church. Through interreligious dialogue, aspects that have not been properly addressed in the contemporary Igbo Church may be settled. The questions now follow.

1. **How does interreligious dialogue help liturgical inculturation?**

The question concerning a definition for inculturation involves two things: faith and culture. When faith meets with culture in a given context, there is a possibility of transformation. This implies
that when the Gospel transforms culture, it allows faith to make meaning to religious adherents within a given context. This transformation process cannot be complete without interreligious dialogue; hence, inculturation goes hand in hand with interreligious dialogue. In this regard, there must be agents who propagate the Gospel and through whom interreligious dialogue is carried out so that the culture is transformed. This inquiry process has produced the first category of questions this dissertation addresses, as follows:

(i) Who are the agents of inculturation and interreligious Dialogue?

(ii) Is the Igbo Traditional Religion an accident or naturally designed by God?

(iii) To what extent has liturgical inculturation been carried out in the Church in Igboland through the help of interreligious dialogue?

(iv) Could interreligious dialogue work in the presence of persistent religious differences?

(v) In what ways could the Church in Igboland benefit from liturgical inculturation and interreligious dialogue?

(vi) Is it possible to appropriate the cultural values and symbols of Igbo team-spirit, hospitality, justice and peace, Ofo na ogu, the kola nut, and Omu, into the liturgy of the Church in Igboland?

2. What are the challenges to inculturation and interreligious dialogue in the Church in Igboland?

To answer this question, this study examines the challenges that inculturation and interreligious dialogue must overcome if the Church in Igboland would become a truly inculturated Church. Conciliar and post-conciliar documents and World Council of Churches’ documents are examined.
Most of the questions addressed involve inherent cultural issues that need to be clarified and transformed into a new method of evangelization. In considering these questions, the Church in Igboland may become a liberating instrument from unjust cultural practices that go contrary to the Gospel message. The questions are as follows:

(i) How would the conciliar and post-conciliar documents of the Church help inculturation?

(ii) What roles should lay men and women play in the Church in Igboland?

(iii) Why does the Church in Igboland still bear a foreign look in spite of its many years of existence?

(iv) Why did the early European missionaries fail to recognize Igbo sacred objects in the Church in Igboland?

(v) If Christ is the proto-ancestor, what position should Igbo ancestors occupy in the Igbo Church?

3. **What are the possible gains of reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue in Igboland?**

This study deals with those significant areas of reshaping that may benefit the Church in Igboland through dialogue. Hence, questions regarding the positive aspects of inculturation and interreligious dialogue are examined. Therefore, practical questions are raised that deal with dialogue and why liturgical inculturation is a necessary condition for making the Igbo Church an African and Christian Church. Other concerns include the following:

(i) Why is inculturation through interreligious dialogue important in the Church in Igboland?
(ii) What aspects of liturgical inculturation should be emphasized more in the Igbo Church?

(iii) What significant role should the Church hierarchy play in reshaping the Church in Igboland?

(iv) What role should the laity play that will be beneficial to the Church in Igboland?

(v) What significant contributions should liturgical inculturation make to the Church in Igboland?

5. Scope and Limit of the Project

The scope of this dissertation includes studying how the inculturation of Igbo sacred values into the liturgy could help to make the Gospel message be at home in the Church in Igboland. Such Igbo cultural values as festivals, naming ceremonies, marriage rites, sacred and symbolic objects, the kola nut, Igbo arts, and instruments for singing and dancing are considered. Certain Igbo ritual symbols such as *Omu nkwu, Ofo* and spaces such as *Mbari* houses, which Christian missionaries view as pagan and superstitious are investigated and proposed for recognition and possible inculturation. Hence, the dissertation proposes a plan to replace the old method that the early missionaries used with interreligious dialogue as an alternative way of evangelizing Igboland today. Doing so might help to reshape the liturgical praxis and mode of worship within the Igbo Church. Much has been said about inculturation of the Church in Igboland, but not much dialogue has been practically implemented. The dissertation proposes and explores possibilities in terms of making the Igbo Church an inculturated Church through interreligious dialogue and re-emphasizes the benefits of interreligious dialogue. The benefits will include mutual understanding, respect and proper learning about Christianity and African Religions.
In terms of limitations for this dissertation, outside its scope are issues bordering on charms/medicine or ogwu,\(^79\) and its forms. This cultural phenomenon is virtually classified as possessing magical powers that protect one from harm when it is worn. It is also associated with poisoning or harming the other, which is an abomination, taboo, or nsọ ani/ala—an offense against the earth goddess—Ala/Ani, or irụ ala, arụrụ ala.\(^80\) Certain Western cultures might view this differently, making this topic too artificial to link with belief in “All Powerful God” who protects. Such artificial powers appear absurd to be associated with God, the spirits and Igbo ancestors who are the custodians of Igbo moral probity. Nonetheless, this as part of African/Igbo culture ought to be compared with Western cultures for further research.

6. Projected Contributions of the Dissertation

Inculturation and interreligious dialogue are two practical concerns in modern theological discussion that have aroused much global interest in recent times. This dissertation adds a new voice to the fact that inculturation, which is described as the relationship between faith and culture, has not been adequately implemented in the Church in Africa/Igboland. This was pointed out by the bishops of Africa and Madagascar during the 1974 synod. During the synod, the bishops preferred using an incarnational model over adaptation and other terminologies employed by most theologians in referring to African theology. Hence, this dissertation contributes to awakening renewed interest in liturgical inculturation. It also opens an avenue for interreligious dialogue between Igbo Traditional Religion and the Church in Igboland. Such implies that the liturgical celebrations, prayers, and ritual exercises, which have been done as conceptualized in the Western

\(^{79}\) Cf. Francis A. Arinze. Sacrifice in Ibo Traditional Religion. (Ibadan: University Press, 1970), 20-22. The author asserts that the general name for charms in Igbo is ogwu which also means ‘medicine’ which could be worn around the neck or waist and could be protective or aggressive.

worldview, could now be celebrated in the Igbo cultural way. In addition, the dissertation offers an immense contribution to the proper understanding of what Igbo culture means and how it could help Christianity. This is because, “knowledge and use of African traditional religion, far from distorting the message of Christ, should enrich it.”

Hence, the dissertation has the potential to reawaken interest in Igbo culture and African religious studies.

As Avery Dulles observed, “In earlier centuries, missionaries tended to carry their own cultures with them… Converts were trained to express their new found faith in the language and style of the missionaries, who came for the most part from Western Europe… Christians… in Asia, and Africa tended to be highly Europeanized or at least Westernized and in many cases they remained small foreign enclaves estranged from the culture of their nation.” Whereas such was the case in Igboland, the Church in Africa—and especially in Igboland, which appears alienated from its culture and daily life experiences—may now find a new approach to the realities of unity in diversity. The reshaping of the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue in Igboland would contribute towards an authentic recognition of African cultural values in the Church. In this respect, Igbo language and culture could be promoted by the Church, which was half done during the missionary era.

At a certain point during the missionary era in some parts of Igboland, the use of the vernacular became a taboo in some schools run by the Irish missionaries. According to Omenka,
“By contrast, the Irish were a new generation of missionaries who came to the mission when the Fathers’ houses were built in total isolation from the villages. Whatever chances they had of mingling with the people got lost in exclusive preoccupation with the school, where the vernacular was often a taboo.”

This study may help to motivate renewed interest in Igbo cultural studies. It will also encourage the organization of the Ahajioku and Odenigbo lecture series in all the dioceses of Igboland. It is hoped that this dissertation would help the younger generations of Igbo sons and daughters to be motivated to learn their native language and culture and use them effectively in communication. A greater number of children from Igbo parents born in the cities do not speak Igbo language fluently. Most parents prefer that their children learn and speak English language rather than Igbo, which they see as local, primitive and belonging to the lower class.

The dissertation may also help to reduce the so-called Igbo traditional religious identity crisis faced by the traditional religious practitioners in the past. They have been made to feel inferior or ashamed when identified with Igbo traditional religion. The dissertation is an attempt to help stop the inferior feelings and the designation of Igbo Traditional Religion as pagan.

The material offered here may help us to learn that a shift must be made to disengage the Church in

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85 Ibid., 203.
86 The Odenigbo Lecture series was initiated by Archbishop Anthony J. V. Obinna of the Owerri Archdiocese in 1996. The lecture is given in the Igbo language to encourage its effective use in communication and learning within the Owerri Archdiocese and beyond.
87 Cf. Peter K. Sarpong. ‘Can Christianity dialogue with African Traditional Religion? Dialogue with followers of African traditional religion.’ http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/sarpong.html - 04/25/2009. (Accessed 11/18/2018). http://www.africafiles.org/printableversion.asp?id=20683 (Accessed 11/18/2018). Here the author explains the meaning of paganism and designates it as one of the injustices suffered by African traditional religion. “… African traditional religion has suffered other injustices especially in the way it has been named. It is called pagan. That this is a misnomer is easily seen from the origin of the word ‘pagan.’ The Latin root suggests that a pagan is originally a rugged, country person. Later on, ‘paganism was employed to refer to any religion that was not Islam, Judaism or Christianity. It is an injustice to call West African traditional religion, with a strong belief in a God who is unique, incomparable and a Creator, paganism.”
Igboland from the European method of evangelization. This paradigm shift from European to Igbo culture through dialogue will give African Traditional Religion its proper place. This is because “[a]ll religions … want to include other religions in their own understanding of truth. This is what gives dialogue its substance, excitement, and value.” Dialogue gives way to mutual respect.

If Christians in Igboland meet the practitioners of Igbo Traditional Religion in dialogue, both parties will learn from each other and they would know that their belief in a “Supreme Being” tallies with other world religions. The major world religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) are diverse but share a belief in One God. Since this is so, “[a] major question that can be posed among persons of diverse religious faiths is: Do we worship the same God?” This pertinent question arouses a certain curiosity as to whether the same God is worshipped in Igbo Traditional Religion. If yes, Igbo Traditional Religion should be recognized and acknowledged as such.

Leonard Swidler notes that “at times the image is projected of God as being the peak of the mountain that all humans are climbing by way of different paths.” If we can approach the same God through diverse religious confessions, the implication is that interreligious dialogue is required to ask one another how each reaches the mountain peak. Uzukwu agrees with Echeruo on the diversified ways of Igbo worship and practice of religion by affirming that “[t]he localization of covenants informs flexibility and results in a multiplicity of patterns of worship. There is no obligation to worship only in one way…” In this sense of diversity, God could be reached in

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different ways through different religions. These multiple ways of approaching the same God call for deep research through dialogue to acquire broader knowledge about different religions.

Through interreligious dialogue between Christianity and the Traditional Religion, Igbo cultural values could be appropriated into Christianity and Christian values appropriated into Igbo culture. As indicated earlier, some examples of Igbo religious and cultural values to be appropriated into liturgical inculturation include, the use of Igbo musical instruments during the liturgy instead of importing those from Europe. It is said that, *ekwe, udu, ogene, ngelenge, oyo, usha, ichaka, ubo, une, opi, nkpa, odu* and the local xylophone, were used for the first time in Owerri during the episcopal consecration of bishop mark Unegbu. It is unfortunate that some of these local musical instruments, also used during traditional dances or other ceremonies are gradually phasing out of use. This research encourages that newer Igbo local musical instruments be introduced instead of replacing those phasing out with imported pianos, micro-phones, trumpets, metronome, violin, guitars and flutes in the Church in Igboland today.

Some Igbo writers have proposed the use of the local palm wine during the Mass instead of importing the wine from the vine brewed in Europe. This should be considered. Others also have suggested the use of Igbo-made clerical vestments like *isi agu*, in place of foreign-made liturgical vestments worn by the priests in Igboland. This also needs attention. These are but a few of those that could be mentioned. Virtually every part of Igboland is familiar with most of these traditional symbols and cultural arts. Christianizing their use would be of great benefit to the

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93 Cf. Theophilus Okere. “Church Music in the Centenary Church.” in *History of the Catholic Church in Owerri Ecclesiastical Province* (1912 – 2012), Chukwudi Anthony Njoku & Mary Noelle Eze (eds.,). (Owerri: Assumpta Press, 2012), 249 – 253. Most of these instruments and the then newly composed Igbo songs were first used in the Church in Owerri during the Episcopal consecration of late bishop Mark Unegbu of Owerri diocese in 1971 and spread to other dioceses. Okere writes: “After the war, with no foreign missionaries left, Igbo language hymns began to dominate, new compositions became common. Bishop Unegbu’s consecration afforded the impetus in the Owerri area. The mass for this consecration was composed by Nicholas Onyechefuna (Melody) encouraged by Fr Bede Onuoha. The Emekuku choir gave outstanding leadership…” 252.
Church in Igboland by raising the morale and spiritual cravings of the people. The use of these items in the Igbo Church could portray her as the custodian of Igbo traditional and moral values. In this way, both Igbo traditional religionists and Christians would be happy and proud to engage in an interactive dialogue without any party feeling inferior.\textsuperscript{94} Igbo people love to be part of a progressive and active cultural/religious phenomenon. It is recommended that there is need to have direct dialoging with adherents of Igbo Traditional Religion to explain things better.

Again, interreligious dialogue between the Church and the adherents of African Traditional Religion would enable the process of inculturation to be properly and adequately addressed in Igboland. It could lead to mutual understanding between Igbo Traditional Religionists and Christians as people with serious attachment to their faith in one God. Dialogue promotes unity and encourages religious plurality in the social realm. It projects a real inclusive attempt that \textit{de facto} eliminates the exclusivist theology of the early European missionaries to Africa.

The Second Vatican Council’s acknowledgement of the reality of various ways of reaching God is to be fostered in Igboland through reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation, which is encouraged through interreligious dialogue. The European branding of African Religion as heathen should now be proven wrong by the renewed vigor instilled into the Church in Igboland through interreligious dialogue. In this way, genuine African cultural values would no longer be treated with condescension.

Another important contribution of this dissertation is that it encourages new ways of viewing African religion and culture as useful to human knowledge.\textsuperscript{95} It proposes that no religion

\textsuperscript{94} The way the practitioners of Igbo Traditional Religion are underrated in Igboland among Christians makes them a laughing stock. This contributed to the inferior feelings which surround the practitioners and discouraged most Igbo people from openly acknowledging that they are traditional religionists. Yet, some secretly consult the gods through the traditional diviners, otherwise called \textit{Dibia afa} or fortunetellers. See Victor C. Uchendu. \textit{The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria.} (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965), 81–82.

\textsuperscript{95} It should be noted that African Traditional Religion is valuable to human knowledge in such a way that the belief system allows room for interaction between the living and the dead. Ancestors are respected for their role in shaping
should be imposed on people as a superior religion that has come to extinguish or eliminate others. Iwuchukwu clarifies this point by affirming that “[t]he rest of the world, especially the Western and Arab countries, need to learn that a truly global cultural and religious pluralism cannot be attained if the expectation or desire is to annihilate or marginalize the religious culture of any group of people on planet earth.” Thus, inculturation negotiated through interreligious dialogue, with the aim of reshaping the exclusivist method of evangelization, forms the core intellectual contribution of this dissertation to the Church in Igboland. This is in the spirit of the Igbo saying, *nku no na mba na eghere ha nri:* “(the firewood available at a given place is good enough to cook the food).” Hence, implementing liturgical inculturation through the use of the valued cultural materials found at a place, gives the people a sense of belonging in the Church.

7. Chapter Synopses

Five topics are addressed in this dissertation: culture, inculturation, Christianity, African/Igbo Traditional Religion, and interreligious dialogue. Thus, there are five chapters including the evaluation and conclusion. The introduction identifies and briefly presents the major focus of the dissertation. It also states the motivating factor of the dissertation: reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue between the Church and Igbo Traditional Religion. Furthermore, the Igbo cultural context, which forms the focus of this research, is the source of the methodology employed in the reshaping process. The scope of the dissertation and its outcome are discussed, and issues related to dialogue/inculturation explored.

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the moral and social lives of the people. They intervene during epidemics and sicknesses to save their families and maintain their lineage.

Some salient literatures are reviewed to clarify issues concerning whether the early European missionaries employed inadequate methods of evangelization in Igboland or not. This leads to suggestions made to provoke further reflections on certain Igbo traditional religious practices for future theological inquiries. The introductory part concludes with the synopses of the chapters of the dissertation in sequential order.

Chapter 1 focuses on the theology and praxis of inculturation from the Igbo cultural perspective. It began by tracing the development and meaning of the theology of inculturation within the Church in Igboland. This chapter also re-examines the argument that genuine inculturation and interreligious dialogue were not adequately introduced in the Igbo Church. The Igbo myth of origin is briefly traced and the Igbo worldview and belief system examined from before the encounter with Christianity. The meaning of culture is further explained for proper understanding which gives way to the various definitions of inculturation. This is followed by an outline of the terms associated with culture and inculturation. The need to reaffirm African traditional religion is emphasized leading to tracing how Igbo Traditional Religion was practiced before the colonial times. Hence, the historical process of the advent of Christianity in Igboland is explored which culminates in the cold encounter with Igbo Traditional Religion. Thus, Igbo response to the theology and praxis of inculturation has not been an encouraging one. The method of evangelization used by the early European missionaries which proved ineffective owing to lack of interreligious dialogue is reviewed, revealing the need for reshaping this method. The missionaries encountered language difficulties and used foreign names in baptizing the converts. They also bought slaves who were kept in new Christian villages. This method of building Christian villages and buying of slaves proved very expensive while the use of the school became...
a viable option. The need to convert upper class is emphasized while the challenges of Igbo polygamous marriage form the major issues discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 2 discusses the World Council of Churches, Pope Paul VI’s *Ecclesiam Suam*, the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar documents that deal with religious plurality—specifically, the documents dealing with aspects of the relationship between the Church and non-Christian religions. The most important document for this discussion is *Nostra Aetate*, followed by *Dignitatis Humanae* and *Ad Gentes*. Some other Council documents that address religious inclusivity are reviewed: *Lumen Gentium*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, and *Gaudium et Spes*. The Council’s position on salvation outside Christianity is critically examined and interreligious dialogue is defined. Post conciliar documents on the difficulties as well as the fruits of inculturation and interreligious dialogue are also reviewed with a brief outline of the position of *Dominus Iesus*.

Chapter 3 presents the major idea this dissertation intends to communicate: reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue. The emphasis here is on reshaping the theological method employed by the early missionaries to Igboland. This leads to exploring the theology and praxis of inculturation in Igbo cultural perspective. A review of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is made as the foundation of liturgical renewal. A new way of evangelization is recommended, which involves initiating liturgical inculturation through interreligious dialogue. This is followed by anticipating many challenges in the reshaping process which must be overcome. The projected outcomes of inculturation through interreligious dialogue are outlined. This finds expression in the need for Igbo self-determination which yields the desired benefits of liturgical inculturation in the Church in Igboland. This chapter also proposes the need to appraise the moral/spiritual values bequeathed by Igbo ancestors. Igbo Sacred symbols and sacred spaces of religious worship should be appreciated. Hence, theologians need to study the
uses of *Ofo, Omu Nkwu,* and *Mbari* houses in Igbo Traditional Religion for possible inculturation into the Church in Igboland. This process requires proper interreligious dialogue and creativity.

Chapter 4 discusses a truly Igbo and truly Christian Church in union with the universal Church. This chapter portrays the Igbo extended family system as a model of the Church. It also emphasizes the autonomy of the local Church with reference to Uzukwu’s appraisal of Cyprian’s ecclesiology. There is emphasis on unity in diversity with reference to Igbo hospitality which gives room for creative initiatives within the Church. Igbo community orientation is seen as an essential model of Christian solidarity. The chapter seeks to promote Igbo genuine Christian faith through the liturgy. Hence, the expression of Igbo genuine Christian faith in relation to Igbo community orientation promotes strong Christian solidarity for the common good. Since the Igbo faithful will participate actively in their liturgy, the Church in Igboland becomes a true home for the incarnation of the Gospel message. The moral implications of unity in diversity within the Church are expressed. This means that the Church in Igboland remains genuinely in communion with the universal Church even when its autonomy is guaranteed. To attain this height requires remodeling the method of priestly seminary training which is still foreign in some parts of Igboland today.

Chapter 5 marks the evaluation and general conclusion of the dissertation. It articulates the major areas of theological reflection covered in the previous chapters from the perspective of the Igbo cultural context. It underscores the point that genuine inculturation could be achieved through interreligious dialogue. Wherever dialogue is lacking, the result is, misunderstanding and superior feelings by one religion over others. The evaluative part critiques the areas the early missionaries failed to implement genuine inculturation of the Gospel message within the Igbo religious and cultural contexts. The general conclusion outlines certain models for proper contextualization and
incarnation of the Christian faith in Igboland. It also highlights some of the contributions that an inculturated Igbo Church can offer as a benefit to the universal Church.
Chapter 1: The Theology and Praxis of Inculturation from the Igbo Cultural Perspective

1.1 Introduction

The theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue from the Igbo cultural perspective of Southeastern Nigeria is yet to be clearly discerned. Many theologians doubt that inculturation has adequately taken place in the Church in Igboland. The reason for this doubt is that the early missionaries to Igboland, mainly from Europe, introduced their own Western culture and manner of worship into the Igbo Church. They appeared oblivious of the fact that the church “does not identify herself with any one culture to the exclusion of the rest – not even with European and Western culture, with which her history is so closely linked.”

The idea of inculturation was not carried out—to such an extent that Igbo culture is gradually disappearing, like a mirage from the Church in Igboland today. The missionaries regarded Igbo culture and religion as inferior to European culture. Avery Dulles argues that this attitude of branding African religion and culture as “inferior” by the early missionaries led to their inability to appropriate the rich cultural values found among those they were sent to evangelize:

> In earlier centuries, missionaries tended to carry their own cultures with them. They did not clearly distinguish between the faith and its cultural expression. Converts were trained to express their newfound faith in the language and style of the missionaries, who came for the most part from Western Europe… Christians … in Asia, and Africa tended to be highly Europeanized or at least Westernized and in many cases they remained small foreign enclaves estranged from the culture of their nation.

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1 Here, the use of the word “Igbo” designates both the people and the language spoken by those who occupy the Southeastern part of Nigeria, which is the home for the Igbo people. Together with the Hausa-Fulani in the North and the Yoruba in the Southwest, they constitute the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. The southeastern part of Nigeria is also designated here as Igboland which comprises five states: Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu, and Ebonyi. All together, they cover a land mass of about 28,624 square kilometers. See Charles A. Ebelebe. *Africa and the New Face of Mission: A Critical Assessment of the Legacy of the Irish Spiritans Among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria.* (New York: University Press of America, 2009), XVII.

2 Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 187.

This superior feeling by the early missionaries in Igboland did not make room for interreligious dialogue and inculturation. Having observed that Africa and Asia have been estranged from their native cultures, Dulles calls for an urgent expression of the Christian faith in “the language, customs, and traditions of the people being evangelized.” The author argues that “to impose foreign cultural forms on a people who have their own culture as the only possible way of expressing the faith and living it, can be an obstacle to catechesis.” It seems incredible that the early missionaries to Igboland ignored the instructions issued from the Roman Curia (Propaganda Fide) in 1659 to missionaries sent to China, which states,

Do not bring any pressure to bear on these people to change their manners, customs and practices, unless these are obviously contrary to religion and morality. There is nothing more absurd than to want to bring France to China – or to bring Spain or Italy or any part of Europe. Carry none of that but rather faith which neither despises nor destroys the way of life and the customs of any people, when these are not evil things. On the contrary, faith desires that these traditions be conserved and protected.

The Second Vatican Council opened the doors of the Church towards reasonable dialogue with various cultures. Yet, the Church in Igboland has retained mostly a Western style of worship while ignoring Igbo local customs and religious traditions. Therefore, one can argue that genuine inculturation through interreligious dialogue has yet to be effective in the Church in Igboland. For this reason, to weigh the positive implications of inculturation in the Church in Igboland in this contemporary period, one needs to study its meaning and development. This study will enable us to review Igbo cultural objects which ought to form dialogue elements for proper inculturation.

1.2 The Meaning and Development of the Theology of Inculturation in the Igbo Church

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4 Ibid.
Many authors, both Igbo and foreign, allude to the neglect of Igbo indigenous customs in the Church in Igboland. For instance, George T. Basden, a missionary from Europe in 1921 stated, “A charge is sometimes levelled at missionaries that they entertain neither respect nor regard for the native religion.” This lack of respect for the native Igbo religion by the early European missionaries constitutes the major point that led to the negligence of inculturation and interreligious dialogue in Igboland. Without respect no cultural value qualifies for inculturation.

Aylward Shorter provides a short definition of inculturation as “the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. More fully, it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures.” This idea clarifies what this dissertation will deal with, which hinges on the interaction between the application of inculturation in the Church in Igboland, and its use when viewed from the Igbo cultural perspective. The implementation of inculturation in the Igbo Church requires a holistic approach, as Justin Ukpong appropriately underscores: “[t]he holistic approach to inculturation calls for a change of attitude in Christian worship, catechetics, biblical interpretation, etc. all of which must include the African world-view and life experiences.” From the Igbo cultural perspective, dialogue is lacking between the Church and Igbo culture. The early missionaries neglected this aspect, which should have made the Church in Igboland to reflect Igbo customs and ways of worshipping God in their vibrant spirit and hospitality. The superior feelings and lack of respect undermined true dialogue.

Theophilus Okere, while retrospectively musing upon the Owerri Archdiocesan centenary celebrations in 2012, noted that dialogue between the Church and Igbo culture was neglected in

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8 Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 11.
10 It should be noted that the history of the Catholic Church in Owerri Ecclesiastical Province began in 1912 and the centenary was celebrated in 2012. Chukwudi A. Njoku writes thus: “In February 1912, the missionaries settled briefly at Ulakwo and there, Fr. Feral said the first Holy Mass in the region, intending to settle there and create a
the past. “Today, in discussing the title, the interface of Igbo theology and Christianity, we are, in a way, trying to establish the dialogue that never took place but that might have been a hundred years old in Owerri . . ., as we celebrate the centenary of the coming of the Catholic faith in this ecclesiastical Province.”\(^\text{11}\) This observation came at a time when efforts are being intensified to drop the old fashioned missionary style of evangelization, which isolated Igbo people from their socio-religious values, to a model that integrates Igbo cultural values.

The Western missionary exclusivist method and lack of dialogue raised tensions that could have been avoided. The Church in Igboland would have become a truly inculturated Church. Okere maintains that “[i]f the missionaries and our fathers had done then what we are attempting to do now… at least some of the areas of agreement would by now have been grafted together, reinforcing each other and giving the mustard tree of the new faith a stronger basis, a larger, sturdier trunk and a deeper taproot.”\(^\text{12}\) All of these point to the apparent lack of interreligious dialogue between the Church and African Traditional Religion in Igboland.

From the Igbo cultural perspective, the theology and praxis of inculturation presents hurdles to overcome if the Church is to be deep-rooted in the Igbo cultural matrix. It appears strange that the Church in Igboland still “wears a foreign look,” long after European missionaries left. Ogbu Kalu draws attention to this by arguing that “in recent times, the receptor communities have become concerned that after many years of Christian contact, the Church still exists as a stranger. The clarion-call has been made that the message should be adapted, indigenized, contextualized, incarnated and inculturated.”\(^\text{13}\) In the light of this clarion call, Chris Manus


\(^{\text{12}}\) Ibid., 20-21.

reiterates the fact that “Africans can contextualize God’s word in the light of their own cultural thought-forms and idioms.” Thus, Igbo proverbs give the audience a better understanding of issues discussed. Where cultural values of a people are not respected, inculturation is at zero level.

The foreign method of worship introduced by the early European missionaries has had a long-lasting influence in the Igbo Church. While Igbo cultural and religious values are neglected in the Church, whatever comes from Europe is seen as superior. For instance, the mass wine used in celebrating the Holy Eucharist in the Church in Igboland is imported from Europe, while the local palm wine, commonly tapped from the palm trees grown in every part of Igboland is discarded. In terms of the arts, the statues of the Saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary in most churches in Igboland are painted and carved in the resemblance of European art. Uzukwu remarks that “[t]here is no aspect of Nigerian life so vehemently attacked by colonial officials and missionaries as the arts. The impact of subsequent indoctrination through schools and religious services not only still remains with us but seems to render us incapable of questioning the value of imported art forms. Our copy-cat attitude and propensity for foreign-made goods do not alleviate the problem.” This is a remark in the right direction indeed, but where do we go from here?

The worst of it is that the missionaries carried Igbo cultural artifacts to their own countries: iron, bronze, and wooden carvings, and amulets greatly valued by the Igbo people. Uzukwu lamented this development, wondering why “our Church buildings are a transplantation of Europe

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15 The palm wine is consumed daily in the rural villages in Igboland by both men and women. The practitioners of Igbo Traditional Religion use it during the pouring of libation to the gods and the ancestors. Every part of Igboland has had the impact of the palm-wine tappers who have made reasonable economic fortunes through harvesting and selling the palm wine.
into Africa. Our traditional sculpture and paintings which play socio-political and religious functions were condemned as diabolical. And yet, these were carted away to European museums or kept by individuals who have managed to domesticate the African devil."\textsuperscript{18} This fraudulent approach has robbed Igboland of the sweet fragrance of their cultural beauty.

Isichei made a list of such artifacts carried away to Europe by the missionaries as follows: "An Ibo image of Ibo family life. A terracotta sculpture, from Kwale, for the cult of the yam spirit (now in) British Museum."\textsuperscript{19} This might seem like a deliberate attempt to wipe out the entire Igbo cultural arts. Thus, everything good comes from, and goes to Europe but not from or to Africa.

Charles Ebelebe argues that inculturation is the only viable option for the realization of truly Igbo Church. “The church that the Irish Spiritans left in Igboland was largely an Irish church. Therefore, I see inculturation as the single most important issue facing the Igbo church today."\textsuperscript{20} Thus, the question remains: What effort are the indigenous Igbo clergy and laity making to transform the Church in Igboland into an inculturated church? The answer is, no effort for now!

It should be noted that the Christian missionary and colonialist interests strategically coincided with the colonization of Igboland. The Igbo Traditional Religion has its cultural rites and rituals (unwritten) that are unique and ceremonially attractive. Even as little or no effort was made to dialogue with such cultural values by the early missionaries, the colonial authorities intimidated and exploited the native Igbo people and extracted their mineral and economic resources without compensation. Fear prohibited the Igbo from asking for compensation as such.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Isichei, \textit{The Ibo People}, 24–25.
However, the question remains: Why were certain Igbo cultural and religious practices regarded as pagan by the missionaries? Is there something good in Igbo culture or religion that needs to be preserved? To address these questions might require having some basic knowledge of Igbo origins and their world-view, as well as their religious culture and concept of God before the advent of the European missionaries. For this reason, this study will briefly explore these elements.

1.2.1 The Myth of Igbo Origin

The recent study of Igbo origins has generated a lot of iterations as to whether its history is real or mere mythology. One thing is certain: historians have different approaches to the myth of Igbo origins. Adding to the complexity are the letters that make up the spelling and pronunciation of Igbo. Barry Floyd observed that “the Eastern Provinces of Nigeria consists of Igbo-speakers… It is a well-nigh impossible task to trace the history of the Ibo or the origin of their nomenclature. Both have been lost in the ‘vicious circle’ of traditions.” If this is true, could the cause be a lack of serious research on Igbo history or that the early missionaries to Igboland were biased about Igbo origins? This calls for dialogues to find facts about how Igbo came to be.

Floyd also draws attention to the fact that G.T. Basden, an Archdeacon of Onitsha, who spent thirty-five years working among the Igbo, wrote: “All my attempts to trace the origin of the name ‘Ibo’ have been unsuccessful.” One might be tempted to believe that because there were no serious studies on Igbo history by foreign authors, and lack of dialogue owing to language

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21 It should be noted here that the words Igbo and Ibo are used interchangeably. The reason is that most of the early authors who wrote on Igbo history were mainly from Europe and had the difficulty of pronouncing two letters of the Igbo alphabet joined together such as gb. Thus, for easy pronunciation, they dropped the gb and used only the letter b while writing “Igbo” which now becomes “Ibo.” Among Igbo writers, preference is given more to gb for Igbo, which is spelt in the native alphabet. See also Ebelebe, Africa and the New Face of Mission, 22.
22 Barry Floyd. Eastern Nigeria: A Geographical Review. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1921), 29. Floyd also notes that Igbo is classified as one of the Kwa group of languages.
23 Ibid. Here Floyd Barry quotes from George T. Basden’s Niger Ibos, 11.
difficulties, differing theories arose concerning the Igbo language and its etymology as we can read in the following excerpt:

There are several theories concerning the etymology of the word “Igbo” (wrongly spelled “Ibo” by British colonialists). Eighteenth-century texts had the word as “Heebo” or “Eboe,” which was thought to be a corruption of “Hebrew.” “Igbo” is commonly presumed to mean “the people.” The root -bo is judged to be of Sudanic origin; some scholars think that the word is derived from the verb gboo and therefore has connotations of “to protect,” “to shelter,” or “to prevent”—hence the notion of a protected people or a community of peace… Contemporary views in Igbo scholarship dismiss completely earlier claims of Jewish or Egyptian origin—that is, “the Hamitic hypothesis”—as “the oriental mirage.” Instead, there are two current opinions as a result of evidence derived from several sources that take into account oral history, archaeology, linguistics, and art history. One suggests the Awka-Orlu uplands as the center of Igbo origin, from which dispersal took place. The second and more recent opinion suggests the region of the Niger-Benue confluence as the area of descent some five thousand years ago, and the plateau region, that is, the Nsukka-Okigwe Cuesta, as the area of Igbo settlement. This first area of settlement would include Nsukka-Okigwe and Awka-Orlu uplands… Until about 1500, major economic, social, and political transformations led to continuous outward migrations from overpopulated and less fertile Igbo core areas to more fertile lands, particularly east of the lower Niger River. The Igbo had cultural relations with their various neighbors, the Igala, Ijaw (Ijo), Urhobo, Edo, and Yoruba…24

Some Igbo writers also attest to this difficulty. Elizabeth Isichei, for example, argues that “[t]he history of the Ibo and their forbearers goes back four thousand years or more. But unfortunately, most of this history is shrouded in obscurity, and is likely to remain so. We have three main sources of information about the Ibo past before the nineteenth century – the findings of archeology, the oral traditions of the Ibo people themselves, and the observations of the European visitors to the Delta.”25 Obviously, “[a]rchaeology could be defined as the technique of constructing the history of an area using the physical or material remains of the past inhabitants of

25 Isichei, The Ibo People, 18.
the area. These remains may include what the people made and used, their food remains, the bones of the people themselves, their habitation and/or camping sites.”

These observations show how opinions differ in tracing the myth of Igbo origin. Some scholars would rather use oral traditions, which are based on stories dating back many centuries ago about the origin of the Igbo nation. One such story is about a discussion God held with some archetypal men through whom the Igbo people were brought into existence. A review of the opinions of Igbo scholars, such as Adiele Afigbo, Chinua Achebe, and Elochukwu Uzukwu, also points to the fact that approaches differ in the narratives of Igbo origin. Chibueze Udeani observes that in tracing Igbo origins, Adiele Afigbo argues from the perspective of the Nri Myth in Awka and Amaigbo in Orlu.

On their part, Achebe and Uzukwu also tend to share an opinion that favors the narrative of certain archetypal men from Nri and Adama who had a discussion with God, and the Igbo ethnic group emerged. Afigbo has another narrative that excludes Adama but points to Nri and Aro, whereby some inferences were drawn from oral tradition, “material culture and artifacts.”

Another Igbo origin story came from Uzukwu and Christopher Nwodo wherein they followed a narrative based on a tape-recorded address at the University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria in 2004 by

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27 Cf. Uzukwu, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, 16-17.
28 Chibueze Udeani, Inculturation as Dialogue: Igbo Culture and the Message of Christ. (New York: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2007), 11. The words in italics are mine to emphasize Igbo names that might not be familiar to most readers.
29 Uzukwu, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, 16-17.
30 The word Aro is the shortened form of the town Arochukwu, named after the Long Juju (Aro) of Igboland. It is in Abia State, Nigeria. It is one of the influential cultural and historic towns in Igboland. In the olden day, people from all parts of Igboland went to Arochukwu to consult with the Long Juju oracle and offer ritual sacrifices to their gods. It was one of the coastal regions where the slave trade flourished most in Igboland.
Chinua Achebe. The emphasis here was a confirmation of the already held narrative from Nri and Adama.

All these historical traces and stories appear so confusing that one might be tempted to believe that no serious research has been done on Igbo origins. Falola Toyin acknowledges this lapse in historical research about Igbo origins by affirming that “[i]t must be emphasized that no area of interest in Igbo history can be said to have been adequately studied, not even the 19th and 20th centuries where most scholars have concentrated. A case in point is the apparently over-written ‘Aro’ subject …, [and] the same is true of the ‘Nri’ theme.” Studies carried out on Igbo history by Isichei also affirm that most parts of Igbo hinterlands have not yet been properly explored:

It was not until 1830 that Europeans discovered the course of the lower Niger, and thus sets eyes for the first time on a few of the states of the Igbo interior. From then on, we have a gradually increasing knowledge of Iboland, and an increasing amount of documentation for its history, though it was not until the end of the century that they penetrated beyond the immediate hinterlands of the Delta and the Niger, and in 1906 – the concluding date for this study – there were still parts of Iboland which no European had ever seen.

Other historians of Igbo extraction such as, J. O. Ijoma, also affirm that “[t]he first European visitors to Igboland did not penetrate into the interior until 1830.” However, the historical origins of Igboland are now unfolding gradually. “… historians are now agreed that Western notion of historical methodology or approach is grossly inadequate for areas such as Igboland. Some of those disciplines such as archaeology, linguistics, ethology, etc., have been

32Cf. Christopher S. Nwodo. *Philosophical Perspective on Chinua Achebe.* (Port Harcourt, Nigeria: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2004), 274–275, as qtd. in Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness,* 16-17. Here Uzukwu quotes Nwodo Christopher on Achebe who narrates the origin of the Igbo Kingship, following the myth of Eze Nri and Eze Adama. It also narrates how God held conversations with those archetypal men of Nri and Adama before creating the Igbo world. Nri and Adama are historical villages in Anambra State of the southeastern part of Nigeria. They are the Igbo-speaking group from which most of the cultural and historical narratives of Igbo origin emanated.


34 Isichei, *The Ibo People,* 18.

called to service. With the help of these disciplines, great strides have been taken in the last decade in recovering Igbo history.”

According to G.E.K. Ofomata,

…there is the need to update our knowledge of, and correct the misinterpretations about Igbo people and their culture. This is because a lot of things have been written and said about Igbos by people who do not have adequate information on Igboland, and who routinely transpose on the Igbo norms alien to Igboland and proceed to judge them by such norms. For example, Igbo society is one of those societies which until recently had received insufficient attention from scholars, and consequently have been grossly misrepresented.

To correct these misrepresentations of Igbo people and culture, there is need for the Igbo to wake up. Hence, “[i]t soon became obvious that, in order to supply the ‘missing links’ and fill the gap in our information about Igbos and Igboland, the priorities of Igboland and Igbo people had to be determined by from within – by Igbos themselves. This is logical as it is only proper that Igbos tell their own story as a contribution to existing information and knowledge on contemporary society.”

The present Igbo ethnic group is located around the Southeastern part of Nigeria in the West African Sub-Saharan coastal region. The major cash crops are yam, cassava, cocoyam, and palm produce. “The land surface of Igboland lies between latitudes 4º 15´ and 7º 05´ North and longitudes 6º 00´ and 8º 30´ East. It covers a total surface area of approximately 41, 000 square kilometres. It has a total population of (42 million people) and a population density of 215 persons per square kilometre. Administratively, it is made up of the entire Omambala (Anambra) Abia, Ebonyi, Enugwu and Imo states, parts of Delta and Rivers states.”

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36 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 1. Cf. Victor C. Uchendu. *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 1. The figure in bracket is mine. The CIA World Factbook puts the Igbo population of Nigeria at 24% of a total population of 177 million, or approximate 42 million people. This is the most recent figure of Igbo population since 2017. The author, G.E.K. Ofomata, gave the population of 8,818,208 based on the 1963 census which has been outdated by time and growth.
According to M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu, “The Igbo live in South-Eastern Nigeria. They numbered about 8.5 million people in 1963, of which 7.5 million were living in the former East Central State and the others in the North of the Rivers State and in the east of the former Mid-West State. They have one of the highest population densities in West Africa, ranging from 300 to over 1,000 persons per square mile.”40 Some other historians, such as Isichei, maintain that “[t]he traditional homeland of the Ibo of South-eastern Nigeria lies between the Niger and Cross Rivers, though a substantial minority lives to the West of the Niger.”41 It is believed that early Igbo settlements in the Southeastern part of Nigeria date to about “6000 years ago.”42 A conservative estimate of the population places it at between 20 and 25 million people.43 The scarcity of land and the quest for greener pasture made the Igbo speaking group to move to other parts of Nigeria; thus, many of them are in the diaspora.

The Igbo language is ranked among the “Kwa group of languages in West and Central Africa with various local dialects.”44 Arinze argues that “Ibo have of course their history, but it is mostly oral, and often local. Written history does not date back to many centuries… Ibo belongs to the Sudanic linguistic group of the Kwa division. The main characteristics of the language are its tonality, the mono-syllabic root-words and an absence of inflexional endings.”45 In the view of, Onwuejeogwu:

The Igbo language, (like any other language), is a vehicle with which the Igbo speaking peoples organize their cultural heritage into categories. There are many cultural variations in the total culture of the Igbo and this is reflected in the various dialect variations in the Igbo culture area. This holds true with the Yoruba, Ijo,
Gwari, Idoma, etc. The Igbo cultures like the Ijọ cultures exhibit some kind of unity in diversity and this is expressed in their languages made up of various dialects.46

The Igbo people are known for their industriousness, religiosity, and peace-loving manner of life. These values which they are known for in their cultural and religious contexts should be considered for inculturation in the Church in Igboland today. Dialoging with Igbo people will help the Church to identify and learn much about the Igbo cultural area. According to Onwuejeogwu,

The Igbo cultural area may be defined as an area enclosed by an imaginary line running outside of the settlements of Agbor, Kwalle (West Niger Igbo), Ahoada, Diobu, Umuabayi (Port Harcourt), Aro-Chukwu, Afikpo, Isiagu (Abakiliki area), Enugu Ezike (Nsukka area), and Ebu (West Niger Igbo). In this area the Igbo live in patrilineages called Umunna. Patrilineages are ranked from minimal to maximal. Patrilineages of variable depth and span and of diverse origins federated to become villages. Groups of villages federated to form towns called Obodo.47

These cultural areas exhibit the same characteristics as Nri which is seen as the area from which other Igbo groups migrated to other places. Incoming cultures are welcomed among the Igbo who learn from such cultures. The understanding that Igbo people exhibit in the face of incoming cultures disposes them to embrace new ways of life; yet, they are a people of their own unique culture. In the same token, Igbo world view should be explored to clarify this point.

1.2.2 Igbo World View

A People is known through an understanding of their world-view. This is clearly expressed by O. U. Kalu who maintains that:

A thorough grasp of the world-view of any given group of people is a fundamental prerequisite for the understanding of the rest of the interconnected beliefs, ideas, values and practices of the groups. This is because the people’s world-view or ideology (in modern parlance), is their unified picture of the cosmos and reality as a whole, explained by a system of concepts which orders the natural and social

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47 M. Angulu Onwuejeogwu. *An Igbo Civilization*, 8
rhythms and every other event, as well as determines the place of individuals and communities in them.\textsuperscript{48}

Cosmologically, Igbo people believe in the existence of two worlds, which interact with each other yet are divided between “the physical and the spiritual world.”\textsuperscript{49} The physical world is inhabited by living human beings, plants, and animals of all kinds, while the spiritual world is the abode of the spirits of the dead ancestors and the gods. Arinze buttresses this idea by maintaining that “[t]he objects of Ibo religious belief and worship in the strict sense are three: God, non-human Spirits and the Ancestors.”\textsuperscript{50} In another place the author writes, “[v]ery common is belief in spirits, both non-human spirits and human spirits who are the ancestors.”\textsuperscript{51} The Igbo also believe strongly that the living and the dead communicate in a mysterious way. Most of the modes of such interactions between the living and the dead are expressed in Igbo idioms, proverbs, story-telling, and gestures, as well as through natural disasters. “The traditional Igbo achieved in their own particular way such an ordered vision of reality. Using the criteria of time and space which seem to encapsulate all other experiences, they perceive the universe as a tiered structure: the sky above (Elu Igwe), the solid earth (Ala), and the underworld (Ala-Mmuo). Each of these spheres is an inhabited region.”\textsuperscript{52} The regions interact with one another through ritual sacrifices from humans.

Thus, Igbo cosmology is centered around the maintenance of human life. “Igbo traditional world-view is fundamentally a religious one. Man’s fortune and destiny are conceptualized in dynamic and delicate relationship with the activities of numerous spiritual beings and forces believed to inhabit the various regions of the cosmic order. However, the enhancement of his life

\textsuperscript{49} Uchendu, The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria, 11–12.
\textsuperscript{50} Francis A. Arinze. Sacrifice in Ibo Traditional Religion., 8.
remains the most vital consideration in the entire perception and scheme of things."\textsuperscript{53} This religious centeredness in Igbo world-view motivates their quest for the divine. Hence, “there is sufficient evidence to conclude firmly that the Igbo belief in the Supreme Being is a vital element of the world-view.”\textsuperscript{54} The Igbo also believe that \textit{Chukwu} or \textit{Chineke} as the creator of all things takes special care of all. “There is also a general belief that God creates and cares for each individual person. This is expressed in the Igbo belief that when God creates each person, he gives him a \textit{chi} guardian spirit.”\textsuperscript{55} According to John Umeh, “… the Igbo traditionally believe that nothing can ever exist without a \textit{Chi} irrespective of whether or not that thing is human or spiritual…”\textsuperscript{56}

In this regard, Arinze continues to emphasize the fact that “prayer and sacrifice figure very much in Igbo Traditional Religion…. the idea of the priesthood is also strong. Human beings are expected in their lives to be attentive to the moral laws of right and wrong, as expressed by customs, directives from the ancestors and moral taboos. To ignore them would be to court trouble from the ancestors or from the spirits.”\textsuperscript{57} Therefore the Igbo naming system also follows a pattern that depicts the circumstances which prevailed when a child is born.

Uchendu notes that besides naming children after their parents, “other names may be given to show the market day on which a child is born.”\textsuperscript{58} The Igbo belief in a Supreme Being is also conceptualized in the names they give their children. In the view of Kalu, “The names \textit{Chukwuka}, \textit{Ifeanyichukwu}, \textit{Onyekachukwu}, \textit{Chukwuemeka}, \textit{Chukwulozie}, \textit{Ikechukwu}, \textit{Olisanumba} among numerous others render some of the major attributes of God as conceptualized by the traditional

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 353.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 354.
\textsuperscript{57} Francis Arinze. “Christianity Meets Igbo Traditional Religion,” 11–12.
\textsuperscript{58} Uchendu, \textit{The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria}, 60.
Children could also be named according to belief in the ancestors who are presupposed to be the living-dead, with such names as Nna-Nna (the father’s father), Nne Nnaya (the father’s mother), Nnamdi (my father lives), and many others.

The Igbo also have organized market days, seasons of the year, and monthly calendar as well as traditional festivals, such as the “new yam festival,” which is celebrated throughout Igboland. Isichei argues that “[a]ll observers agreed that the Ibo world view was overwhelmingly a religious one.” This is very remarkable and one reason that the early European missionaries to Igboland needed to study the Igbo religiosity and decipher the handwriting on the wall. “Igbo traditional religion is conspicuously concerned with the worship of various classes of divinities. Every traditional Igbo group has its own pantheon, comprising all the deities acknowledged in the place. Some of these are regarded as arch-deities and identified with the origin and destiny of the people.” This is an eloquent witness to the fact that Igbo people communicated with God, the deities and the ancestors in their cultural ways before Christianity came in their midst. To be overwhelmingly religious means that Igbo people were seeking for salvation in their traditional way and would have advanced further ontologically. From this knowledge of Igbo cosmology, we shall now examine culture itself for a better understanding of the term. Though many authors have delved extensively into the realm of culture, ours is a brief analysis.

1.2.3 Towards a Further Understanding of Culture

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61 Isichei, The Ibo People, 80.
Culture is the sum total of a people’s way of life from birth till death. It is the expression of a people’s manner of marrying, giving birth, rearing a child, living with neighbors, praying, dancing, artwork, mode of dressing, language, gestures, and burial rites. According to Anthony Gittins, “We can begin, therefore, with these common intuitions: that culture is about people-in-society, about how they live, and about how individuals and groups are both similar to and different from others.”\textsuperscript{63} In the view of Georg Langemeyer, “Culture is the specifically human way through which persons perceive and shape their reality, that is, their own selves, their fellow human beings and the world they share. Human beings are creatures who possess and who produce culture. Culture is closely linked with religion yet must be distinguished from it. ... Religion and culture, however, remain related to one another.”\textsuperscript{64}

Subsequently, Gittins affirms, along with T.J. Gorringe, that “[c]ulture describes how people live, the shape of their daily lives, their worlds of meaning, communication, symbols, ritual, and more; it is ‘concerned with the spiritual, ethical, and intellectual significance of the material world. It is, therefore, of fundamental theological significance.’ Since we cannot survive without culture, it is equally impossible to detach faith from culture....”\textsuperscript{65}

From the above we can see that culture is God’s gift to humanity. Therefore, culture is an ally of religion, which helps human beings to approach God as creator. Chris U. Manus affirms this interwoven relationship between religion and culture by saying that “[a]s far back as 1947, Christopher Dawson had recognized the nexus between religion and culture. He asserts that both realities are often inseparable, for religion cannot escape the necessity of being incarnated in a


culture.” Every human being, every country and ethnic milieu emanates from a specific cultural setting. This explains why we talk of Western culture, African culture, American culture, Christian culture, and others. Charles Kraft, in analyzing the ideas of the famous anthropologist, E. B. Taylor (1871), maintains that

[e]ach of us is thus shaped in the nonbiological portion of our being by the culture into which we are born. We are shaped by a culture transmitted to us by the adults in our life. Humans thus may be regarded as culture-shaped and culture-transmitting beings. But we not only are shaped by and participate in the transmission of our culture; we also influence it and contribute to its reshaping. Indeed… humans originally created culture.

In this same vein, Shorter observes that “[c]ulture is what a human being learns, or acquires, as a member of society. It comprises the learned aspects – as opposed to the inherited aspects – of human thinking and human behavior.” Hence, culture is the way we reveal ourselves to others and the way others reveal themselves to us. In this regard, it sounds convincing, then, that culture embraces every aspect of human endeavor and the society we live in. Taylor quotes Vincente Kiaziku in maintaining that “… everything is culture. And, if we contrast nature and culture, the latter is all that man acquires or produces with his ingenuity and his effort.” Floyd defines culture from the practical point of view. “The term ‘culture’ refers to those aspects of life of a people which relate to their attitudes, objectives, and technical abilities. It is the people’s

67 Most authors including Charles H. Kraft and Aylward Shorter, and Thomas Barfield refer to the definition of culture given by Sir Edward Taylor as the most celebrated definition. For them, Taylor defines culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” See Shorter, Toward a Theology, 4. See also Charles H. Kraft, Christianity in Culture, 45; Thomas Barfield. (ed.). Dictionary of Anthropology. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 98.
69 Shorter, Toward a Theology, 4.
accustomed ways of living, their social organization and their productive (or destructive) activities in seeking to nurture their society.”72

So far, our analysis of culture shows how important this concept is and how it will help us to understand its relationship with religion. Shorter gives a clue about this relationship by noting that “[c]ulture is therefore essentially a transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a pattern capable of development and change, and it belongs to the concept of humanness itself. It follows that if religion is a human phenomenon or human activity, it must affect, and be affected by, culture.”73 Religion is obviously a human activity because it involves the entire human being in relation to God and creation, life and death, and the afterlife. In this sense, it is human activity and, as such, a part of human culture. Hence, Igbo Traditional Religion is part of Igbo culture.

However, because culture is dynamic, no single culture is the model for all to follow. Different people have different cultures, which is the aspect we need to emphasize more as it pertains to the Church, its worship patterns, and the missionary evangelization of peoples around the entire world today. The diverse nature of culture marks it out as being ready to be enriched as well as to enrich others who may not have been familiar with a given cultural ambience. Hence, a static culture is dangerous because it allows little or no room for change. A vibrant culture admits change and allows interaction with people from varying cultural backgrounds. In this process when the Christian religion encounters a new culture dialogue is the meeting ground. This dialogue between the Christian faith and culture gives birth to mutual understanding and cementing of the relationship. This will lead us to analyzing another important aspect of culture dealing with faith, which is referred to as inculturation.

1.2.4 What is Inculturation?

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73 Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 5.
Inculturation is still a neologism in Church circles, though it has long existed in other forms of Christianity. For instance, Orthodox Catholicism has a long history of inculturation, which explains or justifies their non-centralized understanding of Christian liturgy and living experiences. For this reason, Uzukwu argues that “[i]nculturation is popularly described in Roman Catholic official and nonofficial documents as the incarnation of the Christian message in cultures. The idea of incarnation is derived from the Christian experience of the incarnation of the Word.”

The Church of the twentieth-century has witnessed many changes and challenges since after the Second Vatican Council, which took place between 1962 and 1965.

This Council, which marked a turning point in both the method and process of the Church’s evangelization, paved the way for a paradigm shift toward engaging in dialogue with cultures instead of upholding the monologue of the early missionary enterprise. In the African context, Uzukwu uses the analogy of marriage, wherein dialogue plays a significant role. “Marriage involves a dialogue between two families, kindreds, or clans, which is concluded as a covenant or pact. Inculturation involves a dialogue between the whole way of life of African…. and the Christian message. The end result is an intimate bond between African cultures and the Christian message.” This expression of bond makes inculturation authentic because it brings people of different cultures together. “Authentic inculturation must be simple and transformative with enduring values which have a deep meaning in the lives of the people. Its importance in theology today, especially in the mission countries, cannot be overstressed.”

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75 Ibid., 6–7.
Different mission regions have cultures, languages, and contexts peculiar to them, which the Church ought to take into consideration in the process of evangelization. As the church and the Gospel message expand, many cultures are encountered. The monocultural method of evangelization carried out by early European missionaries to Africa and other parts of the developing world needs to be modernized to reflect the cultural contexts of the receiving mission lands. As the Church encounters diversity and plurality of cultures, her missionary outlook changes to embrace these diversities and to make the Gospel message part and parcel of the receiving culture. Schineller expresses this view in an analysis of the diversity and plurality of the global world and of how nations differ culturally from one another. No one nation is exactly the same with the other and this is where the Church should emphasize the need for inculturation.  

Most theologians associate the earliest attempts at using and defining inculturation with the Society of Jesus. For instance, Shorter argues that Fr. Joseph Masson used the term before 1962 when the Second Vatican Council started and that Fr. Pedro Arrupe used inculturation also in a letter to the entire Jesuit Society in 1978. Both Shorter and Schineller present the definition given by Arrupe as follows:

The incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a ‘new creation’. 

This definition received wide acclamation by theologians; and, as such, inculturation should be the guiding principle that animates and transforms a people’s culture to embrace the

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79 Cf. Shorter, Toward a Theology, 10.
Christian faith in their local context. Therefore, Schineller sees inculturation as not only pertaining to culture or cultural issues but also as having a Biblical foundation in the Gospel of John (1:14) which “goes back to the incarnation of Jesus Christ.” Based on this Biblical foundation, Carl Starkloff affirms, “Any theory of inculturation in a Christian context depends fundamentally on biblical interpretation and church history. It must examine in depth the relationships between the church and cultures, starting from the beginnings of the community in the New Testament era and in the formative age of patristic theology, and continuing on through Christian history.”

In the view of Marcello Azevedo—and which a look at Christian history seems to bear out—a turning point has been reached in the ways the Church is carrying out its missionary activities around the entire world. This turning point is the major focus of the conciliar and synodal documents and recent papal publications as could be seen in the following excerpt:

> Since the Second Council of the Vatican, and especially since the Synod on Evangelization (1974) and the subsequent publication by Paul VI of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), theological reflection and ecclesial praxis have demonstrated a deepening sensitivity to the relation between faith and culture, which has come to be denoted inculturation. Inculturation is not a theological, missiological, or pastoral fad, it is an essential quality of revelation, evangelization, and theological reflection.

If this is the case, one might ask certain pertinent questions: How does inculturation help to promote people’s understanding of the Christian faith? How would the interaction between faith and culture pave the way to a real incarnation of the Gospel message into the lifestyle of a people, considering their behavioral patterns, their manner of worship, and their mode of accepting the Christian faith? Is inculturation only a concept on paper, or is it for practical implementation?

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These questions will help us clarify what inculturation is in the context of the Christian faith’s encounter with different cultures. In this regard, Azevedo provides a succinct definition that denotes inculturation as a process in the following manner:

Inculturation, therefore, is not an act but a process, i.e., it presupposes and involves history and time. It is an active process requiring mutual acceptance and dialogue, critical awareness and discernment, transformation and growth, renovation and innovation. Inculturation supposes an interaction between a living faith and a living culture, and thus, it is not cultural archeology. The process of an inculturated evangelization does not lead to the absolutizing of some ideal culture, as if a culture could be an abstraction, or to the restoration of a historical culture having claims to validity only in the reality of its past. Inculturation supposes an interaction between faith and culture as the later exists in actual life, in its dynamic process, which integrates tradition and change, fidelity to origins and new creations.  

In this process, inculturation is thus a dynamic lifestyle that involves faith in dialogue with culture and which provides room for an interactive way of making the Gospel message at home with any given culture. The early European missionaries absolutized Western culture as an ideal to be implanted into the mission areas they evangelized. This is contradictory to the new process of evangelization, which the Second Vatican Council wishes to implement in this modern period of Christian history. On this note, and in toeing the line with regard to ideas already expressed by Pope Paul VI, Azevedo continues to reiterate that

In an inculturated evangelization, then, a relation among faith, culture, and society is implied. Inculturated evangelization is therefore not present in the mere transfer or modification of languages and methods, rites and symbols, organization and norms, outward manners of action and expression. It must go further and reach the foundations, the roots, of culture and cultures…, i.e., it must reach the meanings and criteria of a given culture, its worldview, and the tacit or patent, but genuinely determinative, inspiration of the sociocultural praxis of this human group as translated in the dynamic development and historical transformations of its sociocultural ethos. Thus, an inculturated evangelization touches the deepest level of human reality, on both the individual plane as well as the social.  

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84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., 502. See also Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 20.
The above passage shows that the dynamics of inculturation do not necessarily require the modifications of already existing cultural norms; rather, it implies going deeper into the fabric of a given cultural ethos so that faith and such a culture will interact to learn from and to transform each other. This outlook provides a clue as to what Uzukwu cautioned against in terms of the social aspect of inculturation if it fails to be all embracing, especially within the African context. “Negatively, one must reject inculturation locked up in mystification and sacralization of structures of power with seductive rhetoric of authenticity and cultural identity. Positively, one adopts inculturation with a social liberating agenda.”

In this process, also, one needs to recall the major reasons why the Church—especially the Synod bishops of Africa and Madagascar in 1974—emphasized the need for inculturation. Azevedo has much to say about this:

Three factors especially favored the resurgence of an ecclesial awareness of the need for inculturation: (1) the diversified experience of a church now become actually worldwide, (2) a recognition of the ecclesiological status of the local churches and the consequences of this new appreciation, and (3) the rehabilitation or reemergence of cultures long repressed or oppressed by the constitution of the national states or by the process of colonization.

This perspective also corresponds with what Schineller has outlined as the necessity for inculturation, which includes the fact that “today more than ever we are in an age of mission, with tremendous challenge to and activity on the part of the church. Second, we are in an age of global awareness, which includes the awareness of cultural diversity. This diversity or pluralism is seen both within one nation, such as the United States, and when comparing one nation with another.”

This means that inculturation is dynamic and not static. For this reason, Robert Schreiter defines inculturation from the perspective of the changing circumstances and theological shifts since the Second Vatican Council. “Inculturation, as a noun, is often used of this shift in theological process

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87 Azevedo, “Inculturation,” 503.
as well. A combination of the theological principle of incarnation with the social-science concept of acculturation… the term has come to be used widely in Roman Catholic circles and appears in many documents of congress and episcopal conferences.”89

Pope John Paul II’s post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa offers a further understanding of inculturation. The Pope sees inculturation as in line with the Mystery of the Incarnation, Pentecost, and redemption in Jesus Christ.90 His insights imply that through the process of inculturation, the people being evangelized gain the fullness of redemption since both Christ and the Gospel are incarnated in their culture. One issue is that “[i]nculturation is a difficult and delicate task, since it raises the question of the Church’s fidelity to the Gospel and the Apostolic Tradition amidst the constant evolution of cultures.”91 The difficulty notwithstanding, one notes that what matters is for the receiving culture to be recognized as authentic and then be disposed to welcome the transforming process of the Gospel which also receives transformation from the culture in question. This involves and requires dialogue so that each side remains faithful to its origins while avoiding what is contrary to the Gospel of Christ.

For this reason, Dulles cautions that inculturation “should not mean an unqualified acceptance of all features of the existing culture. Human cultures usually involve features that need to be purified and corrected in the light of the gospel.”92 The idea that culture evolves expresses its dynamism. This dynamic nature of culture is re-emphasized by John Paul II while appraising the ideas of African bishops who affirm: “Considering the rapid changes in the cultural, social, economic and political domains, our local Churches must be involved in the process of inculturation in an ongoing manner, respecting the two following criteria: compatibility with the

89 Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, 5.
90 Cf. John Paul II. Ecclesia in Africa, no. 61.
91 Ibid., no. 62.
92 Avery Dulles. The New World of Faith, 114.
Christian message and communion with the universal Church... In all cases, care must be taken to
avoid syncretism.” It should be noted that Christianity in its Jewish origin is syncretic. That is, it
appropriated some elements of Judaism and the Jewish culture from where it originated. Why
should it not do the same with African culture which experiences the same cultural dynamism that
could enrich or transform the Gospel and be transformed by it as well. This stand of African
bishops is shaky, because, inculturation is the interaction between faith and culture.

Along this line also, liturgical inculturation received attention as one of the focal points for
practical application of inculturation. “In practice, and without any prejudice to the traditions
proper to either the Latin or Eastern Church, ‘inculturation of the liturgy, provided it does not
change the essential elements, should be carried out so that the faithful can better understand and
live liturgical celebrations.” The faithful will better understand liturgical inculturation when
their good cultural values are appropriated into the liturgy. This requires proper study and dialogue
with the practitioners of African Traditional Religion. In this regard, we shall next examine some
terms associated with culture and inculturation.

1.2.5. Explanation of Terms Associated with Culture and Inculturation

For readers to acquire the basic knowledge of Igbo cultural perspective, an explanation is
needed for certain terms associated with culture and inculturation. Such will certainly be of great
benefit to us as we seek to understand the Igbo Church and its liturgical practices. Every religion
operates within a cultural ambience and expands its tenets through cultural behaviors and

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93 John Paul II. *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 62.
94 Ibid., no. 64.
associations with people from different cultures and behavioral patterns. In this regard, John Paul II affirms that “a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived…”\(^\text{95}\) Herein lies the issue about faith and culture that this study is trying to investigate and to reveal properly.

The Church, following the missionary mandate it was given by Christ (Matt. 28:19-20), has spread the Gospel message from Europe to other parts of the world, including Africa. The major challenge of this evangelizing mission of the church has been how to apply the Gospel message meaningfully within the cultural contexts of these growing mission areas. This challenge also constitutes the major concern of the Second Vatican Council’s decree on the missionary activity of the church *Ad Gentes*, as well as some of the encyclicals of modern popes. To address this challenge, a process of dialogue between Christian faith and culture emerged, accompanied by new theological terms, such as *acculturation*, *adaptation*, *incarnation*, *enculturation*, and *contextualization*. Some authors, like Peter Schineller, also include *imposition*, *translation*, and *indigenization*.\(^\text{96}\) These terms, which theologians have recently adopted as correlates to evangelization and mission, need to be explained in order to follow the trend of events happening within the Church as it encounters many different cultures. Beinert Wolfgang notes that the Church’s encounter with different cultures has historical significance.

At the present, history and historicity acquire far-reaching significance as categories in which the task of the church, now for the first time really becoming spatially universal, can be made clear. This occurs with catchwords and ideas like *inculturation*, *aggiornamento* (the updating of the church), and the historical shaping of the world in culture, work, politics, science, and theology. The tension

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between progress and restoration becomes greater in view of the aporias posed by, for example, questions about peace or the ecological problems.\textsuperscript{97}

These terms, though not exhaustive, could be helpful for us to maintain our bearing, especially when dealing with faith’s interaction with and expression in different cultures. While some of these terms may fit the description of inculturation, others might not adequately explain what it stands for in proper terms. They are used here to create an awareness about the universality of the church’s mission and to indicate how this universality correlates with the local Church and different cultures. These terms are further defined as follows for clarifications and proper understanding.

\textit{Acculturation}. Although theological writers mostly use the terms \textit{acculturation} and \textit{inculturation} interchangeably as theological terms, they have significant differences. According to Shorter, the interchangeability of these terms might be confusing, yet they are distinguished from each other sociologically. Thus, acculturation as a sociological concept stands apart from inculturation, though they necessarily complement each other. Acculturation occurs when one culture encounters another as well as when many different cultures meet themselves.\textsuperscript{98} Their encounter with one another produces cultural change as an outcome.

Thus, when human beings from different cultural backgrounds interact with each other, a process of cultural change occurs among them because each has something new to offer to or learn from the others. This process implies that acculturation gives way to cultural fluidity. Hence, for Shorter: “Acculturation, the communication between cultures on a footing of mutual respect and tolerance, is a necessary condition of Catholicism, of a Church that claims to be universal.”\textsuperscript{99} The

\textsuperscript{98} Shorter, \textit{Toward a Theology}, 6–7.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 8.
Church in this regard respects the differences in cultures and welcomes what is good and valuable in each of them.

Mutual respect should be fostered between cultures, not just an imposition\textsuperscript{100} of one culture upon a claim of superiority. Rather, a mutual crossbreeding should exist and the sharing of ideas with understanding and acceptance from either side of human involvement and communication. Theologically speaking, however, acculturation might not fit properly into the model of conscious communication of the Gospel message from one culture to another. This situation requires the consideration of another term that is associated with inculturation.

\textit{Enculturation}. Most authors see enculturation as a socio-anthropological term dealing with the learning process of an individual who is born and bred into a particular cultural ambience. Shorter describes the term in both its sociological and theological aspects; as such, it “refers to the cultural learning process of the individual, the process by which a person is inserted into his or her culture.”\textsuperscript{101} This process enables an individual to become acquainted with the culture one could identify as one’s own. In this process the individual becomes familiar with the cultural patterns around the environment where one lives through a spontaneous process. The relatedness of enculturation and inculturation notwithstanding, the former process has a limited connotation in theological use while for Shorter, “[i]nculturation is not limited in its application to the first insertion of faith into a culture.”\textsuperscript{102} This limitedness has cancelled out the use of enculturation in theological terms to designate the process of making the Gospel at home within the different cultures of the places evangelized by the Church today.

\textsuperscript{100} Cf. Schineller, \textit{A Handbook on Inculturation}, 14–15. Here Schineller describes \textit{imposition} as one of the inadequate words used to designate inculturation. It has a negative meaning and as such is not appropriate for inculturation.
\textsuperscript{101} Shorter, \textit{Toward a Theology}, 5.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 6.
Translation. This term describes the missionary process of literally trying to translate and adapt or transcribe the teachings of the church—such as catechisms, prayer books, or liturgical practices already written in Latin or English—into the local language of the people evangelized. This is always an incomplete form of inculturation because it is subject to stereotype and often obscures even the meaning being conveyed from one language to another. “[T]he entire catechism, the prayers and liturgy, and the Bible are simply translated into the new languages with no creative adaptation or modification in accord with local customs or thought patterns.”

Sometimes this method does not allow the receiving culture the chance to express itself or to deeply reflect its cultural values in the material translated. In the view of Schreiter, the incoming culture looks for parallels in the new culture without asking “whether there really are such parallels, whether the parallels have the same place of significance in the new culture or whether other more significant patterns might better be drawn upon.” This method alienates Jesus from the new culture because he is being translated but not discovered within that culture. It is just the same as asking a student to memorize the theory of evolution without explaining *The Origin of the Species*.

The inadequacy of translation can be seen in the fact that the original meaning is often lost in the process of translating from one language to another. Moreover, certain words in a particular language might be very difficult to translate into another. When this is done, certain aspects vital to the point of discussion might either be omitted or misinterpreted in the process. However, some African theologians such as, Bediako refer to the universal character of translatability as something positive. According to Bediako:

Translatability is also another way of saying universality. Hence the translatability of the Christian religion signifies its fundamental relevance and accessibility to

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persons in any culture within which the Christian faith is transmitted and assimilated. Nowhere is this character of Christianity more evident than in the Christian view of Scripture... Accordingly, the Bible translated into whatever language remains essentially and substantially what it is believed to be in its original autographs.\textsuperscript{105}

This idea points to the fact that faith is the measure of what is transmitted and how it is accepted by those who are evangelized. And that faith is expressed according to the people’s cultural ambience wherein the Word of God takes flesh and the incarnation is assumed. Hence, Bediako points out that: “Behind the Christian doctrine of the substantial equality of the Scripture in all languages, there lies the even profounder doctrine of the Incarnation, by which the fullest divine communication has reached beyond the forms of human words into the human form itself… Translatability, therefore, may be said to be in-built into the nature of the Christian religion and capable of subverting any cultural possessiveness of the faith process of its transmission.”\textsuperscript{106}

Be that as it may, the process of inculturation might not go by presumption. It rather, presupposes factual lived experiences of the people embracing the Word and making it their own in all its expressions. The Incarnation is not an assumption but a fact that God took human flesh and entered human culture within a given environment. This might help us to look at, yet another term associated with inculturation referred to as adaptation.

\textit{Adaptation}. Robert Schreiter considers adaptation as one of the models used in constructing local theologies.\textsuperscript{107} In the view of Schineller, most of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, such as \textit{Sacrosanctum Concilium} (nos. 38–40) and \textit{Ad Gentes} (no. 22), as well as papal exhortations by Paul VI and John Paul II speak in favor of adaptation.\textsuperscript{108} Nonetheless,

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 110.
\textsuperscript{107} Cf. Schreiter, \textit{Constructing Local Theologies}, 9–12.
“adaptation has more recently been criticized as inadequate, in fact as a subtle form of imposition, and accused of not truly taking the local culture seriously.” In the process of adaptation, the local people try to picture and adopt an element of the foreign culture, often drawn from Europe, into their local culture.

This leads to a mix of both the foreign and the local, and the foreign predominates as the superior element to which the local must be adapted. This is like forcing a square peg into a round hole. The foreign cultural element will still appear like oil poured into a basin of cold water, which it cannot penetrate fully but remains on top. This adaptation model was rejected as obsolete by the bishops of Africa and Madagascar in the 1974 synod of bishops. Léonard Kinkupu writes, “The African prelates regarded the theology of adaptation and implantation as quite outmoded and opted for the theology of incarnation or of inculturation.” With this position of the synod bishops as a guide, we shall consider the incarnation model in the next section.

**Incarnation.** God, taking human nature in the person of Jesus—the Word made Flesh—is by far the greatest event in salvation history. Therefore, during the Second Vatican Council, emphasis shifted from the hierarchical structure of the Church to human development and the recognition of the plurality of cultures. The idea of inculturation is seen as analogous to the incarnation as it relates to the Word of God taking human flesh (Jn. 1:14). For Shorter, this refers to the “seeds of the Word” of St. Justin. It also refers to the effort the Church is making to actualize the Word of God among the people she evangelizes. In this manner, the Gospel message will no longer be a strange element to the people.

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109 Ibid., 17.
111 Cf. John Paul II. *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 60.
112 Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 195. See also Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 6.
Incarnation is a preferable term which this research endorses as a suitable corelate to inculturation. Most authors such as, Schineller also sees incarnation from the perspective of its relatedness to inculturation as the Word of God taking Flesh within particular concrete cultural contexts.\textsuperscript{113} Since inculturation deals with faith meeting culture and given that the incarnation took place within a given cultural context, it could appropriately be applied to inculturation as a correlated term. “For the Incarnation of the Son of God, precisely because it was complete and concrete, was also an incarnation in a particular culture.”\textsuperscript{114} This relatedness of the Incarnation and inculturation drives home to the people the message of the Gospel.

On this note, Schineller further remarks that “Jesus Christ, for example, the model of incarnation and inculturation, became incarnated in one particular time and place.”\textsuperscript{115} Thus, the incarnation of the Gospel message in a particular place makes inculturation manifest so that the place digests and absorbs what is preached properly in its particular cultural ambience.

\textit{Indigenization}. The theological shift in perspective in recent times has given rise to different terms and expressions dealing with the process of evangelizing people using their local cultural values as a preparation for the Gospel to take root within such cultures. This awareness that the message of Christ and the Christian faith is encountering different cultures has been a great help towards the understanding of cultural pluralism. The question of such a change in perspective revolves around what name such shifts should bear. Schreiter identifies this change in perspective by maintaining that “[o]ne of the first terms for this new perspective was

\textsuperscript{113} Cf. Schineller, \textit{A Handbook on Inculturation}, 20–21.
\textsuperscript{114} John Paul II. \textit{Ecclesia in Africa}, no. 60. See also John Paul II. “Address at the University of Coimbra, Coimbra” (15 May 1982), 5: \textit{Insegnamenti} V/2 (1982), 1695.
\textsuperscript{115} Schineller, \textit{A Handbook on Inculturation}, 7.
indigenous theology which emphasizes the fact that theology is done by and for a given
geographical area—by local people for their area, rather than outsiders.” 116

The term “indigenous,” according to Schreiter, has colonial connotations and as such is
unsuitable for theological application. It alienates outsiders from having pure knowledge of
cultures other than their own. On another note, Schineller notes that “one possible danger inherent
in the term indigenization is that it might result in too static a view of culture.” 117 If this is the case,
we must not underrate cultural dynamism, which characterizes all cultures. Other writers also
associate indigenization with the political and religious struggle between the colonialist clergy-
missionaries and indigenous religious men and women.

This quest for indigenization was noticed much in Africa during the years of colonial rule
and European missionary enterprise in the continent. In this vein, Ruy Costa observes that “debates
over indigenization… go a step further with the inclusion of conscious power struggle between
foreign missionaries and national leaders.” 118 The danger here is, if inculturation is reserved for
the indigenous alone, it alienates others who may wish to share and identify with any given local
culture to enrich and be enriched by it. When faith meets with culture, there is always a
transformation, and the tendency is for that culture to assume the tenets portrayed by the Gospel
message as a model. In this sense, indigenization appears opposed to the missionary effort to make
the Church at once both local and universal.

**Contextualization.** This is another preferable term with regard to situating the gospel
message within the concrete cultural ambience of the people evangelized. In her missionary

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116 Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 5.
endeavors, the Church has emphasized the need for contextualizing the message of Christ and the Christian faith even from early times. The awareness of cultural change is brought into the limelight through contextualization. While tracing the historicity of the term “contextualization” in theological circles, Schineller writes:

Contextualization achieved prominence in 1957 when the Rockefeller Foundation gave three million dollars to establish a theological education fund to train leaders for churches in the third world. Grants were offered with a view to “contextualizing the gospel.” The World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1972 in Geneva made use of the term, as did the WCC Conference in Lausanne in 1974. In 1978 an International Colloquium on Contextual Theology was held in Manila.

The notion of context shows how different aspects of missionary effort need to be addressed according to prevailing circumstances in any given place. This implies that what obtains in a given mission field may differ from another. This is in line with the argument proffered by Manus that “[t]he preoccupation of the exegetes using the contextualist method is to express the Christian message and mode of worship in forms that are conducive to their native and cultural patterns of life.” The differences in place and time need different ways, means, and methods of approaching them. Schineller goes on to say that “contextualization thus shows greater awareness of the particularity of contexts; it also shows greater awareness of the historical development and change that is ongoing in all contexts. One must again and again study the situation and contextualize the gospel for that situation as it changes.” It is worth noting here that history is the conveyer of culture and events of the past.


Although, contextualization is seen to be breaking with the past easily, yet, it tries to identify with the concrete situation of the moment. For this reason, it might complement the process of inculturation in a given circumstance. In the view of Schreiter, “Contextual models are seen increasingly as embodying the ideas of what local theology is to be about, even though the working out of those ideals often proves difficult in the practice.” When changes occur rapidly, there is tendency to forget the previous ideals in the process of contextualization. What is important in inculturation is a situation “in which faith and culture mutually integrate in some measure, and Christian existence becomes incarnate in the actual history of the land where the Christian community belongs.” This actual history of the land depicts the concrete event to be addressed.

Having briefly examined some terms associated with culture and inculturation, though not exhaustive, we observed that “incarnation” and “contextualization” are the preferred terms this research endorsed as corelates to inculturation. Other people are entitled to their own opinions, but viewed with the eyes of modern theological method, these two terms portray what inculturation intends to accomplish – the incarnation of the Gospel message within a given cultural context. Hence, we examine the next line of action which points to the reaffirmation of the good values inherent in African Traditional Religion.

1.2.6 Reaffirming African Traditional Religion Today

The most astonishing aspect of Western missionary enterprise in Africa, especially in Igboland is the deliberate attempt to indirectly suppress, if not annihilate or terminate, the African Traditional Religion. The reason for this attempt was lack of interreligious dialogue and the Western eagerness to assert Euro-superiority over Africans and what they stood for. Another

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123 Schreiter, Constructing Local Theologies, 12.
reason was that African religion and cultures were misunderstood by the early missionaries as evil. Uzukwu argues, “[t]his misunderstanding of Africans, their world view, cultures and religions became entrenched in the European tradition, especially from the fifteenth century… [;] their orientation was suffused with the ideology of European dominance.”

This European dominance not only weakened Africans but also stunted their culture, religious values, and socio-economic as well as socio-political life. Jacob Olupona observes that

African peoples today, especially the elders, look at their classical religious heritage with a nostalgia for a paradise lost. In the beginning, they often argue, was a deep religious and spiritual heritage vouchsafed in myths, rituals, and symbols. But as a result of Africa’s contact with the outside world, especially under very ignominious circumstances—exploration, slave trade, and colonialism—significant aspects of these traditions were lost or modified to conform to the taste of the conquerors and the new rulers.

However, since the Second Vatican Council has opened the door to establishing a relationship between the Church and non-Christian religions, a revaluation of African Traditional Religion is called for in order to rediscover and to reaffirm its lost rich spiritual values as a people’s authentic religion. The point of emphasis here is the positive values inherent in African Traditional Religion as enumerated in Pope Paul VI’s Africae Terrarum. Inasmuch as the Pope is not asking African Christians to return to the traditional ways of worshiping God, the major issue is to recognize and respect the good spiritual values inherent in the religion. Hence, “[t]he gauntlet has been thrown to scholars of Igbo culture to make up for the years which the locust ate and to reconstruct the Igbo world which we are fast losing.”

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125 Uzukwu, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, 52–53.
127 Cf. Paul VI. “Africae Terrarum: A Message from Pope Paul VI to the Countries of Africa.” in AFER 10, no. 1 (Jan 1968): 71–84. Here the Pope corrects the misconception of ATR as “animism” and commends its spiritual view of life, the idea of God as the ultimate cause of all things and the mysterious view of the visible and spiritual worlds.
For instance, in most parts of Igboland, when a traditional religionist gets up from sleep in the morning, the first thing he does is to pray by offering a piece of kola nut (Oji) and pouring of libation of palm wine to the gods and to the ancestors. According to Kalu, “[t]he traditional Igbo prays incessantly. This is only a natural consequence of the essential conceptualization of reality as a whole in terms of religious models.” This deep-seated prayer emanates from the heart showing dependence not on self but on the Supreme Being and deities who give life, wealth and children to every family or individual. Prayer is very important to the Igbo who depends on God.

For the traditional Igbo, prayer is one of the clearest expressions of their acute sense of dependence on spiritual beings for the all important recurrent theme of life enhancement. Individuals pray privately to the various supersensible entities whose activities are believed to impinge on the well-being of men. Groups under the leadership of someone who could be a ritual leader or not, depending on the circumstance, offer occasional prayers publicly or privately to the deities and ancestral spirits.

In most parts of Igboland, the individual often prays for good health, asks for protection from the ancestors, and for a long life. This life-centeredness of Igbo Traditional Religion and the dependence on God coupled with respect for the ancestors need to be reaffirmed and presented for inculturation in the Church today. At this juncture, it would be nice to re-examine how Igbo Traditional Religion was practiced before the colonial period.

1.2.7 Igbo Traditional Religion Before the Colonial Era

Religious beliefs and cultural systems shape a people always. In this vein, Arinze argues that “[t]he Christian theologian knows that he or she cannot understand a person properly without being well informed on that person’s religion and culture.” Igbo people are a group of traditional religious worshippers like other Africans. “The principal objects of belief and worship in Igbo

129 Ibid, 358.
130 Ibid, 359.
religion are *Chukwu*, (God), *Mmuo*, (Deities), *Arusi*, (Spirit- forces) *Ndichie*, (Ancestors), and *Amusu*, (Witches) and *Ogwu* (Medicine).”\(^{132}\) They have much respect for their ancestors, whom they believe co-exist with the living in this world. P. A. Talbot affirms that among the Igbo, “the dead are not dead but living and in full command of their faculties.”\(^{133}\) Of course, this Igbo respect for their ancestors runs through other African traditional belief systems. In this regard, Zahan argues that “[i]ndigenous African religion is also founded on the belief that ancestors maintain an active presence in their earthly families. Their progenies observe ritual services in their honor and they reciprocate by protecting, healing, and prospering their endeavors.”\(^{134}\) This implies that “[t]he basic structure of Ibo religion is similar to that of many other African religions.”\(^{135}\) In these observations, we see the need for dialogue, proper study and evaluation as well as inculturation of Igbo religious and cultural values into the Church in Igboland today. This implies that the important aspects of Igbo culture must be preserved and not discarded.

The archeological find since 1938 at Igbo-Ukwu in Anambra state of Igboland, Nigeria gives much clue to the fact that cultural and religious values pre-existed among the Igbo before the colonial era. The excavations carried out between 1959/1960 led by Thurstan Shaw made much revelations about Igbo society, their culture and religious practices of the past. Shaw writes:

The first find of bronze to be reported from Igbo-Ukwu seems to have been made during the course of 1938. When a man called Isaiah Anozie, in digging a water-cistern for a new compound, struck a number of bronze objects. He dug them out of the ground and piled them against the wall of his house; with his consent some of his neighbors helped themselves, believing these objects to be ‘good medicine’. (It is possible, however, that an earlier find had been made in an adjacent area, in

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\(^{132}\) Emefie Ikenga – Metuh., and Christopher I. Ejizu. *Hundred Years of Catholicism*, xvi.


\(^{135}\) Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 80.
the course of digging clay for making compound walls, as far back as 1922, but this piece of information did not come to light until 1963).\textsuperscript{136}

From the discoveries, it is obvious that “[b]efore the advent of Christianity in Igboland, the Igbo already had a clearly defined system of customs in both religion and secular areas, although they did not distinguish the two as separate entities.”\textsuperscript{137} There was genuine fear or respect for the gods of the land, such that one knew the right thing to do at any given time. In this regard, Shaw describes how Igbo people respect their traditional institutions in the authority and functions of the \textit{Eze Nri}. “The \textit{Eze nri} is a royal or priestly official chosen from the Umundri clan of the Ibos. This clan claims descent from’… Ndri, the youngest of the sons of Eri (a sky being) and their first divine king. …’ The functions of the \textit{Eze Nri} are non-political but are in connection with the system of title-taking, disputes, fertility and the cleansing of ‘abominations’; his authority in these respects is recognized throughout large parts of Ibo-land.”\textsuperscript{138}

The Igbo understanding of every reality and life’s endeavors is permeated by religious undertones in the belief that \textit{Chukwu/Chineke} (God) is the creator of all, and he designated powers to lesser deities including \textit{Ala/Ani} and the ancestors to direct human activities. “The deities, \textit{Mmuo} are generally regarded as good spirits. They are non-human spirits created by God to help him shepherd different sections of the universe. Some have their abode in the sky and hence, are believed to be nearer to God. Deities like \textit{Anyanwu}, (Sun) \textit{Amadioha}, (Thunder), and \textit{Igwe}, (Sky), are believed to be sons of God, and sometimes act as his agent.”\textsuperscript{139} Igbo Traditional Religion has much affinity with antiquity. Joseph- Thérèse Agbasiere alludes to an interview conducted by BBC


\textsuperscript{138} Thurstsan Shaw. \textit{Igbo-Ukwu}, 269.

\textsuperscript{139} Emefie Ikenga – Metuh., and Christopher I. Ejizu. \textit{Hundred Years of Catholicism}, xvi.
World Service concerning the novel, *Things Fall Apart*. During the interview, the author, Chinua Achebe, “stressed that the main aim of the novel was to depict the antiquity of Igbo tradition, such a stress on ‘antiquity’ implies the notion of authenticity, of wisdom, of respect, among other things. It implies as well that Igbo tradition existed long before the advent of Christianity or colonial rule in the area.”¹⁴⁰ All the cultural nuances described here are a few of the predominant original Igbo customs and traditional religious belief prior to the advent of the colonial masters and the early European missionaries into Igboland. This will help us to examine how Christianity came in Igboland and the impact it made on Igbo traditional religionists.

1.3 The Advent of Christianity in Igboland

Igboland has variously been identified as “the Lower Niger.”¹⁴¹ History has it that the earliest missionary adventure to reach this part of Nigeria was in 1857.¹⁴² “The coming of the Christian missionaries to Igboland had far reaching effects on the Igbo. They provided Western education and some crafts and industries which the Igbo quickly acquired or learnt. They also helped in fighting against certain obnoxious beliefs and practices. On the other hand, Christianity had adverse effects on the institutions and the culture of the people.”¹⁴³ The first group of Christian missionaries was led by “the Rev. Samuel Adjai Crowther and his colleagues…under the auspices of the London based Church Missionary Society (CMS).”¹⁴⁴ Ijoma also confirms that this first group arrived Onicha “on July 25, 1857.”¹⁴⁵ The next group were the Catholic missionaries, the Holy Ghost Fathers, who in 1885 “established the first Catholic mission in

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According to Obi, “… the Holy Ghost missionaries came to the Lower Niger out of generosity and obedience to the Vicar of Christ who assigned them to seek the welfare of the black race.” As soon as they reached Onitsha, Bishop Crowther gave them a piece of land he acquired from the people already. For this reason and other signs considered as providential, “the Holy Ghost missionaries chose Onitsha as their headquarters…”

No sooner had they settled than things began to change, both positively and negatively. The positive aspect was that the missionaries were well received by the King of Onitsha, Obi Amazonwu, who gave them vast hectares of land upon which to build a church. A reasonable number of the indigenous children were also sent to the missionaries for training, and the mission began to grow rapidly. On the negative side, the missionaries suffered a great deal of sickness and a good number died within a short time. The early Protestant missionaries became jealous of the rapid success recorded by the Catholic missionaries within a short time of arrival. Obi reports that: “The C.M.S. missionaries felt their position threatened by the rapid changes and the relatively numerous converts being made by the Catholic mission which started to establish itself.” This rift strained the cordial relationship that should have existed between the protestants and Roman Catholics in Igbo land such that inter-marriages between their members were eclipsed. At that time, the missionaries had yet to enter the Igbo hinterland.

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146 Isichei. *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 147. See also Obi, *A Hundred Years*, 1.
147 Obi, *A Hundred Years*, 8.
148 Isichei, *The Ibo People*, 147.
149 Obi, *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church*, 14.
150 Ibid., 13–19.
151 Ibid., 24.
152 Ibid., 20–21.
153 Ibid., 25.
1.3.1 The Encounter between Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion

It is obvious that African Traditional Religion had been practiced by the Igbo people ever before the advent of the Christian missionaries in their midst. “The Igbo are extremely religious people. Their life is pervaded by a strong feeling of the presence of the supernatural. No aspect of human life is excluded from the influence of the spirits. In this sense the Igbo make no clear distinction between the sacred and the profane. This is clearly illustrated by Igbo beliefs and practices of sacred prohibitions, ‘Nso’, and Sacrifices, ‘Ichu Aja.’”\(^{154}\) However, the history of the early encounter between Christianity and Igbo indigenous religion was a rough one. Okwu notes that “from the beginning of Igbo contact with the missionaries, their relationship has been marked by a love-hate syndrome, reluctant tolerance and periods of serious public resentment of the agents of the new faith.”\(^{155}\) The reason for this was that when the missionaries arrived, they did not study the people’s belief system in depth. “Obviously, the historical study of African religion is a fundamental necessity if we are to understand contemporary developments, but it must be a genuine historical exercise, appealing to genuine historical evidence.”\(^{156}\)

The missionaries neglected this initial study and, rather, began to classify Igbo religion and culture as pagan and primitive. “Because Christianity is culture bound, the missionaries wanted the Igbo society to change the people’s way of life. The customs and practices of the people were considered primitive and ‘pagan’. The idea of European cultural superiority was manifested in the actions of the missionaries.”\(^{157}\) This was a fundamental mistake and an unwise presumption: that whatever comes from Africa is bad. This was the attitude of the Irish missionaries to Igboland. In

\(^{154}\) Emefie Ikenga – Metuh., and Christopher I. Ejizu. *Hundred Years of Catholicism*, xvi.


this regard, Ebelebe argues against such an approach: “Liebermann’s use of the word “primitive” to describe African traditional religion is regrettable, but his acknowledgment that Africans believe in one Supreme Being (Great Spirit) before the arrival of Christianity and so did not owe it to the missionaries is a great step forward at this time in the encounter between African Traditional religion and Christianity.”

Obviously, a religion may not be termed primitive when it has not been adequately studied. The Igbo people practiced their religion in a unique way before the early missionaries came. Dialogue would have been a preferable approach than describing African religion as “primitive.” This view is succinctly expressed by Shorter, who argues that “[t]he first alternative would certainly lead to the possibility of a dialogue in verbal terms, using the communications conventions of literate cultures.” As an important contribution to this issue, Aguwa strongly affirms. “Religion was important in the African indigenous society. Its force permeated every aspect of life and institutions. Individuals became religious merely by being born into such religious milieu. Religious ideas are evident in the native myths, folklores, traditions, beliefs, institutions and relationships in such ways that no sharp division could be made between the sacred and the secular.”

The Igbo therefore, operated with valuable norms and cultural dignity before the advent of the early European missionaries. They had their religion and culture, and these were much valued by the Igbo indigenes. Richard Pruitt notes, “Colonial intrusion into Igboland brought many changes in the religious traditions of the people. Igbo resolve to adapt to new governmental structures, Western education, and the Christian missionaries’ message led many to believe that

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the Igbo lacked deeply rooted cultural and religious ideas.” It is worthwhile to demonstrate briefly that Igbo had existed with every cultural and religious nuance before the advent of Christianity in their midst. For this reason, Udeani maintains that “[t]he aim of this short review…. of the Igbos has been among other things…. to demonstrate that Igbo traditional religion is as old as the Igbo society and underwent the same transformations as that of the traditional society. This is also a positive indication for Christian faith taking deep root in Igbo cultural world.”

That the Igbo welcomed cultural change or transformation even before the early missionaries came does not mean they were not religious. Hence, one needs to see that, as a people, they had ways of communicating with the gods and the ancestors. For this reason, it was an oversight for the early European missionaries to presume that Africans or Igbo people had no knowledge of God before their arrival. “Research into the concept of God in ATRs by African Christian theologians is built upon the bedrock of the conviction that European and North American missionaries did not bring God to the Africans.” Uchendu clarifies this idea as follows: “The Igbo have a culture; they have also a history, an unwritten history which is the task of the cultural historian to piece together.”

Hence, the Church in Igboland needs to dialogue with the practitioners of Igbo Traditional Religion so that the Gospel message might fully be incarnated into Igbo culture. This might not mean the return of the Irish missionaries but, rather, a total reshaping and reorganization of the local Church’s liturgical practices to decipher what the early missionaries failed to put in place due to lack of dialogue. Uzukwu brands this effort as “looking at everything twice.” This clarion

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161 Pruitt, *Contemplating the Inculturation*, 432.
162 Udeani, *Inculturation as Dialogue*, 16.
164 Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast*, 2.
call to look at the Church in Igboland ‘twice’ matters a great deal to the average Igbo person who wishes to worship in a revitalized Igbo Church. The negative attitude of the early European missionaries towards Igbo Traditional Religion created a barrier that hindered proper inculturation.

1.3.2 Igbo Responses to the Theology and Praxis of Inculturation

Although, the Igbo as a docile people are ready to embrace new changes and new innovations in culture and religion, their response to the theology and praxis of inculturation has followed a rather slow process. One of the reasons for the slow process was that the church in Igboland during the time of the missionaries was helped through *Fides Donum* and so was presumed to be relatively young.\(^{166}\) During those early days also it relied on the adult churches in Europe for economic support. Another reason for the slow pace of inculturation in the Church in Igboland is the fear that to embrace Christianity and retain Igbo cultural values and be in full communion with the universal Church might appear syncretic.\(^{167}\) From the point of view of its origins, Christianity had been a syncretic religion, why should the case be different in Igboland? This explains why Shorter appraises the interest Pope John Paul II had in inculturation, but notes that “The idea of inculturation has received its fullest theoretical expression in his addresses and writings, while the need for its implementation in practice has never been so acutely felt by theologians and church-men in the Third World.”\(^ {168}\) Another reason for the slow pace stems from the fear that the foreign missionary ideals, which still abound in the Igbo church, would seem

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\(^{166}\) Cf. Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 186. Here Shorter refers to the encyclical letter, *Fidei Donum* of Pius XII published in 1957 wherein the pope made appeals to supply missionaries to Africa which brought about the concept of “young churches.” This concept has been historically prolonged because as local churches financed from Europe, they are unable to manage their own affairs without the approval of the adult churches.


\(^{168}\) Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 179.
quickly forgotten. This was why, to engrave their presence, the European missionaries made sure that all the parish Churches they established in Igboland bear the names of European Saints to date. In this regard, Dom Nwachukwu argues,

Christian churches with Western cultural models were planted in Igboland, and Christian practices with Western cultural biases were imposed on the Igbo. Igbo culture, customs, traditions, and institutions were treated as inferior to their Western counterparts by most missionaries. In some cases, missionaries arbitrarily replaced Igbo customs, traditions, and institutions with Western ones. As a result, Christian converts were subjected to the agony of going through the very difficult process of becoming Western in Igbo society, in the name of religion. 169

Most of the attempted ways of inculturation in Igbo Church today retain European methods of worship and style of praying. 170 If any inculturation at all has occurred, it revolves around literal interpretation and transcription of the Latin language into Igbo language. This falls in line with the observation made by Gerald Arbuckle that “[t]he Church, in the eyes of many missionaries and ecclesiastical authorities, was so integrated into European culture that no distinction could be made between them. Conversion meant accepting the European cultural expression of the faith.” 171 Hence, “Western civilization was equated to Christianity. Thus, Christianity was slow in achieving avowed aims and objectives in Igboland.” 172 Such a perspective portrays the Church in Igboland as lacking in initiative as well as deprived of a strong foundation in Igbo culture. If the Church in a particular place is not contextualized, inculturation is difficult.

169 Dom Nwachukwu and Peter Nlemadim. Authentic African Christianity: An Inculturation Model for the Igbo in African University Studies. Book 210, Series VII. (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 2. Qtd. in Pruitt, “Contemplating the Inculturation of,” 432. Some examples of customs replaced with Western ones include, but not limited to the use of European names for baptism, the use of foreign-made material for clerical vestments, the importation of mass wine from Italy and Spain for use at mass in Igboland while palm wine produced in Igboland is discarded.
170 In Igbo Traditional Religion, the worshippers stoop while praying to the gods and the prayer is often spontaneous, but in Christianity people kneel or stand up while praying and often the prayers are memorized and recited from written models.
Okwu further stated the reason for the lack of strong Igbo cultural backing in the Church in Igboland from the start. “To give up traditional beliefs and practices for an alien religion whose basic principles had no practical meaning to the people was to surrender the adult’s free choice of action and behavior within the social norms of conduct to the dictates of alien young missionaries with their regimented codes of behavior and imported theoretical philosophies.”\textsuperscript{173} Pruitt notes that “the Igbo seemed to accept the changes on a surface level while retaining their own religion, heritage, and values.”\textsuperscript{174} If this is the case, the retained values could now become elements of interreligious dialogue between the Church and Igbo Traditional Religion. For this reason, Arinze argues that “[i]nculturation has to be based on good scientific study of cultural and religious elements and not on \textit{a priori} acceptance or rejection of not-well-studied and not-properly-understood practices.”\textsuperscript{175} This study becomes effective through dialogue with the practitioners.

Hence, there is an urgent need for serious study of Igbo religious worship through dialogue to reshape the predominance of Western culture today in the Igbo Church. The Church in Igboland is of age and should avoid depending much on help from outside. This is also in line with Uzukwu’s observation that “[t]he dependency syndrome and the search for external models are as much of a problem for the African state as for the church in Africa. This is why in this study I opt for a theology that arises from the resources of the living Christian community. The birth of the Christian community is the result of the encounter in history between traditional African societies and the Christian message.”\textsuperscript{176} The Church in Igboland has all it takes to be an inculturated church.

This is why in another place, Uzukwu, while appraising the emergence of creative Christian liturgies in Africa, affirms that “Christian liturgy insofar as it is ritual-gesture, insofar as it is

\textsuperscript{173} Okwu, “The Weak Foundations,” 34.
\textsuperscript{174} Pruitt, “Contemplating the Inculturation,” 432.
\textsuperscript{175} Arinze, “Christianity meets Igbo Traditional Religion,” 13.
\textsuperscript{176} Uzukwu, \textit{A Listening Church}, 9.
symbol, creating an environment for the encounter between God/Christ and the assembly, must be particular. This principle of particularity is evident in the diversity of Churches the apostles left behind. It was acknowledged from Irenaeus of Lyon to Gregory the Great.”

Thus, certain important ritual-gestures of Igbo religious origin should be encouraged through dialogue with practitioners of Igbo religion to facilitate proper inculturation of the Gospel message in Igboland.

Certain ritual-gestures of Igbo religious practice could be regarded as the inherited elements of Igbo Traditional Religion that constitute Igbo response to the theology and praxis of inculturation in the Church in Igboland today. They include, but are not limited to, Igbo veneration of the ancestors; Igbo use of the ritual symbol - Ofo; Igbo sense of moral probity – Ogu; the Igbo sense of the sacred as represented by the symbolism of Omu Nkwu; Igbo respect for sacred spaces/places such as Mbari houses and shrines; Igbo initiation process and rites of passage – the naming ceremony; their sense of justice and peace-making —Igba Ndu/Ala di Nma; Igbo hospitality; the extended family system; and respect for human life, among others. Chibuko suggests that “Igba ndu the traditional rite of covenanting is yet another important instance in the Igbo traditional religion which can very well enrich the Christian celebrations.”

In his address to the Synod Fathers in - Ecclesia in Africa, Pope John Paul II says:

I put before you today a challenge – a challenge to reject a way of living which does not correspond to the best of your traditions, and your Christian faith. Many people in Africa look beyond Africa for the so-called ‘freedom of the modern way of life’. Today I urge you to look inside yourselves. Look to the riches of your own traditions, look to the faith which we are celebrating in this assembly. Here you will find genuine freedom – here you will find Christ who will lead you to the truth.

178 Patrick Chukwudezie Chibuko. Igbo Rite of Marriage, 16.
179 John Paul II. Post-Synodal Exhortation - Ecclesia in Africa., no. 48.
This address visualizes the truth inherent in African culture as reiterated by the Pope. Most Africans cling onto things imported from outside the continent to feel a sense of belonging and to measure up with the Church in the Western world. Africans have elements of truth within their culture. Hence, Igbo Christians need diligence, hard work and dialogue with the custodians of some of these essential elements of Igbo traditional religious practice in order to present them for inculturation. Those outside of Africa are not expected to tell Africans what elements they should present for inculturation. It is the traditional Africans themselves who know the values of these elements and through dialogue, they open up to teach, instruct and impart the needed knowledge.

Schineller outlines some of these elements as familial solidarity, sense of ritual and festivity, sense of the sacred, primacy of the personal, hospitality, and life.\(^{180}\) Going further, Schineller argues that the process of full inculturation of these elements without Western influence is yet to be realized in depth in the church in Nigeria. “In order words, we must sometimes free the present form of Catholicism from its particular European analogue, in order to encourage and foster a new creative inculturation with African values and thought patterns.”\(^{181}\) In this regard, the vibrant Igbo musical life and the cultural display of body movement\(^{182}\) during the ceremonial parts of Igbo festivities need to be revitalized. The Igbo people also speak through body gestures, symbols, idioms, proverbs, and story-telling\(^{183}\) which epitomize the ways the ancestors passed

\(^{180}\)Cf. Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 76–80. Here, Schineller mentions that self-isolation is not practiced among the Igbo, rather, members of the family try to reunite with their siblings on an extended level. Every family member is supported by the family no matter the distance. The Igbo sense of ritual and festivity is dense, and they celebrate with joy. The sacred and the secular are not separated. Business partners exchange warm greetings with each other in the sense of personal primacy. Igbo hospitality is practiced through sharing of food in common, offering of kola nut to the visitor as a symbol of welcome, and helping the needy. There is love and respect for life.\(^{181}\) Ibid., 83–84.

\(^{182}\) Cf. Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language*, 1. The author affirms here that “The pattern of this movement depends on place, time and space.”

\(^{183}\) Cf. Ibid., The author describes the Africa world as one full of activities. “Africans take note of the pattern of motion which characterizes some animals. They employ these observations to instruct, educate, or entertain. Proverbs, pithy sayings, legends, and myths are full of such observable patterns among animals…”
relevant information from one community to another. These Igbo cultural values should not be suppressed, rather, they ought to be utilized for proper dialogue between the Church and Igbo traditional religious practitioners for proper inculturation.

Attempting to bypass these existing Igbo cultural and religious gestures without studying them through dialogue with the traditional religious worshippers could be strange. Okwu argues along this same line of thought: “It is thus not surprising that the Igbo resented the young missionaries and their agents who ignorantly sought to reform the society by attempting to overthrow the basic structures and principles on which its survival and social order depended.”

Without dialogue, the Igbo response to inculturation remains only on the peripherals. The Church in Igboland is of age and needs to take the initiative as a fully African/Igbo inculturated church. Here lies the major point which will act as a guide in reviewing the methods the European missionaries used while evangelizing Igboland in the recent past.

1.3.3 A Review of the Methods of Western Missionaries in the Church in Igboland

The early Western missionaries in Igboland used certain methods of evangelization that could be considered ineffective in some respects and effective in others. One side of the coin which was charitable and noble was the process of buying and converting slaves. Although it was a noble enterprise to free the slaves, but turning them into cheap manual workers for the missionaries without any stipulated compensating structure gave the process of their freedom a questionable remark? It should be recalled that the attention of the then Pope – Leo XIII, was drawn “to the on-going traffic in human lives in Africa.” For this reason, the Pope issued an encyclical letter – In Plurimis of May 5, 1888, asking anti-slavery societies in France and all over the world to

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185 Celestine A. Obi. ed., A Hundred Years of the Catholic, 34.
financially support redeeming of the slaves. When some of the slaves were freed, they were not allowed to rejoin their natural families. Most of them lived with the missionaries while some lived in the Christian villages build for that purpose. Majority of the freed slaves and other converts previously belonged to the lower strata of the Igbo society. Some were also considered to have committed abominable crimes within their rural Igbo communities. For this reason, most of them were banished or were meant to be used for ritual sacrifices or sold into slavery to die far away from their communities.

Due to the above reasons, the method of buying slaves, though noble, was not welcomed by the then Igbo upper -class, because, the Igbo society was arranged in a strata or semi-caste system. The so-called superior class would reject whatever comes from the lower or inferior class. The reason for rejecting whatever comes from the inferior class was the fact that some of them were fugitives banished from their villages for abominable crimes they earlier committed. This made it impossible for them to return to their original villages after gaining their freedom. Thus, the freed inferior class were kept in Christian villages established by the missionaries to isolate them from their ancestral homes for fear of being sacrificed. The Christian villages became very expensive to maintain financially. Obi reports that “[t]he apostolate of redemption of the slaves destined for human sacrifice or to be sold to far distant lands equally suffered due to lack of funds. The missionaries could only buy one quarter of the slaves brought to their mission.”

Although the freed slaves became the foundation members of the Church in Igboland today, inculturation could not be properly implemented because most of the converts were out of

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186 Cf. Ibid.
187 Cf. Emefie Ikenga – Metuh., and Christopher I. Ejizu. *Hundred Years of Catholicism*, 17-18. The authors stated thus: “Besides slaves, there were other categories of people redeemed and Christianized by the missionaries. These were mainly outcasts of the Igbo society. The Igbo like many other tribes of Eastern Nigeria had a number of sacred prohibitions (taboos), believed to be the decrees of ‘Ala’ the earth-Mother, goddess of the earth. Infringements of the decrees result in the pollution of the earth and consequently a threat to the fertility of the land and agriculture…”
touch with the tradition of their original villages or clans. “This missionary method which appeared so promising at this early stage was soon to become irksome. Its weakness as a hinderance rather than a help for the development of missionary work soon became evident. And, at the time of Fr. Lejeune, it was abandoned.”

Another ineffective method was the missionaries’ negative attitude to Igbo culture. Although the French-speaking missionaries were closer to the local people, the Irish group were not. “These conflicting approaches of the Irish and French missionaries to the ministry inevitably found expression in their attitudes towards the all-important language issue. While the former emphasized English – the language of the school- the latter busied themselves with the study of the vernacular – the language of catechism. It was no accident, therefore, that the few works in the vernacular by the Catholics were produced by the French missionaries.”

Casmir Eke et al, writing about the history of the Spiritan Province in Nigeria also admitted that “[t]he pioneer Spiritans to Nigeria have been criticized not only for its limited use of the vernacular but for poor and negative attitudes to traditional religion and indigenous culture.” It was said that some of the missionaries operated along the line of the colonialists and neglected the earlier plea by Libermann to show good example to the indigenes. “Quite often they shared the white colonialist’s prejudices. They showed a certain disdain for the ‘natives’ and displayed airs of superiority. Their behavior showed how difficult it is, even for people of unquestionably high motivation, to escape the fetters of firmly established views that are dominant in their era and environment.”

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189 Emefie Ikenga – Metuh., and Christopher I. Ejizu. *Hundred Years of Catholicism.*, 17.
192 Ibid., 73.
Another method that proved difficult was the use of foreign language in preaching and foreign names for baptism instead of communicating in the local Igbo vernacular. However, the positive and effective aspect began with the conversion of the upper class and the method of school building to encourage learning. Yet, difficulties emerged that undermined the efforts toward effective inculturation. To find solution to some of these difficulties, we need to discuss them critically, because, each has its own peculiar image to project and protect.

1.3.4 Language Difficulties and Using Foreign Names for Baptism

Without a doubt, language is the conveyor of culture and patterns of communication. Igbo language during the Shanahan era\textsuperscript{193} was not easy for the missionaries to use for effective evangelization of Igboland. Moreover, the Igbo hinterland could not be easily penetrated by the Irish missionaries who spoke only English without an effort to pronounce a word of the Igbo language. This is contrary to the time of Frs Lejeune and Ganot when effort to learn Igbo language was intensified.\textsuperscript{194} The critical question to be asked under this situation is, how then did the Irish missionaries communicate with the local Igbo people? According to Ebelebe, “generally speaking, the Irish Spiritans never mastered the Igbo language. They interacted with the people and did their preaching mostly through interpreters.”\textsuperscript{195} At certain times, these interpreters were somewhat devious, in that what they interpreted to the people reflected their own (the interpreters’) selfish interests. Sometimes they told the local people what the missionaries never intended to say.

\textsuperscript{193} Cf. Ibid., 95-96. The authors report that when the Propaganda Fide in Rome approved the erection of the prefecture of the Lower Niger on July 25, 1889, it instructed “that missionaries of English nationality should exercise the sacred ministry there.” Hence, the Lower Niger mission, mainly run by French speaking Spiritans was gradually taken over “by Irish missionaries which started with the appointment of Fr Joseph Shanahan in 1902.”
\textsuperscript{194} Cf. Ibid., 99. It should be recalled that one of the major pastoral projects of Lejeune was “the composition of a readable Catholic catechism in Igbo language. Earlier, Fr Ganot had published his \textit{Grammaire Ibo} and his \textit{English-Ibo-French} Dictionary in 1900 and 1904 respectively. He also published his \textit{Katekismi Ibo} in 1901.”
\textsuperscript{195} Ebelebe, \textit{Africa and the New Face of Mission}, 100.
Isichei argues that “the ideas of the missionaries were communicated in Igbo— a foreign language to them— or translated by Igbo interpreters— or expounded by Igbo catechists with an imperfect knowledge of English. The problem of communication is an important facet of Igbo intellectual history, and one which is well documented.”

It is doubtful if the interpreters really got the true message across. Uzukwu noted that “knowledge of the local language is key to understanding the minds and riches of any indigenous culture. The absence of a systematic vernacular education project in Catholic schools, as the Protestants had, weakened the attempts of the Catholic missionaries in the Niger mission to develop a local church properly equipped to account for its faith (1 Peter 3:15).”

As the missionaries began getting converts who were mainly ex-slaves, they baptized them with European names that the Igbo found extremely difficult to pronounce. Such names as Floyd, Cynthia, Ryle, Ryan, and Daryl began dramatically to replace Igbo good and meaningful names given according to the circumstance or market day a child was born, like “Nweke, (Eke-child), Nworie (Orie-child), Nwankwo (Nkwo-child), Nwafor (Afor-child).” In this process, the missionaries changed the Igbo way of life and failed to incarnate the Gospel message properly into Igbo soil. Okwu argues that “the converts were to demonstrate the change in their way of life by rejecting their culture and behaving differently in their society… they were to reject their ancestors and accept European heroes and saints as their patrons…”

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197 Casmir I. Eke et al., In The Footsteps of Our Founders, 172. Qtd. from a photocopied copy of Elochukwu E. Uzukwu’s lecture delivered during the 1999 CIWA Theological Week, titled “Shanahan and Traditional Igbo Life.” (CIWA Port Harcourt, Nigeria, 1999).
198 Udeani, Inculturation as Dialogue, 29.
Ghost missionaries to Igboland failed to dialogue with indigenous Igbo culture. “I have argued that the Irish Spiritans paid little attention to inculturation in Igboland.”

What happened next?

1.3.5. Building Christian Villages, Buying Slaves, Converting the Upper Class

Evangelization in Igboland was not an easy task for the missionaries. It was very difficult to penetrate the hinterland from Onitsha where the Holy Ghost Missionaries established their base. As at the time in question, slave trade was still operative, and the missionaries, wishing to free them, bought some from the agents and converted them to Christianity. Okwu asserts that “[t]he missionaries’ first encounter with the Igbo through the slaves was almost unavoidable, for the freeborn were apathetic to the missionaries and uninterested in their message, whereas the social outcasts and slaves were enthusiastic towards the new religion that preached human equality.” As the number of freed slaves began to increase, the missionaries built “Christian villages” to settle the new converts. Clarke argues that “[t]he principal method employed by the Holy Ghost Roman Catholic Missionary Society in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in their mission stations in Africa was that of the Christian Village. This method had several theoretical and practical recommendations.” On the positive side, the Christian village provided shelter to the ex-slaves.

The Christian Village was also known as the “place of liberty.” However, the liberty was questionable because the so-called freed slaves were used for cheap labor and other odd jobs by

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201 Cf. Obi, *A Hundred Years*, 34–35. Here Obi narrates about what was called “The Apostolate of Redeeming the Slaves.” Money for this purpose was supplied by such organizations as the Propagation of the Faith and others as at that time. The freed slaves were harbored in the mission houses, but as their number increased, the idea of building Christian villages to keep them came up. Augustine Okwu also mentions other groups of people that joined the freed slaves in the Christian villages such as “the social outcasts,” misfits, abandoned twins, and “the depraved of Igboland.” The Igbo name for the Christian village is *ogige*. See Okwu, “The Weak Foundations,” 33.
the missionaries, thereby making them seem guilty of what they condemned. In addition, the
Christian village alienated the converts from their natural families and culture because they were
not allowed to mix up with the local populace. Dulles observes that “it is a mistake to uproot
converts from the culture they have inherited. By retaining their heritage they can better
appropriate the gospel; they can function more effectively in their ethnic countries and contribute
more to the Church they are joining.”

It was for this reason of being uprooted from their native cultures that those who eventually
went back to their villages relapsed into the traditional mode of worship. This method became
difficult to maintain because of lack of funds and the accusation that it encouraged the slave trade
instead of stopping it. Clarke reports that “there was, however, one major problem involved in
evangelizing through the Christian village method and that was the problem of finance.” Fr
Lejeune also attributed the poor financing of the prefecture of the Lower Niger to the maintenance
of large number of slaves who depended on the charity of the mission. “As an economic recovery
package, Lejeune insisted that the limited financial resources of the mission should no longer be
concentrated on redeeming slaves and sponsoring ‘Christian villages’ like the one at Aguleri.
Rather he recommended to his Superior General, projects like hospitals, orphanages, boarding
schools and overseas campaign for funds.” By this measure,

Fr Lejeune’s administration in the prefecture was quite revolutionary. One of his
first major steps in this revolution was a radical departure from the charity-oriented
approach to evangelization. He argued that a method of evangelization that laid
undue emphasis on a section and for that matter the lower caliber of the populace
and not mindful of the needs of the entire community was fraught with dangerous
consequences. He reasoned that the free-born and the upper class of this society
would look with spite on an institution (a Church) which gave refuge to ‘their
outcasts, their criminals, and the accursed of their gods.’

204 Avery Dulles. *The New World of Faith*, 114.
207 Ibid., 159.
Moreover, “the Igbo free-born” did not like to participate in what slaves had begun. For this reason, Obi argues that “the Holy Ghost missionary venture owed its success not so much to the Christian villages which were later abandoned, but to the programme for the transformation of the society.” In the Christian villages, the missionaries used catechists who were not well educated to teach the converts. The emphasis was on the Sacraments more than on the Bible, unlike the Protestants, who taught the Bible.

At this point, it was observed that to start by converting the “upper class” would have been a better method for the future of the Church in Igboland. This meant starting the process of conversion from top to bottom instead of from the bottom up. The idea was to start from the kings or chiefs ruling the Igbo towns and villages before getting to the lower strata or “the rejects” of the Igbo society. According to Obi, this dream of the missionaries came true when King Idigo of Aguleri was converted. Subsequently, this was followed by the conversions of the influential people in Igboland. This also had its own problem with regard to the kings who were polygamous.

1.4 The Problem of Polygamy in the Igbo Church

The conversion of the upper classes raised multiple and complex problems in the Igbo Church. Most of the converts by then were titled men and traditional Igbo religionists who had already married many wives before the advent of Christianity. Polygamous marriage was not a familiar system to the missionaries, who came mainly from Europe where such marriages are not allowed. Jordan quotes Bishop Shanahan as saying that “Ibo mentality was very complex on the question of women, so that a solution well adapted to European needs was not adequate for

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208 Obi, *A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church*, 36.
209 Ibid., 43.
Mbiti gives different meanings of polygamous marriage. “Technically the term ‘polygamy’ should mean what its Greek components imply, and that is, marrying ‘many’ (wives, husbands or times). But in popular usage it is applied to mean the state of marriage in which there is one husband and two or more wives. This should be referred to as ‘polygyny’; and where one wife has two or more husbands this is ‘polyandry.’” This clarification notwithstanding, the major concern here is, what must have been the reasons for polygamy in Igboland? It should be noted that polygamy exists in Biblical times. In the Old Testament, instances of polygamy abound. In Exodus we read about the marital law between a slave girl and her master. “If he destines her for his son, he shall treat her like a daughter. If he takes another wife, he shall not with-hold her food, her clothing, or her conjugal rights. If he does not grant her these three things, she shall be given her freedom absolutely, without cost to her” (Ex 21:9-11). In 2Samuel also we read about King David having many concubines and wives in Jerusalem and more sons and daughters were born to him there (2Sam 5:13). In 1Chronicles we read about the many sons born to David by different women in Hebron (1Ch 3:1-9). In 2 Chronicles 11:21, we read that Rehoboam had eighteen wives and sixty concubines and he fathered twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters (2Ch 11:21). It is reported in the book of the Kings that Solomon had seven hundred wives of princely rank and three hundred concubines (1Kg 11:3). In the New Testament, Jesus did not approve of polygamy. He maintained that “…whoever divorces his wife (unless the marriage is unlawful) and marries another commits adultery” (Mat. 19: 9ff). Polygamy in the New Testament became outdated and replaced with covenant monogamy as God’s cherished system of marital union preached by Christ.

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It should also be noted that most African/Igbo men marry more than one wife for different reasons. “The Ibo regarded marriage as the core of his whole social structure, and nothing concerned with it was taken lightly.” Agbasiere notes that “[t]he Igbo marriage system is based on extensive rules of exogamy, and residence primarily patrilocal, although there is a growing tendency among the Igbo elite to practice neo-locality. In addition, Igbo marriage is potentially polygamous, although in practice the majority of marriages are monogamous.” Some Igbo males marry more than one in the quest for a male child in order to keep the family ancestral lineage open and running. Since the girl child will be married to an outsider, the male is sort for seriously to keep the family ancestral lineage always functional. This is the desire of every Igbo man.

Among the Igbo, the male child is set to be the custodian of the father’s property and lineage. While the female children are equally important, they would get married and join another family, and the father’s own family would not continue if no male child is born to him. For this reason, the man who got only females through one wife would want to get a male child if possible, by marrying a new wife. In addition, some marry more than one wife owing to the vastness of one’s farmland. In some parts of Igboland, during the farming season, the men clear the farmland while the women and children do the planting, and such farming system requires many hands. In the view of Laurenti Magesa, “since one’s power and influence in the clan and lineage and in society in general depends to some significant degree on the size of one’s family and how well one manages it, a man will be drawn into acquiring many wives because of the potential to have a greater number of children.”

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This is not to say that the man is influenced by concupiscence. “Polygamous unions for reasons of concupiscence on the part of African males are not sanctioned by African Religion. Concupiscence does not guarantee the permanence and stability that African polygamous unions demand and assure.”215 Sometimes, there is an agreement between the man and his first wife if there is need to marry a second wife. Magesa argues that “a wife may complain that she is tired of doing all the work at the home and needs a helper. She may continue entreating her husband and may even suggest or provide a girl of her choice for him to marry. It is difficult for the husband to resist these pressures, and he most often ends up accepting his wife’s wishes.”216 The reason is that “Within the domestic sphere, the Igbo woman reigns supreme. Within a polygamous household, each woman still owns her own house, where she lives with her children until they are grown up. Upon her devolves the burden of family sustenance and health care of the matri-focal group. Early socialization of the children is principally in her hands.”217

There are some men, also, who marry more than one wife through widow inheritance—that is, if one’s brother dies, the surviving brother can marry the wife. Rems Umeasiegbu alludes to this custom in explaining what happens to a wife mourning her dead husband in Igboland. “At the end of the mourning period she has to decide whether to re-marry or not.... In this case, if she insists on getting a new husband, one of her late husband’s brothers takes her as one of his wives. Generally, she is free to remain a widow and invite men of her choice to keep her company”218

According to Ifi Amadiume, during a seminar on widowhood in 1986, “… there were extensive discussions of how widows are accused of the death of their husbands and victimized, tortured and

215 Ibid., 137.
216 Ibid., 38-39.
generally regarded as unacceptable in society. They are made to sit on ashes, dress in sacks, go without food or a bath, and forced to eat from broken plates.” In view of this, Magesa appraises polygamous marriage by affirming that “[t]his structure of marriage … provides more protection for widows, because it makes sure that women remain within the lineage after the death of their husband and that they are materially provided for.” The idea behind this is that African marriage embraces not only two persons but also the entire families of the couples and their village communities as a whole.

In the view of Chibuko, “Marriage in African culture is rather a family affair than one to one relationship.” In some parts of Igboland, the choice of a marriage partner is not only made by the two persons involved. “… parents enjoy the right to choose partners for their children even before they are born. This could be motivated by some reasons: either to cement family to family relationship, or to acquire some enviable traits which are found in a particular family, or even to be associated with the fame of a particular family. A choice of this nature is usually irrevocable when the child is born and simply grows up with this decision and lives with it.” Sometimes other relatives or friends may make such choices and at recent times the two partners can take the decision themselves through association and acquaintance from childhood. However, the choice by parents may lead to polygamy in the sense that the partner chosen for their female child may have married before. This practice has been overtaken by time as Igbo society becomes more enlightened. Yet, some remote villages in some parts of Igboland still adhere to this practice.


220 Magesa, African Religion, 137.

221 Patrick Chukwudezie Chibuko. Igbo Christian Rite of Marriage, 46.

222 Ibid.
Uchendu also asserts that “Igbo marriage is an alliance between two families rather than a contract between two individuals. As far as the widow is concerned, death does not terminate the alliance. Widow inheritance is therefore a recognized and still prevalent institution. In this case a half siblingship is created for the children of the widow.” Magesa makes it clear that “for African Religion, marriage involves not only interpersonal relations but also in the final analysis inter-community relations. In marriage, the communities involved share their very existence; in reality they become one people, one ‘thing,’ as Africans themselves would put it.” The early church in Igboland had to cope with this problem of polygamy, which slowed down the process of conversion and affected the traditional Igbo setup and process of inculturation adversely. Ekechi cites an example with Owerri area of Igboland. “Early attempts at converting the masses in Owerri proved painfully difficult and disappointing… Certainly, missionary criticism of ‘pagan’ customs, particularly the condemnation of polygamy, militated against conversions.”

The early missionaries failed to open dialogue with Igbo traditional religionists to learn much about this cultural polygamous system in Igboland. Rather, they condemned it without seriously studying it in-depth to understand its relevance among the Igbo. “To the men as well as to the women, a polygamous household was an index of social well-being. In the Igbo scheme of things, to be rich is to have many wives and many children, and only a poor man was expected to marry only one wife. Women also prided themselves on being the wives of polygamists, for to be the only wife was an indication that her husband was poor.” In this regard, Mbiti affirms that “Polygamy also raises the social status of the family concerned. It is instilled in the minds of African peoples that a big family earns its head great respect in the eyes of the community. Often

223 Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast*, 50.
226 Ibid, 63.
it is the rich families that are made up of polygamous marriages.” All this needed a serious study for revealing what is positive in it and to find a way of fine tuning it to facilitate inculturation in the Church in Igboland today. There is a need for interreligious dialogue in cases such as this to know what gave rise to its practice. Inculturation should play a part in settling some Igbo couples intending to embrace Christianity but who might have been facing polygamous problems. Though European culture forbids polygamy, Igbo culture might have a different view of it, depending on the circumstance leading to such practice. This study recommends serious study, thorough examination and adequate background inquiry on this Igbo traditional system of marriage that was embraced by the ruling class of the Igbo cultural society in the past, and in some cases today.

1.4.1 The Use of School as a Viable Method of Evangelization in Igboland

The method of evangelization that recorded huge success in Igboland was the building of schools. This method, which started with rudimentary catechetical instruction to some ex-slaves, was welcomed by Igbo people and approved by Fr Lejeune. Nicholas Omenka supports this view:

The era of Father Lutz and his successors, which was superseded in 1900 by the prefectship of Father Lejeune, was largely a period of missionary experiments in which the slave method, the Christian village and the apostolate of the school were collectively employed with varying degrees of emphasis. As has been seen, Lejeune rejected the first two methods of evangelization on economic and ideological grounds. This perforce led to a concentration of attention on the school method of evangelization.228

Among the Igbo, education and learning are very important. All families love to see their children progress and advance in learning. Education is a value cherished and desired by the Igbo, and they are ready to pay whatever it costs to acquire it. The early missionaries to Igboland

appealed to this keen desire of the Igbo people and began teaching catechism to some of the ex-slaves. Clarke notes that both education and the Church in Eastern Nigeria were started with slaves.229

In Clarke’s assessment, the mission school started around 1893, but Omenka argues that missionary education started earlier in 1886 in the form of catechism classes given in the foreign language of the white man.230 Even though educating native Igbo children in a foreign language fell short of the demands of inculturation, Omenka commends the missionary’s effort as follows: “The educational experiments of the first years of the Catholic Mission in Onitsha were remarkable from the point of view of the importance attached to them by both the Catholic missionaries and the leaders of Onitsha.”231 Obi also commends the early missionary endeavors of Father Joseph Lutz concerning his love for the education of Igbo women and children; “He gave special status and recognition to womanhood in Eastern Nigeria by teaching the beauty of virginity and inviting the sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny to take up the education of girls and young women – the future mothers and pillars of the nascent Catholic Church.”232 The success recorded in the school method of evangelization in Igboland motivated the missionaries into entering the interior parts of Igboland to establish outstations.

Fr. Lejeune is credited as having been the master mind of this successful method of evangelization. “Among other things, he proposed the establishment of an outstation at Onitsha Town to be run by a catechist whose duty would include school activities.”233 Father Lejeune’s school method deeply impressed the people to the extent that “he promulgated a law which

232 Obi, A Hundred Years of the Catholic Church, 30.
enjoined all parents and guardians to send their children to school.”

It is said that “by May 1901 the school was just the one other means of evangelization. By 1902 it had become for Lejeune, the ‘surest means’ and the only method of evangelization capable of placing Christianity on firm grounds in Africa. Through education, he argued, the indigenes would be gradually persuaded to distance themselves from the unworthy aspects of pagan heritage.” Concerning this success with the use of the school method, Clarke remarks, “[t]he method of evangelization by means of the school system was Father Lejeune’s major contribution to Roman Catholic enterprise in Eastern Nigeria.”

Yet, after all is said and done, though the school method was successful under Lejeune and later under Shanahan, Omenka points out the weakness of not carrying the people along in their local culture and vernacular. Hence, according to Omenka, Shanahan in particular was very reluctant to promote Igbo vernacular which should have led to proper inculturation.

From the missionary point of view, Shanahan’s antipathy towards the vernacular was an attitude with a sardonic twist. He was the prefect who fought hardest to win approval for the apostolate of the school in Eastern Nigeria. But by moving squarely against the vernacular, he unfortunately missed the most important issue in any balanced education. While the school method of evangelization he propagated made some use of the vernacular, it was not prepared to go all out to discover and promote its inherent cultural values.

Thus, the missionaries used people who were not familiar with the rubrics of education and teaching to propagate the school method. Metuh and Ejizu recounts that:

The expansion of the staff and Catholic schools was rather slow. Fr. Lecuyer, who joined the staff in 1888, took over the management of the school. When he left the mission in 1889, Fr Lutz had to hire Mr. Henry Venn, a converted CMS teacher, who took charge of the school, until Br. D. Doran arrived in 1893. The mission

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234 Ibid., 55.
235 Casmir I. Eke et al., In The Footsteps of Our Founders., 159-160
showed lack of foresight in the staff development programme. The sole sources of recruitment was the white missionaries, or reconverted Protestant teachers and catechists.\textsuperscript{238}

However, in collaboration with Father Aimé Ganot who had earlier published \textit{Grammaire Ibo} the missionaries produced \textit{Katekismi Ibo} and other books in the Igbo vernacular.\textsuperscript{239} A few lay people were employed who were not well equipped to teach or make accurate interpretations from English to Igbo, which is why inculturation was not adequately implemented at the foundational stage of Christianity in Igboland. Some logical conclusions can now be drawn, based on the foregoing, which reveals no doubt that the Church in Igboland needs reshaping through the collective efforts of the local clergy and laity as well.

1.5. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Igbo culture was grossly neglected by the early European missionaries to Igboland. That interreligious dialogue with, and the inculturation of most African/Igbo cherished cultural values were not adequately carried out during the missionary era. That the issue at stake now is not about foreignness, rather, it is about how to move forward towards making the Church in Igboland an inculturated Church. To achieve this, the myth of origin, cosmology and religious belief of ancient Igboland have been outlined. For proper understanding, culture is further explained and the various definitions of inculturation are given. Some of the terms associated with culture and inculturation are also analyzed. Granted that some of these terms could not theologically match the aspirations of culture and inculturation, the theological models of incarnation and contextualization are considered appropriate in this research. Contextualization brings the issues involved closer to the daily life experiences of the people in their concrete local

\textsuperscript{238} Emefie Ikenga – Metuh., and Christopher I. Ejizu. \textit{Hundred Years of Catholicism.}, 21.
ambience. On the other hand, incarnation and inculturation are intertwined to form the acceptable option as opposed to adaptation which was rejected as obsolete by the bishops of African and Madagascar in the synod of 1974. Although Igbo Traditional Religion was not specifically mentioned among the world’s major religions, it shares in the categorization of religions treated in the Second Vatican Council’s document *Nostra Aetate*. As such, Igbo Traditional Religion has to be reaffirmed and acknowledged with due respect. Thus, dialogue between Christians and Igbo traditional religionists should be concrete. This will show how Igbo Traditional Religion was practiced before the colonial times.

Above all, we have also seen that the Igbo are a very industrious and religious people. They practiced their traditional religion before the advent of Christianity in their midst. Their belief in One God, also known as *Chukwu* (the Supreme God) or *Chineke* (God the creator), shows that the dynamics of the Christian belief system finds concrete expression in African/Igbo Traditional Religion also. The encounter between the missionaries and Igbo Traditional Religionists was not an easy one. Igbo response to the theology and praxis of inculturation has been very slow. It should be recalled that the early European missionaries employed certain methods that did not foster interreligious dialogue and the process of inculturation. Such methods as buying of slaves and building Christian villages far away from the original villages where the *Umu Nna* (the clan) are clustered together proved unsustainable. These methods coupled with language difficulties and the use of foreign names for baptism deprived new converts to Christianity the right to use or introduce Igbo cultural values in the Church. The conversion of the upper class helped the growth of the Church, though it brought the problem of polygamy into play. Polygamous marriage was common

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240 Cf. *Africae Munus*, nos. 92-93 appear to have denigrated African Traditional Religion. Interreligious dialogue should be between Christians and the current adherents of African Traditional Religion but not between Christians and converts to Christianity.
in Igboland because of certain cultural nuances that should have been studied by the missionaries to know why such obtains among the Igbo. In most cases polygamous marriage is initiated by the first wife who feels the need for her husband to get a younger person to help in the daily chores of the family set-up. Upon agreement also the surviving male can inherit the late brother’s widow.

In spite of the difficulties in learning Igbo language, Father Aimé Ganot made effort and published *Grammaire Ibo* and *Katekismi Ibo* in Igbo language. Education was one of the most viable methods employed by the missionaries, though, to some extent did not favor the idea of inculturation because the students were taught in the native language of the missionaries which they could hardly understand.

The next chapter will examine the World Council of Churches, Paul VI’s *Ecclesiam Suam*, the Second Vatican Council, and post-conciliar documents on religious plurality and interreligious dialogue. This discussion will pave the way towards reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue between the Catholic Church and African Traditional Religion in Igboland.

2.1 Introduction

The World Council of Churches, Pope Paul VI’s *Ecclesiam Suam*, the Second Vatican Council’s documents and post-conciliar documents, paved the way for the Church’s interaction with the entire world. It is now possible for Christians and non-Christians to dialogue and try to understand the values in each other’s religion. It was obvious that prior to the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church was not openly in support of dialogue with other religions. Since the Council, interreligious dialogue has become a viable option which enables adherents of different religious confessions to engage in meaningful conversation with Christianity. The Second Vatican Council’s document, *Nostra Aetate*, inspired this vision.

Around the world today, dialogue has been a huge success and has given rise to religious tolerance, peace, and mutual understanding between Christians and non-Christian religions. However, in Igboland, where Traditional Religion is practiced, effective and sustainable dialogue has been absent. Even though African Traditional Religion was not specifically mentioned in the Vatican II documents, it should be seen as one of those other religions alluded to in those documents, given that it is the religion practiced by many Africans.

Moreover, the Council’s document on religious liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*, maintains that because of human dignity, one is free to worship God in the best manner and in ways comprehensible to the individual. The idea of human freedom leaves room for interpersonal and interreligious relationships. Interreligious dialogue presupposes going out to meet the other for necessary interaction and/or the sharing of ideas about God and religion, which may or may not
lead to conversion. If it eventually leads to conversion, new converts are free in their choice. This approach is in line with the declaration from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights, as well as the affirmation that one is free to change one’s religion.¹

To exercise human freedom presupposes respect for human dignity at all levels. This respect is also extended to the various human cultures and religious confessions to which people belong. To be clear, freedom of worship does not imply that one should do whatever one likes in the name of religion; rather, it means that one is free to apply reason while exercising freedom in the practice of faith. Therefore, it is significant to explore the WCC’s declaration of religious freedom, the Second Vatican Council’s documents on religious freedom, and other post conciliar documents alluding to religious freedom amid the Church’s presence in various cultures of the world.

The reason for this exploration is to ensure that each religion is recognized, whose core teachings form themes for dialogue with other religions. In this way, people will feel free to interact with one another as the children of One God, irrespective of different religious confessions. However, Catholic teaching on soteriology has resulted in diverse opinions on religious pluralism between the more traditional and pluralist theologians.

According to Marinus Iwuchukwu, “These theologians have argued in their diverse ways that salvation is available to all people and also that religious pluralism is not only a de facto reality but also a de jure of God’s (or the Absolute’s) relationship with humanity.”² Iwuchukwu’s review of post-Vatican II documents reveals that “[w]hile virtually all the documents reviewed acknowledge that religious pluralism is an existential or social reality, there has yet to be any

² Ibid., 81.
official acknowledgement by the Church of Rome and/or its dicasteries that God’s principle of relationship with all humanity through religion is pluralistic.”³

Iwuchukwu further argues that “[t]he rejection of de jure religious pluralism arises from the unique nature of some world religions, which tend to question the authenticity and validity of other religions, but more importantly, it arises because each religion operates on its self-defined understanding of what constitutes valid human response to the divine or absolute.”⁴ If religious pluralism is truly acknowledged, it will inspire interreligious dialogue, improve our ways of worshiping God and interacting with one another. This is further clarified by the WCC, whose declaration of religious freedom is reviewed briefly below.

2.2 The World Council of Churches on Religious Pluralism

Deliberations on religious freedom and plurality had been going on within the WCC⁵ and in the United Nations Organization before 1962. Jeffrey Gros points to religious freedom as a major concern of the WCC. “The modern ecumenical movement blossomed in the Christian world during the post-war years, with the founding of the WCC, which held its first Assembly in Amsterdam, August 1948. Religious freedom was among the organization’s earliest concerns.”⁶ According to Edward Cassidy, this commitment to religious freedom led the WCC assembly in Amsterdam to issue “a strong Declaration on Religious Liberty, which provided an important resource for the work of the Second Vatican Council.”⁷ This also opened an avenue for stronger

³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., 82.
⁵ Regarding the Catholic Church’s membership of the WCC, Marinus Iwuchukwu explains that the Catholic Church is not an official member; rather she sends representative members to some of WCC’s affiliate bodies, like the Faith and Order Commission. See Ibid., 18, note 43. See also Edward Idris Cassidy. Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue, 78-79.
⁷ Ibid.
Christian participation in the United Nations deliberations and promulgation of human rights and religious freedom. The introductory section of the WCC’s declaration highlighted this issue of freedom to be recognized by all. “The rights of religious freedom herein declared shall be recognized and observed for all persons without distinctions as to race, colour, sex, language, or religion, and without imposition of disabilities by virtue of legal provision of administrative acts.”

The first article of the declaration reads: “Every person has the right to determine his own faith and creed.” The WCC also encouraged members of different religious confessions to dialogue and to associate with one another.

From this perspective, Iwuchukwu argues in favor of the efforts of the WCC to encourage interreligious dialogue, though he does not object to its emphasis on Christianity over other religions. “While it is true that WCC has continued to advocate for meaningful interreligious dialogue and has even embraced religious pluralism as a de facto reality, it continues to emphasize the preeminence of Christianity over other religions.” This emphasis placed on Christianity over other religions creates a vacuum that needs to be filled. Nevertheless, Iwuchukwu believes that “[t]he WCC has certainly been both proactive and positive about interreligious dialogue with peoples of non-Christian faith traditions.” In this regard, the WCC could be said to be championing healthy relationship among diverse faith traditions.

Some papal documents, the Second Vatican Council, and some post conciliar documents have found in this effort of the WCC an anchor for moving forward in their quests for religious freedom.

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9 Ibid., no. 1.
11 Ibid.
freedom. Here, we need to review the first encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, so that its encouraging vision on interreligious religious dialogue could be well understood.

### 2.2.1 Review of Paul VI’s *Ecclesiam Suam*

The first encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI is *Ecclesiam Suam*, issued on August 6, 1964. It focused on the Church’s evangelizing mission and the society. In the document, Paul VI reiterated his commitment to follow the renewal process began by John XXIII’s *aggiornamento*. The document is clear about its aim to unify the Church and the world so that they come to know each other better in dialogue. To achieve this, Catholics are to have strong understanding of their own faith. The encyclical upholds the idea of freedom as expressed in *Dignitatis Humanae* from the Second Vatican Council.

The Pope presents three points for exploration in the encyclical. First, the Church ought to know herself properly; second, there is a need for renewal; and third, the Church ought to relate with the world in dialogue in certain ways.\(^{12}\) Paul VI exhorts Christians to pursue dialogue with true humility and charity in keeping with the aim of bringing Christ to the entire world and to seek common ground with other religions. Added to the zeal to encourage evangelization is the desire to promote dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religious traditions. The pope affirms,

> But we do, nevertheless, recognize and respect the moral and spiritual values of the various non-Christian religions, and we desire to join with them in promoting and defending common ideals of religious liberty, human brotherhood, good culture, social welfare and civil order. For our part, we are ready to enter into discussion on those common ideals, and will not fail to take the initiative where our offer of discussion in genuine, mutual respect would be received.\(^ {13}\)

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Through this encyclical, the Church became more aware of her role to dialogue with the entire world in the sense that dialogue has a transcendent origin in God, and it leads to salvation.\footnote{Cf. Paul VI. \textit{Ecclesiam Suam}: nos. 72–79.} Paul VI defines dialogue as “… a method of accomplishing the apostolic mission. It is an example of the art of spiritual communication.”\footnote{Ibid., no. 83.} He then offers four characteristics of dialogue and its modes, as follows:\footnote{Cf. Ibid., nos. 80–90.}

a) Clearness above all; dialogue supposes and demands comprehensibility.

b) Meekness, the virtue that Christ bade us to learn from him.

c) Trust, not only in the power of one’s words, but also in an attitude of welcoming the interlocutor’s trust. Trust promotes confidence and friendship.

d) Pedagogical prudence, which esteems highly the psychological and moral circumstances of the listener, whether he be a child, uneducated, unprepared, indifferent, or hostile.\footnote{Cf. Ibid., nos. 83–84. See also Matt. 11:29; and Matt. 7:6.}

According to the pope, interreligious dialogue has four concentric circles through which the Church speaks to mankind and the entire world.\footnote{Cf. Ibid., no. 100.} The first circle is mankind, that is, common human nature in all its ramifications as lived in the world. This circle of mankind includes all those without any belief system in God, such as atheists and others with varied ideologies.\footnote{Cf. Ibid., nos. 101–104.} The second category of the circle consists of non-Christians, including those who worship and share the same monotheistic belief in One Supreme God as Christians do. They include Jews, Muslims, African traditional religionists, and the religions of Asian origin.\footnote{Cf. Ibid., no. 111.} The third category of the circle involves other Christian Churches who are separated from the Catholic Church. For these, ecumenical
dialogue should be intensified to elaborate on Christian values common to all.21 The fourth category of the circle is addressed to Catholics, encouraging them to have dialogue among themselves, speaking among themselves face to face for a proper understanding of the Catholic faith.22

In an erudite manner, Paul VI presents the dialogue of salvation as the model of all dialogues.23 This is the form that dialogue should take when Catholics engage the world. “The dialogue of salvation was made accessible to all; it was destined for all without distinction; in like manner, our own dialogue should be potentially universal, i.e. all-embracing and capable of including all, except those who either reject it or insincerely pretend to accept it.”24 Dialogue of salvation can take many forms. “It adapts itself to the needs of a concrete situation, it chooses the appropriate means, it does not bind itself to ineffectual theories or cling to hard and fast forms when these have lost their power to speak to men and move them.”25 The document reiterates the importance Paul VI attached to dialogue of salvation, “for it concerns the relation of the Church’s mission to the lives of men in a given time and place, in a given culture and social setting.”26

Many questions may arise regarding how the Church can adapt its mission to the demands of local cultures. How can a dialogue of salvation help to save the world and all within it, considering all the human and local circumstances? How should a missionary evangelize to suit local conditions? Paul VI intelligently affirms that:

The world cannot be saved from outside. As the Word of God became man, so must a man identify himself to a certain degree with the forms of life of those to whom he wishes to bring the message of Christ. Without invoking privileges that would only widen the separation, without employing unintelligible terminology, he must

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21 Cf. Ibid., no. 113.
22 Cf. Ibid., no. 117.
23 Cf. Ibid., nos. 75 - 79.
24 Ibid., no 78. Cf. Col. 3: 11.
25 Ibid., no. 88.
26 Ibid., no. 89.
share the common way of life—provided that it is human and honorable—especially of the most humble, if he would be listened to and understood. And before speaking, it is necessary to listen, not only to a man’s voice, but to his heart. A man must first be understood; and, where he merits it, agreed with. In the very act of trying to make ourselves pastors, fathers and teachers of men, we must make ourselves their brothers. The spirit of dialogue is friendship; even more, it is service.27

The Pope then warns against the dangers or difficulties of interreligious dialogue. One danger is that the coming together of different religious adherents might lead to watering down the truth or compromising the faith.28 Another danger is the immoderate desire to resolve our differences at all costs, which might appear skeptical about the power of God’s word that is preached. There is also the danger of being contaminated by having contact with errors.29 Another which might arise is in dealing with atheists, which the Pope describes as “obstacles of the moral order.”30 Given the importance and difficulties of dialogue so far outlined by Paul VI, the Church is equipped for viable interreligious dialogue with both Christians and non-Christians in the world today. We turn next to Vatican II’s declaration of religious freedom.

2.2.2. Vatican II’s Declaration of Religious Freedom

After the Second World War, former rigid positions in the religious and social-political realms began to shift. In the Catholic Church, Vatican II provided a forum for the view that society is no longer static but dynamic and diversified. This diverse and pluralistic nature of society made it necessary for the Church to consider shifting its position on certain issues. Iwuchukwu notes that

27 Ibid., nos. 89-90.
28 Cf. Ibid., no.91.
29 Cf. Ibid., no. 92.
30 Ibid., no. 106. By obstacles of the moral order, the Pope means “the absence of sufficient freedom of thought and action, and the perversion of discussion so that the latter is used, not to seek and express objective truth, but to serve predetermined utilitarian ends.”
“the Church was compelled to consider a different approach to the question of religious differences and the social validity of non-Christian religions. This development led to the Church’s ratification of the fundamental human rights affirmed by the United Nations and eventually the approval and recommendation of the freedom of religion in the document Dignitatis Humanae of Vatican II.”

Here, Dignitatis Humanae is identified as the document of the Vatican II with the most thorough treatment of religious liberty.

2.2.3. Dignitatis Humanae: Declaration on Religious Liberty

This important document of the Second Vatican Council, which deals with religious liberty, was declared on December 7, 1965. The document has been variously commended for respecting human values and for giving credence to human dignity and freedom of religion. The document, quoting from pope John XXIII’s Pacem in Terris, affirms,

Contemporary man is becoming increasingly conscious of the dignity of the human person; more and more people are demanding that men should exercise fully their own judgment and a responsible freedom in their actions and should not be subject to the pressure of coercion but be inspired by a sense of duty. At the same time they are demanding constitutional limitation of the powers of government to prevent excessive restriction of the rightful freedom of individual and associations. This demand for freedom in human society is concerned chiefly with man’s spiritual values, and especially with what concerns the free practice of religion in society.

This is what human freedom entails: to worship (or not to worship) God as one wishes, devoid of any coercion, not controlled by the government, and not dominated by one culture. Being coerced into one cultural pattern amounts to what Bernard Lonergan calls ‘classicism.’ “…while a classicist would maintain that one should never depart from an accepted terminology, I must

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contend that classicism is no more than the mistaken view of conceiving culture normatively and of concluding that there is just one human culture. The modern fact is that culture has to be conceived empirically, that there are many cultures…” Hence, to uphold human dignity, “[t]he Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. Freedom of this kind means that all men should be immune from coercion on the part of individuals, social groups and every human power so that within due limits, nobody is forced to act against his convictions nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his convictions in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in association with others.”

The challenge of freedom involves respect for cultural and religious pluralism. This is why mission or evangelization requires learning, and an in-depth study of a people’s culture and faith expressions by the incoming missionaries in order to foster interreligious dialogue. This in-depth study of people’s cultures is needed because, “[t]he story of the Church … is the story of encounters with ‘the other.’ In these encounters both parties are affected.” The early European missionaries failed to carry out such an in-depth study of culture the first time they arrived in Igboland.

To this effect, Stephen Bevans and Jeffrey Gross maintain that “Dignitatis Humanae provides an essential perspective to the church’s missionary activity in that the conviction of human dignity and the freedom of individual conscience (DH, 1) is itself the condition of the possibility for an evangelization worthy of God.” Human freedom is essential to the missionary enterprise in the sense that it requires one making a decision by oneself and not to be lured into

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accepting what one is not convinced about. This freedom to choose one’s is also applicable to communities and groups of individuals who already have a particular religious culture.

Hence, individuals should be allowed the natural will-power to know what they want to follow without force or coercion. The documents of the Second Vatican Council offer us new ways of seeing things; especially, as stated by Bevans and Gross, “the new genre was one that was more pastoral, more positive, and more persuasive in tone.” These new pastoral and positive approaches to evangelization will be emphasized as we look at the Second Vatican Council’s declaration on religious freedom. It should be noted that this freedom finds expression in human communities where it promotes the common good.

Therefore, human dignity should be respected because freedom of worship enables human beings to approach God as divine. Hence, Dignitatis Humanae maintains that “this doctrine of freedom is rooted in divine revelation, and for this reason Christians are bound to respect it all the more conscientiously.” What this implies is that one who is free should also promote freedom for others and should not coerce them into accepting any particular mode of worship. In this regard, Dignitatis Humanae warns that “it is therefore fully in accordance with the nature of faith that in religious matters every form of coercion by men should be excluded.”

Jeffery Gross affirms the major concern of the document as follows: “Dignitatis Humanae represents one stage in the long pilgrimage of Christian reflection on faith, freedom, and society.” Therefore, it sounds morally unjust for one religion to be declared the state religion to the exclusion

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38 Cf. Vatican II, Dignitatis Humanae, no. 2.
40 Cf. Vatican II, Dignitatis Humanae, no. 6.
41 Ibid., no. 9.
42 Ibid., no. 10.
of other faith confessions in the same state. If this becomes the norm, human freedom will be jeopardized. Rather, human freedom should be promoted for the common good. Hence, it is necessary to explore another document of the Council, *Nostra Aetate*, to see its approach to religious freedom and interreligious dialogue with non-Christian religions.

### 2.2.4 *Nostra Aetate* and Interreligious Dialogue with Non-Christian Religions

*Nostra Aetate – Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* was promulgated on October 28, 1965. It marks the opening of the Catholic Church towards interreligious dialogue. It came out of Pope Paul VI’s desire to demonstrate how the Catholic Church could relate cordially with Judaism, which is the religious background Jesus Christ himself was born into and to which Christianity owes its historical beginnings. The Pope’s desire was not limited to Judaism; rather, it extended to the Church’s relationship with other non-Christian religions. Hence, the opening statement of *Nostra Aetate* reads as follows:

> In this age of ours, when men are drawing more closely together and the bonds of friendship between different peoples are being strengthened, the Church examines with greater care the relation which she has to non-Christian religions. Ever aware of her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations, she reflects at the outset on what men have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them.\(^4^4\)

This statement clearly opened the way for interaction between Christianity and other non-Christian religions. Unlike in the days when one religion operated in isolation of others, it has now been made open through interreligious dialogue that God is the God of all peoples, not of just one religion or culture. Hence, “all men form but one community… and… all share a common destiny, namely God.”\(^4^5\) This sharing of a common destiny in God epitomizes the different positions human

\(^{4^5}\) Ibid.
beings take in their quest for the ultimate. The One God we all worship can be approached by people in diverse ways.

Since we all share one common destiny in God, though we belong to different cultural and religious backgrounds, there is a need to know and recognize how each human group relates with this One God. *Nostra Aetate,* in answer to this, affirms that “[m]en look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence. The problems that weigh heavily on the hearts of men are the same today as in the ages past. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of life? What is upright behavior, and what is sinful? … What happens at death?… What reward follows death?”

These and many more questions about life, the world, and God need to be clarified for proper understanding. Hence, we turn to different religions to search for answers toward understanding these multiple questions. The Church acknowledges these facts and wishes to see what other religions could offer through interreligious dialogue. *Nostra Aetate* confirms this disposition of the Catholic Church to enter into interreligious dialogue with other non-Christian religions, in these words: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.”

While deliberating on this concept, the Council Fathers emphasized the need for collaboration and interreligious dialogue. “The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., no. 2.
encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.”

This injunction refers not only to the advanced world religions, such as Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism, but also to African Traditional Religion and African culture as well. Hence, interreligious dialogue is necessary in the Igboland context.

This idea of interreligious dialogue is an essential path opened by the Second Vatican Council. An insight from the Council notes that “throughout history even to the present day, there is profound among different peoples a certain awareness of a hidden power, which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life.” Human contemplation of creation universally inspires feelings of awe. This idea richly inspired the Council to see ways of interacting with both the Jewish religion and other religions of the world as a learning process.

Edward Cassidy observes that “[d]uring the Council, a remarkable change had taken place in Catholic teaching on the Jewish people, and a new era had opened for relations with other world religions.” One might view this statement as alluding to religious plurality. Yet, the issue at stake here is whether there is a possibility of salvation for those outside the Church? To clarify this, a review is needed of the Council’s documents that may reflect religious plurality.

2.2.5. Review of Council Documents on Salvation Outside Christianity

After the Second Vatican Council, the Church made a significant shift by trying to know if there is the possibility of salvation in non-Christian religions. This reconsideration goes further to inform the church’s disposition to dialogue with these other religions. Although Vatican II acknowledged that non-Christian religions possess something good, but the conciliar documents

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
are silent about the possibility of salvation in these other religions. Rather, the good in those other
religions serve as “seeds of the Word” in preparation for their adherents to receive the Gospel of
Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit.

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the Church had insisted on *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* - outside the Church, there is no salvation. Some theologians view this as a Christian claim to
superiority over other non-Christian religions. This claim made interreligious dialogue a very
difficult task as expressed by Michael Fitzgerald. “In those pre-Vatican II days dialogue, as a
dimension of the Church’s evangelizing mission, was not part of the common vision.”

*Nostra Aetate* alludes to the fact that human beings share a common destiny, which is God.
It goes on to say that “His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men,”
demonstrating that there is no limit to the generosity of God to all his creatures. Hence, non-
Christians who do the will of God may also receive God’s saving grace, yet it is in Christ, through
“whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19), [that] men find the fullness of their
religious life.” This idea poses a problem as to whether non-Christian religions can be mediators
of divine revelation and salvation to their members. A number of Christian theologians have
expressed their diverse opinions in this regard.

Jacques Dupuis presents an articulated argument on this issue regarding non-Christian
religions’ credibility in mediating salvation to their members. In an interview conducted by Gerard
O’Connell, Dupuis affirms, “I have been careful to affirm that they are ways of salvation for their
followers, due to the ‘elements of truth and grace’ and the ‘rays of that Light which enlightens

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53 Cf. Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 16
54 Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2.
every man’ contained in them, and not through their deficiencies and shortcomings. But the same
would have to be said where Christianity is concerned. No way is perfect and beyond reproach.
But God can write straight with crooked lines, and use imperfect ‘paths’ to his own end.”

On the other hand, Peter Phan is strongly of the opinion that other religions are legitimate
ways of salvation. Phan nuanced this opinion a bit differently from Dupuis:

More simply, theologies of religions are often categorized in three models: exclusivism, pluralism, and inclusivism. Exclusivism holds that there is only one savior and one true religion or church and that no salvation is possible outside of them. At the other end of the spectrum, pluralism holds that there are many saviors and different paths leading to salvation, none necessarily superior to the others. Inclusivism maintains that although there is only one savior and one true church, salvation remains possible outside of them—though it is always ultimately dependent on them.

Phan moves further to assert that most theologians of other religions hold this opinion, while in
the Catholic official teaching, “Dominus Iesus favors inclusivism while warning against the
dangers of pluralism.” Phan also cites the nuanced response given by the Catholic Bishops’
Conference of India on the question of whether other religions may be regarded as ways of
salvation, as follows:

Christ is the sacrament, the definitive symbol of God’s salvation for all humanity. This is what the salvific uniqueness and universality means in the Indian context. That however, does not mean there cannot be other symbols, valid in their own ways, which the Christian sees as related to the definitive symbol, Jesus Christ. The implication of all this is that for hundreds of millions of our fellow human beings, salvation is seen as being channeled to them not in spite of but through and in their various socio-cultural and religious traditions. We cannot, then, deny a priori a salvific role for these non-Christian religions.

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57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
Gavin D’Costa commends the effort the Catholic Church made to produce a document on non-Christian religions. “The tone was entirely positive and the concern was to focus on what was held in common so as to build together from shared strengths. This was a gigantic step for the Roman Catholic Church.” However, D’Costa observes that the conciliar documents are silent about whether other non-Christian religions can mediate salvation to their adherents. The silence is from the fact that it is taken “for granted, following both pre-conciliar and post-conciliar teachings that there is no doubt that the non-Christians may be saved.”

The idea that non-Christian religions are not adequate mediators of salvation without Christ is further buttressed in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*. God did not abandon the fallen human race “but at all times held out to them the means of salvation, bestowed in consideration of Christ the redeemer…” D’Costa believes that *Nostra Aetate* promotes the idea that non-Christian religions—such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions elsewhere (including African and Asian primal religions)—are related to the Church theologically and historically.

Moreover, *Lumen Gentium* enumerated those outside the Church who can have salvation. These include the Moslems, who profess the faith of Abraham, those who seek God in shadows and images, those who are ignorant of the gospel of Christ through no fault of their own but seek God with a sincere heart and do his will with a good a conscience and lead good life. Hence, those who worship the “Unknown God” are the offspring of God as well.

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60 Cf. Ibid., 102.
61 Ibid.
65 Cf. Acts 17: 22- 28; 1 Tim. 2: 4. All peoples are given salvation by the grace of God and the mercy of Christ who gives life to all.
In this respect, while the Church acknowledges that non-Christians can be saved, it also emphasizes that salvation comes through Christ. There is no explicit affirmation in the Conciliar documents that other religions can mediate salvation to their adherents directly without Christ and through the action of the Holy Spirit. D’Costa believes that “all these actions of the Spirit cannot facilitate a theology of religions which affirms the various religious quests as authentic in themselves, apart from Christ, the trinity, and the Church.”\(^66\) Dupuis reacted to this position of D’Costa by affirming thus: “To state that there is no foundation in Catholic theology for holding that the religions ‘in themselves’ can be considered ways of salvation for their followers does not correspond to reality and betrays a lack of information about the theological scene in the church today.”\(^67\) For this reason, this study will review the conciliar documents that may reflect religious inclusivity.

2.3 Review of the Council’s Documents that May Reflect Religious Inclusivity

The idea of the possibility of salvation outside the church is no longer hidden; however, the capability of other religions to mediate salvation to their adherents without Christ remains ambiguous. This situation calls for a further review of the Second Vatican Council’s documents on the issue. Dupuis argues that “it is, moreover, important to situate Vatican II in the conciliar history of the church. The Council of Florence (1442) had assumed the more rigid understanding of the axiom \textit{extra Ecclesiam nulla salus}. A century later (1547) the Council of Trent, with its doctrine of ‘baptism of desire,’ had solemnly affirmed the possibility of salvation for those who were outside the church.”\(^68\)

\(^{66}\) D’Costa, \textit{The Meeting of Religions}, 107.
\(^{67}\) O’Connell, \textit{Do Not Stifle the Spirit}, 188-189.
\(^{68}\) Dupuis, \textit{Christianity and the Religions}, 59-60.
In this regard, we will review some documents of the Second Vatican Council, chiefly *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate*. They both went beyond Judaism to include other non-Christian religions and their adherents as being related to the Church in various ways. It should be noted that *Lumen Gentium*, which was promulgated on November 21, 1964, can be considered as inclusive. Articles 13 and 16 of the document start by referring to all peoples as belonging to God and by alluding to the fact that the Holy Spirit is effective even outside the church. The document affirms that “those who have not yet received the Gospel are related to the people of God in various ways.” Moving further, it identifies the Jews into whose culture and religion Jesus was born and who were the first to receive the covenant and promises made by God.

The document argues that included in the salvific will of God are the Moslems, who acknowledge the creator by professing Abraham as their father and adore one God. Another group to be saved are those who search for God “in shadows and images” and those who, through ignorance do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church but seek God with a sincere heart.

*Nostra Aetate*, on its part, is concerned with the religious nature of humanity in relation to their culture. This document, significantly, mentions Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as other religions, such as Islam and Judaism as being linked with the church. The idea in this document is to eschew divisions, by fostering friendly ties that help people discover what they “have in common.” Dupuis supports this summons to unity advanced in the document thus:

In *Nostra Aetate*, however, the council’s intension is not to show a guarded “orientation” of members of other religions toward the church; it rather consists in exhorting everyone to overcome divisions and to foster friendly relations… Such relations should be based on what all people, their specific allegiances notwithstanding, “have in common,” [which] tends to promote fellowship among them.

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71 Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 60-61.
Given this inclination of the council’s document, Dupuis draws attention to the fact that “the ancient prejudices and negative assessments of the past had to be knocked down, and that could be done by pointing to the positive values and divine gifts of the other religions.”\(^\text{72}\) This observation tends to prove that positive elements could be found in non-Christian religions and that such positive values could be of help to their adherents as well. However, Dupuis holds the view that non-Christian religions’ possessing the possibility of salvation did not begin with Vatican II, it had been recognized before the council.

Dupuis went further to affirm that there are different modalities of obtaining salvation by all in Christ, which is not restricted to within the Church alone. “But the affirmation of the singularity of the ecclesial mediation, as the ‘way’ established by God in his Son, does not necessarily lead to denying or undervaluing the positive meaning of other ‘ways’ of salvation.”\(^\text{73}\) In thinking this way, Dupuis does not imply that the Church is not necessary for salvation. Rather, it is not the only way through which God’s grace could be received, though, it has complete mediation of salvation. “It is true that the mediation of the mystery of salvation, operative in the other religious traditions, remains, ‘incomplete,’ and therefore ‘ordained’ toward the complete mediation operative in the church. But this does not mean that the church is the only ‘place where grace is operative.’ For grace has no ‘one place’ of operation. It is operative everywhere, and salvation can reach all people, in whichever historic situation or circumstances of life they may find themselves.”\(^\text{74}\)

The Council Fathers also examined how individual non-Christians could be saved and how the positive values found in these religions are used in the process of salvation. “The main texts

\(^{72}\) Ibid., 61.
\(^{73}\) O’Connell, *Do Not Stifle the Spirit*, 283.
\(^{74}\) Ibid.
under consideration belong… to the constitution *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 16-17, the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2, and the decree *Ad Gentes*, nos. 3, 9, 11.”75 Hence, we observe that the issues at stake here include the salvation of those outside the church, the reality of genuine values found in non-Christian religious traditions, and how these values are cherished by the Church today.

In *Lumen Gentium*, it is argued that salvation is also available to those who, without their own fault are ignorant of God and yet, through the grace of God lead good life.76 For this reason, the Church holds that whatever is valuable and good in other religions exist in ‘preparation for the Gospel.’ All these are abundant gifts from Christ, who is the author of all life and the light of the world.77 Moving further, *Lumen Gentium* and *Ad Gentes* emphasize how the Church preserves the good values infused in the human heart and other values proper to people’s way of life to the glory of God.78

All these show the hidden presence of God in all human beings, their religion, and their cultures, and the Council wishes that the Church and her missionaries, while living among non-Christians, “should be familiar with their national and religious traditions and uncover with gladness and respect those seeds of the Word which lie hidden among them.”79 With these as the stand of the Council on religious plurality and inclusivity, there appear to be contradictions which might lead to a critique of the pluralistic position.

75 Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions*, 62.
79 Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, no. 11.
2.4 Critique of the Second Vatican Council on Religious Plurality

There is no doubt that, as a reality in life, the Second Vatican Council acknowledges the idea of religious plurality.\textsuperscript{80} In this regard, Paul Knitter maintains that “[p]luralism – as the term in use here – does not denote the simple fact that in our world, and increasingly in each of its societies, there is a plurality of religions.”\textsuperscript{81} What is important is their ability to hold the truth. D’Costa supports the view that “religious harmony will follow if tradition-specific… approaches which allegedly claim monopoly over the truth are abandoned in favor of pluralist approaches which recognize that all religions display the truth in differing ways.”\textsuperscript{82} The various Vatican II documents—Ad Gentes, Lumen Gentium, Nostra Aetate, and Dignitatis Humanae—allude to this fact, yet the Catholic Church has not officially issued any document to acknowledge this position as such.

In the view of Dupuis, “Nostra Aetate places the meeting of the church with the world religions in the broader context of the common origin and destiny of all people and the effort, common to all religious traditions, to answer the ultimate questions that beset the human spirit (no.1).”\textsuperscript{83} The issues at stake could be stated as follows: If all people have “common origin and destiny” and also if there is something “common to all religions” and if God is this ‘Being’ common to all, whose providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all,\textsuperscript{84} why should salvation not be extended through all religions, both Christians and non-Christians alike? The same document maintains that “men look to their different religions for an answer to the unsolved riddles of human existence.”\textsuperscript{85}


\textsuperscript{81} Knitter, The Myth of Religious Superiority, 22.

\textsuperscript{82} D’Costa. The Meeting of Religions, 19.

\textsuperscript{83} Dupuis, Christianity and the Religions, 63.

\textsuperscript{84} Cf. Vatican II, Nostra Aetate, no. 1.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
In this sense, the claim that whatever is true, holy, and noble in other religions is in ‘preparation for the Gospel’ sounds colloquial and contradicts the idea that other religious traditions have salvific values in themselves. In addition to this, an analysis of the “seed of the word” appears to have different theological interpretations. Dupuis argues that “the Council has left us in doubt about its true intentions on the matter. While the general assessment of the religions sounds rather positive, it still suffers from a certain vagueness.”

This is true because the Council, while recognizing other religions, holds that the values found in them are latent preparations for the Gospel of Christ and, therefore, that they possess no salvific values on their own accord.

D’Costa criticizes the pluralist claim to harmonize all religions in such a way as to have a universal religion to the detriment and eradication of others. If this pluralist bid to harmonize all religions works, “we will be able to claim properly that ‘pluralists’ are really ‘exclusivists,’ the category type which they constantly criticize.” In Knitter’s view, “One of the sharpest and most oft-repeated of these criticisms is that the pluralist model is a cleverly camouflaged but ultimately exploitative Western imposition.” The idea that the reality of language is ignored by pluralists is another argument Knitter makes concerning what the critics posit.

Knitter and Karl Rahner agree that the Catholic Church, through Vatican II, has opened the doors towards appreciating the values found in other religions. Yet, the duo - observe a certain ambiguity surrounding the church’s understanding of the truth claimed by these other religions. The issues at stake here involve both the salvific will of God to all humanity and the necessity of the Church which forms the core of Catholic teaching.

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86 Dupuis, Christianity and the Religions, 64.
all belong to one church before they could be saved? Is God confined only to one place? Did non-Christian religions emanate by accident or by God’s design? Whatever is the case, one looks forward to a time when an official pronouncement could be made by “the Church to appreciate religious pluralism not only as a de facto reality but also as a de jure of God’s relationship with humanity.”

This awaited pronouncement by the Church is necessary:

More and more Christians, along with peoples of other faiths and ideologies, are experiencing religious pluralism in a new way – that is, they are feeling not only the reality of so many other religious paths, but also their vitality, their influence in our modern world, their depths, beauty, and attractiveness. And because of this new experience of pluralism, Christians are feeling the need for a more productive dialogue and cooperation with other religions, a new attitude toward them.

These pluralistic experiences and new attitudes notwithstanding, the document of the Church, Dominus Iesus – (On the unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church), holds a contrary view in this regard. The document issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on August 6, 2000 has aroused much criticisms. It was signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger who was the head of the congregation under the papacy of Pope John Paul II. Non-Catholic Christians raised objections to this document which declared that “there exists a single Church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and the bishops in communion with him.” The Vatican II harmonized the use of “subsists” to indicate that “the Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church, and on the other hand, that ‘outside of her structure, many elements can be found of sanctification and truth’, that is, in those Churches and ecclesial

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90 Iwuchukwu, Media Ecology and Religious Pluralism, 82.
communities which are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church.”\textsuperscript{93} The document also stated that “The Church’s constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only \textit{de facto} but also \textit{de iure} (or in principle).”\textsuperscript{94} The document also insists that “the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery, are not Churches in the proper sense, however, those who are baptized in these communities are, by Baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church.”\textsuperscript{95} On the relationship of the Church and other religions to salvation, the document states that the grace of God gets to individual non-Christians in ways best known to God, but,

\begin{quote}
Indeed, some prayers and rituals of the other religions may assume a role of preparation for the Gospel, in that they are occasions or pedagogical helps in which the human heart is prompted to be open to the action of God. One cannot attribute to these, however, a divine origin or an \textit{ex opera operato} salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments. Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that other rituals, insofar as they depend on superstitions or other errors (cf. 1 Cor 10:20-21), constitute an obstacle to salvation.\textsuperscript{96}
\end{quote}

This position of the document gives way to some theological reflections that have much to be investigated, especially, when it further states that the savior sent by God, founded a Church which is an instrument for the salvation of all humankind. “This truth of faith does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time, it rules out, in a radical way, that mentality of indifferentism ‘characterized by a religious relativism, which leads to the belief that ‘one religion is as good as another.’”\textsuperscript{97} Here the document appears to contradict the idea enshrined in Vatican II’s \textit{Nostra Aetate}. Finally, \textit{Dominus Iesus}
acknowledges the necessity of mission *ad gentes* and interreligious dialogue. For this reason, the way out of this theological quagmire is to look forward to a new method of evangelization which would employ interreligious dialogue as a necessary tool for mission today.

2.5. What is Interreligious Dialogue?

To understand what interreligious dialogue stands for, we shall briefly trace its historical development in the Church. Pope Paul VI’s *Ecclesiam Suam* marked a historical breakthrough toward directing the Catholic Church to engage in interreligious dialogue with other, non-Christian religions. It is also worthy of note that prior to *Ecclesiam Suam*, Pope John XXIII’s famous encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris* had already set the stage for interreligious dialogue between Christianity and non-Christian religions.

Iwuchukwu notes that “while it is true that Pope Paul VI’s *Ecclesiam Suam*, was the first papal document not only to address the question of dialogue with non-Christian religions but also seek to promote it, it is indeed a truism that the real ground breaking document that lit up this desire for interreligious dialogue came from John XXIII’s encyclical *Pacem in Terris.*”98 Pope John Paul II also made immense contributions towards enhancing interreligious dialogue between the Church and other world religions today.

It has often been said that prior to the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church held tenaciously that no salvation could be found outside its confines. Interreligious dialogue was not encouraged and this contributed to the lack of exchange of religious and cultural values between Christianity and most world religions, especially African Traditional Religion. Idara Otu affirms that “Vatican II teachings on the relations of the Church with other world religions are a watershed

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in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. Prior to the Council, the Church had adopted a cautionary and condemning stand in its attitudes towards other religions.”

However, a significant change of attitude came into the Church after the Vatican II, which made interaction and dialogue between Christianity and other religions possible. Following this same line of thought, Edward Cassidy observes that the Second Vatican Council was exceptionally inspirational in bridging the gap between Christianity and other religions:

> It was during that Council that the bishops of the Catholic Church reflected on the relationship of the Church with other religions, and opened the way for a new dialogue based on the desire for deeper understanding and respect. This new approach is outlined especially in the Second Vatican Council’s declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*), but is reflected and has its foundation in two other Council documents: The Declaration of Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*) and the very basic Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*).

This disposition of the Church to dialogue with non-Christian religions also opened an avenue towards acknowledging, “the possibility of salvation both outside the Church and from non-Christian religions.” As stated earlier, the conciliar document that signaled the facilitation of interreligious dialogue between the Catholic Church and other world religions is *Nostra Aetate*. Having briefly made an historical excursus of the development of interreligious dialogue in the Church’s circles, we can now contextually state its meaning.

In line with Pope John Paul II, Michael Fitzgerald, sees dialogue as the gateway to mutual understanding and a means of enriching one another. Fitzgerald argues that dialogue encourages cordial relationships between people of different religious confessions.

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102 Cf. Ibid.
Such relations, which to qualify as dialogue must be positive and constructive, can exist between individual believers at an informal level, or between representatives of communities… The goal of dialogue is first, “mutual understanding,” to try to understand others as they want to be understood. Each has to be open, ready to listen, to put aside prejudice and to learn from the other. At the same time, each must have the freedom to express their own conviction. A further goal of dialogue is “mutual enrichment.”

In the same manner, Raimundo Panikkar provides a platform for different religions to interact and share ideas for better understanding of each other. Panikkar argues that “our age prides itself on its ecumenical spirit and has indeed risen above the clan mentality far enough to acknowledge the right of other clans to exist, whether they call themselves philosophical systems, religious beliefs, races or nations.” Panikkar equates religion with language in terms of dialogue. Although language is complete, yet it is capable of growth. Its growth involves borrowing from others while maintaining its identity. The borrowing does not diminish its expressions; rather, it enriches it and makes it plausible. In that order, one thing could be expressed in different ways yet point to the same thing. Panikkar affirms,

Any religion is complete as any language is also capable of expressing everything that it feels the need to express. Any religion is open to growth and evolution as any language is. Both are capable of expressing or adopting new shades of meaning, of shifting idioms or emphases, refining ways of expressing and changing them. When a new need is felt in any religious or linguistic world, there are always means of dealing with that need. Furthermore, although any language is a world in itself, it is not without relations with neighboring languages, borrowing from them and open to mutual influences. And yet each language only takes as much as it can assimilate from a foreign language. Similarly, with religions: they influence each other and borrow from one another without losing their identity.

What Panikkar is saying here is that each religion should be allowed to co-exist and interact with others to complement one another. Without this complementarity, every religion will become

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105 Ibid., xxiv.
isolated, and diversity is stifled, giving rise to monotony. This leads to inferior and superior feelings as the adherents of each religion might feel that their own religion is the only authentic one. Most early European missionaries who evangelized Igboiland had this superior feeling, and this hindered the process of interreligious dialogue. Through interreligious dialogue, each religion learns and borrows from the other. Panikkar in this regard argues,

> A religious dialogue must first of all be an authentic dialogue, without superiority, preconceptions, hidden motives or convictions on either side. What is more, if it is to be an authentic dialogue it must also preclude preconceiving its aims and results. We cannot enter a dialogue having already postulated what will come out of it, or having resolved to withdraw should it enter areas we have a priori excluded. Dialogue does not primarily mean study, consultation, examination, preaching, proclamation, learning, etc.; if we insist on dialogue we should respect and follow its rules. Dialogue listens and observes, but it also speaks, corrects, and is corrected; it aims at mutual understanding.\(^\text{106}\)

Since people from different religious and cultural backgrounds meet in different places and live together, interreligious dialogue is necessary. “The aim of interreligious dialogues is understanding. It is not to win over the other or to come to a total agreement on a universal religion. The ideal is communication in order to bridge the gulfs of mutual ignorance and misunderstandings between the different cultures of the world, letting them speak and speak out their own insights in their own languages.”\(^\text{107}\) This is clear enough to follow because, people from different cultures are supposed to enrich one another in their diversities and not to impose their way of life on others.

Francis Arinze views interreligious dialogue from its perspective of bearing fruit through the respect, openness, and sincerity of the interlocutors. “Interreligious dialogue, to be fruitful, requires of the participants such mental attitudes as respect, listening, sincerity, openness, and willingness to receive and to work with another.”\(^\text{108}\) In this sense, interreligious dialogue does not

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 50.
\(^{107}\) Ibid., xxii
require that one should relinquish one’s religion. Rather, it requires an attentive ear to understand what the other has, which might enhance each other’s relationship with God. Arinze goes further to say: “Interreligious dialogue, therefore, leaves intact the right of every person to practice his faith and to propose it to others. Dialogue does not require of the participant that he should temporarily suspend his belief in his religion, or some articles of it. Interreligious dialogue is a sincere, friendly and loving encounter on the religious level between believers in different religions.”

Paul Knitter presents an experiential understanding of interreligious dialogue, which is based on trust while the differences stand. He narrates this experience as follows:

From my own experience – gained in conference rooms, libraries, and meditation halls – I would describe interreligious dialogue as the confrontation with utter, bewildering, often threatening differences and at the same time, the trust that such differences are, for the most part, friendly rather than hostile, fruitful rather than barren. In dialogue, one faces the utterly other and trusts that one can speak to, learn from, even work with that other. Within the heart of dialogue, therefore, beats a deep act of faith and trust.

The trust as applied here refers to the fact that each religion has a certain value to offer to others and to learn from others, while the dialogue interlocutors bear witness to their differences. The recognition of differences in religions show that no universal religion forms the bedrock for everyone to copy and adhere to. Knitter argues that “as far as we can tell, in this finite world of many cultures and religions and histories, there is no universal foundation outside the fray of history and diversity on which we can make universal judgements and assess the diversity.”

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109 Ibid.
111 Ibid., 26.
Everyone has a cultural or religious influence that forms one’s background in every sphere of life. For this reason, dialogue is required to understand each other’s religious and cultural bearings.

Knitter continues to affirm that “though we will realize the difficulty of understanding, and the danger of judging, another person’s religious beliefs and practices, we find ourselves borne or grasped by suspicion, a hope, a resolve that we can speak to each other across our religious barriers; that it is worthwhile even necessary, to do so. This is, indeed, an act of faith.”¹¹² From the realm of faith, Knitter maintains that “dialogue is the exchange of experience and understanding between two or more partners with the intention that all partners grow in experience and understanding.”¹¹³ The implication of this growth in experience, in Knitter’s view, is that “[t]he World religions, in all their amazing differences, are more complementary than contradictory.”¹¹⁴

If religions complement each other in this sense, one could favorably argue that Igbo Traditional Religion can also complement Christianity, but the early European missionaries to Igboland misinterpreted this complementarity as syncretism or relativism. This might have contributed to their failure to dialogue with African/Igbo Traditional Religion.

Interreligious dialogue provides space for peace and justice, which lead to freedom of worship as enshrined in the Second Vatican Council’s document, Dignitatis Humanae. Dialogue also opens the avenue for love. Peter Feldmeier affirms that “[t]o love others is to want to listen to them, to pay attention to what is meaningful and sacred in their lives, and to honor that. Such solicitude does not demand that one always agree, but it does demand that one recognizes that one is walking on sacred ground.”¹¹⁵

¹¹² Ibid., 27.
¹¹⁴ Ibid., 220.
In this sense, Maria Hornung affirms that

Interreligious dialogue is hard work! It is also good work! Investment in this work has evidenced its great potential for being a way of relating, a way that respects all reality as subject of its own evolution, a way that leads to compassion, personal fulfillment, procreative world-building, and networking for peace. Interreligious dialogue has netted many positive results: violence stopped, creativity come alive, levels of happiness increased, destructive energy turned to creative energy, as well as growth of the authentic self.\(^{116}\)

The early missionaries to Igboland ignored the sacred places of Igbo Traditional Religion and failed to initiate interreligious dialogue between Christianity and the native religion. It should be recalled that Pope John Paul II spoke favorably about certain good qualities present in other religions, which he attributes to the work of the Holy Spirit outside the church. The Pope refers to what is common to all religions as the *semina verbi*. The Pope remarks thus:

At this point it would be helpful to recall all the *primitive religions*, the *animistic religions* which stress ancestor worship. It seems that those who practice them are particularly close to Christianity, and among them, the church’s missionaries also find it easier to speak a common language. Is there, perhaps, in this veneration of ancestors a kind of preparation for the Christian faith in the communion of Saints, in which all believers – whether living or dead – form a single community, a single body? And faith in the communion of Saints is, ultimately, faith in Christ, who alone is the source of life and of holiness for all.\(^{117}\)

One wonders why Pope John Paul II used such words as *primitive* and *animistic* to describe African Traditional Religion. These words (primitive and animism), have become obsolete and might not represent the good qualities found in African Traditional Religion as such. Be that as it may, there is need for proper dialogue. The common language to be spoken in this regard is interreligious dialogue, which brings into focus the similarities and differences in religions for deeper studies and mutual understanding. This amounts to what Leonard Swidler calls “Deep-


Dialogue.”\textsuperscript{118} In this regard, it is advantageous to reiterate the argument offered by Michael Fitzgerald and John Borelli that “interreligious dialogue is a response to religious plurality, a phenomenon which is increasing as communications become easier and rapid. In recent years both the awareness of diversity and the need for and desire for dialogue have grown.”\textsuperscript{119} This growth in the desire for interreligious dialogue, coupled with the need for inculturation, is at the same time, experiencing some difficulties. These difficulties are expressed in some post-conciliar documents, which are reviewed in the next section.

2.6. Post Conciliar Documents and the Difficulties of Inculturation and Interreligious Dialogue

Popes Paul VI and John Paul II have been acclaimed by many as “apostles” of evangelization, inculturation, and interreligious dialogue. The duo manifested their zeal for inculturation and interreligious dialogue through their visits to various parts of the world (including Africa) and meetings with leaders of different religious traditions. Pope John XXIII, who convoked the Second Vatican Council, did not live to finish it, though his pontificate saw the need for renewal of the Church as evidenced by his introduction of the term aggiornamento.

After the Second Vatican Council, many post-conciliar documents were published to buttress the need for interreligious dialogue and inculturation. Hence, there is need to review some of the post-conciliar documents that may shed light on the fruits and difficulties of inculturation and interreligious dialogue.


The International Theological Commission (ITC) is a body of theologians that advises the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The texts and documents of the ITC address pressing theological issues, drawing upon theological experts from around the world who represent differing branches of theology, yet who share a common commitment to authentically Catholic theological reflection. The members of the commission meet from time to time to discuss theological issues, especially “on the relationship between faith and culture.” The theme of the inculturation of the faith has been of great concern to the Magisterium of the Church since the Second Vatican Council, and the international theological commission has followed its development systematically. (This document will be referred to henceforth as Faith and Inculturation).

The document openly showed that the theme of faith and inculturation has been furnished by the synod and conciliar documents, especially Gaudium et Spes, as could be seen “from its first experiences of inculturation in the Greco-Roman world.” The document goes on to narrate the way the Second Vatican Council has encouraged the promotion of culture in its documents. Faith and Inculturation also provides a clue about the relationship between culture and the message of salvation.

Thus, culture is described as “an effort toward a deeper humanity and toward a better plan for the universe.” Christians have a duty to defend the rights of persons to the culture and to

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122 Faith and Inculturation. no. 1. It should be noted that in 1984 the ITC spoke directly on the inculturation of faith in its study on the mystery of the Church and produced its document in view of the extraordinary synod of 1985.

123 Cf. Ibid., no. 2

124 Cf. Ibid., no. 3. See also Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes. no. 44.

125 Ibid.
harmonize the relationship between culture and Christianity. The document points out that both
*Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate* developed these positions, while two ordinary synods dealt
with evangelization of cultures: that of 1974 on evangelization and another in 1977, which dwelt
with catechetical formation.\(^{126}\) During the synod, which marked the twentieth anniversary of the
closing of Vatican II in 1985, inculturation featured prominently.\(^ {127}\)

*Faith and Inculturation* goes further to commend the efforts of Pope John Paul II in
promoting dialogue and the evangelization of cultures. To facilitate the process of dialogue with
cultures, the pope established a curial body, known as the Pontifical Council for Culture, in
1982.\(^ {128}\) Based on this effort of John Paul II, the International Theological Commission wishes to
discuss the theme “inculturation of faith” in this document. The document agrees with Pope John
Paul II’s strong belief that “the incarnation of the Word was also a cultural incarnation…”\(^ {129}\) Based
on this anthropological notion, the document affirms that “[c]ulture must be purified and restored
in Christ.”\(^ {130}\) Thus, the human reality of culture and the evangelization of cultures, inspired by
love for the human person, are important topics in the teachings of John Paul II.

The document is made up of three sections or sub-topics. The first deals with nature,
culture, and grace. The second treats the process of inculturation at work in the history of salvation:
in ancient Israel, in the life and work of Jesus, and in the early Church. The third section deals with
the problems presently posed to faith by its encounter with popular piety, with non-Christian
religions, with the cultural traditions in the young Churches, and modernity.\(^ {131}\)


\(^ {127}\) *Faith and Inculturation*. no. 3. Here, the synod fathers on 7 December 1985, described inculturation as, “the
intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity in the various human
cultures.”

\(^ {128}\) Cf. Ibid., no. 4.

\(^ {129}\) Ibid., no. 5.

\(^ {130}\) Ibid.

\(^ {131}\) Cf. Ibid., no. 8.
In its first section dealing with nature, culture, and grace, the document provides the opinion of anthropologists who see culture as contrary or opposed to nature. The document deals with nature as originating from God and follows natural law, while culture is the extension of what human nature requires to accomplish its end, as spelled out in *Gaudium et Spes*. The document also identified the human person as the constituent of culture. “The primary constituent of culture is the human person, considered in all aspects of his being. Man, betters himself – this is the first end of culture – but he does so thanks to the works of culture and thanks to a cultural memory. Culture also still designates the milieu in which and on account of which persons may grow.”

The document maintains that the human being is religious by nature, and has an in-born desire towards the absolute. “In a general sense, religion is an integral constituent of culture, in which it takes root and blossoms.”

*Faith and Inculturation* notes that “the Christian faith is, on the one hand, compatible with all cultures insofar as they conform to right reason and good will, and, on the other hand, to an eminent degree, a dynamizing factor of culture.” While talking about the work of grace, the document maintains that in explaining the relationship between faith and culture, “[g]race respects nature, healing in it the wounds of sin, comforting and elevating it.” This is why grace tends to reach the divine life as its end, inasmuch as nature is healed.

The document describes the process of inculturation as “the Church’s efforts to make the message of Christ penetrate a given social milieu, calling on the latter to grow according to all its particular values, as long as these are compatible with the Gospel. The term *inculturation* includes

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132 Cf. Ibid., no. 4. See also Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*. no. 53.
133 Faith and inculturation., no. 5.
134 Ibid., no. 8.
135 Ibid., no. 10.
136 Ibid.
the notion of growth, of the mutual enrichment of persons and groups, rendered possible by the
counter of the Gospel with a social milieu.”137 This is in line with Pope John Paul II’s definition
of inculturation as “the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of
these cultures into the life of the Church.”138

The second sub-topic of Faith and Inculturation is “Inculturation in the history of
salvation.” This topic compares the relationships between nature, culture, and grace with the reality
of the historical covenant between God and humanity. This covenant started with a given people,
Israel, whose son is also the Son of God and which extends to all nations on earth as the incarnate
Word.139 All these happened in the form of a revelation within the cultural milieu of ancient Israel,
which grew together with other cultures.

Thus, ancient Israel had to borrow from these other cultures. For instance, such institutions
as “circumcision, the spring sacrifice, the Sabbath rest, are not particular to it. It borrowed them
from the neighboring peoples.”140 The document clarifies that even though ancient Israel borrowed
from other cultures, it rejected the inhuman aspects inherent in them. This concept is crucial to our
understanding of inculturation in the present missionary endeavors in the Church in Igboland
today. The document also notes that:

[j]n the Old Testament, cultures fused and transformed, are placed at the service of
the revelation of the God of Abraham, lived in the covenant and recorded in
scripture. It was a unique preparation on the social and religious plane for the
coming of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, the God of Abraham, Isaac and
Jacob, revealed at a deeper level and manifested in the fullness of the Spirit, invites
all cultures to allow themselves to be changed by the life, teaching, death and
resurrection of Jesus Christ.141

137 Ibid., no. 11.
138 John Paul II. Slavorum Apostoli, 21.
139 Faith and Inculturation. section II, no. 1. See Vatican II, Dei Verbum, 13.
140 Ibid., no. 3.
141 Ibid., no. 5.
The document maintains that since both pagans and Israelites could relate under the circumstances of culture, it means that “the original plan of God concerns all creation.” This is a confirmation that the plan of salvation is inclusively meant for all and not limited to one nation or a particular religious tradition. The document moves forward to provide other subtitles that reflect the idea that Jesus is the Savior of the world, who is also present in culture and cultures. The fact of Christ’s transcendence does not “isolate him above the human family but renders him present to all, beyond all restrictions. He ‘cannot be considered foreign anywhere or to anybody.’” Surely this also applies to Africa: European culture is not the only context where Christ can be found; he is present in every culture and has come to save all humanity. “Thus, Christ is at one with us in the unity we form as in the multiplicity and diversity in which our common nature is realized.”

The third section of *Faith and Inculturation* treats a crucial point, which it identifies as “the present problems of inculturation.” Inculturation “poses considerable problems for theological reflection and pastoral action.” Certain questions were posed in the document which border on the issues that emanated during the sixteenth century discovery of the New World. Some of the questions are as follows: How may one harmonize the spontaneous expressions of the religiosity of peoples with faith? What attitude should be adopted in the face of non-Christian religions, especially those “bound up with cultural advancement?” Answers should be attempted to these questions based on the inculturation of faith, as treated under the following subtitles: popular piety, inculturation of faith and non-Christian

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145 Ibid.
146 Ibid., Section III. No. 1.
147 Ibid.
religions, the dialogue of religions, the transcendence of the Gospel in relation to culture, the young Churches and their Christian past, and Christian faith and modernity.¹⁴⁹

On popular piety, especially, in those places where the Gospel has been preached, the document says, “[W]e normally understand by popular piety, on the one hand, the union of Christian faith and piety with the profound culture, and on the other with the previous forms of religion of populations. It involves those very numerous devotions in which Christians express their religious sentiment in the simple language, among other things, of festival, pilgrimage, dance and song.”¹⁵⁰ Pope Paul VI, in Evangelii Nuntiandi, acknowledged the “rich values” of popular piety and also encouraged people to appreciate it anew, since it was neglected in the past.¹⁵¹

At this juncture, the document enlists the limits of popular piety which have often been condemned by many Christians. The limits are also addressed as dangers of popular piety. They are as follows:

- They stem from a certain naivete [and] are a source of various deformations of religion, even superstitions.

- One remains at the level of cultural manifestations without a true adhesion to faith at the level of where this is expressed in service of one’s neighbor.

- Badly directed, popular piety can even lead to the formation of sects and thus place true ecclesial unity in danger.

- It also risks being manipulated, be it by political powers or by religious forces foreign to the Christian faith.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Faith and Inculturation. Section III, no. 1.
¹⁵⁰ Ibid., no. 2. It should be noted that the Third General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America, in their document “The Evangelization of Latin America in the Present and Future,” 488, talked about “vital synthesis” with reference to this piety, it unites “body and spirit, ecclesial communion and institution, individual and community, Christian faith and love of one’s country, intelligence and affectivity.”
¹⁵² Cf. Faith and Inculturation. Section III, no. 6.
To tackle these limits or dangers of popular piety, the document recommends having regular and intelligent catechesis. The liturgy should be lively, adapted to the integration of pure faith in its traditional forms suitable to the people’s religious life.\footnote{153 Cf. Ibid., no. 7.}

The document notes that the Church has had a long history of encounter with religious plurality in the world. Because the number of Christians in the world is relatively high, “they must live in a world which expresses a growing sympathy for pluralism in religious matters.”\footnote{154 Ibid., no. 8.} For this reason, any Church situated in a particular cultural locality must be ready to encounter non-Christian religions in such a given cultural environment and take them seriously. \textit{Faith and Inculturation} cites an example with the multi-religious culture of Asia, which has Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, Taoism, and Shintoism, which have deeply influenced the lives of the people. They need enter into interreligious dialogue to enhance cordial relationship.\footnote{155 Cf. Ibid., no. 10.}

The dialogue of religions is therefore necessary because, “dialogue with other religions forms an integral part of Christian life: by exchange, study and work in common, this dialogue contributes to a better understanding of the religion of the other and to a growth of piety.”\footnote{156 Ibid., no. 11.} The document quotes from \textit{Nostra Aetate} to support the fact that the Holy Spirit is mysteriously present and directing the Church to listen and learn from other religious traditions who also learn from her.\footnote{157 Cf. Ibid., no. 12. Cf. Vatican II, \textit{Nostra Aetate}, no. 2.}

The document affirms that “[t]his dialogue possesses something original, since, as the history of religions testify, the plurality of religions has often given rise to discrimination and jealously, fanaticism and despotism, all of which drew on religion the accusation of being a source...
of division in the human family.”

158 Faith and Inculturation notes that while it is true that the Church respects what is “true and holy” in people’s cultural heritage, it should not compromise the Gospel with such. This means that the Christian faith is an affirmation that the incarnation took place in a specific human culture. That is, no absolute character is attributed to such cultural heritages as to override the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word. Hence, while inculturation requires interreligious dialogue, it should not succumb to syncretism. 160 Or the fusion of Christianity and African Traditional Religion. What is important in inculturation is the incarnation of the Gospel message in a culture and the appropriation of the good cultural values found in a place to make the Gospel message make meaning to the people. This is done through dialogue, as opposed to the arbitrary fusion of scrutinized cultural elements into Christianity.

The young Churches represent the people of “the new covenant” who concretize the mystery of Christ—the “Servant of Yahweh,” foretold by the prophets of old, to be savior and light to all the nations on earth. 161 The young Churches therefore, originated from the little group of the Twelve, who were with Christ during the Last Supper, also known as “the covenant meal.” This small group thrived within a particular culture and became the people of the new covenant. The document believes that “it is insofar as it commemorates the paschal mystery and ceaselessly announces the return of the Lord that the Church may be called an eschatology that began with the cultural traditions of peoples, on condition, of course, that these traditions had been subjected to

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158 Faith and Inculturation. Section III. no. 13.
159 Ibid. See also Vatican II, Lumen Gentium. no. 1, 48.
160 Faith and Inculturation. Section III. no. 14.
161 Cf. Ibid., no. 15.
the purifying law of death and resurrection in Christ Jesus.”¹⁶² This statement implies that these initial cultures were not discarded but were purified. Saint Paul did likewise, during the encounter with the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17: 16-34). Therefore, “the young church interprets its ancestral culture in a new and creative manner.”¹⁶³

The last part of the third section of Faith and Inculturation dwells on the aspect of “Christian faith and modernity.” Here, it observes that new human discoveries through science and technology, and urban development, affect the society and its people seriously. “They were the beneficiaries and also, quite often, the victims of these changes.”¹⁶⁴ For this reason, Christians have the onus to learn the characteristics of the culture of their time, since “the industrial revolution was also a cultural revolution.”¹⁶⁵ During the time of such a revolution, many things were subjected to questioning, such as personal or communal work, relation of man to nature, family membership and its support both at home and at work, belonging to human local or religious communities, and taking part in the traditional ceremonies and rites that make up human existence. While much progress has been made industrially, there are risks and deep-rooted misgivings.

However, there is hope for moral recovery, for if people listen to the Gospel, it will lead to spiritual regeneration. To achieve this, the document calls for, “solidarity, in the interest of the whole good of the person, to the promotion of peace and justice, to adoration of the Father, from whom all good things come.”¹⁶⁶

Faith and Inculturation also gives three methodological elements that will enhance evangelization and uphold the inculturation of the Gospel in modern societies. These elements are

¹⁶² Ibid., no. 17.
¹⁶³ Ibid., no. 18.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid., no. 20.
¹⁶⁵ Ibid., no. 21.
¹⁶⁶ Ibid., no. 22.
(1) an attitude of openness and a critical eye; (2) the capacity to perceive the spiritual expectations and human aspirations of the new cultures; (3) the aptitude for cultural analysis, having in mind an effective encounter with the modern world. The document advises those who wish to evangelize the society to acquire a receptive attitude and a new sense of solidarity. This is in line with the Second Vatican’s resolve to take “a lively account of the new conditions in which she must exercise her mission, and it is in the cultures of modernity that the Church of tomorrow will be constructed.”

The document illustrates this idea about carrying the people’s cultural values along by citing Pope Pius XII. “It is necessary to deepen one’s understanding of the civilization and institutions of various peoples and to cultivate their best qualities and gifts… All in the customs of peoples which are not inextricably bound up with superstition or errors should be examined with benevolence and if possible, preserved intact.” To determine this requires interreligious dialogue with the custodians of such values. Cultures should be analyzed so that they can actually recover their moral or spiritual values. The document advises that “a mobilization of the whole Church is called for so that the extremely complex task of the inculturation of the Gospel in today’s world may be faced with success.”

Lastly, the document cites Pope John Paul II, who says, “From the beginning of my pontificate I considered that the dialogue of the church with cultures of our time was a vital area, whose stake is the fate of the world in thus the end of the twentieth century.” From this document, we see that the Church in Igboland and the Christian faith in general require proper

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167 Ibid., no. 23.
168 Ibid., no. 24.
169 Ibid. See also Pius XII. *Summi Pontificatus*.
170 Ibid., no. 26.
inculturation within the context of the people’s culture and religious expression. We turn now to
the review of another document, *Redemptoris Missio*, by Pope John Paul II.

2.6.2. Review of *Redemptoris Missio* on Interreligious Dialogue and Cultural Renewal

The encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary
Mandate), was issued on December 7, 1990,\(^\text{172}\) by Pope John Paul II. It is an eye opener in
understanding the importance of missionary activity. This mission-oriented encyclical comprises
eight chapters, which are anchored on the experiences the pope acquired through the many travels
he made to various countries of the world. In the encyclical, the pope encourages all peoples of
the world to incarnate the teachings of the Gospel into the main stream of their culture and
tradition.

The introduction laments that the missionary mandate given by Christ to the Church has
yet to reach its completion. The pope urges “peoples everywhere [to] open the doors to Christ! His
Gospel in no way detracts from man’s freedom, from the respect that is owed to every culture and
to whatever is good in each religion.”\(^\text{173}\) The pope makes a link between the incarnation, culture,
and human freedom, while emphasizing the necessity of missionary activity.

Chapter 1, which is captioned “Jesus Christ, the only Savior,” conservatively upholds the
fundamental doctrine of the Catholic Church. The Pope anchors the teaching in the mystery of
Christ as it is stated in the Nicene Creed, which is centered on the Trinitarian article of faith: “I
believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God…”\(^\text{174}\) The expression of faith plays

\(^\text{172}\) It should be recalled that the encyclical letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, was published on 22 January 1991. It marks
*Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation* (Maryknoll, New York:

\(^\text{173}\) John Paul II. *Redemptoris Missio*, no. 3.

\(^\text{174}\) Ibid., no. 4.
an important role in accomplishing the mission of redeeming the entire humanity by Christ. The pope observed that the world needs missionary activity because not all know Christ who is the savior of all mankind.

Faith in Christ is the basis for any missionary activity. In this sense, the relevance of the mission to non-Christians becomes questionable, especially when examined in relation to such sayings as “No one comes to the Father, but by me” (Jn 14:6); “I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rv. 22:13). This has been the basic teaching of the Church—that Christ is the one and only savior of all mankind who leads all to God. The pope cited many passages from the New Testament to emphasize the universality of salvation in Christ the Lord, who is the one mediator between God and mankind.175

Pope John Paul II also affirms that “faith in Christ is directed to man’s freedom.” This is because “the urgency of missionary activity derives from the radical newness of life brought by Christ and lived by his followers.”176 On human freedom, the Pope quotes from Vatican II’s declaration on human freedom Dignitatis Humanae, which asserts that “[t]he human person has a right to religious freedom… All should have such immunity from coercion by individuals, or by groups, or by any human power, that no one should be forced to act against his conscience in religious matters, nor prevented from acting according to his conscience, whether in private or in public, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.”177

The encyclical draws attention to “the Church as Sign and Instrument of Salvation.” The Church stands out as the body of Christ who collaborates with him in the salvation of mankind through her missionary activity. In that order, God loves all people and wants them to be saved

175 Ibid., See nos. 5, 6.
176 Ibid., no. 7.
177 Ibid., no. 8. Quoted from Vatican II, Dignitatis Humanae, no. 2.
through Christ, the one mediator, and the Church he established as the universal sacrament of salvation.\textsuperscript{178} The pope emphasized the need to “keep these two truths together, namely, the real possibility of salvation in Christ for all mankind and the necessity of the Church for salvation.”\textsuperscript{179}

Thus, salvation in Christ is offered to all human beings. Here, the document provides a definition for the universality of salvation. “The universality of salvation means that it is granted not only to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church. Since salvation is offered for all, it must be made concretely available to all.”\textsuperscript{180} Some theologians critique the Catholic Church’s non-acceptance of religious pluralism based on this statement.

For instance, Iwuchukwu observes that “Dupuis will argue that it is a contradiction for the Church to hold such an outstanding view of universal salvation and be opposed to \textit{de jure} religious pluralism.”\textsuperscript{181} The document also maintains that Christ is the only mediator. However, it acknowledges the fact of participated forms of mediation, though they are not equal to that of Christ. “Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value only from Christ’s own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his.”\textsuperscript{182}

In the second chapter, which is subtitled, “the Kingdom of God,”\textsuperscript{183} the document presents the different biblical texts from the Old to the New Testaments which focus on the relationship between the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom brought about by and in Christ, and the Church as the proclaimer of the Kingdom to all peoples. This chapter alludes to the issue of salvation for all in Christ who reveals God’s presence among all peoples. “The Kingdom of God is meant for all

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., no.9. Cf. Vatican II, \textit{Lumen Gentium}, no. 48., \textit{Gaudium et Spes}, no 43.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., no. 10.
\textsuperscript{181} Iwuchukwu, \textit{Media Ecology and Religious Pluralism}, 46.
\textsuperscript{182} John Paul II. \textit{Redemptoris Missio}, no. 5.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., no. 12.
mankind, and all people are called to become members of it.”¹⁸⁴ In relation to the Church, the document affirms that “the Church is effectively and concretely at the service of the kingdom. This is seen especially in her preaching, which is a call to conversion. Preaching constitutes the Church’s first and fundamental way of serving the coming of the kingdom in individuals and in human society.”¹⁸⁵ Another way the Church serves the kingdom is “by establishing communities and founding new particular churches, and by guiding them to mature faith and charity in openness toward others, in service to individuals and society, and in understanding and esteem for human institutions.”¹⁸⁶

The title of Chapter 3 is “The Holy Spirit: The Principal Agent of Mission.” The mission entrusted by Christ to the church through the apostles continues to work through the action of the Holy Spirit. *Redemptoris Missio* asserts this by affirming that “[t]he Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the church’s mission. His action is preeminent in the mission *ad gentes*, as can clearly be seen in the early church…”¹⁸⁷ Hence, the church of the new missionary era ought to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit for credible evangelization of the world.

The fourth chapter, titled “The Vast Horizons of the Mission *Ad Gentes*,” notes that the missionary frontier has no boundary. All peoples should benefit and share in the missionary enterprise. The principal content of missionary endeavor is the communication of the love of God to all. For this reason, “this mission is one and undivided, having one origin and one final purpose; but within it, there are different tasks and kinds of activity.”¹⁸⁸

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¹⁸⁴ Ibid., no. 14.
¹⁸⁵ Ibid., no. 20.
¹⁸⁶ Ibid.
¹⁸⁷ Ibid., no. 21.
¹⁸⁸ Ibid., no. 31.
Despite the universality of the missionary activity of the Church, there are certain geographical limits, which are designated as “parameters of the Church’s missionary Ad Gentes.” Therefore, missionary activity “is exercised within well-defined territories and groups of people”\(^\text{189}\) because situations and circumstances differ from one place to another, especially with regard to some places that have yet to know Christ or those already evangelized who might have relapsed.

The document also emphasizes the cultural sector, which illustrates the experience of St. Paul in “Athens, where he went to the Areopagus and proclaimed the Gospel in language appropriate to and understandable in the surroundings (cf. Acts 17:22-31).”\(^\text{190}\) To this effect, there is need to integrate the new means of communicating the Gospel, especially the media, into the “new culture” created by the same media today because “there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology.”\(^\text{191}\) Thus, all hands must be on deck to achieve success. This entails promoting human freedom and remaining faithful to Christ. The document clearly states that “[t]he Church proposes; she imposes nothing. She respects individuals and cultures, and she honors the sanctuary of conscience.”\(^\text{192}\)

Chapter 5 presents “Paths of Mission” and sets “witness” as the first and major form of mission. Hence, “the first form of witness is the very life of the missionary, of Christian family, and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living.”\(^\text{193}\) This new way of living does not deprive one of being part of one’s origins. Thus, the document stresses the idea that “Christians and Christian communities are very much a part of the life of their respective nations and can be a

\(^{189}\) Ibid., no. 37. See also Vatican II, Ad Gentes, no. 6.
\(^{190}\) Ibid.
\(^{191}\) Ibid.
\(^{192}\) Ibid., no. 38.
\(^{193}\) Ibid., no. 42.
sign of the Gospel in their fidelity to their native land, people and national culture, while always
preserving the freedom brought by Christ."194 From this, one might rightly argue that mission
relates to the proclamation that all men and women are saved by the grace of God through Jesus
Christ in the Holy Spirit.

The Pope emphasizes the need for incarnating the Gospel in peoples’ cultures. “As she
carries out missionary activity among nations, the Church encounters different cultures and
becomes involved in the process of Inculturation. The need for such involvement has marked the
Church’s pilgrimage throughout her history, but today it is particularly urgent.”195 This chapter
maintains that “[i]nculturation is a slow journey which accompanies the whole of missionary life.
It involves those working in the Church’s mission ad gentes, the Christian communities as they
develop, and the bishops, who have the task of providing discernment and encouragement for its
implementation.”196

To this effect, the document emphasizes the idea that “missionaries, who come from other
churches and countries, must immerse themselves in the cultural milieu of those to whom they are
sent, moving beyond their own cultural limitations. Hence, they must learn the language of the
place in which they work, become familiar with the most important expressions of the local culture,
and discover its values through direct experience.”197 This is re-echoed in the same document when
the pope writes, “The safeguarding of traditional values is the work of a mature faith.”198 In the
African context, the Igbo faith has matured; thus, it is time to safeguard its traditional values.

194 Ibid., no. 43.
197 Ibid., no. 53. Here it is stated that missionaries should appreciate the culture of the place they are sent to work.
198 Ibid., no. 54.
Redemptoris Missio gives the meaning of interreligious dialogue and its relationship with the evangelizing mission of the Church as follows:

Interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission ad gentes; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions. This mission, in fact, is addressed to those who do not know Christ and his Gospel, and who belong for the most part to other religions.\footnote{John Paul II Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Missio, no. 55. Also, qtd. by Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli, Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2006), 27.}

Pope John Paul II’s visits and meetings with leaders and representatives of different religious confessions in different parts of the world gave interreligious dialogue much theological prominence and ecclesiastical backing. The most remarkable initiative of the Pope towards promoting interreligious dialogue was the convocation of the World Day of Prayer for Peace at Assisi in 1986.\footnote{Cf. Michael L. Fitzgerald, “Pope John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue: A Catholic Assessment.” in John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue, ed. Byron L. Sherwin and Harold Kasimow. (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 29, 208.} Another outstanding achievement of the Pope towards interreligious dialogue was during his visit and meeting with the religious leaders of Sri Lanka in 1995, where he declared:

The Catholic Church has been fully committed to pursuing the path of dialogue and cooperating with members of other religions. Interreligious dialogue is a precious means by which the followers of various religions discover shared points of contact in the spiritual life, while acknowledging the differences which exist among them. The Church respects the freedom of individuals to seek the truth and to embrace it according to the dictates of conscience.\footnote{Sherwin and Kasimow, John Paul II and Interreligious Dialogue, 9-10. See also Pope John Paul II, “To the Religious Leaders of Sri Lanka,” Colombo, January 21, 1995.}

This understanding of dialogue is developed with regard to the Church’s relationship with other religions that are non-Christian. The document also states: “In Christ, God calls all peoples to himself and he wishes to share with them the fullness of his revelation and love. He does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only in individuals but also to entire peoples through spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential expression…”\footnote{John Paul II. Redemptoris Missio, no. 55.} Hence,
while the Church encourages dialogue with people of other religions, she also continues to proclaim Christ as the savior of all.

The document maintains that both interreligious dialogue and the proclaiming of Christ go hand in hand with the economy of salvation. “These two elements must maintain both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore, they should not be confused, manipulated, or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable.”203 The fact that the Church acknowledges whatever is true and holy in other religious traditions does not mean she will stop proclaiming Christ.

On the necessity of the Church, the document—while quoting Vatican II documents—also affirms: “Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation.”204 The pope goes further to assert that dialogue is not just ordinary random talk, but it has its means and methods of maintaining its dignity and respect. Hence, “those engaged in this dialogue must be consistent with their own religious traditions and convictions, and be open to understand those of the other party without pretense or close-mindedness, but with truth, humility and frankness, knowing that dialogue can enrich each side.”205 Dialogue at this level must be devoid of all bias or prejudices by both parties.

Many areas lie open for dialogue in its different forms, and all these lead to the establishment of cordiality in human society. At different levels all are encouraged to be involved in dialogue that leads to the kingdom. Concerning development, the document comments that the

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203 Ibid.
204 Ibid. Cf. Vatican II, Unitatis Redintegratio, no. 3. Ad Gentes, no. 7.
205 Ibid., no. 56.
Church is also involved in this aspect through the proclamation of the Gospel and the formation of conscience, which lead to human promotion.\textsuperscript{206}

The sixth chapter recognizes that “the Church is missionary by her very nature, for Christ’s mandate is not something contingent or external, but reaches the very heart of the Church.”\textsuperscript{207} The document also requests local Churches to send missionaries to other places, given that the Church is universal and missionary. This collaborative venture will be beneficial in that younger Christian communities will be helped by older and richer ones. This means that the bishops should collaborate with the pope to increase missionary vocations and to evangelize the entire world.

The seventh chapter emphasizes the need for “cooperation in missionary activity.”\textsuperscript{208} The most effective and evident manner of cooperating in missionary activity is through witness, prayer and sacrifice. Chapter 8 is dedicated to “Missionary Spirituality,” which demands missionaries to be docile to the promptings of the Spirit within them, which stimulate intimate union with Christ. The conclusion expresses enthusiasm in its response to missionary activity by all Christians. This is the spontaneous presence of the Spirit guiding and directing the whole human race and the Church to genuine cultural renewal today. We will turn now to another document dealing with the fruits of interreligious dialogue.


A document titled “Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” was issued by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in collaboration with the Congregation for the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[206] Cf. Ibid., no. 59.
\item[207] Ibid., no. 62.
\item[208] Ibid., no. 77.
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Evangelization of Peoples in 1991. The document is made up of three main divisions which include: “interreligious dialogue, proclaiming Jesus Christ, and interreligious dialogue and proclamation.”

Furthermore, the document presents three parts that portray dialogue and proclamation as an interesting area for serious study. In the first instance, the document teaches that we live in a religious pluralistic world in which religions influence the behavior of their adherents. For this reason, “in the present context of religious plurality, the important role played by religious traditions cannot be overlooked.” The second point is that although interreligious dialogue between Christians and non-Christians is yet to be successfully carried out, it should not be neglected. Finally, it is observed that opinions on this issue differ, because most people are opposed to interreligious dialogue while others express doubt as to whether dialogue has come to replace the proclamation of the Gospel.

For this reason, the document anchors its teaching in Pope John Paul II’s encyclical letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, for clarification and to provide the way forward. This implies that *Dialogue and Proclamation* and *Redemptoris Missio*, complement each other. The document also provides the significance of interreligious dialogue as manifested on the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi in October 1986 convoked by Pope John Paul II. The pope expressed the view that interreligious dialogue and the proclamation of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ are genuine but

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diverse ways of engaging in the mission of the Church. One cannot emphasize the one while
discarding the other.

The document clarifies certain terms it will be dealing with, so that they will be properly
understood. The terms are: “evangelization, dialogue, proclamation, conversion, religious
traditions, and new religious movements.” Evangelization, here, refers to the entire mission of
the Church in a broad sense and to proclamation in a specific sense. The document explains that
dialogue could be understood in different ways, but “in the context of religious pluralism, dialogue
means, ‘all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of
other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment’ (D & M 3), in obedience
to truth and respect for freedom.”

The document maintains that “[p]roclamation is the communication of the Gospel
message, the mystery of salvation realized by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit.
It is an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism into the
community of believers which is the Church.” In Evangelii Nuntiandi, proclamation is said to
be the “foundation, center, and summit of evangelization (Cf. EN 27).” The document affirms
that “interreligious dialogue ought to extend to all religions and their followers.”

Within the major parts of dialogue and proclamation, interreligious dialogue ranks first.
This first part of the document is further divided into five subheadings such as: “a Christian
approach to religious traditions, the place of interreligious dialogue in the evangelizing mission of

216 Ibid., no. 10. Here, the document mentions that proclamation could be solemn or public as in Acts 2:5-41, or
private as in Acts 8:30-38.
217 Ibid.
218 Ibid., no. 13.
the church, forms of dialogue, dispositions for interreligious dialogue and its fruits, and obstacles to dialogue.”219

While expatiating on the topic of “a Christian approach to religious traditions,” the document commends the effort so far made by the Church to get to know other religions. It recommends that a practical approach to other religious traditions and their adherents be fostered through genuine interreligious dialogue. Christians should approach other religious traditions with a sense of respect, especially the values they represent and offer to the human society. Pointing out the good example offered by the Second Vatican Council in reference to salvation for all in Christ, the document quotes from *Gaudium et Spes*, which says: “For since Christ died for all, and since all are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal Mystery.”220 Emphasizing the need to respect other religious traditions, *Dialogue and Proclamation* refers its readers to important council and Magisterial documents, ranging from *Ad Gentes* and *Nostra Aetate*, to the teachings and encyclicals of John Paul II, such as *Redemptoris Missio* and others, which refer to the issue of universal salvation in Christ and dialogue and purification.221

The second sub-topic of the first part of *Dialogue and Proclamation* deals with “the place of interreligious dialogue in the evangelizing mission of the Church.”222 Here the document quoted *Lumen Gentium* especially, where it refers to the Church as “the sign and instrument of the divine plan of salvation.”223 The document refers to the Church as synonymous with the “seed and

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221 Ibid., nos. 16-32.
222 Ibid., nos. 33-41.
beginning of the kingdom” in the theological sense. Both are inseparably centered on Christ. The document also talks about the way the Church should relate with other religious traditions. On this, it states: “the members of other religious traditions who, inasmuch as they respond to God’s calling as perceived by their conscience, are saved in Jesus Christ and thus already share in some way in the reality which is signified by the kingdom.”

Orders and Proclamation views the Church as both a divine and a human institution. It is holy by its divine nature while as human institution, it is imperfect; and as such, it is a pilgrim Church still searching for the truth. For this reason, and in the theological sense, the Church should enter into a dialogue of salvation with all, which makes her commitment to interreligious dialogue necessary for her evangelizing mission. This process might sometimes lead to conversion from one religion to another. It also encourages mutual respect and freedom to follow one’s conscience in collaboration with the Holy Spirit. This shows that “interreligious dialogue possesses its own validity.”

In the third sub-topic of this section, Dialogue and Proclamation also explains the forms of dialogue, their interdependence, the aspect of human liberation, dialogue and culture, the tensions and conflicts involved in them. The forms of dialogue are the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of theological exchange, and the dialogue of religious experience.

The fourth sub-topic dwells on dispositions for interreligious dialogue and its fruits. The document exhorts all involved in interreligious dialogue to adopt a balanced attitude, to uphold their various religious convictions, and to be open to truth, which disposes one to obtain the fruits

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224 Ibid., no. 35. See also Iwuchukwu, Media Ecology and Religious Pluralism, 55.
225 Ibid., nos. 40-41. See also Dialogue and Mission, no. 37.
of dialogue. By doing this, those engaged in dialogue acquire new dimensions in their faith expressions. Christians, on their part, will witness new discoveries that manifest “the active presence of the mystery of Jesus Christ beyond the visible boundaries of the Church and of the Christian fold.” While non-Christians would be enriched by the light of the Gospel transforming their traditional and spiritual values.

The fifth and last sub-heading of the first part of *Dialogue and Proclamation* enumerates the obstacles to dialogue. The document treats these obstacles, which pose challenges to the free flow of interreligious dialogue, as human factors; yet, they cannot overshadow the divine will. These human obstacles as listed in the document are as follows:

a. Insufficient grounding in one’s own faith.

b. Insufficient knowledge and understanding of the belief and practices of other religions, leading to a lack of appreciation for their significance and even at times to misinterpretation.

c. Cultural differences, arising from different levels of instruction, or from the use of different languages.

d. Sociopolitical factors or burdens of the past.

e. Wrong understanding of the meaning of such terms as *conversion*, *baptism*, *dialogue*, etc.

f. Self-sufficiency, lack of openness leading to defensive or aggressive attitudes.

g. A lack of conviction with regard to the value of interreligious dialogue, which some may see as a task reserved to specialists, and others as a sign of weakness or even a betrayal of the faith.

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\(^{227}\) Ibid., nos. 47-50.
\(^{228}\) Ibid., no. 50.
h. Suspicion about others’ motives in dialogue.

i. A polemical spirit when expressing religious convictions.

j. Intolerance, which is often aggravated by association with political, economic, racial, and ethnic factors; a lack of reciprocity in dialogue which can lead to frustration.

k. Certain features of the present religious climate—e.g., growing materialism, religious indifference, and the multiplication of religious sects, which creates confusion and raise new problems.\textsuperscript{229}

It should be noted that interreligious dialogue has a divine dimension to it as God’s own initiative to have a dialogue with humankind.\textsuperscript{230} Most of the human obstacles arise out of ignorance and lack of love for learning about the goal of interreligious dialogue and other religious traditions, especially when one feels that one’s religion is superior to others.

The second section of dialogue and proclamation has, “Proclaiming Jesus Christ” as its title. It is made up of eight sub-topics which theologically present the ways, means, and methods of meaningfully proclaiming the Gospel. Although obstacles plague proclamation, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the evangelizing mission of the Church must be accomplished. The sub-topics include the mandate from the risen Lord, the role of the Church, the content of proclamation, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the urgency of proclamation, the manner of proclamation, obstacles to proclamation, and proclamation in the evangelizing mission of the Church.\textsuperscript{231}

Within the first sub-topic, the document bases its teachings on the sacred Scriptures, especially the passages from Matthew 28:1–20, Mark 16:15–16, Luke 24:46–48, Acts 1:8, and

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\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., no. 52.
\textsuperscript{230} Cf. Dialogue and Proclamation, no. 53.
\textsuperscript{231} Ibid., nos.55–75.
\end{flushright}
John 20:21, all of which contain the missionary mandate. These passages and others portray the presence of the kingdom as witnessed through the work of Christ while on earth. Hence, the Church as a witness and at the service of the kingdom has the duty to prepare missionaries for the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

To accomplish the important task of proclaiming the Gospel, *Dialogue and Proclamation* enlists the qualities that must be present in the Church’s proclamation of the Gospel: 232

a) Confidence in the power of the Spirit and in obedience to the mandate received from the Lord (cf. *1 Tm* 2:2; *2 Co* 3:12; *7:4; Ph* 1:20; *Ep* 3:12; 6:19-20; *Ac* 4:13, 29-31; 9:27,28 etc.).

b) Faithfulness in the transmission of the teaching received from Christ and preserved in the Church, which is the depository of the Good News to be proclaimed (cf. EN 15). “Fidelity to the message whose servant we are… is a pivotal point of proclamation” (EN 4). “Evangelization is for no one an individual and isolated act; it is one that is deeply ecclesial” (EN 60).

c) Humility in the awareness that the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ has been received as a free gift (*Ep* 3:2) and that the messengers of the Gospel do not always fully live up to its demands.

d) Respect for the presence and action of the Spirit of God in the hearts of those who listen to the message in the recognition that the Spirit is the “principal agent of evangelization” (EN 75).

e) Dialogical, for in proclamation the hearer of the word is not expected to be a passive receiver. There is progress from the “seeds of the Word” already present in the hearer to

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232 Cf. Ibid., no. 70.
the full mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Church must recognize a process of purification and enlightenment in which the Spirit of God opens the mind and heart of the hearer to the obedience of faith.

f) Inculturation, incarnated in the culture and the spiritual tradition of those addressed, so that the message is not only intelligible to them but is also conceived as responding to their deepest aspirations, as truly the Good News they have been longing for (cf. EN 20, 62). Dialogue and Proclamation also goes further to enumerate the obstacles to proclamation. The obstacles are categorized as internal and external factors, which are also described as the difficulties of proclamation. Those arising from within the Christian community are as follows:

a) Christian witness may not correspond to belief; there is a gap between word and deed, between the Christian message and the way Christians live.

b) Christians may fail to proclaim the Gospel through negligence, human respect, or shame, which St. Paul called “blushing for the Gospel” or because of false ideas about God’s plan of salvation (EN 80).

c) Christians who lack appreciation and respect for other believers and their religious traditions are ill-prepared to proclaim the Gospel to them.

d) In some Christians, an attitude of superiority, which can show itself at the cultural level, might give rise to the supposition that a particular culture is linked with the Christian message and is to be imposed on converts.

The external difficulties are also enlisted by the document in the following manner:

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233 Ibid. Also cf. Burrows, Redemption and Dialogue, 112. See also Iwuchukwu, Media Ecology and Religious Pluralism, 58.

234 Dialogue and Proclamation, no. 73. See also Burrows, Redemption and Dialogue, 113.
a) The weight of history makes proclamation more difficult, as certain methods of evangelization in the past have sometimes aroused fear and suspicion on the part of the followers of other religions.

b) The members of other religions may fear that the Church’s evangelizing mission will result in the destruction of their religion and culture.

c) A different conception of human rights or a lack of respect for them in practice can result in lack of religious freedom.

d) Persecution can render the Church’s proclamation especially difficult or well-nigh impossible. It must be remembered, however, that the cross is a source of life. As the saying goes, “The blood of Martyrs is the seed of Christians.”

e) The identification of a particular religion with the national culture or with a political system creates a climate of intolerance.

f) In some places, conversion is forbidden by law, or converts to Christianity meet with serious problems, such as ostracism by their religious community of origin, social milieu or cultural environment.

g) In pluralistic contexts, the danger of indifferentism, relativism, or religious syncretism creates obstacles to the proclamation of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{235}

The document also talks about dialogical and inculcated qualities of proclaiming or incarnating the Gospel, and the fear that one religious tradition might destroy another. This constitutes an obstacle indeed. Hence, there is need for inculturation and interreligious dialogue.

The last section is titled “Interreligious Dialogue and Proclamation.” An analysis of this last part shows that the document theologically identifies both interreligious dialogue and proclamation as interrelated, and yet each maintains its own distinct outlook. The Church and her members should carry out her mission through dialogue in the conviction that her mission of proclaiming the Gospel is meant for all. The document puts it clearly that the Church while dealing with other religious traditions plays a prophetic role. This means that the Church ought to decipher the “signs of the times” in bearing witness to the Gospel values, “through which the Spirit of God is speaking, teaching and guiding.”

The significance of this part hinges on the fact that “the members of the Church and the followers of other religions find themselves to be companions on the common path which humanity is called to tread.” For this reason, the document maintains that “the Church encourages and fosters interreligious dialogue not only between herself and other religious traditions, but even among these religious traditions themselves.” Through engaging in interreligious dialogue and by proclamation, both Christians and the followers of other religions may observe that they share common values.

Hence, as Christians and members of different religious traditions engage in interreligious dialogue, love should be the common ground for the sharing of each other’s faith. This concept is based on the idea that “all dialogue implies and aims at banishing fear and aggressiveness.” Christians are to draw closer to Christ as the model of dialogue and proclaiming of the kingdom.

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237 Dialogue and Proclamation, no. 78.
239 Dialogue and Proclamation, no. 80.
240 Ibid., no. 83.
Then comes the presence of the Holy Spirit who inspires freedom, faith, and obedience. “In this way, the partners in dialogue proceed in response to the divine call of which they are conscious.”  

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, the position of the WCC, Paul VI’s *Ecclesiam Suam* and some of the Second Vatican Council’s documents and Post-Conciliar documents on religious plurality and interreligious dialogue are examined. Again, the documents that may reflect religious inclusivity and the critique of the Council’s treatment of religious plurality were also reviewed. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the WCC had initiated calls to acknowledge religious freedom. Paul VI’s encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, became a masterpiece that opened Catholic thought towards inculturation and interreligious dialogue.

The Council Fathers also emphasized the need for dialogue and exhorted members of the Church to respect those values that are shared with non-Christian religions. John Paul II pointed out the need for the Church to carry out her missionary activity through genuine dialogue with other religious cultures. Through engaging in interreligious dialogue and studying the values in other religions, both Christians and non-Christians may understand each other. This will also lead to the appreciation of those values they share, which point to their common destiny in one God. When Christians and members of different religious traditions engage in interreligious dialogue, love, openness, and tolerance should characterize the common ground for discussing each other’s faith. This is with the view that no one religion has a monopoly on truth, though the Church holds up Christ as the source of truth and salvation; even so, no person can claim to know the truth

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241 Ibid., no. 84.
entirely. Therefore, the claim to superiority by any particular religious confession should be avoided. Hence, religious plurality is both a *de jure* and *de facto* reality ordained by the absolute.

As Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II, rightly observed in their various encyclicals, there is a need for renewal in the Church’s method of evangelization which finds expression in mutual respect through interreligious dialogue. The process of inculturation, which refers to the incarnation of the Gospel in different cultures, should be vigorously pursued. This will be successfully achieved through missionary activity that is adapted to acknowledge or recognize the genuine traditional forms suitable to the people’s culture and religious life. The Church does not reject whatever is holy and genuine in other religions because there is salvation for all in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

However, certain difficulties or obstacles undermine the process of genuine inculturation and interreligious dialogue. Most of these difficulties are human, not divine, and they include fear, a claim to superiority, and lack of openness. The whole Church is called upon to overcome these human obstacles, so that the task of reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue between the Church and African Traditional Religion in Igboland may be faced successfully. The next chapter discusses reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue.
Chapter 3: Reshaping the Theology and Praxis of Inculturation through Interreligious Dialogue

3.1 Introduction

In recent times, the Church, previously seen as European, is witnessing a dramatic shift of emphasis towards the developing nations of the world. It is believed that the early European missionaries to Africa neglected African culture and religion. Dialogue was not seen as a practical process for interaction between Christianity and African indigenous religion. “Christians did not take the religious traditions of Africa as seriously as they did the so-called ‘World Religions’ of Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism… African religions were despised as a miscellaneous collection of superstitious beliefs.”¹ Thanks to the Second Vatican Council and the world-wide travels and efforts of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II. Through them significant changes have been made in the attitude of the Catholic Church towards other religious traditions.

One of Vatican II’s documents, Nostra Aetate, initiated this change, and it is bearing much fruit in many parts of the world today. Vatican II is considered a landmark in Church history, as “the Catholic Church at Vatican II exhibited greater geographic and ethnic inclusiveness than ever before in its history.”² The questions that need to be answered are as follows: Is it possible to reshape the pre-Vatican II elements that remain in Igbo liturgy?³ Can liturgical inculturation through interreligious dialogue be attainable in Igboland? Who should take the initiative and how will it be carried out? Thus, liturgical inculturation through interreligious dialogue between

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³ Cf. Uzukwu, “Liturgy and Inculturation,” 19-30. Here, Uzukwu observes that in the Igbo Church, “[o]ne could rightly consider liturgical practice as almost the same as in the pre-Vatican II time.” In most parts of Igboland, the Latin Mass is still in use. People are still not allowed to receive Holy Communion in their palm, only on the tongue. People still kneel along concrete altar rails to receive Communion. Lay Eucharistic ministers are not used in the Igbo Church yet today.
Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion shall form the major element of this reshaping process within the Church in Igboland.

In answer to the first question, it is possible for Christianity in Igboland to become part of Igbo cultural life as is the case in Europe. Such might be achieved by establishing a harmonious relationship between good Igbo religious and cultural values and the Church in Igboland. By way of answering the second question, it is attainable, and it requires a process of reshaping through interreligious dialogue between Igbo Traditional Religion and the Church. The answer to the third question will require courage from the Church in Igboland to take the initiative. By spreading to other countries, the Church encounters other cultures and religious systems which need to be explored for possible inculturation of the Gospel message. The process of interreligious dialogue is needed to make the exploration successful.

Avery Dulles observes that the Second Vatican Council has opened the avenue for inculturation. “It admitted the vernacular into the liturgy, provided for the establishment of the international Synod of Bishops, gave new statutes to the regional and national bishops’ conferences, and endorsed the principle of missionary accommodation.”4 The Council also allowed the bishops of the different continents of the world to maximize efforts toward maintaining their identity by avoiding copying from Europe. For this reason, the bishops ought to channel their insights and their distinctive religious experiences toward interreligious dialogue aimed at facilitating the process of inculturation. This challenge to facilitate the process of inculturation is geared towards the Church in Africa, especially in Igboland, where inculturation is still very slow.

For this reason, it would be necessary to review the contents of the letter from the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue issued by Francis Cardinal Arinze and Archbishop Michael

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4 Avery Dulles. The Reshaping of Catholicism, 35.
Fitzgerald on March 3, 1988, entitled “Pastoral Attention to African Traditional Religion (ATR).” In the letter, the secretariat notes that it is important to respect the wishes of the episcopal conferences of Africa and Madagascar to pay attention to the traditional religion which has been misconstrued as “animism.” The secretariat gave their reflection on the issue under four parts:

I. Reasons for the pastoral attention to African traditional religion (ATR)

II. Some elements of ATR

III. Some key doctrinal points

IV. Suggested action by Bishops’ Conferences.5

_Reasons for the pastoral attention to African Traditional Religion (ATR):_ It is observed here that ATR is the religious and cultural context from which most Christians in Africa come, and in which many of them still live. At some critical moments in their Christian lives, they relapse into practicing the traditional religion or consulting prayer houses, healing centers or other places where their culture is upheld. For them, ATR is still alive, dynamic, and winning new members. In this regard, the letter refers to the Vatican II document which says: “The Church respects the religions and cultures of various peoples and wishes in her contact with those peoples to preserve all that is noble, true, and good in their religion and culture.”6

The letter also opines that “the better ATR is understood by the heralds of the Gospel, the more suitable will be the presentation of Christianity to Africans. By a study of ATR the underlying felt needs of Africans will be identified so that it will become clear how Christianity can meet such needs. In this way the Church will be more and more at home in Africa, and Africans will be more and more at home in the Church.”7 In order to know which elements Christianity will adopt or

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6 Ibid., nos. 3-6.

7 Ibid., no. 7.
reject in ATR, study or deeper theological investigation is important. Both Popes Paul VI and John Paul II “have given this pastoral effort their authoritative approval and traced the major guidelines to be followed.”

There is emphasis on dialogue with ATR which has two aspects. The first is dialogue with ATR adherents who do not want to become Christians. This entails an ordinary encounter requiring mutual respect and mutual discernment of the will of God. The second is dialogue with adherents of ATR who wish to become Christians and with Christian converts from ATR. Dialogue here should be understood in the wider sense to make the Gospel have deeper roots in African soil.

*Some elements of African Traditional Religion.* The letter suggests the episcopal conferences set up a committee of experts to research ATR. The major objects of the research should include “its name, major object of belief, especially God the Creator, the fundamental rites in this religion, sacrifices, priesthood, prayer, marriage, the human soul, life after death, religion and moral life.” There is also the need to study the “values such as sense of the sacred, respect for life, sense of community, family spirit, a spiritual vision of life, authority as sacred, and symbolism in religious worship…”

The letter also spells out the other issues to be studied, such as “the negative elements that may be found in ATR and culture, such as inadequate ideas on the objects of worship, objectionable moral practices, degrading rites, polygamy, discrimination against women, human sacrifice and rejection of twins (where these are practiced), etc.” Most of these elements mentioned here appear unrealistic in the sense that ATR tends to respect women instead of

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9 Ibid., no. 10.
10 Ibid., no. 11.
11 Ibid., no.12.
12 Ibid., no.13.
13 Ibid., no. 14.
discriminating against them. Moral practices of ATR are of high standard compared to most other religions of the world. All these need proper studies to make sure that ATR is given its right place among world religions. There should be factual evidence to highlight previous studies made and their results as well as efforts the Church has made so far to handle such issues.

**Some Key Doctrinal Points.** This part of the letter suggests that the key tenets of Christian revelation in Christ should be emphasized as well as the centrality of Christ, the biblical tradition and the Church’s unity under St. Peter, and communion of the local Churches with the Church of Rome. While the unity of the Catholic faith is essential throughout the world, how it is expressed may differ because of the different cultures of the people involved.\(^\text{14}\) This calls for interreligious dialogue aimed at inculturating the essential values found in the different cultures involved.

**Suggested Action by Bishops’ Conferences.** It is important that each episcopal conference appoints some experts to study the research in detail. “Episcopal conferences should see that seminaries, ecclesiastical institutes and houses of religious formation in Africa and Madagascar, which do not already have courses on ATR, should now arrange to have them.”\(^\text{15}\) These form the major points presented in the letter towards understanding the procedure the inculturation of African religious values should follow in the Church today.

As it were, this procedure has not properly been adhered to in various parts of Africa, especially in Igboland. Much needs to be done through interreligious dialogue geared towards inculturation and making the Church in Igboland part and parcel of Igbo cultural and religious life. To put this process of inculturation in the proper theological framework, we will explore the theology and praxis of inculturation in Igbo cultural perspective.

\(^{14}\text{Cf. Ibid., no. 17.}\)

\(^{15}\text{Ibid., no. 20.}\)
3.2 Exploring the Theology and Praxis of Inculturation in Igbo Cultural Perspective

From the Igbo cultural perspective, and among other ethnic groups in African society, community life is very outstanding. Igbo rural and social life typifies this community structure, which marks the group out as custodians of African tradition and communal life. Yet, in the present time, certain celebrations in the Church in Igboland do not reflect this community aspect properly. Uzukwu observes this lacuna and affirms, “It sounds contradictory to say that churches are full and certain lay ministries recognized while, at the same time, stressing the lack of communitarian aspect in the celebration.”¹⁶ This absence of the communitarian aspect in the Igbo Church critically shows that the memory is like remembering the past years when respect for ancestors was high and their teachings were taken seriously. Many things changed when the local Igbo culture encountered the foreign European missionaries. Igbo culture and religion began to fade and disappear because of the disrespect with which they were treated by the foreign missionaries.

This observation tallies with an opinion shared by many: that most Igbo cultural values began to fade and lose their respect and integrity in the face of their contact with foreign religions. For instance, the European missionaries discarded most valuable Igbo religious and cultural elements as pagan during the early stages of the introduction of the Christian religion to Igboland. Edwin Udoye attests to this fact as follows:

Igbo culture …had enviable and rich cosmological, religious, socio-cultural, theocentric and anthropocentric features that promoted cordial interaction between man and the spiritual world as well as other spatio-temporal events in the traditional – natural environment. Many Igbo traditional and cultural elements began to lose their relevance as they came in contact with in-coming cultures and new religion—Christianity.¹⁷

On the other hand, while reviewing the effects of the introduction of Christianity into the African continent, Shorter observes that despite the attempts to extinguish African Traditional Religion, it is still relevant today. “The shrines and oracles have dwindled; the priests and diviners are a remnant; the sacrifices and rituals are attenuated, if performed at all. Urbanization and the rural revolution have brought entirely new structures into being. Nevertheless, African Traditional Religion lives on in the minds of the ordinary African, jostling with newer Christian and Islamic ideas.”\textsuperscript{18} This is true, as most African Christians still go back to their ancestral traditional worshipping style when faced with difficulties in life. Shorter also argues that “it is a mistake to conclude that African Traditional Religion is a dead or dying tradition.”\textsuperscript{19} Francis Arinze also admits that in Igbo religion, “there is no suggestion that the ancient religion retains its pristine vigor today. Many customs have died away. Nevertheless, this religion still remains and the majority of the Ibos still profess it in one form or another.”\textsuperscript{20}

While concurring with others that African Traditional Religion is still in existence, J. O. Awolalu explains the word “traditional”: “This word means indigenous, that which is aboriginal or foundational, handed down from generation to generation, upheld and practiced by Africans today. This is a heritage from the past, but treated not as a thing of the past but as that which connects the past and the present with eternity. This is not a ‘fossil’ religion, a thing of the past or a dead religion. It is a religion that is practiced by living men and women.”\textsuperscript{21} O. U. Kalu affirms that “… one of many areas of Igbo culture which has remained resistant to eroding foreign influence is Igbo religion. Christianity has made enormous impact, but even the most intrepid of

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
the missionary agents often despained, as Shanahan once confessed, of making a convert out of the neophytes.”

Despite the forceful efforts of the early European missionaries to suppress African Traditional Religion and culture, African (Igbo) values are still relevant to humanity today. What is needed at present is dialogue and the inculturation of these valuable elements into the Church in Igboland. As Arinze suggests in the following excerpt, the Igbo religion requires serious study by theologians:

> Without suggesting that the average person in a Nigerian university today, or the business person in Lagos, or in Ariaria market in Aba, or in Nkwo Nnewi, or the member of parliament in a State capital or in Abuja, is necessarily practising this Igbo Traditional Religion in its pristine state today, there is no denying that this religious patrimony is impressive, that together with its accompanying culture it continues to influence even converted Christians, and that it is worthy of respect and serious study today.\(^23\)

Pope Francis affirms the necessity of dialogue with cultures that could be of great benefit to the Gospel message. The pope reiterates the need to re-examine certain cultural values that would require dialogue to make the Word of God part and parcel of the people’s manner of worship. “We must examine this more closely in order to enter into a dialogue like that of our Lord and the Samaritan woman at the well where she sought to quench her thirst (cf. Jn 4:1-15).”\(^24\)

Arinze in this regard emphasizes the need to study and respect the religion and culture of the Igbo people. “The religious culture which held sway in Igboland before the arrival of the Christian missionaries deserves close study and respect.”\(^25\) To understand Igbo religion, we need a general working definition of religion so that we may understand how it connects to the Igbo people. In the view of Arinze, “Religion can be defined objectively and subjectively. Subjectively


\(^{23}\) Arinze, “Christianity meets Igbo Traditional Religion,” 12.

\(^{24}\) Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 72.

\(^{25}\) Arinze, “Christianity meets Igbo Traditional Religion,” 11.
religion is the consciousness of one’s dependence on a transcendent Being and the tendency to worship Him. Objectively, religion is the body of truths, laws and rites by which man is subordinated to the transcendent Being.”

Earlier, the strong Igbo belief was noted in one God (Chukwu or Chineke), who is the origin and maker of all things visible and invisible. The Igbo also believe in the existence of the spirits and ancestors, and all these constitute the objects of Igbo belief and worship. In the views of Metuh and Ejizu, “[t]he world as the Igbo knew it, is full of spirits. Their world is not limited to the material world of visible beings but includes the realm of invisible beings. Nobody who has been to the country of the Igbo entertains any doubts about this.”

In another place, Arinze also maintains that “because of the belief in the spirit world, prayer and sacrifice figure very much in Igbo Traditional Religion. A consequence is that the idea of the priesthood is also strong.”

The Igbo mode of worship is charismatic and self-expressive. It is characterized by body movements and traditional dances. “The African world as humans experience it is a world full of activity: action, reaction, interaction.” All these began to fade when the missionaries failed to engage in dialogue with Igbo religion and culture. The nostalgic feelings of the missionaries about their European cultural background influenced their evangelization process in Igboland and other places. This led to the establishment of a European style of worship in the Church in Igboland. Uzukwu is of the view that “… to impose a gesture in order to realize a uniform practice of

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27 Cf. Ibid. Arinze maintains here, “The objects of Ibo religious belief and worship in the strict sense are three: God, non-human Spirits and the Ancestors.”
28 Emefie Ikenga – Metuh and Christopher I. Ejizu. *Hundred Years of Catholicism.*, xv.
31 Ibid., 1.
Christianity is harmful.” The European missionaries appeared to have emphasized their nostalgic feelings by imposing their style of worship on mission lands.

Today, the Church in Igboland is feeling the same nostalgia since their culture is disappearing like a mirage within the Church. To restore the missing link of Igbo cultural ethos in the Church in Igboland today requires a reshaping process and a repositioning of the worshipping style to recover what was lost. Okorocha argues along this line: “The persistence of elements of the traditional piety among Igbo Christians shows that the Christian religion, as they have it today, has not fully satisfied the religious aspirations of the people… This situation calls for reform on the critical issues of theology, dogma, liturgy and sacraments.”

All these give a clue towards finding a common ground for dialogue between Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion and Culture. To do this requires meeting Igbo traditional religionists directly to engage them in dialogue. Arinze enthusiastically subscribes to this view by affirming,

The Christian theologian knows that he or she cannot understand a person properly without being well informed on that person’s religion and culture. And because for the Igbo, as for most Africans South of the Sahara, religion and culture are so closely related that at times it is hard to tell when and where religion finishes and culture begins, and the same word may be used for religion, customs and culture, therefore a serious study of Igbo theology and religion is called for. The Christian evangelizer sees it as necessary to understand the Igbo, to respect them and to pay tribute to what their traditional religion and culture possess that is good, true, beautiful and holy. Only when the Christian takes this background seriously will it be possible to present to the Igbo the Christian message in full consciousness of their religious and cultural context, since they do not come from a religious or cultural void.

Here lies the major issue involved in exploring the theology and praxis of inculturation in Igbo cultural perspective. Along these lines, a major aspect is proposed in this study that will boost the recognition of and respect for African/Igbo Traditional Religion and culture. Pope John Paul

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32 Ibid., 15.
II’s *Ecclesia in Africa* is a resource piece for the appraisal of African endeavors toward a brighter future for the entire Church. The exuberant cultural heritage abundant in Africa would enhance the speed with which the Church would become a landmark in the entire continent.

Pope John Paul II made a list of genuine cultural values which Africa could offer to the Church through dialogue and for proper inculturation today. “Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world. The reality of sin in its individual and social forms is very much present in the consciousness of these peoples, as is also the need for rites of purification and expiation.”

This re-echoes Pope Paul VI’s *Africae Terrarum*, which in 1967 praised “the moral and religious values in African attachment to the family, evidenced by ‘the bond with ancestors, which finds expression in so many widespread forms of worship.’ He also notes that through its union with its ancestors the family enjoys continuity beyond earthly life.”

Igbo respect for the ancestors need proper study through dialogue, because, it has certain features close to the Christian communion of the saints.

From this perspective, Agbasiere illustrates the idea of ancestral reincarnation further. “Mention should also be made of the notion of reincarnation, referred to as *ilo uwa* (literally ‘returning again to the world’). Not unexpectedly, the relationship of this belief to the ideas of procreation is ambiguous. Thus, people speak of a new born baby as an ancestor reincarnated, but at the same time, they affirm the view that the new-born child is a unique creation and not a duplicate of another.”

This points to one of the reasons for Igbo ancestral veneration which finds prominent position in the Zairean mass. Illustrating the importance of ancestral veneration within the Zairean liturgy, Chibuko remarks: “[t]he entire celebration itself focuses on the presence of the

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35 John Paul II. *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 42.
sacred: God, the world of spirits and ancestors with whom the assembly is asked to commune in an attitude of humility and awe. That is why not only the saints but also the ancestors of righteous heart are invoked during the entrance litany. V: You, our ancestors of righteous heart. R: Be with us.”

To clarify this point further, it would be nice to analyze the principles of liturgical inculturation as illustrated in Sacrosanctum Concilium of the Second Vatican Council.

3.2.1. Sacrosanctum Concilium on the Principles of Liturgical Inculturation

The Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963. This is the first among other documents approved by the council, which contains liturgical reforms for the Roman liturgy. A general overview of the document is given here with highlights on the areas that concern liturgical reform. In the introductory part of the document, the aims of the reforms are stipulated as follows:

This sacred Council has several aims in view: it desires to impart an ever-increasing vigor to the Christian life of the faithful; to adapt more suitably to the needs of our own times those institutions which are subject to change; to foster whatever can promote union among all who believe in Christ; to strengthen whatever can help to call the whole of mankind into the household of the Church. The Council therefore sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy.

The liturgical reform undertaken by the council has several principles for its implementation in the universal Church. These general principles are discussed in the first chapter of the document which focuses on “General Principles for the Restoration and Promotion of the Sacred Liturgy.” It also has a sub-title, “The Nature of the Sacred Liturgy and Its Importance in the Church’s Life.” Here the document emphasizes the fact that Christ is the center of every

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39 Vatican II, Sacro Sanctum Concilium, no. 1.
liturgical life of the Church. His life, passion, death, resurrection, and the salvation of mankind form the basis of liturgical gathering and are celebrated in the sacraments. All these indicate the real presence of Christ in “His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations.”40 This context of Christ’s presence in the Church informs the idea that “the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time, it is the font from which all her power flows.”41

The second subtitle of the first chapter of the document indicates an emphasis on “The Promotion of Liturgical Instruction and Active Participation.” It encourages active participation of the faithful during liturgical celebrations by virtue of their baptism.42 To foster active involvement of the faithful in the liturgy, it is recommended that “pastors of souls must promote the liturgical instruction of the faithful, and also their active participation in the liturgy both internally and externally, taking into account their age and condition, their way of life, and standard of religious culture.”43

The third subsection of the first chapter is titled “The Reform of the Sacred Liturgy.” The major reason for the reform is for the faithful to acquire grace abundantly from the sacred liturgy, since it is “made up of unchangeable elements divinely instituted, and of elements subject to change. These latter not only may be changed but ought to be changed with the passage of time, if they have suffered from intrusion of anything out of harmony with the inner nature of the liturgy or have become less suitable.”44 The document emphasizes that “[i]n this restoration both texts and rites should be drawn up so as to express more clearly the holy things which they signify. The

40 Ibid., no. 7.
41 Ibid., no. 10.
42 Cf. Ibid., no. 14.
43 Ibid., no. 19.
44 Ibid., no. 21.
Christian people, as far as is possible, should be able to understand them with ease and take part in them fully, actively, and as a community.”

Hence, the Council stipulates the following norms.

A) General Norms: Under the general norms, the following are enlisted.

1. Regulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, that is, on the Apostolic See, and, as laws may determine, on the bishop.

2. In virtue of power conceded by the law, the regulation of the liturgy within certain defined limits belongs also to various kinds of bishops’ conferences, legitimately established, with competence in given territories.

3. Therefore no other person, not even a priest, may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority.

The next paragraph also states: “In order that sound tradition be retained, and yet the way remain open to legitimate progress, a careful investigation – theological, historical, and pastoral – should always be made into each part of the liturgy which is to be revised.

B) Norms Drawn from the Hierarchic and Communal nature of the Liturgy.

The emphasis here is that liturgical celebration should not be private. Another important aspect of this norm is the need to encourage active participation of the people. "To promote active participation, the people should be encouraged to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalmody, antiphons, and songs, as well as by actions, gestures, and bodily attitudes. And at the proper times all should observe a reverent silence.”

C) Norms based upon the Didactic and Pastoral Nature of the Liturgy.

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., no. 22.
47 Ibid., no. 23.
48 Cf. Ibid., nos. 26 - 27.
49 Ibid., no. 30.
Here the use of the vernacular or mother tongue is encouraged to help to drive home the message being communicated to the faithful. To do this requires the approval of the competent ecclesiastical authority.\textsuperscript{50}

D) Norms for Adapting the Liturgy to the Culture and Traditions of Peoples.

This is where the need for inculturation arises within the liturgy of the Church. The document makes it clear that the Church has no intention of rigidly imposing uniformity in liturgical celebration among the faithful of different places. It states as follows:

Even in the liturgy the Church does not wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather does she respect and foster the qualities and talents of the various races and nations. Anything in these peoples’ way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, so long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit.\textsuperscript{51}

However, in number 38 of the same document, the use of the term, “adaptation” might water down the spirit of real inculturation. It states: “Provided that the substantial unity of the Roman rite is preserved, provision shall be made, when revising the liturgical books, for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions and peoples, especially in mission countries. This should be borne in mind when drawing up the rites and determining rubrics.”\textsuperscript{52} The issue of inculturation appears to be replaced here by the word “adaptation” with some difficulties involved in its implementation.\textsuperscript{53} This term was seen as unsuitable for inculturation by the bishops of Africa and Madagascar during the 1974 synod. This needs a careful study by competent authorities and

\textsuperscript{50} Cf. Ibid., no. 36.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., no. 37.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., no. 38.
\textsuperscript{53} Cf. Ibid., nos. 39, 40.
experts. Yet, other sections of the same document did encourage dioceses and parishes to promote liturgical life and action respectively.\textsuperscript{54}

The document presents the Eucharist as the bond of unity of the universal Church. Hence, the need to pay attention to the vernacular during Eucharistic celebration is also stressed. “In Masses which are celebrated with the people, a suitable place may be allotted to their mother tongue.”\textsuperscript{55} This is important because active participation of the faithful during Eucharistic celebration is fostered using the local language. “The Church, therefore, earnestly desires that Christ’s faithful, when present at this mystery of faith, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration.”\textsuperscript{56}

The document also approves the use of the vernacular in the administration of the sacraments and sacramentals.\textsuperscript{57} It stipulates that elements of the initiation rites used by some people in mission lands could be adapted to the Christian ritual.\textsuperscript{58}

The Incarnation of Jesus in the flesh gives a sense of inculturation in the liturgy. The document states, “Christ Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into the earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He joins the entire community of mankind to Himself, associating it with His own singing of this canticle of divine praise.”\textsuperscript{59} Although, the Latin language is recommended for use during the divine office, approved vernacular translations are also allowed in particular circumstances.\textsuperscript{60}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Cf. Ibid. nos. 41-46.
\item Ibid., no. 54.
\item Ibid., no 48.
\item Ibid., nos. 63, 78.
\item Cf. Ibid., no. 65.
\item Ibid., no. 83.
\item Cf. Ibid., no. 101
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Igboland, except for the choir formed by Father Raymond Arazu, C.S.Sp, to sing the psalms in the Igbo language, no other effort has been made by Igbo bishops to encourage such in their dioceses.

In the document, special reference is made to the language to be used for the sacred music in the Church at various celebrations. The use of the traditional music of the local people is also encouraged in mission lands. The entire document draws our attention to the fact that “the Church has not adopted any particular style of art as her own.; she has admitted styles from every period according to the natural talents and circumstances of peoples, and the needs of the various rites.” This means that good artistic designs that come from every part of the world which are helpful toward worshipping God could be accepted in the Church. This is a clear evidence of liturgical inculturation in principle.

The document states that “the art of our own days, coming from every race and region, shall also be given free scope in the Church, provided that it adorns the sacred buildings and holy rites with due reverence and honor; thereby it is enabled to contribute its own voice to that wonderful chorus of praise in honor of the Catholic faith sung by great men in times gone by.” The principles of liturgical inculturation as seen from the perspective of the document are very clear. It is important then, to appreciate the efforts being made by some local Churches in Sub-Saharan West Africa towards adapting the Roman liturgy to people’s cultures. For this reason, this study proposes a process of initiating liturgical inculturation through interreligious dialogue. This is also in line with the stipulations of the recently issued Magnum Principium by Pope Francis.

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61 Cf. Ibid., no. 113.
62 Cf. Ibid., nos. 119, 120.
63 Ibid., no. 123.
64 Ibid.
3.2.2. Initiating Liturgical Inculturation Through Interreligious Dialogue

In September 2017, Pope Francis issued a Motu Proprio Apostolic Letter, *Magnum Principium*, in which he modified Canon 838. This modification of the document allows liturgical prayer to be accommodated to the people’s comprehension. The task of realizing this modification is entrusted to the local bishops, who can now formulate liturgical books to reflect the language and culture understandable to the people of their region.\(^{65}\) Like most other Africans, Igbo people practiced their Traditional Religion before the European missionaries arrived in their midst. According to Kalu, “Liturgy is a central feature of Igbo traditional religious life: stretching from purely religious activities like prayer, ritual sacrifices, etc., to socio-economic affairs in which religious rituals are equally incorporated.”\(^{66}\) Thus, Igbo traditionalists in their various communities had some practical liturgical ways of worshipping God in their own cultural or traditional forms. This implies that the purpose of liturgical inculturation through interreligious dialogue is not to destroy any religion, rather, it serves as a process of learning about each religious confession and its worshipping style. This learning process also applies to the Igbo traditional worshipping style, which could be studied and proposed for inculturation in the local Church.

The Igbo traditional form of worship or adoration is designated as ‘*Ife Ofufe*’ or ‘*Nsekpulu*’ while offering different kinds of sacrifices is known as *Ichu Aja*.\(^{67}\) Hence, “In its various classifications, sacrifice is the highest activity of worship which the traditional Igbo offers to the

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\(^{67}\) Cf. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion.*, 37-38 & 46. Here, Arinze makes distinctions regarding the meanings and kinds of sacrifices. “The fortune-teller prescribes sacrifice as the only way to escape from the evil machinations of these capricious and indignant spirits. This type of sacrifice is always called ‘aja’. ‘*Ichu aja*’ is, in the strict sense of the word, to offer such a sacrifice to the evil spirits and to them only…” About *Nsekpulu* – adoration, the author quotes from: Holy Ghost Fathers, Onitsha, *English, Ibo and French Dictionary*, Onitsha 1904, p. 304.
different grades of spiritual beings with which he communes.”

According to Arinze, “Sacrifice is the soul of Ibo cult. If it is removed, Ibo traditional religion is almost emptied of its content.” Hence, the author makes distinctions between the joyful and joyless sacrifices since both are designated by the same word- ‘Ichu aja’.

Following therefore the Ibo attitude, we prefer to make a division according to the person to whom the sacrifice is offered. This criterion determines the rite, the priest, and often also the victim. Ibo sacrifices at once fall into two clear-cut divisions: (a) sacrifices to God (rear), to the spirits with shrines, and to the ancestors: these we shall henceforth call ‘joyful sacrifices’; and (b) sacrifices to evil spirits and to them only: these we shall henceforth call joyless sacrifices’ or ‘Ichu aja’ in the strict sense. We say ‘joyful’ sacrifices, not because these sacrifices have one hundred percent joy, but to distinguish them from the ‘joyless’ sacrifices in which there is never any expression of joy.

Arinze, in describing the different ways sacrifices could be offered within Igboland affirms: “The Ibos therefore have no single word for each type of sacrifice. ‘Aja’ in the wide acceptation could be applied to the joyful sacrifices too. But ‘aja’ in the strict sense refers only to the joyless sacrifices.”

Igbo worshipping style is practical, lively, and rhythmic. “It is, therefore, no surprise that the liturgical life of the Igbo are re-enacted with zeal and enthusiasm and with all the resources that are available to each individual community. From generation to generation, they are transmitted through successive groups with little or no alteration.” Uzukwu describes the Igbo universe as “life-oriented” and not static. For Arinze, “Ibo worship is in sympathy with

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69 Arinze, Sacrifice in Ibo Religion, 22.
70 Ibid., 59-60.
71 Ibid., 61. It should be noted that the word- sacrifice is also designated with other words in different parts of Igboland. For instance, people from Mbaise and Ngor Okpala of Imo state, use ‘Igwe aja’ in place of ‘Ichu aja’ (to offer sacrifice), while Owerri main town and suburbs use the word ‘Ikwa aja’ which also means - to offer sacrifice in their dialect.
nature and human activities. It follows the seasons. When the rains come in April, the yam spirit, *Ifejioku*, must be worshipped before planting begins.”\footnote{Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, 22.} The aim is to enhance and protect life.

Everyone involved in the Igbo worshipping exercise takes an active part because it is usually a community affair.\footnote{Cf. Ibid., 23.} Arinze confirms this point by saying that, “SACRIFICE is an act of public worship offered in the name of a community or part of it. The community fulfills this great obligation, not by itself directly, but through a special person, the priest.”\footnote{Ibid., 62. Arinze distinguishes the person and types of priests as understood among the Igbo people.} Sometimes it is not just the priest that offers sacrifices. “At the different levels of the traditional social structure, the *di-okpara*, as the holder of the lineage *ofo*, is obliged to sacrifice from time to time to the deities and patron spirits of the particular kin group, especially the ancestors.”\footnote{O. U. Kalu. “Igbo Traditional Religious Systems.” in *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, 359.}

During certain Igbo annual ritual celebrations, people are moved or vibrantly motivated to dance to the tone of rhythmic music that comes out from the talking drums and the wooden gongs.\footnote{Cf. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 120. Here Achebe notes that Igbo musical instruments talk to the people in a special way. “One of the things every man learned was the language of the hollowed-out wooden instrument.”} According to Agbasiere, “Women are also responsible for cleaning and maintaining public shrines… and for the staging of dances. Dances and songs still form an essential part of every Igbo ritual celebration.”\footnote{Joseph- Therese Agbasiere. *Women in Igbo Life*, 43.} The dance is intermittently punctuated by the loud ovation of the people present in these words: *Igbo kwenu, yaa, kwenu yaa, kwezuonu yaa* (Yes, we the Igbo unanimously agree). It is also followed by the presentation and breaking of the kola nut, a symbol of Igbo unity, hospitality, reconciliation, and welcome. Those present will shake hands with each other which adds much joy and enthusiasm within the ongoing worship activity because *ekwe ekele ihu asaa* (a handshake brightens the face).
During joyful sacrifices, this is followed by the sipping of palm wine, the pouring of libations, and prayers\(^\text{80}\) invoking God, the earth goddess- *Ala*, the ancestors, and the deities whose spirits are believed to be present among the living. The palm frond (\*omu nkwu\*) is displayed, and the white or yellow chalk is made into powdered form and symbolically put on the eyelashes of the priest (\*Eze-Mnuo* or \*Eze-agbara\*) as a sign of mysterious vision. A meal is made from the slaughtered goat and chicken at the end of each joyful sacrifice. This is shared among the attending elders present following the order of kindred/village seniority\(^\text{81}\) according to the ranks of the *Ofo* holders. In some parts of Africa, it is believed that the participants at such joyful sacrifices may share a common family ancestry.\(^\text{82}\) It might also involve the entire community paying homage to God and their ancestors.

In the case of petition or atonement for sin, the sacrificial rite (*Emume Ichu Aja*) involved here could be very scary, because, the worshippers see themselves as being in the presence of the spirits to ward-off evil. Some categories of people are not allowed to take part during certain Igbo ritual activities, such as young women and little children, except the one the sacrifice is recommended for. In this case, the category of sacrifice involved is the joyless type to ward-off bad spirits. Nevertheless, certain mature women can sweep the space/place (the shrine – *Ihu agbara*) for the sacrifice or to prepare the food to be eaten during the exercise but not those in their menstrual periods.\(^\text{83}\) M.M. Green cited an example with the women from Agbaja in Igboland. “The women’s rites, which included the clearing of the paths to the shrines of the deity, were performed

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\(^\text{81}\) Cf. Ibid., 5. The author affirms that “Among the Ibos there is great respect for seniority.”
shortly after the annual Agbaja religious ceremonies of the men in the seventh month by Ibo reckoning.\(^{84}\) While elucidating the religious or ritual status of Igbo women, Agbasiere notes that women do not act as priests of public shrines, nor do they hold the family or lineage ofo… In practice, however, women play a major role in most ritual ceremonies. In virtually every sacrifice of public concern, women – especially as wives (ndinyom) – provide most of the items, including eggs, chicken and cooked food, for the ceremonies. Hence, they bear most of the expenses involved in ritual ceremonies. Apart from providing the items for sacrifice, women usually take custody of the effigies of female divinities and are responsible for carrying them in procession to the respective shrines during public celebrations.\(^ {85}\)

The sacrifice, Aja, normally takes place under a big tree, or at the foot of a mountain or at the shrine dedicated to any of the deities. Sometimes it may take place at a four-cornered road so that each deity coming from the East or West, North or South, might have its own share. This confirms the Igbo saying, Onye rie, ibe ya rie ogbuu emena - “Let everyone have a share of the sacrifice to avoid jealousy.” The foregoing demonstrates that Igbo people use proverbs in communicating relevant ideas. Arinze affirms thus, “In the study of Ibo religion and sacrifice, therefore, great attention will be paid to proverbs for they often tell one more than a detailed cross-examination could give a well-trained ethnologist. Proverbs crystalize the accumulated wisdom handed down by the ancients. They reveal profound thoughts, the soul of the people. This field is often closed to outsiders.”\(^ {86}\) Thus, the mystery behind the offering of the joyless sacrifice is also hidden within the context of an Igbo proverb which says: Ana achu aja k’ikpe n’ama ndi mnuo - meaning, “Let sacrifices be offered, and let the guilt befall the spirits.” This refers to the evil spirits.

Though this study does not conclude that all these should be inculturated into the Christian liturgy, some good aspects of them could be considered through dialogue. Arinze in this regard stresses that, “The Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ is for all peoples, cultures and

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\(^{85}\) Joseph Therese Agbasiere. *Women in Igbo Life*, 42-43

\(^{86}\) Arinze., *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, 3.
languages. The Gospel should be at home among each people, and each people should be at home in the Church. A deeper understanding of Igbo culture and religious tradition is required for proper inculturation of the Gospel message into the Igbo society. The process of liturgical inculturation should involve a serious interreligious dialogue. The reason for initiating liturgical inculturation through interreligious dialogue comes closer to what Arinze observes:

When the Gospel arrives among a people, the missionaries bring those people the riches of the Catholic faith and tradition and the experiences of other nations along the corridors of history. Gradually from the customs and traditions of the local people, from their wisdom, their arts and their sciences, these local Churches borrow some elements that lead to the glory of God the creator and to the living of the Christian life.

Arinze’s observation here attracts criticisms because the emphasis is on “borrowing.” This waters down proper inculturation and as such, the Church in Igboland has not fully embraced liturgical inculturation. Uzukwu observes that “an attempt is being made to celebrate the Eucharist in Nigerian languages but, apart from this, not much has been done towards contextualization.” In this regard, instead of “borrowing” or importing golden and silver chalices and ciboria and other liturgical elements from Europe and America, the Igbo wooden cups and plates or bowls carved by Igbo artists could be used in the Igbo Church during liturgical celebrations. Most Igbo people also use kola nut, palm wine, and palm kernel oil or mmanu aku, in their families and other gatherings. These elements might be used during the Church’s sacramental liturgy in place of the olive oil and wine from the vine imported from Europe. Implementing these require interreligious dialogue with Igbo traditional religionists who know the uses of these elements. This will help in determining their meaning and relevance for liturgical use in the Igbo Church today.

88 Ibid.
Anscar Chupungco, a renowned liturgist, provides an elaborate description of the meaning of liturgical inculturation by using certain terms:

Over the years, different technical terms have been tried in liturgical circles in an attempt to express as accurately as possible the relationship between liturgy and culture. The more popular among them are “indigenization,” “incarnation,” “contextualization,” “revision,” “adaptation,” “acculturation,” and “inculturation.” To describe how inculturation works, other technical terms such as “transculturation,” “deculturation,” and “exculturation,” have subsequently been coined and entered into the active vocabulary of scholarly studies.91

Most of these terms, which also correspond with the ideas expressed by Chupungco, were already discussed in the first chapter. However, some of the terms might not adequately give the exact meaning of the relationship between faith and culture in the liturgical sense. Inculturation and incarnation as well as contextualization are better terms used to describe the possible introduction of local cultural expressions in the already existing liturgical texts of the Church—the Roman Liturgy. This attempt has not yielded much positive response in the Igbo Church today.

Chupungco cites an example in the Philippines as follows: “Indeed, Filipino Catholics have not known any form of official worship other than the Roman Liturgy. Yet it continues to be a foreign element in the body of religious practices kept by the vast majority of the faithful. The reason for this was the inability of the liturgy before Vatican II, to absorb indigenous traditions.”92 This inability to absorb local traditions into the Roman liturgy has spread to other parts of the world, especially Africa because the emphasis is on ‘adaptation.’

Shorter notes that the Extraordinary Synod of 1985 had not much to say about inculturation, rather it made “a sharp distinction between inculturation and adaptation (acculturation).”93 This situation has been the major issue which led to lack of proper inculturation of the Gospel message

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92 Ibid., 15.
93 Aylward Shorter. *Toward A Theology*, 236.
into African Culture and especially in the Igbo Church. While analyzing the failure of liturgical inculturation in Onitsha province, Uzukwu maintains that “[o]ne could rightly consider liturgical practice as still almost the same as in the pre-Vatican II time.”\textsuperscript{94} If this is true, the Church in Igboland is liturgically far behind others.

This is another major point for proposing the reshaping of the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue in the Igbo Church today. Interreligious dialogue between the Church and African/Igbo Traditional Religion projects the idea that a people’s religion other than Christianity is equally important and worthy of study. Dialogue disposes two religions to listen to each other and so that they can discern the next action. Interreligious dialogue will make interaction between two different religions, especially Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion very easy. “It will be less difficult to discern elements of the traditional religion and culture which Christianity could adopt, or adapt, or retouch, and elements which are so diametrically opposed to the Christian faith that they have to be rejected. Greater care will then be exercised in approaching ambiguous or unclear practices.”\textsuperscript{95} This is where interreligious dialogue is needed most. The elements in Igbo Traditional Religion which are diametrically opposed to Christian faith and which are ambiguous or unclear need to be explored through dialogue for proper understanding. This is because, dialogue is the key to mutual understanding and proper learning. This dialogue must be exercised in clear terms and not haphazardly. In dialogue, we might disagree so as to agree on certain articles of faith and belief.

While referring to \textit{Ad Gentes} in relation to the terminologies associated with inculturation such as incarnation, Chupungco asserts:

\begin{quote}
In imitation of Christ, who by virtue of the incarnation made himself one with the Jewish nation, the local Church should become not merely a Church \textit{in} but the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{94} Uzukwu, “Liturgy and Inculturation,” 19-30.
\textsuperscript{95} Arinze, “Christianity meets Igbo Traditional Religion,” 13.
Church of a particular locality. The incarnation of the local Church inevitably affects the liturgy, which will likewise implant itself in the traditions and culture of every people. One may contend that the process of the Church’s incarnation will attain completion when the liturgy shall have embodied in its rites and texts the people’s cultural expressions.96

This is what it takes to make the Church at home with the given culture of a particular place. In many ways, inculturation has become an important term for theologians and liturgists among both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Pope John Paul II used the term for the first time in official Church documents in 1979 as a neologism depicting the incarnation in reference to faith and culture.97 The emphasis on liturgical inculturation is aimed at using the positive elements found in a particular culture in liturgical expression. “The people of God are entitled to a Liturgy that they can understand and so participate actively.”98 The Igbo need a liturgy that will touch their lives entirely. In Uzukwu’s terms, “there is, therefore, need to develop a liturgy addressing the real life of the Igbo. This is the task of inculturation in the liturgy.”99 This makes the Church at home among the people where it is established.

Chupungco illustrates this point further by explaining the definition given to inculturation by the 1985 synod of bishops. “The synod’s definition contains the essential elements of inculturation, namely the process of reciprocal assimilation between Christianity and culture and the resulting interior transformation of culture on the one hand and the rooting of Christianity in culture on the other.”100 This rooting of Christianity in any given culture gives way to mutual interaction as opposed to the extinction of one or the other.101 This mutual interaction requires

100 Chupungco, Liturgical Inculturation, 29.
101 Ibid.
dialogue whereby the custodians of any given culture are approached in friendly manner to deliberate on issues relevant to their cultural and religious practices. This approach involves certain anticipated challenges. To overcome the challenges in the attempt to reshape the already existing European style of worship and liturgical praxis used in the Igbo Church today, dialogue is needed. This idea of using dialogue to overcome the challenges involved in the reshaping process would be examined in the subsequent section.

3.2.3. Overcoming the Challenges involved in the Reshaping Process

The Church in Igboland is faced with many challenges that hinge on making the Church’s liturgy part of Igbo cultural life. Igbo Christian worship needs some cultural touch that would make the people celebrate life and participate actively in the liturgy. For this reason, Uzukwu observes that:

Christian worship in Africa has suffered because it has not been life-centered: in other words, it has not come from the real life of people to address real people. Yet, if there is one thing the Judeo-Christian tradition has in common with African traditions, it is life – a life coming from God (summed up in the blood) and implicating necessary respect (cf. Gn 9:4; Lv 17:11-14). It is not surprising then that John sums up Jesus’s mission thus: “I came that they may have life and have it in abundance” (Jn 10:10b).102

The situation raises certain questions: Could it be possible to have a real Igbo liturgy that is life-oriented? At what age should the Church in Igboland develop an Igbo worshipping system that originates from the Igbo people, for the Igbo people and by the Igbo people? Should the reshaping of the liturgical praxis within the Church in Igboland lead to separation from the universal Church? What form or shape will liturgical inculturation take in the Igbo Church today? Is there any possibility for interreligious dialogue between Igbo Traditional Religion and the

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Church in Igboland? These questions constitute big challenges to be overcome if the reshaping of the theology and praxis of inculturation in the Igbo Church would become a reality.

Regarding the question about the possibility of having a real Igbo liturgy that is life-centered, there is need to make the liturgy community oriented. Igbo sense of community motivates the faithful to be focused and be united in purpose while celebrating together as brothers and sisters. In the Church in Igboland, the clergy appear to dominate the liturgy more than the active participation of the laity. This ought to be reshaped, since the Second Vatican Council’s document on the liturgy - Sacro Sanctum Concilium draws our attention to the fact that

Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation of the Christian people as ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people’ (1Pet 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit; and therefore, pastors of souls must zealously strive to achieve it, by means of necessary instruction, in all their pastoral work.103

Community-oriented liturgy is life-centered liturgy, and this is what Igbo Church should be: people oriented.

Concerning when the Church in Igboland should develop an Igbo worshipping system that originates from the Igbo people, for the Igbo and by the Igbo,104 there is nothing to show yet. Uzukwu contends that all the liturgical reforms which took place across the Church in Europe after World War II, leading to the Vatican II liturgical reforms of 1963, appear not to have been the concern of either the Igbo Christians of Onitsha province or the Irish missionaries to Igboland.

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104 Cf. Chibuko, “A Practical Approach,” 2-27. Here the author affirms that “liturgical inculturation should express the authentic liturgy of the people, from the people, by the people and for the people. It should also assimilate the cultural values and genius of a given people.”
“Apart from translating some of the Roman liturgical texts into the vernacular, the faithful (clergy, religious and laity) simply carry on as before the Council. I remember how often I have been told that our people are not ready for a real Igbo liturgy.”105

Theophilus Okere recalls how the debate about the use of vernacular in Igbo liturgy failed in those days, even in the major seminary.

I still clearly remember participating at a debate organized in Bigard Memorial Seminary where I defended the side that argued for the introduction of the vernacular in the liturgy. Though we had the better arguments, we lost the debate to the conservative traditionalists who insisted on Mass in Latin. Yet I had the last laugh as I felt vindicated when the very first document of Vatican II, On the Sacred Liturgy ‘Sacrosanctum Concilium’ approved, encouraged and in a way mandated the use of the vernacular in the Roman Catholic liturgy.106

Procrastination is yet another hurdle to be overcome for an effective reshaping process. The time for a change is approaching, but “time waits for nobody,” they say. The Church in Igboland should wake up for action before it becomes too late. Another question concerns whether the reshaping of the liturgical praxis within the Church in Igboland would lead to separation from the universal Church? The Vatican II constitution on sacred liturgy, in the section dealing with “norms for adapting the liturgy to the culture and traditions of peoples” allows for flexibility and adaptation where necessary. The following excerpt gives a clue.

Even in the liturgy, the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniform in matters which do not implicate the faith or the good of the whole community; rather does she respect and foster the genius and talents of the various races and peoples. Anything in those peoples’ way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, so long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit.107

107 Vatican II, Sacrosanctum Concilium, no. 37.
This passage of the constitution clears up any fear and doubt about moving forward in the reshaping process if the Church in Igboland thinks about doing so. This is also in line with a new recommendation from Pope Francis that bishops of ecclesiastical regions should come up with a liturgical language peculiar to their people and then request approval of such from Rome. Developing an Igbo liturgy does not imply separation from the universal Church; rather, it will enhance its closeness even more. It also means that “as we reshape the Church, we cannot accept everything that the early Christians held or admired, but we can still learn much from their imperfect efforts to live the way of Jesus in their time.”

The question remains, of course: What form or shape will liturgical inculturation take in the Igbo Church today? This study proposes that Igbo liturgy should follow the normal process by slowly introducing certain genuine Igbo cultural elements. Such elements should include the ovation, *Igbo kwenu, yaa*, and the proverb, *Ndu mmiri ndu azu* (May the river flow and the fish swim). These would make liturgical celebration active and life oriented or life enhancing. “To the African in general and the Igbo in particular, life is so central that everything else rotates around it.” Any celebration that is life-oriented is very important to the Igbo people.

Allowance should also be made for creativity within the Igbo liturgy. “After such liturgy where people have participated fully, they go home enriched, spiritually energised, transformed and edified. Such a liturgy equips them for the Christian battle during which they glorify God. It is these soul-mind-body uplifting celebrations that give meaning to the wounded society in which they live.” Matters pertaining to Igbo liturgy also related to the next question: Is there any

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111 Ibid.
possibility for interreligious dialogue between African/Igbo Traditional Religionists and the leaders of the Church in Igboland? This forum is very necessary to deliberate on Igbo culture.

The development of an Igbo liturgy would require genuine interreligious dialogue between those who practice Igbo Traditional Religion and leaders of the Church in particular. In this sense, nothing shall be presumed since most Igbo traditional religionists would be glad to explain what and how certain elements of the Igbo religion operates. The two religions would mutually enrich each other in this process. It would be wrong to tag Igbo traditional religionists as an unapproachable group. Openness and humility on both sides are required. This would lead to an understanding of the projected outcomes of inculturation through interreligious dialogue in the Church in Igboland today.

3.2.4. Projected Outcomes of Inculturation through Interreligious Dialogue

What we celebrate in the liturgy is God’s divine presence among his people. We also celebrate unity and love as we gather to share in the heavenly banquet. Igbo people also believe that during every ritual activity, the living communicate with the invisible realities whose spirits partake in the sacred act, though unnoticed. Christ was born into a given cultural background, which is Jewish in nature. During the Eucharistic liturgy, the Church as the people of God gather to share the meal of the angels, wherein heaven and earth are joined together as one. This takes place within a given cultural context, found among a certain people in a particular location and in a building accessible to the participants. In the case of Igbo religion, it takes place at the shrine.

The elements are usually either brought from the worshippers’ homes or bought from shops/local markets located within that area. African/Igbo Traditional Religion has its sacred elements as well. Catholics believe that the consecratory prayer by the priest transforms the species
of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. In the same manner, “an authentic inculturation must be simple and transformative with enduring values which have a deep meaning in the lives of the people.”\textsuperscript{112} The African or Igbo worshipper looks for something tangible that touches human life and relates human pains, sufferings, joys, and daily life experiences with the divine. Igbo life experiences are seen to be transmitted from God, through the ancestors to their descendants. This is what they call \textit{ome na ala/ani} or tradition. They want the cultural and traditional values inherited from their ancestors to be preserved without alteration, unless they are evil. In this sense, Jean-Marc Ela affirms that “[m]y subject here is meaningless for a Christianity which is no more than a transposition of foreign dogmas, rites, rules and customs, and which breaks abruptly with African traditions…, [and wherein] the African rejects any surrender of his cultural identity.”\textsuperscript{113}

Hence, the projected outcomes of inculturation through interreligious dialogue must include the preservation of relevant ancestral traditions passed on from one generation to the next among the Igbo people. For example, respect for elders, observation of taboos associated with incest, shading of innocent blood, and settling of disputes through \textit{Igba ndu} (covenant) ritual. Such calls for dialogue aimed at reshaping certain dogmas, rites and rules of Christian liturgy that are foreign to the Igbo person. The blending of foreign Euro-Christian values with African traditional values require proper discernment through dialogue for mutual understanding and possible inculturation. Chupungco sees this blending as a process of inculturation that culminates in integrating Christian values with specific cultural elements. The author argues that “[a]pplying this concept of inculturation to the liturgy, one may define liturgical inculturation as the process

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{113} Ela, “Ancestors and Christian Faith,” 34.
whereby pertinent elements of a local culture are integrated into the texts, rites, symbols and institutions employed by a local church for its worship.”

When this is done through dialogue, the two religions will have learned something new from each other to inaugurate the reshaping process. An Igbo proverb says, *Nku di na mba na esiri ha nri:* (“the firewood available in a particular locality is enough to cook the people’s food”). This implies that a people should feel a sense of belonging within the Church in their locality. “One result of inculturation is that the people are able to identify with the liturgy and claim it as their own. This is because, the liturgical texts, symbols, gestures, and feasts evoke something from the people’s history, traditions, cultural patterns, and artistic genius. The power of the liturgy to evoke local culture is a sign that inculturation has taken place.” The people will now say, “this is our church” in reality, unlike when it was called the white man’s church or the reverend father’s church—*Uka fada.*

Another projected outcome of inculturation through interreligious dialogue in the Igbo Church is that Christianity will be enriched with the Igbo traditional past, which was filled with beautiful songs, folklores, proverbs, signs, gestures, and symbols. Hence, “the liturgy not only uses symbols and is composed of various symbols, it is a symbol in itself. Its components, whether they are words, actions, or material elements, reveal through the veil of signs the presence of God, the mystery of Christ, and the community of the Church.” On the other hand, Igbo culture, like dancing during certain festivals, will be illumined with Christian malleable values, since “in the liturgy signs or symbols consist of words like sacramental formularies, gestures like hand laying,

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115 Ibid., 339-340.
and material elements like water, bread, wine and oil.”\textsuperscript{117} All these, like the use of Igbo material elements such as, the white chalk (\textit{nzu}), kola nut (\textit{oji}) and palm wine (\textit{mmanya nkwu}) during certain festivals, reveal the mystery of the hidden presence of the ancestors and the divinities who are invoked during such ceremonies.

Another important projected outcome of inculturation through interreligious dialogue is the recalling of what Igbo ancestors accomplished in the past and the invocation of their spirits to protect and guide their children. The Roman Missal for the dioceses of Zaire approved by the Holy See in 1988\textsuperscript{118} illustrates the invocation of the ancestors in an African-Christian worship. Uzukwu, while briefly analyzing the Zairean mass writes: “… Since the traditional cult is always conducted in solidarity with the ancestors, the Zairean Mass has two possible invocations of the ancestors in the faith as one of its preliminary ritual. One remarkable feature is that the traditional African ancestors, who are ‘pure of heart’, who ‘aided by God, have faithfully served him’, are specifically mentioned.”\textsuperscript{119}

The author compares this gesture of invoking African ancestors with the Jewish liturgy. “It might be of interest to note that in the Jewish liturgy of atonement, or Yom Kippur, there is an extensive memorial of Jewish ancestors from Adam to Aaron; this memorial was copied by the Clementine Liturgy into its Eucharistic prayer…This Zairean practice is justified all the more by Vatican II’s declaration of salvation in non-Christian religions…”\textsuperscript{120} Chibuko analogically reiterates the overwhelming statement made by the Zairean Conference of Bishops in this regard. “The Conference of Bishops explained that by becoming a Christian an African does not severe

\textsuperscript{118} Cf. Patrick C. Chibuko. \textit{Liturgical Inculturation: An Authentic African Response.}, 106
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, 62.
all relationship with the ancestors. Invoking them in Christian worship is consequently a pastoral and liturgical imperative. The conference urges further that the ancestors of righteous hearts are, through the merits of Christ, in communion with God and hence can be invoked in the liturgy just as Abel, Abraham, and Melkizedek are remembered in the Roman liturgy. "121

Uzukwu also appraises the efforts made by the Church in Zaire to project a new faith experience. "The Zairean composers have made a genuine effort to translate the local Church’s faith-experience into ritual. They have succeeded in making a translation which keeps the Zairean world, with all its dynamism, in healthy dialogical tension with the living Jewish – Christian tradition."122 It should be noted that while the Church in Zaire has given a clue towards the possibility of constructing a new African liturgical rite, the mass retains the main features of the Roman text. For this reason, Uzukwu argues:

The Zairean Church calls its Mass according to the Zairean rite. Certainly such a designation would create concern in certain quarters… But since rite embraces more than the Eucharistic Liturgy and includes administration of sacraments and sacramentals, church discipline, theology, etc., a Zairean rite as such does not yet exist. Or should we not rather borrow a jargon phrase common in Christian eschatology to say that for Zaire in particular, and for Africa in general, the question of typical rites is on the level of already and not yet?123

Whatever is the case, the local Churches in Africa have what it takes, both human and spiritual resources to express its faith-experience in an African lifestyle. In doing this, freedom should be exercised, while keeping communion with the universal church must never be watered down. However, the idea of recalling what the ancestors accomplished in the past and honoring them could be compared with the concept of memorial as expressed by Shorter.

Memorial is an important concept in historical religions, such as Judaism and Christianity. There are, of course, ethnic groups in Africa with a very well developed sense of history, but for many the historical memory is short. However,

123 Ibid., Spearhead 66.
within the micro-history of families, clans and neighborhoods a strong sense of memorial develops in Africa, appealing to a continuity with the immediate past and to the memorial example of the parental generation as a pledge of hope for the future. Among those groups which stress mediation, memorial focuses on the ancestors, but in the deistic models it centres on the lives of cult-heroes and divinities with their historical traditions. In the theistic, nomadic types of society, if a sense of history is well developed, memorial centres on events in the history of past migrations.124

In the same way, the Igbo believe that when they recall the deeds of their ancestors, they receive progenies, spiritual blessings, and mediation through them. Therefore, “[a]mong the Igbo the dead are held in veneration because they are believed to manifest interest in the welfare of their living relatives.”125 They also believe that the spirits of their ancestors’ hover around their families to give them protection and to shield them from harm. Shorter goes further to buttress this point by affirming that

Memorial is simply a particular aspect or consequence of the vital communion between living and dead, and the theme of judgement is another aspect or consequence of the same. Judgement is not so much a ‘Last Judgement’ or even a judgement at the hands of God, as a judgement at the hands of other human beings in this life. It is a theme which is particularly strong among societies which stress mediation. The idea is that one must keep faith with the ancestors and with one’s fellow human beings and that happiness in the after-life depends to a great extent on the recognition of one’s moral worth by one’s descendants.126

This fact of remembrance and recognition of one’s moral worth by one’s descendants corresponds with the idea expressed by Bénézet Bujo that

African ethics is articulated in the framework of anamnesis, which involves remembering one’s ancestors. As a narrative community, fellowship here on earth renews the existence of the community of the ancestors. This reestablishing (poiēsis) in turn implies the praxis which efficiently continues the remembrance of the ancestors and gives a new dynamism to the earthly fellowship. Consequently, ethical behavior in the Black African context always involves reestablishing the presence of one’s ancestors; for one who takes the anamnesis seriously is challenged to confront the ethical rules drawn up by the ancestors, in order to

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actualize anew the ‘protological foundational act’ which first called the clan fellowship into life.127

To maintain this clan or community fellowship with the ancestors, in some parts of Igboland, full burial rites are accorded to parents who begot grown-up children while they lived. To receive full funeral rites depends on the circumstances surrounding one’s death. If the deceased person lived good life and reached ripe old age, died ‘good death’ and got grown-up children, he could be given full burial rites in order to be welcomed by the ancestors into the land of the dead - *ala mmuo*. In some parts of Igboland, such as Owerri, this full burial rite is called *Okwukwu*.

Maduawuchi S. Ogbonna elaborately describes the importance of *Okwukwu* - the Igbo complete funeral rite. “*Okwukwu* is one of the most important practices in the life of the Igbo people of Southern Nigeria. It is an elaborate ceremony of rituals and festivities, which is essential for a closure and healing after bereavement. The Igbo believe that the performance of *Okwukwu* is a precondition for admission of the deceased into the ancestral community in afterlife.”128 Kalu argues that this “afterlife” could refer to the realization of personal salvation by an ancestor.

Ancestorhood is the clearest expression of the traditional Igbo belief in the afterlife. It marks the fullest realization of personal salvation. This state is the preserve of good men and women who lived out their full span of earthly existence in strict compliance with the corpus of norms of morality obtaining in their community. In the course of their lives on earth, they enhanced their life by taking the noble ranks of titled men and women, begetting children, who ensure that at their parents’ death they receive complete funeral rites.129

In some parts of Igboland also this burial rite, *Okwukwu*, is called, *Akwam Ozu*. This rite is often a community affair. Thus, the African/Igbo concept of community in this sense embraces

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the living, the dead ancestors, and those yet unborn. Hence, African sense of community is all-embracing. In this sense, Ogbonna contends that

The denial of Okwukwu ceremony is a dishonor to the deceased that excludes him from life in the ancestral community. The bereaved, whose responsibility it is to initiate the Okwukwu rituals but fails to do so, displeases the Igbo community; which in turn excludes him from communal life. Hence the general tendency of the relatives of the deceased is to perform the rituals of Okwukwu. The performance of Okwukwu ceremony has continued, in spite of the influences of Christianity and westernization in Igboland; it is necessary to understand what purposes it serves for the well-being of Igbo people.  

What this implies is that the link between the living and the dead is very strong among the Igbo. One should be aware of the psychological effects of bereavement and such experiences could be another element for dialogue between Christian leaders and Igbo traditional religious adherents in Igboland today. Ogbonna quotes Metuh as saying that

Okwukwu takes the form of: a carnival type of festivities. Comprising of the shooting of guns, drumming and dancing, display of acts of bravery by young men, and acts of wonder by medicine-men and masqueraders believed to be ancestors from the spirit-land. Relatives join in the dancing carrying for display pictures, trophies and other objects, which symbolize the statues of the deceased. Relatives and friends from distant place gather together at different corners of the compound to share the food and drinks offered to them by their hosts. Theses rites and celebrations for the Igbo constitute the essence of the funeral rites, and their purpose is to ensure that the dead is received as a full-fledged member of his own lineage in the spirit-land.

Hence, the burial rite of Okwukwu brings the community together to re-enact the presence of the ancestors among the living and to welcome the dead into a new abode in the spirit world. According to Ogbonna, “The period of mourning among the Igbo is usually one year starting from the day of burial. However, actual healing from loss due to bereavement, which includes full integration into the life of community, does not start until after the performance of Okwukwu. The

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bereaved that omits Okwukwu is not welcome to some social gatherings. Embarrassment and ridicule await him should he attempt to seek full association.”\textsuperscript{132} This needs serious study today.

Another major binding force of Igbo community-life is sharing, which excludes whatever leads to individualism or isolationism. An example of community sharing in an African context is seen in marriage, which is taken as a covenant relationship between two families and their communities in contrast to western marriage which is a contract between the two persons concerned.\textsuperscript{133} “Marriage is one of the fundamental elements which strengthen and reestablish the community; it signifies an anamnetic solidarity with one’s ancestors. Moreover, it is a communio with one’s ancestors which ultimately achieves a communicative fellowship that transcends death. All this also implies the idea of fertility and the transmission of life, and this not only concerns the survival of the individual but also embraces… the living, the dead, and the unborn.”\textsuperscript{134}

Hence, in the African communitarian context, marriage reenacts fellowship or communion with the ancestors. It puts the community into shape and teaches the young the link between the living and the dead ancestors. This is a learning process for the young which is established through fairy tales, poetic expressions, idioms, proverbs, symbols, riddles, jokes and initiation process.\textsuperscript{135} For this reason, Agbasiere affirms that “Marriage is considered as a religious duty or vocation, a consequence of being endowed with a distinct individuality… Hence, a major purpose in life is seen as marriage and the begetting of children for the lineage and for the ancestors, and this is assumed to be the greatest and most fundamental ritual of human existence.”\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{132} Maduawuchi S. Ogbonna. \textit{Okwukwu}, 2.


\textsuperscript{134} Ibid, 57- 58.

\textsuperscript{135} Cf. Patrick Chukwudezie Chibuko. \textit{Igbo Christian Rite of Marriage: A Proposed Rite for Study and Celebration}. (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 1999), xx. According to the author. “In Igboland, the symbols, poetic expressions, idioms, proverbs used in worship re-assure the praying participants of a certain degree of upliftment of the mind and fulfillment in prayer.”

\textsuperscript{136} Joseph- Therese Agbasiere. \textit{Women in Igbo Life}, 95.
Thus, marriage ceremonies among the Igbo are occasions that summon the lineage, clan or the community together. According to Arinze, “for the Ibo, as for many Africans, to exist is to live in the group, to see things with the group, to do things with the group. Life is not an individual venture, each one for himself. This powerful social instinct has been harnessed to produce wonderful results in community development projects. The Ibos help one another to build a house or to cut a new road, to celebrate a marriage or to solemnize a funeral.”\(^{137}\) Such funeral rites and marriage ceremonies, which open the link with Igbo ancestors and encourage community solidarity should form dialogue elements to be considered for inculturation in the Igbo Church today.

The projected outcomes of inculturation through interreligious dialogue could assume many forms as a continuous process. The mystery of Christ’s taking human flesh in his Incarnation is interpreted within the framework of human culture, which analogously is modeled as inculturation. Shorter explains this as a motivating factor behind the choice of the theology of incarnation by the bishops of Africa and Madagascar during the 1974 synod.\(^ {138} \) By rejecting the theology of adaptation, which had become old-fashioned, they broke away from foreign imposition and opted for something acceptable to Africans. This development followed a process of dialogue during the synod. In like manner, “through his dialogue with culture, Jesus is inculturated in successive traditions. As Pope John Paul II put it, Christ in his members is (for example) ‘himself African’. He accepts human cultures and expresses himself through them. He lives their way of life.”\(^ {139} \)

Thus, recalling what Igbo ancestors enacted in Igboland as a memorial of them by their descendants is another projected outcome of inculturation. Jesus also, while instituting the

\(^{137}\) Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, 4-5.

\(^{138}\) Cf. Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 80.

\(^{139}\) Ibid.
Eucharist, instructed his disciples and the entire Church: “Do this in memory of me!” Chupungco views this instruction as being fulfilled within the Trinitarian dimension of the liturgy.

The Trinitarian dimension of the liturgy has given rise to such basic liturgical concepts as anamnesis and epiclesis. In the rites composed of words, gestures, and sometimes material elements the church recalls or makes an anamnesis of what the Father has completed through Christ in human salvation. The act of recalling, of calling to mind, of making present is basic to the definition of the liturgy. It is through anamnesis that God’s marvellous deeds, the magnalia Dei, are recalled by the liturgical assembly and are made present in their midst…

Hence, the Church in Igboland needs to dialogue and possibly inculturate Igbo cultural values, such as, marriage, full burial rites and respect for the ancestors. These will enable the Igbo people to re-live their ancestral communitarian life properly. The action of the bishops of Africa and Madagascar during the 1974 synod in support of incarnation is a necessary aspect of the projected outcomes of inculturation through interreligious dialogue. To uphold these projected outcomes of inculturation through interreligious dialogue, there is need for Igbo self-determination to affirm what is good and necessary in their culture.

3.2.5. The Need for Igbo Self-Determination

The flippancy with which the colonialists and the early European missionaries treated African Traditional Religion and culture is regrettable. Most African theologians attested to this fact. In the view of Bujo, “it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the missionaries adopted an attitude of blanket condemnation of African culture in all its aspects.” Bujo also retold the observations made by Ngugi wa Thiong’o, who notes that “African converts were required to turn their backs on the whole of their tradition and the whole of their culture. Only then was it

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considered that the Christian faith had truly taken root in their souls.”

This issue of being made to turn one’s back to one’s culture needs to be replaced with self-determination to be truly African and truly Christian.

Given the fact that not everything about African culture is excellent, some basic principles should have been put in place as the yardstick for its cultural transformation. It is also not established that everything about African culture is bad. If the African polygamous system for instance, is not acceptable in European culture, is there anything wrong with having dialogue with the practitioners, rather than condemning it outrightly by the missionaries? Celestine Obi reports that in 1915 the first Catholic Congress of its kind took place at Onitsha convoked by Father Shanahan, the Apostolic Prefect. During the Congress issues boarding on pagan titles, the masquerade cult and traditional marriage were discussed. Resolutions based on these issues discussed were reached as follows: “No Christian should be initiated into the Muo masqueraders secret society nor participate in Muo public dances and processions. No Christian may take the Ozo and other titles since these tended to promote division between the slave and the free-born and to keep alive oppression of the poor. No Christian should contract marriage in the traditional fashion.”

While there were certain genuine reasons for proscribing these practices, some needed not be tampered with.

Again, Emmanuel Anagwo narrated similar incidence. “At Nteje (a town in Igboland, Nigeria), for example, the missionaries forbade the parishioners from taking part in traditional dancing, masquerading and festivities.” These were also their traditional religious rites which

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143 Celestine A. Obi. (ed.,) A Hundred Years of the Church, 147.
made their mode of worship very lively. It is a disfavor done to an African to forbid dancing, which marks a vibrant moment during worship and adds beautiful rhythm to their festivities.

Omenka critically analyzed the same resolutions made during the Onitsha 1915 first Pastoral Congress. “The aim was to discuss the crisis which had beset the Prefecture since 1912. Three problems were chosen as subjects of discussion, namely, 1) pagan titles, 2) the masquerades and their public manifestations, 3) pagan customs on marriage.” In the view of Omenka, “The final resolutions of the Congress on the first two subjects – pagan titles, and masquerades – were, in many respects, unfortunate, shortsighted, and ill-advised. The first Catholic Congress in Eastern Nigeria missed a golden opportunity of allowing the natives to give expression to their Christian faith through their culture and prevailing social habits.”

It is also said that in 1923 some missionaries working in a Congo mission issued a document containing a list of forbidden African customs such as “offerings to spirits and ancestors; co-operation in ancestor rituals; dancing and hunting ceremonies; magical or religious rites on the occasion of a birth, or the appearance of the child’s teeth, or circumcision, or a girl’s puberty, or marriage, or illness.” The people of Congo cherished these rites as important cultural and religious values that needed to be addressed via dialogue before deciding either to reform them or to Christianize them. Applying dialogue in this case would have facilitated the inculturation of African respect for their ancestors which analogically corresponds with the Christian communion of the saints to a certain extent. All these were done to give way to a Eurocentric mode of worship and to wrongly affirm that nothing good comes from Africa, or Igboland in particular. However, these have been overtaken by time and reversed at recent times.

145 Nicholas I. Omenka. The School in the Service of Evangelization, 123.
146 Ibid, 124.
147 Bénézet Bujo. African Theology in Its Social Context, 44.
Self-determination makes room for surprises that open the eyes of outsiders to a people’s latent potential. The Biblical story about Philip and Nathaniel meeting Jesus and Nathaniel’s bias, as expressed in his seemingly rhetorical question about whether any good thing could come from Nazareth (Jn 1:45-51), is comparable to European bias about something good coming from Igboland or from Africans. Jesus overcame Nathaniel’s bias by proving him wrong. When Nathaniel’s eyes were opened, he acknowledged Jesus and said, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel” (Jn 1:49). Similarly, African or Igbo theologians need to find a way to prove to the world that they are equal to the task of reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue between the Church and African Traditional Religion in Igboland.

The way to do this is by maintaining continuity with the past—that is, by making sure that the good cultural and religious values handed on by the ancestors are not left to waste and rot away. However, the Igbo self determination to worship God in their cultural setting needs interreligious dialogue so that mutual enrichment will occur between Christianity and African/Igbo Traditional Religion. In terms of liturgical inculturation, the lively Igbo musical tones should be continued in the liturgy. The important festivities of Igbo origin such as, masquerading, which re-enacts communion with, and memorial of Igbo ancestors, should be Christianized to allow active participation of the Igbo people in their cherished culture.

According to Arinze, “The ‘mnuo’ or ‘mmanwu’ are believed to be the dead come to life for special celebrations.” Ezra Chitando notes that “by… developing liturgies that reflect the African context and paying attention to African art, architecture, music and other cultural products, African Christian theologians have sought to have a Christianity which ‘drinks from African

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Africans, particularly the Igbo, are of an age to tell the world that they can worship God through what nature and culture have provided in their midst, which are God’s abundant gifts to humanity in general.

The Igbo sense of community solidarity has enough cultural acumen to counter European individualism which perpetrates isolated life. Oliver Onwubiko made an elaborate presentation in this regard on the “clan vital.” The African sense of community guarantees security and abhors alienation. Community, which emphasizes unity and communion, is expressed as *Ujamaa*. “*Ujamaa*, in the literal sense means, ‘togetherness’, ‘familyhood’. *Familyhood* here does not depend on consanguinity. It depends on ‘community spirit’ of togetherness which considers all people as ‘brothers.’”

The Igbo do not distinguish between people born within the same family or village as distant relatives. They see each other as brothers and sisters; in fact, there is no word for half-brother or half-sister in Igbo language and culture. Self-determination gives way to creativity. This creative vision through self-determination is needed in the Church in Igboland.

While critiquing the Church leaders for the slow pace of inculturating the Roman liturgy in West Africa, a few proposals have been made by Uzukwu and others toward proper inculturation of the gospel in the area. Mention have also been made of certain liturgical creativities aimed at inculturating the Roman liturgy already taking place in the Region. “Experiments geared toward adapting the typical editions of the Roman liturgy are on course in English-speaking West Africa. Some of these adaptations have gone beyond the limits of preserving the unity of the Roman rite.

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They already chart ways for the emergence of new rites.”\textsuperscript{152} The use of adaptation here is questionable because it has been seen as obsolete by the synod bishops of Africa and Madagascar.

Through self-determination, certain aspects of inculturation have been taking place during the Corpus Christi celebrations in Ghana and Nigeria. The yearly \textit{Odwira} - outing of the King of Ashanti – the \textit{Ashantehene}, in Ghana and the Igbo of Nigeria celebration of \textit{Ofala Jesu}, marking the yearly outing of Jesus as King. According to Uzukwu, this is celebrated “with fanfare, cannon shots, song and dance, etc.”\textsuperscript{153} A long processions along the major roads of certain cities and rural villages in Eastern Nigeria is observed on Corpus Christi Sunday. Along the same line also, Archbishop Anthony Obinna in 1996 introduced the ODENIGBO lecture series to promote Igbo language and primary evangelization in the Owerri area of Igboland. The \textit{Uka bia nara Ngozi} – (come and receive blessing in the church), is also an Igbo innovative idea which has made the Church in Igboland very vibrant and lively. Uzukwu calls it “the introduction of patterns of cooperative development or improvement unions into the rite of the ‘presentation’ of gifts.”\textsuperscript{154} The author further describes this ceremonial offertory procession as follows:

The presentation of gifts or offerings in procession, according to the Roman rite, involves bringing the bread and wine to the alter accompanied by the offertory song. Money or gifts for the poor and the Church may also be collected or brought forward during the preparation of the gifts. Among the Igbo this has been converted into a procession of song and dance by everybody in the assembly to present his or her gift to the Lord. Offertory hymns are carefully worked to inspire participation. The procession is accompanied by singing, hand-clapping, and dancing. The minister often stands before the alter to sprinkle holy water on those presenting their gifts. The most dramatic display of this kind of presentation of gifts is on Holy Thursday (Chrism mass). Parishes, sodalities, religious communities, and organization within the diocese come forward with gifts of all kinds.\textsuperscript{155}

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\item Enochukwu E. Uzukwu. \textit{Worship as Body Language}, 273.
\item Cf. Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
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Another way to attain self-determination is by Christianizing the Igbo naming ceremony. This is already taking place among Yoruba Catholics in Western Nigeria. In the process of adapting to the Roman rite, the Yoruba anticipate infant baptism as a ceremony celebrated in their culture.

There are two remarkable features of the naming ceremony among the Yoruba and other African groups like the Igbo. The first is the imposition of a name or names that display the web of relationships through which the individual is defined. The neonate is linked to the loved ancestors, to the day of the week, to prayers made to God or spirits, to particular wishes or experiences of the parents, and so on… Second, the skills necessary for the child to achieve ‘personhood’ are already anticipated in the instruments presented to the newborn. These are tools that the social group uses to produce competent humans as defined by the culture.  

The link with the ancestors is already a traditional method used to communicate with past historical events. The ancestors form the spiritual community that is linked with the living through child birth. The two communities (living and the dead ancestors) are one, though, separated by different realms of life and leadership but culturally one. In this sense and in African culture,

Each newborn baby is a little creature of its culture. It is born into an established community with patterns of behavior proper to it. Among many sub-Saharan African groups, the naming ceremony, which takes place eight days after the biological birth, is the occasion for the ‘social birth’ of a child. This ceremony makes the child a member of the community. The naming ceremony is the first major (and symbolic) gesture through which African societies begin the socialization of the child – the beginning of his or her social definition as a person. Infant baptism, among Christians, has overshadowed this native African practice.

Traditionally, children born into an Igbo family are often named according to the circumstances surrounding their birth, or the market day they were born. Since the handing on of the teachings of Christ from the apostles to their successors down to the Church is known as tradition, it is important that what the Igbo ancestors handed on to their children as ome na ala/ani be preserved as well. Ome na ala Igbo refers to those traditions bequeathed by the ancestors.

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156 Ibid., 275.
157 Ibid., 274-275.
Thus, after the eighth day of birth, an Igbo male child undergoes circumcision. The next important day is the day of the naming ceremony when friends and relatives are invited. The child is brought into the Obi and named by the oldest man who is also the head of the clan - the holder of the ancestral Ofo. This is followed by the grandparents and the parents giving their own special names to the child.¹⁵⁸ Music and dancing follow while food and drinks are then served, and the child is fully welcomed into the entire clan.

The naming ceremony is a community exercise and not just a family celebration. Members of the family, friends and well-wishers present gifts to the child as a sign of welcome and a sense of belonging to the entire community. All these events, if applied in the Igbo Church, would facilitate liturgical inculturation. Igbo Self-determination will accomplish this task. There are many people who clamor for recognition, especially, through title taking. The Owerri Archdiocesan Catholic Women Organization (CWO) fashioned a way of recognizing some outstanding women among them by the title of Nne Oma/Ezinne – good mother.

This title-giving ceremony has become a yearly event whereby women of outstanding virtue are nominated by their local parishes for recognition by the entire Archdiocese. These women gather at the diocesan Cathedral for this ceremony of Nne Oma/Ezinne title-giving. It is performed during the Eucharistic celebration presided over by the Archbishop or his delegate. Each of them is given a decorated barge (with the picture of the Blessed Virgin Mary) hung on their shoulders with the inscription: Nne Oma of Owerri Archdiocesan CWO. This has given much ardor and strong faith to such women and their families. This Nne Oma title-giving ceremony could be made an Igbo cultural event within the dioceses of Igboland to facilitate inculturation for the benefit of the church and society in general. All these could be achieved through Igbo self-

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Arinze, Sacrifice in Ibo Religion, 4. Here the author maintains that “Children receive names from their father, mother and grand-mother according to local custom… Ibo names always have a meaning.”
determination to prove their faith through their cultural elements and vibrant life celebrations. This sets the stage for the benefits of liturgical inculturation in the Church in Igboland today.

3.2.6. The Benefits of Liturgical Inculturation in the Church in Igboland

The genuine inculturation of Igbo cultural and religious values would be of great benefit to the Church in Igboland and beyond. In the first instance, it will promote a profound sense of solidarity among the members of the parish community who will see each other as brothers and sisters in an extended manner. Onwubiko buttresses this point by affirming that “[t]he African sense of solidarity means ‘living together’ in the sense of ‘community of brothers and sisters,’ which is the basis of, and the expression of, the extended family system in Africa.”\(^{159}\)

Another benefit is that people will see the Church as their own, not just a foreign Church where the language, music, songs, gestures and musical tones are imported. Africans, and especially, the Igbo express themselves in proverbs, wise sayings, folklore, and eulogies, which evoke a longing for more time spent in worship. This epitomizes the Biblical passage which says, “One day within your courts is better than a thousand years elsewhere” (Ps 84:10). Hence, the Igbo saying: *Ura ọba utọ ekwobe ya ekwobe*; “when sleeping becomes sweet, snoring occurs.”

Liturgical inculturation becomes sweet when it is realized within a given culture. When this is done, it arouses the active participation of all and sundry—men, women, children, young and old. People enjoy the liturgy when they understand the language and the rhythm of the indigenous songs and music. For instance, during the *Uka bia nara Ngozi* in the Igbo churches, dancing starts spontaneously and vigorously, depicting the presence of the divine. A dancing

\(^{159}\) Onwubiko, *The Church in Mission*, 371.
people is a happy people. Most importantly, Chupungco views the benefits of liturgical inculturation as a two-sided event.

Inculturation means reciprocal enrichment. The Roman liturgy absorbed the wealth of classical culture. What did culture gain from its union with liturgy? J. Jungmann gives the following answer. “Society, political life, the lives of the people, family life, the position of women, the appreciation of human dignity, whether slave, child, or infant yet unborn – all this was transformed in a slow but sure process of fermentation out of a pagan society a Christian society was born.” History affirms that inculturation is an effective means of evangelization.\(^\text{160}\)

The benefits of liturgical inculturation are numerous, as both the Church and the receiving culture have much to gain from each other. For this reason, certain Igbo cultural and religious values such as respect for ancestors, which seems to tally with the Christian cult of saints, should be considered in the Church in Igboland for possible inculturation. Appraising the spiritual and moral values of the Igbo ancestors is important since the ancestors are regarded as people who lived and died virtuously by upholding the traditions of the land. Hence, an appraisal of the values Igbo ancestors cherished is necessary for achieving proper inculturation in the Church in Igboland.

3.3. Appraising the Spiritual and Moral Values of Igbo Ancestors

The cult of ancestors\(^\text{161}\) is a potent factor in understanding the hierarchical structure of Igbo moral and spiritual life. To qualify as an ancestor depends on certain factors judged to be virtuous. “The reason is that not every dead person is regarded as an Ancestor: for example, women (among


\(^{161}\) Enshrined ancestors are those who lived their lives well and died in a socially acceptable manner (i.e., were given the proper burial rites). These ancestors live in one of the worlds of the dead that mirrors the world of the living. The living pay tribute to their ancestors by honoring them through sacrifices. *Igbo Religion and Expressive Culture*, accessed September 3, 2017. [http://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Igbo-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html#ixzz4rfryjKp1](http://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Igbo-Religion-and-Expressive-Culture.html#ixzz4rfryjKp1).
the Owerri Igbo), those who die young, … or those who leave no children of their own behind at their death to accord them a befitting burial, are not regarded as Ancestors.”

When the Igbo people appeal to God (Chukwu) for good health and protection, they do so by invoking the mediation of the spirits of their ancestors and the divinities. The rationale is that “Ancestors occupy a special place in Igbo religious practice. The Igbo conceive of their ancestors as the invisible segment of the lineage.” Among the divinities is the earth goddess – Ala (the goddess of fertility), while the human mediators are the ancestors, also known as Ndichie (the custodians of morality and spiritual life). “There is also the belief that ancestors protect their living descendants and are responsible for rain, harvest, health and children.” M.M. Green affirms that “[a]ncestor cult is an important factor in the life of the people.” The Igbo people truly respect their ancestors.

Herbert Cole also presents an important description of the Igbo ancestors with reference to Owerri area of Igboland. “The ancestors are the spirits of certain people who have died. They are thought to live in the land of spirits, ala mnuo, and to pursue much the same activities as people on earth. Ancestors are the concern of families and lineages, who erect shrines for them at which are offered, periodically, food, drink, and prayer. Ancestors affect the morality, prosperity, and

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general well-being of the family or lineage.”¹⁶⁷ They always protect their descendants and their families¹⁶⁸ here on earth.

In the various ancient kingdoms located east of the River Niger, the role of the ancestors has been extolled. Yet, a saying associated with leadership and authority in Igbo culture raises doubt as to whether the Igbo pay allegiance to centralized authority or not. According to Uzukwu, “the saying, igbo enweghi eze (Igbo have no King) simply means that Igbo do not tolerate autocracy.”¹⁶⁹ Many other interpretations could be given to this saying. One might be that the Igbo are ungovernable; another could mean they do not recognize a centralized authority.

However, the fact that the Igbo have traditions (Ome na ala or ani) passed on from ancestors to descendants proves these negative interpretations wrong. Uzukwu cautions that the “West African ancestral map of the universe displays resilience and complexity that one should not underestimate; this at the same time increases difficulty in the God-talk and calls for critical vigilance.”¹⁷⁰ This ambiguity can be clarified if the Igbo leadership structure is traced from its ancestral roots.

The structure of Igbo leadership and authority cuts across the different segments of Igbo social, moral, spiritual and political life. Uzukwu has wonderfully described the various levels of the Igbo exercise of moral and political authority. “Society is anchored on the sacred; and ritual is exercised on various levels by heads of families, kindreds, clans, and village-groups (ancestral cult, common festivals at the various levels, and related cults) and by priests of divinities (especially Ala—the Earth deity which, along with ancestors, presides over the land and its laws—

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, 19. The author says that “[t]he Ibo family is not made up of those only who are still living in the flesh. The unseen ancestors are part of the family and are every inch interested in it.”
¹⁶⁹ Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 15.
in brief, over morality).”\textsuperscript{171} The author goes further to examine the Igbo respect for authority.

“Closely related to this respect for rulers is the respect for elders - parents, older brothers or sisters, older age grades, any older person, elders of the society, titled people. The summit of this respect for authority is the cult of ancestors among those ethnic groups where the cult exists. … The ancestors are very close to God and the divinities.”\textsuperscript{172}

The Igbo believe that God cannot be reached directly because of the awesome aura surrounding him as a divine Being. He is known, yet not fully comprehensible: \textit{Amama-amasi-amasi. Ogbajiri igwe kpo ya nku. Okaa kaa. Onye bi n’eluigwe ogodo ya n’akpu na ala}. All these attributes describe God as all powerful and omnipotent.\textsuperscript{173} He protects humankind from above in the high heavens. Arinze maintains that the Igbo believed in the existence of God and practiced their traditional religion even before Christianity came in Igboland. This could be attested to by their family names and the names given to their children, which are pre-fixed by \textit{Chukwu}, the Supreme God, to assert their religious belief. These include such names as \textit{Chukwuemeka} (God has done wonders), \textit{Chukwudalu} or \textit{Kelechukwu} (Thank God), \textit{Chukwudi} (There is God), and so on. Hence, for the Igbo people, “God is the Supreme Spirit, the creator of everything. No one equals Him in power. He knows everything. He is altogether a good and merciful God and does harm to no one.”\textsuperscript{174} It is believed that such a highly placed figure as \textit{Chukwu}\textsuperscript{175} cannot be approached directly except through divinities and the ancestors.

According to Umeh, “The Igbo have several names and praise terminologies for \textit{Chukwu}, the Universal God. As \textit{Aka} He is the origin, the antiquity and the first One. \textit{Chukwu} is invoked or

\textsuperscript{171} Uzukwu, \textit{A Listening Church}, 15.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 18-19.
\textsuperscript{173} Arinze, \textit{Sacrifice in Ibo Religion}, 9.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{175} Cf. Ibid. Here, the author maintains that “[f]or the Ibo… there is an atmosphere of mystery about \textit{Chukwu}. They are not sure how exactly to worship Him. His awe and majesty perplex them. He is entirely transcendent. Hence they think it more courteous and more within man’s range to appeal to the spirits to obtain requests from God.”
chanted among others as: Cutter that cuts things And Creator that creates things.”

It should be noted that “while the spirits have their statues of wood and red clay, Chukwu has neither cult symbols nor statues.” It is this lack of altar and shrine dedicated to the merciful and benevolent Chukwu that hints at his distancing himself from people. “Thus the ancestors who are closest to him mediate these powers and benefits to humans.”

During the election and enthronement of Igbo traditional rulers (The Obi or Eze), the ritual invocation of the ancestral spirits over them is the key ceremony. “Consequently, these rulers are very close to the ancestors. They are their representatives or even their emanations. In some communities this close association or identification of rulers with the power of ancestors leads to the ritual eating of a potent part of a deceased king or chief by his successor. Normally the heart of the chief is eaten! To respect authority is, indirectly, to respect ancestors and also God.”

However, this practice might not be generalized as a stated Igbo practice. “The particular words, actions and rituals associated with the ancestors, and with the elders in general, have a deep meaning in the life of African people. They constitute a rule of conduct for the living, and they must be continually repeated. The present and the future depend on this repetition and representation of past speech, actions and rituals. It is in truth a matter of life and death.”

The memoria of the ancestors must always be kept alive.

The above appraisal of the ancestors has given rise to both Uzukwu and Bujo’s emphases on constructing a new African Christianity based on the resources drawn from Africa. It is in light of the respect accorded to African ancestors as mediators of God’s salvation to humans that Bujo

177 Arinze. Sacrifice in Ibo Religion, 10.
178 Uzukwu. A Listening Church, 19.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid., 77.
designates Jesus as the “Proto-Ancestor.””\textsuperscript{181} The African past is relived in the present when the deeds of the ancestors, who are the custodians of morality, are remembered. For Bujo, “[t]he past is enshrined in the traditions of the Fathers, but it is a past which still lives and is the guarantee of present salvation.”\textsuperscript{182} For Uzukwu also, “[t]he ancestral universe is dominated by God, multiple deities, spirits, and ancestors ideally for the enhancement or realization of the destiny of individual humans and the community.”\textsuperscript{183} All these go a long way to show both the primacy of position ancestors occupy in Igbo religious, moral, and political life in particular and Africa in general, and how these concepts might be related to Christianity.

Therefore, when the earth deity – 
\textit{Ala}, requests it, some parts of Igboland enshrine or engrave the images of some humans, animals or benevolent deities in monuments made of mud or clay - a sacred symbol known as \textit{Mbari}. This is done to accord the earth deity – \textit{Ala} and the ancestors honor and respect and to portray their latent power, strength, and authority. “The scenes in mbari come from real life, dreams and imagination, from spiritual belief, mythology, law, custom, from the modern world as well as from the times of the ancestors.”\textsuperscript{184} The \textit{Mbari} objects which are held as sacred, facilitate human interaction with the ancestral spirits they symbolize. In Christianity also, images of the saints are engraved in medals and statues for their memorial. If this is the case between Igbo Traditional Religion and Christianity, some Igbo sacred ritual symbols, such as \textit{Mbari}, \textit{Omu} and \textit{Ofo}, should be studied through dialogue for proper understanding and possible inculturation in the light of the Gospel. Igbo sacred symbols should be appropriated in the Church through dialogue to facilitate genuine faith and proper understanding of what the symbols stand for during worship.

\textsuperscript{181} Bénézet Bujo, \textit{African Theology in Its Social Context}, 77–79.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{183} Uzukwu, \textit{God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness}, 1.
\textsuperscript{184} Cole, \textit{Mbari}, 198.
3.4. Introducing and Appropriating Igbo Sacred Symbols

According to Christopher Ejizu, “Symbolism is the basis of human communication. For by nature, man is a *homo symbolicus*, a symbolizing, conceptualizing, and meaning-seeking animal. He is capable of using one thing to stand for or represent another.” Moving further, the author asserts with other writers that “[r]eligious symbols, on the other hand, are essentially hierophanies, as they are in one form or another, manifestations of the sacred. They reveal man’s experience of the ultimate reality and seek to integrate the various levels of his awareness – the preconscious, the personal and the transcendental. Religious symbols mediate knowledge about the cosmos and man’s place in it.” While reiterating the importance of symbols, Augustine Onyeneke asserts that “[t]he capacity to use symbols is one of the characteristics that distinguish human beings from lower animals. Language, the system of employing speech sounds to present abstract thought is part of this. Objects also become symbols when used (beyond their immediate physical properties) as vehicles to present states of mind, sentiments, ideas and beliefs, usually of great importance to the people.”

Following these definitions of religious symbols, in some parts of Igboland, the earth goddess – *Ala*, is honored through the building of *Mbari* houses. *Mbari* is an architectural work of art that manifests the beauty of nature. The significance of the *Mbari* culture in Uratta Owerri, Igboland, cannot be overemphasized. Other villages under the Owerri region also share in the activities and festivals of *mbari* in their various localities. According to studies made by Herbert Cole, “The Uratta people, acknowledged originators of mbari, share this distinctive artistic world

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with five or six other groups, several of which are known as Ngor peoples. All together the mbari-building groups number somewhere between 250,000 and 300,000 people, spread among roughly 90 village clusters. Before colonial times, most of these village groups were politically independent from one another, without any common meeting place, ancestors or deities.”

Cole defines Mbari as “a festival of life, vibrant in color, alive with clay sculptures of gods, men, animals, and monsters set in a richly painted architectural complex.” The men included on this list might refer to the ancestors. Among the Owerri people of Igboland, while they build shrines for the earth goddess -Ala and other deities, they also erect Mbari houses at the request of Ala, where men, animals and other objects are artistically painted and molded in mud and clay depicting the beauty of nature. While mbari is not a general Igbo culture, “regional variation in Igbo cultural patterns is the rule. A traditional Onitsha man, for example, will not understand the Owerri word for ‘god’ or ‘spirit,’ agbara, nor will he know about mbari. All Igbo people, on the other hand, will understand ‘mmuo,’ the common word for spirit. Thus some values and attitudes, as well as words, are shared widely, yet regional culture patterns are often quite distinct; mbari themselves prove the point.”

The Mbari is often built when the earth goddess, Ala, has decreed that it should be constructed for her as “a thing of pride” and a sign that she is not neglected by the people. The Mbari depicts a display of “…the colorful, decorative orchestration of the god’s ‘fancy’ house. The fact that this is an artistic display, and not a god’s real house, is well known.” The important

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188 Cole, Mbari, 5-6.
189 Ibid., xv.
190 Ibid., xvi.
191 Ibid., 73-74ff. Here the author asserts that the process of building Mbari is often known through strange occurrences in the land, such as sudden deaths of children and young people, appearance of big snakes or python in the yam barn of village heads. The priests of the deities through divination or sorcery consult the gods who mystically reveal their anger over the people for negligence or abandonment of the oracle. To build an Mbari shows that the people have accepted to be close to the gods and to offer sacrifices to them in worship.
192 Ibid., 128.
thing about *mbari* is not just the house but the artistic and colorful objects inside it, display the Igbo beauty it represents. “The enormous variety of subjects represented in *mbari* calls for some examination of artists as both transmitters of culture and innovators.”\(^{193}\) This is contrary to the view held by Arinze and others regarding the *Mbari* houses. For Arinze,

These are peculiar buildings set up to avert an imminent disaster from an angry spirit. This is peculiar cultural practice of the Oratta Ibo and is not common throughout Iboland. A *dibia* is consulted. The elders make plans and communal labour is employed. Special people are selected and these dedicate about a year to the building. They live together under strict laws. Famous artists are invited. The *mbari* house when finished looks like a place of worship. It is dedicated, but after this, the aim is achieved and it is totally neglected and allowed to go to rack and ruin.\(^ {194}\)

Here Arinze did not mention that *Mbari* has any connection with the earth goddess – *Ala/ani*. The angry spirit mentioned by Arinze has no name or identity. Cole differs from Arinze regarding the notion that the *mbari* house is abandoned after it is finished and dedicated. In the view of Cole, *mbari* is not completely forgotten because;

“When an *mbari* is opened, it is no longer highly charged with spiritual power: it is now a public monument. The sacrifice has been presented and accepted; since this fundamental purpose has been served, the *mbari* is never repaired. In the old days it was permissible to replace worn-out roofing mats, but never could crumbling, rain-washed figures be repaired or repainted. Yet the life and function of *mbari* in the community are far from finished.”\(^ {195}\) Again, *Mbari* is also a way of portraying the people’s vision of the world and the beauty of *Ala* – the earth goddess of fertility who gives posterity and farm produce. The site for the *Mbari* is often consecrated and located facing the main shrine of the god or goddess that ordered its building. “An *mbari* house is not

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\(^{193}\) Ibid., 157.  
\(^{194}\) Francis Arinze, *Sacrifice*, 86-87.  
simply erected in any convenient place. It is usually built upon, and comes to dominate, a precisely located sacred area, the ‘face of the god,’ *ihu agbara*, which has been in existence as both a religious and an artistic entity long before the mbari is built – twenty years or more in some cases.”

The *Mbari* festival is celebrated during the unveiling of a completed one. It should be noted that, prior to the building of *mbari* house, the clan involved would first accept the verdict of the diviner that *Ala* wants it built for her. The process of acceptance is enthroned by a ritual sacrifice known as *ekwelem* – I have agreed. The skulls of the sacrificed goats and fowls are tied to a rod iron bar and pinned onto the place where the *mbari* house is to be built. “The importance of the rod iron, used variously in mbari, should be noted: it is a symbol of strength, wealth, and supernatural power, having been used as a form of trade currency from the slavery era onwards, and it is encountered frequently in Igbo shrines and rituals.”

Among Owerri people, during the period of building *mbari* house, which lasts for a year or more, certain stringent laws are pronounced. “No one will fight or steal, no one will cut another with a knife, no one will poison or murder; all must obey *Ala*. The goat killed during the rite represents the penalty for any offender in the town.”

Comparatively, *Mbari* could be taken as an Igbo systematic method of constructing a sacred space in the like of the Christian grottos of the saints often located in front of most Churches at recent times. Since the Church in Igboland today imports statues of the saints from Europe and the Western world, shouldn’t it be possible to appropriate such a significant Igbo sacred symbol within the same Church through dialogue with *Mbari* makers? Herbert Cole notes that “[a]s the

\[196\] Ibid, 128.
\[197\] Cf. Ibid., 74.
\[198\] Ibid., 75.
\[199\] Ibid.
influence of European education and European missionaries grew in the 1940s and 1950s, the institution began to change and to decline.” Nevertheless, the author compares mbari process to life.

Like life itself, the mbari process may be seen as an interplay between the united but separate concepts of continuity and change. The history of all mbari, as well as the development of a single one, can be visualized as a dialogue between a conservative adherence to tradition and a series of breaks with that tradition. Ultimately, mbari means security — the preservation and cyclical repetition of known and expected secular and ritual acts aimed at establishing human life against the threats or ravages of war, disease, drought, and death. More than that, however, mbari means security in the more active sense of continuity, involving forward motion, the developing sense of human existence, including procreation and the incorporation of new ideas and forms within old patterns. Igbo culture may be called a borrowing culture, for the Igbo people adapt, delete, and innovate, and have been doing so since well before prolonged European contact.

Although most Mbari sacred symbols were destroyed during the European missionaries’ era in some parts of Igboland near Owerri, yet some people retained little particles of them, and a few of the artists can be located around the Owerri area today. For this reason, a spot called Mbari Cultural and Art Centre is located at Ikenegbu in Central Owerri, Imo State Nigeria. The spot is designated as Ama mbari (mbari center), and it is a converging place for young men and women for recreation, eating and drinking. Hence, Cole constructs an Igbo social and etymological meaning for mbari in terms of its sacrificial meal-sharing aspect between the gods and men.

Thus mbari is a time and a place where the whole town (or village) eats, or more precisely, where representatives of the town’s various segments converge for a prolonged major celebration. Like many African peoples, the Igbo invest considerable social and symbolic value in the sharing out of food and its consumption. Nowhere are these valuations more clearly demonstrated than in a festival setting, like mbari, when men and the gods share the same sacrificial foods in a carefully choreographed act of communication.

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200 Ibid., 3.
201 Ibid., 196.
202 Ibid., 183-184.
Mbári as an Igbo “art and ritual constitute a system of communication independent of words, expressing things for which there are no real verbal equivalents. It is possible to discuss such concepts as the motion, function, meaning, and content of mbári…”203 The architectural designs of mbári could be an Igbo model in building Grottos close to the Church in Igboland today. This is because, “Mbári is thanks as well, and a tangible prayer for further benefits.”204 As people pray in front of grottos, mbári as sacred space could serve the same purpose for prayers.

Another Igbo sacred symbol to be considered in this research is Ofo. Studies from Herbert Cole, M.M. Green, Christopher Ejizu, Cyril Okorocha, Raymond Arazu, Edmund Ilogu, Francis Arinze, and others provide significant clues toward the understanding of Ofo.205 Jesus as Opara/Okpala Chineke - the Son of God, should be regarded as an Ofo holder among the Igbo people. Those who represent Jesus by virtue of their priestly ordination, that is, the Igbo Catholic bishops/priests, should also be regarded as Ofo holders – Ndi Oji ofo. According to Cole, “Each compound is an effective household under a recognized leader who holds ofo, a secular and spiritual symbol of headship in the form of a short staff deriving its power from lineage ancestors. An ofo brings to its guardian numerous ritual and social rites and obligations.”206 The Catholic bishops of Igboland as spiritual heads in their various local Churches could also use the Ofo branchlet in making their crosier in place of the gold coated ones they import from Europe. The use of the Ofo branchlet to construct an Igbo bishop’s crosier identifies the bishop more with Igbo culture. In this case, the image of Christ crucified could also be attached to the Ofo branchlet. This

203 Ibid., 183.
204 Ibid., 184.
205 Cf. Christopher I. Ejizu. Ofo, 31-32. According to the author, “The Igbo term OFO is the proper name of two related objects. It immediately designates a particular plant species which grows in the Igbo area. And then in a derived sense, it identifies the twig or branchlet from the wood of that tree. Both the plant and its sticks are equally referred to as Ofo.” Both the tree and its disengaged branches are sacred among all Igbo. Women are prohibited from touching the tree or its fallen branches. While Ejizu says that the botanical name for Ofo according Nigerian Forestry Department, is Detarium Elastica, other Igbo authors use Detarium Senegalense as the botanical name.
206 Cole, Mbári, 8.
identifies Christ with Igbo culture in contrast to the image of a white man displayed on the crucifixes found in Igbo Churches.

M.M. Green observes that “[t]he head of each kindred possesses a sacred symbol, looking usually like a small wooden club, sometimes bound with iron, and called *ofo*. It is held in great awe and respect, and is frequently used. People judging an important case will be sworn on *ofo*. By it an unknown criminal may be cursed or a man suspected of crime may swear his innocence, saying let *ofo* kill him if he is guilty.” On another note, Ejizu maintains that “[t]he African mind perceives the universe as a ‘forest of symbols.’ Visible things stand for invisible things, just as masks evoke and make present the ancestral spirits.” *Ofo* recalls to mind Igbo ancestors.

Along this line, Ejizu describes *Ofo* by analyzing its significance as a dominant Igbo ritual symbol. This is demonstrated by the fact that *Ofo* points to that which Igbo culture respects much.

*Ofo*’s dense meaning-content touches virtually every level of the indigenous Igbo awareness, the preconscious, conscious and transcendental levels, as also the sensory and ideological poles. This should not come as a surprise given the fact of its being an integral part of the people’s original creation narrative. Ordinarily, the average Igbo knows that *Ofo* symbol represents sacred authority and power, and the crucial values of justice and moral uprightness that are vital to mutual interrelationship, peaceful coexistence and harmonious living.

While referring to other Igbo writers such as E. N. Njaka, on the use of *Ofo*, Ejizu argues that “Ofo symbolizes the links between *Chukwu* and man, the dead and the living, the living and the unborn. Ofo is primarily a staff of office which symbolizes justice, righteousness and truth. Hence the prevalent role of the ritual object in the social, political and religious life of the Igbo. It

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is used for the conferment of titles and for the ratification and consecration of laws. Together with its adjunct Ogu, Ofo is used in maintaining or claiming innocence.”

Every serious decision considered binding on some Igbo villages, clan or kindreds is sealed by invoking ofo; this practice is known as iku ofo. When this is done any violation of an agreement or decision by any person, might lead to the sudden death of the defaulter. Hence, when the village ofo holders—ndi Oji ofo—gather together for a serious decision that will be binding on the entire village, Ofo is invoked to seal the decision. “When blessings or curses are pronounced, the head of the sacred ofo stick is hit several times on the ground with the chorus Eha, eha, ‘so be it’ - a pronouncement thought to have acquired sacred and binding potency.” Ofo has many significant uses within the various parts of Igboland. According to Ekechi, “In their handling of village disputes, the elders often reinforced their authority by invoking the memory of the ancestors. This they did by using their Ofo as an instrument of social control or curse.”

Edmund Ilogu tallies with Okorocha in terms of using ofo during Igbo prayer by maintaining that “[t]he chief priest, who may also be the head of the clan, leads the prayer, holding his Ofo stick in his hand. At the end of each significant section, all the Ozo titled men strike the ground with their own Ofo and say ‘eha-a’ – amen, so be it.” Cole also confirms this statement as follows:

They invoke ofo to bind all villagers to a decision and to kill all transgressors. The ofo itself dramatizes the spiritual basis of even the most secular matters even today, for its power represents the authority of the high god, Chineke, channeled through lineage ancestors, ndichie, without whose support and concurrence men dare not act. Thus the ultimate sanction for human activity – law making, war, buying and

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211 Okorocha, The Meaning of Religious Conversion, 100.
212 Felix K. Ekechi. Tradition and Transformation, 144.
sitting, changing village sites, planting or harvesting, making and using ‘art’ comes not from living man but from supernatural beings.\textsuperscript{214}

Ejizu also makes a list of the various circumstances during which \textit{Ofo} could be used within Igbo traditional ritual exercises. It is believed that the \textit{Ofo} holders are mysteriously in touch with the divinities and ancestors of their respective lineages or villages. The holders of \textit{Ofo} also serve at religious, social, and political functions. “\textit{Ofo} is intricately bound up with the Igbo cosmology serving as a vital medium of communication between man and the supernatural order.”\textsuperscript{215}

Religiously, \textit{Ofo} serves the purposes of prayer, ritual sacrifices, contact with spirit patrons, and magico-religious uses. On the social level, \textit{Ofo} is used during a naming ceremony, in the determination of calendar of events, in affirming moral uprightness, and sealing of covenants. On the political sphere, \textit{Ofo} is used for the legitimation of status/office, decision-making, settlement of disputes, oath-taking, and promulgation and enforcement of laws.\textsuperscript{216} The author quotes Mbonu Ojike, who compares \textit{Ofo} with “the Christian use of the Bible.”\textsuperscript{217} This explains why in the judicial courts of Nigeria, while Christian witnesses at a case swear by the Bible, and Muslims swear by the Koran, Igbo Traditional Religionists swear by \textit{Ofo}.

Ejizu made an extensive study of the ideas expressed by, Ilogu regarding the meaning and functions of \textit{Ofo}. Along this line, “\textit{Ofo} is the abode of spirits of dead ancestors, it is the emblem of unity, truth, authority and indestructibility of the individual or group.”\textsuperscript{218} Arinze defines \textit{Ofo} not as a spirit, but in terms of its symbolic nature wherein the first born son of an Igbo family holds it. “This is not a spirit but the symbol of authority which descends from the ancestor, a guarantee of truth, and sometimes part of the regalia of the \textit{umụ alụsi} (spirits). \textit{Ofo} is a piece of wood cut from

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Cole} Cole, \textit{Mbari}, 10.
\bibitem{Ejizu_first} Ejizu, \textit{Ofo}, 61.
\bibitem{Ejizu_second} Cf. Ibid., 61-64.
\bibitem{Ejizu_third} Ibid., 24, qtd from Mbonu Ojike. \textit{My Africa} (1947).
\bibitem{Ejizu_fourth} Ejizu, \textit{Ofo}, 26.
\end{thebibliography}
a tree of the same name (*detarium senegalense*). At its first ‘consecration’ it has all the appearances of a charm, but its most important aspect is its symbolism of ancestral authority when it has been handed on to the first-born son (*okpala*) for several generations.”

The position of the first-born male (*Okpala* or *Okpara*) is very special in Igbo family setup. After the death of their fathers or ancestors they automatically inherit their position and staff of office in the family or lineage. Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones referred to this while making a study of ‘Igbo religious beliefs and cults’ regarding *Ala*, the earth goddess of fertility. In the view of the authors,

The ancestors (*ndichie*), who are also under the control of *Ale* (*Ala*, earth goddess), act as her agents, as guardians of morality, of which any departure from custom may be regarded as a breach. The head (*Okpara*) of each sub-lineage, in Owerri, for example, owes his authority largely to his role as the representative and mouthpiece of the lineage ancestors, symbolized by the religious staff (*ofo*). Sacrifices to the ancestors are offered periodically and whenever a diviner so indicates. Priests of other cults have an *ofo*, which is the means of communication with the deity or spirit and is also held to represent those who formerly ministered to the cult; the *ofo* may be identified with the principle of truth and justice, and in many groups oaths are sworn on it. 

On the other hand, Cyril Okorocha writes that “[t]he Igbo traditional *ofo* stick is made out of a small branch of a tree of the same name – the *Detarium Senegalense*. The tree itself is rare but has one significant feature: the branches when old and dried pluck themselves off the parent trunk without rotting. Consequently, they are thought to live forever. The branches of this tree are tough and the whole tree is held to be sacred. An *ofo* tree is never cut.” The author describes how the Igbo people regard the fallen *ofo* tree, leaves and sticks with high esteem as a sacred object mysteriously given by God- *Chineke*. Hence, “[t]he *ofo* stick fashioned out of these fallen branches

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of the parent tree is both an ancestral staff or emblem of authority, and the traditional symbol of justice and truth.”  

Along this same line, Raymond Arazu affirms that “[t]he ofo is not a god. It is used to make contact with the ancestors and other benevolent spirits. It is used to speak authoritatively and without fear to both the living and the dead and the gods. Tradition has conferred on the ofo a holiness that removes every part of the tree from profane use. Nobody climbs the ofo tree. The branches fall off on their own.”

Ofo is of various types and uses depending on the circumstances and levels that re-enact the symbolic presence of divinities and the ancestors. Okorocha gives the types of Ofo as, “the ofo of the Ozo, ‘titled men’, or the ofo of the Lolo, ‘titled women.’ The dibia or traditional medicinemen or seers, have their own ofo.” The author asserts that throughout Igboland, “the most important ofo is the lineage ofo generally known as ofo nnanyi ha, ‘the ofo of our fathers’. Sometimes this ofo is simply referred to as Nn’aa – ha, ‘my fathers’. The lineage ofo is thought to have been acquired by the founder of the lineage. It is handed down to the oldest surviving male member of the lineage.”

Arinze also affirms that “[t]he head (okpala) of each kindred (umunna) is venerable because he holds the Ofo, because he represents the ancestors and forms the link with them.” M. S. O. Olisa buttresses this fact by affirming that “[e]ach kindred is under the leadership of an OKPARA (literally, elder) who may be an elderly man or young man. The Okpara holds the OFO of the family and performs all duties attached both to his leadership position and to the OFO as a

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222 Ibid.
225 Ibid., 96-97.
226 Arinze, Sacrifice in Ibo Religion, 19.
binding ritual symbol of the kindred. His duties include performing sacrifices for members on request, representing the kindred vis-à-vis other kindreds at the village level…”

According to Arazu, “A new *ofo* is given to a man at some initiation ceremony. One inherits an *ofo* of the ancestors on becoming the oldest man in the family, in the kindred, in the clan, in the village, village-group or town. Certain deity shrines have *ofo* which generations of priests use in turn for invoking the god of the shrine.” All these show the good qualities of *ofo* as a credible Igbo religious object that could serve as a sample for interreligious dialogue between the Igbo traditional religionists and the Church in Igboland and even beyond.

Okorocha describes what an already-used *ofo* stick looks like.

The stick itself, generally about nine inches in length, is about one inch in diameter but tapers towards the end. The ‘head’ has become big from ‘eating’ kola nuts chewed and spat upon it and sacrificial blood spilled upon it over the years. The staff is held at the thin (tail) end and the head is struck on the ground during prayers, cursing, or other ritual functions requiring the mediation of the Ancestors and of justice.

The *ofo* is cleansed ceremoniously every year by the eldest man of the lineage or family that holds it. The cleansing process is called, *Igwo ofo* or *Iwake ofo* (to sharpen the *ofo*). Ilogu describes it as a form of prayer and worship. “The ‘Igwo Ọfo’ worship is also a routine done once a year as a prayer privately offered by the head of a household when the Ọfo stick is ceremoniously cleansed with blood of a chicken sacrificed to the ancestors and wiped off with akoro (selagenella) leaves.”

*Ofo* is also used for prayers, pronouncing curses, settling disputes and marking the symbolic presence of the ancestors in any given circumstance.

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The *ofo* staff is believed to embody within itself the spirit and ethos of the Ancestors and is at once the emblem of unity, verity, and sanctity as well as the perpetuity of the family or group possessing it. Hence its authority and sacredness. Consequently, the holder of a lineage *ofo*, the *paterfamilias*, however reprobate his character before assuming office, at once acquires a new and special status and sanctity in his immediate family as well as the whole community by virtue of the authority, that is *ebube* (*mana*), which the sacred *ofo* confers upon him.\(^{231}\)

Furthermore, “[t]he *ofo* is used for the removal of the evil effects of abominations, that is, for cleansing persons as well as society, after an abominable breach of order has occurred. In this way, ogu as well as tranquility or order is thought to be restored.”\(^{232}\) Okorocha also argues that old age is an advantage in holding *ofo*, but in a situation where the only male from the family or group is young, the responsibility falls on him to hold the *ofo*. “… even when a relatively young person becomes the holder of a family or group *ofo*, he soon becomes revered by virtue of his new position… No matter the age of the lineage *ofo*-holder, he is aware that he is now the family priest and intercessor as well as intermediary within the decorum of the elaborate Ancestor cult.”\(^{233}\)

Green distinguishes between kindred *ofo* and the village-group *ofo* holders in terms of how they function. In the view of Green, holders of the kindred *ofo*

are neither priests nor magicians with a primarily supernatural function but are kindred heads whose preoccupation is largely with secular matters. They are however, supported by the supernatural sanction of their *ofo* … A devout family head and *ofo* holder ought daily, or at least on certain regular days, to chew pepper and spit it on his *ofo* asking the sacred symbol to spare him if he is innocent, but to kill those who seek his undoing, or conversely to kill him if he himself is seeking to injure any other human being … This ceremony, an affirmation of innocence, is known as (*itu ogu*), and emphasizes that aspect of *ofo* in which it is a guardian of the moral code.\(^{234}\)

On the other hand, while *ofo* protects and imposes a significant social function on its holder, it has certain grades among the village-groups. Citing an example, Green writes: “Just as there is

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\(^{232}\) Ibid., 100.
\(^{233}\) Ibid., 98.
\(^{234}\) Green, *Igbo Village Affair*, 59. The emphasis on (*itu ogu*) is mine for correct spelling.
in Agbaja a man who holds the big *ofo* of the village-group, so in each village there is a senior kindred whose *ofo* is the big *ofo* of the village and is held by the head of that family. If a number of *ofo* are being used for any ceremony, this man’s *ofo* will take precedence of those of the other kindreds of his village, and he has certain other rights in virtue of his position…”

Although the Igbo are hardworking people both economically and politically, the lineage *ofo* is never earned; rather, it is inherited. It is passed on from the *paterfamilias* to the eldest male child in the lineage. Ilogu strongly argues that “it is a calamity to both the living and the dead if no sons remain to offer to the ancestors the daily prayers, libations of wine, and sacrifices of kola nuts or pieces of food.” For this reason, Ejizu affirms that “*Ofo* represents the male sex organ, blood, the family unit, and human life (ndu), as well as gerontocracy, patriliny, power, authority, justice at its sensory and ideological poles of meaning respectively. As a core religious object, the symbol is capable of telescoping this rich spectrum of meanings and integrating them in the transcendental center of ultimate meaning.”

Green designates *ofo* as an important Igbo ritual symbol that draws supernatural powers closer to the people. “*Ofo* plays an important part in Ibo life and beliefs. That of the *umunna* is a symbol of family or ancestral authority and a reservoir or carrier of supernatural powers… But it is the ancestral *ofo*, that of the *umunna*, which people have in mind when they speak of *ofo*.” In this narrative, Green describes the different types and uses of *ofo*. The author alluded to the fact that “*ofo* is often brought out and placed on the ground when sacrifice is being made to a deity. It is knocked… on the ground when it is used in swearing. It is evidently in some intimate connection

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235 Ibid.
with Ala and must be kept from contact with the ground except when it is being ceremonially used. It is usually kept up in the roof of a man’s room when not in use and is carried in his bag slung over his shoulder when he carries it with him.”

All these show how important ofo is in Igboland. Nkeonye Otakpo also illustrates how important ofo is in Igbo traditional communities. “It is believed that the holder of ofo is endowed with spiritual powers by the ancestors and the gods. In some communities, it is the symbol of authority for the eldest male member of the family, that is, di okpala. By virtue of this, he is the spiritual as well as the political head of the family.”

As a sacred Igbo ritual symbol, the holders of ofo are held in high esteem as custodians of truth, justice, and fairness, as well as upholders of omenala/ani Igbo. “For this reason the keeper of ofo must be fair to all, honest, just, objective, unprejudiced and morally impeccable… Ofo is, thus, not merely a status symbol, a religious and political symbol; it is also, and most important, a judicial symbol. It is a most powerful judicial instrument. Its use, its presence in any adjudicatory situation ensures that litigants, witnesses, the audience must be fair and just in their dealings.”

This judicial symbolism places ofo in the realm of reconciliation, peace-making, and social harmony. Otakpo affirms that “Ofo, as the symbol of justice and morality is a binding force. It binds the community together. It binds men, spirits and gods together and serves as an instrument of cosmic and social order.” The author further explains this peace-making aspect of ofo by quoting from T. U. Nwala: “Ofo is a legal instrument for validating decisions of the family lineage, village or clan. It helps to ensure political stability by its role as a means of sanction, settling disputes, and ensuring peace, harmony and conformity. It expresses the will of the community

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239 Ibid., 71.
241 Ibid.
242 Ibid., 19.
including the living and the dead ancestors and the gods."\textsuperscript{243} To a certain degree, the yet unborn are also included here. In the view of Olisa,

Justice is executed with the aid of the OFO, upon which disputing parties could be made to swear. When the lineage enacts new rules for itself, or desires strict adherence to established rules, final sanction is demonstrated by ISU OFO (knocking OFO on the ground) by all concerned… The OFO is therefore believed to keep men or even shrines ‘straight’; it is a symbol of truth and uprightness. It is the ritual potency of the OFO which assists the OKPARA to discharge his leadership roles and achieve a high level of compliance from kindred members in spite of his not possessing any coercive or real authority.\textsuperscript{244}

Hence, this important Igbo religious as well as socio-political symbol ought to be used as an object for inculturation and interreligious dialogue between Igbo Traditional religion and the Church in Igboland today. Thus, this study suggests that bishops and priests of Igbo extraction should hold \textit{ofo} as a symbol of their authority – \textit{Ndi Oji Ofo}. Bishops in Igboland also ought to use \textit{ofo} branchlets in constructing their crosier.

Arazu wonders why Igbo Christians discard such a sacred object as \textit{ofo} and hold unto foreign introduced religious objects. For Arazu, “When the traditional Igbo man holds his \textit{ofo} in a prayerful mood, he is in active contact with his ancestors who carry on existence on the other side of the coin of life. Of all the trees in the forest, the \textit{Ofo} is the one that most resembles the structure of man’s bones. The branches have joints like man’s limbs and fall off the tree like parts of a human skeleton.”\textsuperscript{245}

Since Igbo cosmology is dyadic, “\textit{Ogu}… is a binary complement of \textit{Ofo}, it primarily stands for the all-important ideal of moral uprightness and innocence which the traditional Igbo strongly believe should characterize every human life and interrelationships.”\textsuperscript{246} The duo, \textit{ofo na ogu}


\textsuperscript{244} M.S.O. Olisa. “Igbo Traditional Socio-Political System,” in \textit{A Survey of the Igbo Nation}, 222.

\textsuperscript{245} Arazu, \textit{Our Religion}, 132.

coexist and function as twin sacred Igbo religious objects. They move together in carrying out the Igbo principles of “justice and moral probity.” Again, “to the Igbo, true full or viable life hinges upon justice and moral probity: ofo-na-ogu. That is, as the Igbo names suggest, ofo bu ndu or ogu bu ndu: moral probity or justice is the true source of life.” Green adds that ofo “…is held in great awe and respect, and is constantly used or invoked. ‘Ofo na-eji ogu egbu’ is said about ofo. The meaning is that ofo never kills an innocent man.” Among the Igbo, one has to hold onto the moral code, ogu, while invoking ofo.

Ejizu and Uzukwu appraise Achebe in saying that “nothing stands by itself” ihe kwuru ihe akwudebe ya (one thing stands, and some other thing stands by it). “The Igbo elder knows that before the dynamic power of Ofo can swing into action, the Ogu must be properly avowed, the injured party must first have met all the requirements of Ogu (iji Ogu) that is, publicly declaring one’s innocence. That is the ground for the regular interlink of the two concepts and symbols, Ofo na Ogu.” Otakpo compliments this point by explaining the binary nature of Igbo worldview. “The Igbo worldview is fundamentally dualistic. Reality for them is explicable in dual terms. So is the world and all there is. This dualism is expressed in different ways: matter and spirit; visible and invisible; body and spirit; material and immaterial.” It is in this sense of Igbo duality that ofo na ogu are seen as two realities in one.

In the view of Okorocha, “Ogu has to do with moral probity and a correct sense of judgement concerning what is right. It is usually represented symbolically by the tender stock (or sometimes a bundle of such stocks) of the ogirishi (or ogoloshì) shrub. The idea is that the

248 Ibid.
249 Green, Igbo Village Affair, 71. Here, Green explains that the combination of ofo and ogu which is known as, iji ogu, means literally to hold a piece of young knotted palm frond, omu, while protesting innocence. Itu ogu.
251 Otakpo, Justice in Igbo Culture, 14. It is important to note here that while the author used dualism, it does not actually mean that the elements are opposed to each other; rather they are complementary or dyadic.
tenderness of this stock signifies the tenderness and innocence characteristic of a baby. It is believed that one who wishes to be vindicated in any dispute should declare one’s innocence through invoking ofo na ogu. The idea is that the duo – ofo na ogu, always act in favor of the innocent and harm the perjurer. This is clarified in the following excerpt:

Ofo in conjunction with ogu, forms the grounds on which a praying man may expect to be heard. Ofo is used for oath-taking to determine the presence or otherwise of ogu on the part of the one who swears. The perjurer is expected to die. In that case it is said that ofo has killed the person. Those who are innocent on hearing that ofo has killed a perjurer, wave their right hands over their heads, snap their fingers and shout ejikwam oguoo: ‘I am holding on to innocence or moral probity’. Thus they expect the vengeance of ofo or justice to keep its distance.

To prove their innocence, many Igbo families bear Ofo or Ogu as their last names. Others bear derivatives from these words, such as Uwajumogu, Oguzie, Nnajiofo, Jideofo, Ejimofo, Ofoegbunam, Oguamanam, Obijiofo, Oguejiofo, Ofodile, and so on. Ofo na Ogu are the embodiment of the Igbo traditional code of conduct. Hence, the Igbo saying, Ome ihe jide ofo (“let one’s action be guided with justice”), and ogu amalam (“may I not be found guilty of injustice”). This practical expression of the two (ofo na ogu) traditional principles is observable in most parts of Igboland. “Prohibitions and other decisions of the elders acquire a legal status and permanence when they are enforced ritually with the ofo. This is where the function of ofo and ogu as a joint entity comes to the fore in the establishment of the traditional ethical code or omenala.”

Okorocha further explains:

The idea of Omenala as at once originating from the Ancestors and having been handed down as a normative social ethic, is what forms the link between it and the ofo. When an Igbo asserts his innocence and protests, ejikwam oguoo, he is in fact asserting that he lives according to what has been handed down and thus expects the Ancestors to side with him against those who are acting against him and against omenala. A man holds ogu (iji ogu) when, in his own estimation, he has not contravened the ethical and ritual demands of omenala in any way. The spirit and

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252 Okorocha, The Meaning of Religious Conversion, 100.
253 Ibid.
254 Ibid., 101.
letter of *omenala* are symbolically embodied in the *afo* staff which the ancestors – the originators of these traditions – have handed down. It is through the mediation of the *afo* staff that the Ancestors still speak abiding truth, enact new laws or repeal old ones, as well as act justly within the boundaries of the community of which they are held to be founders and builders.255

Subsequently, this study humbly submits that *afo na ogu* and other sacred symbols used in Igbo Traditional Religion should constitute relevant dialogue opportunities and perhaps be appropriated into the Church in Igboland in the light of the Gospel as objects of inculturated Igbo Christianity. Interreligious dialogue in this case should be on the level of religious experiences of the interlocutors concerned. For example, Igbo Catholic bishops and priests should invite Igbo traditional religious practitioners for dialogue on the significance and uses of *mbari* and *afo na ogu*.

Arazu finds it ironic that most Igbo Christians relinquish their ancestral *afo* because it is made of wood, whereas they use crosses and beads also made of wood in Christian worship. This study proposes that the use of *afo* branches for fixing the crucifix and making rosary beads should be given attention to in the Church in Igboland. Arazu also suggests that ancestral *afo* should be preserved, at least as a relic of the past in Igbo Christian families. Again, the image of the crucified savior should be fixed to a detached branchlet of the *afo* tree to make meaningful inculturated Christianity in Igboland.256 This calls for a deep dialogue which ought to be urgently pursued.

It should be noted that while *afo* endows the holder with ritual authority, *ogu* vindicates the just whose moral integrity is impeccable. This will pave the way towards proper appreciation of their use as sacred religious symbols. Also, *Mbari* could represent the sacred space whereby the Igbo engrave and portray, in an architectural manner, the strength, beauty, and gallantry of the ancestors that needs to be appreciated by the Church in Igboland today.

255 Ibid.
3.5. Appreciating Igbo Sacred Spaces and Sacred Objects

Among the Igbo, something sacred is equivalent to something consecrated, holy, saintly, or innocent. It is designated by the Igbo word *nso* or *aso*. If it is a sacred object it is regarded as *ihe di nso/aso*, or *ihe edoro nso*, while a sacred space such as shrine is designated by *ihu agbara*, *ihu mnuo*, *ihu arusi*. In most Igbo communities sacred objects are located in a designated place or space. Kalu describes a typical Igbo sacred place as a space set aside for worship as follows:

The structure of a typical sacred place in most area of traditional Igboland for communal acts of worship, consists of a large open space which serves as a gathering place for group, then the sacred precincts of the deity. This latter area is usually shielded from the popular section by walls. The shrine holding the altar, symbolic objects and other instruments of cult, usually stands at one end of the precinct. A thick grove generally forms the background of most typical communal sacred places.

The sacred objects and spaces require certain restrictions such as taboos which instill awe and demand careful handling. Those who handle them are believed to have been chosen by the gods themselves. They are expected to have made themselves ready through abstinence from too much eating and drinking and sexual immorality before handling any sacred object. The sacred spaces in most parts of Igboland are so special that certain ritual ceremonies such as, conferment of titles, initiation rites and ritual festivals take place in them. Sometimes, they are places for recreation and peace-making.

In some parts of Igboland such as Owerri, certain market days are also observed as sacred. On such a day, to work in the farm is not allowed. For instance, on *Eke ukwu* market day, Owerri people are forbidden to go to the farm. Sometimes the week before certain Igbo ritual festivals

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258 Cf. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 36-40. It should be noted that one of these Igbo yearly cultural festivals is the New Yam Festival. Achebe describes the feast as an occasion for giving thanks to Ani, the earth goddess and the source of all fertility. The author explains that Ani played a greater part in the life of the people than any other deity.
is marked out as a Sacred “Week of Peace” during which people should neither fight nor ferment trouble. This is because, “[t]he annual cycle of life and activities of every traditional Igbo group (community) contains, among other things, communal ritual festivals. These celebrate significant religious, socio-historical and economic events in the life of the group. Such celebrations seek to weld together the various aspects of the traditional life, for the traditional Igbo perceive their world as an organic unity.” The violation of such a Sacred Week is known as *Nso Ala* or *Iru Ala/Mmeru Ala* (abomination or desecration of the land), and the individual involved must face severe punishment, which requires ritual sacrifice to calm the wrath of the earth goddess *Ala* and the ancestors. The type of sacrifice involved in this case is the joyless one.

Again, among the Igbo, it is a great offence against the earth goddess *Ala*, to commit incest, shed innocent human blood, or steal. “Destruction of crops or stealing them was viewed by traditional religionists as a very serious criminal offence (*Nso Ala*), an abomination against *Ala*, because such an act amounted to a negation of the good work of *Ala*, a negation which results in serious hardship to those affected.” Sacred spaces and objects are so important to the Igbo people that when they are desecrated, the perpetrator might be isolated, punished severely or sometimes be put to death. For instance, in Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, Ebo shot and killed Akukalia when the later split the *ikenga* at the shrine of Ebo’s father. It amounts to a dirty slap on a man’s face to desecrate one’s sacred space and sacred object in his *obi*, the ancestral house in an Igbo compound meant for relaxation and entertainment of visitors.

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259 Ibid., 29-32. *Nso ani* - means the desecration of the land which offends the earth goddess and must be appeased with the stipulated sacrifices as required by Igbo tradition. Here the priest told Okonkwo to atone for violating the “Week of Peace” by bringing to the shrine of Ani “…one she goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries.” See page 31.


It is alarming that certain Igbo shrines and sacred spaces were destroyed during the colonial rule in Igboland. Okorocha cites an example of the British destruction of the Aro Chukwu shrine. “In 1901-2, British troops forcefully destroyed the Long Juju (Ibini-Ukpabi). Igwe-ka-Ala, Kamalu Ozuza, and others were to follow afterwards.”

In addition, some other shrines and sacred forests reserved for the gods in some parts of Igboland have been cleared and destroyed by some new generation/Pentecostal churches. All these contributed to the abandonment of some shrines and sacred spaces in most parts of Igboland from the time of the European missionaries till today. On the general level, it has also been observed that Radical Christian Pentecostalism encourages Christian converts to destroy cultural objects, especially those that are associated with traditional religion, or those that are held sacred in Igbo culture. These converts are told that these objects are abodes of evil forces, and that keeping them means harbouring Satan and allowing him to operate in their lives. In the name of breaking covenants with Satan, Igbo Christians are asked to destroy their Ofo (that ancient symbol of authority and presence of the ancestors), burn their Ikenga, wipe out shrines with all the objects in them, kill animals regarded as totems of the supernatural in their local communities. With this, shrines have been raided and sacked, prolonged conflicts have erupted in families and communities over the keeping of objects traditionally considered sacred; in fact the destruction has become so extensive that scholars working on Igbo culture and religion would now find it difficult to access cultural objects and sites in Igbo communities that are related to their investigations.

Ejizu also alluded to the failure of the expatriate missionaries and colonialists to appreciate Igbo sacred institutions. “Many of the worries that have arisen over the issue of the future prospects of some key aspects of the indigenous culture of the Igbo, have been traced to failed policies and missed opportunities of the Christian missionary era… in not accommodating

263 Okorocha, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion*, 212. These destructions robbed the Igbo people of a central shrine for worship, which was observed in Aro Chukwu before the Colonial government arrived in Igboland.

certain vital ritual symbols and cultural institutions of their Igbo hosts.”\textsuperscript{265} Anyika believes that “[t]he Long Juju which was greatly weakened by the 1901/02 British Expedition that was directed against it…, was but one of the oracles existing in pre-colonial Igboland.”\textsuperscript{266} This destructive mentality calls for a change of attitude now that the foreign missionaries have left Igboland and handed the Church over to Igbo indigenous clergy and religious. Hence, efforts should be geared towards appreciating and preserving Igbo sacred spaces and sacred objects.

There are many sacred spaces and sacred objects used in Igbo religious rituals and revered as representing the gods and ancestors of the Igbo people. It should be noted that certain things could be held as sacred in one part of Igboland but not seen as the same in another part. However, certain objects, like the Ofo na Ogu, Omu nkwu (palm frond), Ikenga, and Oji (kola nut) are commonly regarded as sacred in all of Igboland. Victor Uchendu argues that “[t]he kola nut is the greatest symbol of Igbo hospitality. It always comes first.”\textsuperscript{267} At every gathering of the umunna\textsuperscript{268} (kinsmen), the kola nut is presented as a sign of respect and welcome. It is always given to the oldest man at the gathering to say prayers to the ancestors before breaking and sharing it. Arinze also confirms the importance of kola nut as follows: “The kola-nut is the first thing to be shared with a visitor. It is the traditional welcome.”\textsuperscript{269}

Certain totem animals and reptiles are also regarded as sacred among the Igbo. These are not killed or eaten in some Igbo villages where they stand as sacred symbols representing the gods and the ancestors. Some such animals include: the monkey -enwe, tortoise - mbe, python - eke,

\textsuperscript{267} Uchendu. \textit{The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria}, 74.
\textsuperscript{268} Cf. Achebe, \textit{Things Fall Apart}, 165-166.
\textsuperscript{269} Arinze, \textit{Sacrifice in Ibo Religion}, 4.
certain kinds of fish, crocodiles, and in some places, cow – ehi/efi, the he-goat – mkpi, and the leopard. Some rivers and lakes as well as certain forests, mountains and trees are revered as the abodes of the spirits and could not be desecrated, and sometimes women are not allowed access to such sacred objects and spaces.

Certain myths or folklores surround some of these sacred objects and spaces in Igboland. Such stories are narrated as creation myths or feature an act of kindness and protection obtained by a village from a certain animal, forest, tree, mountain or river during tribal wars or other enemies. In the case of the sacred animals, no one dares to kill or harm them, no matter the circumstance. Often, they are also allowed to enter and go freely from some compounds. Killing a sacred animal or reptile amounts to a taboo or an abomination (nso ala, iru ala). When this happens, the gods must be appeased through ritual purification joyless sacrifices to atone for the killing of the totem. The issue is that killing the totem animal attracts bad omen to the entire village.

The process requires that the killed totem must be given a befitting burial rite, like a human being. The reason for doing this is that totems are believed to be the incarnate spirits and messengers of Chukwu or the representatives of the ancestors and the gods. They are also believed to be owned by the deities who protect the villages in question. For this reason, some families, villages, persons and places are named after such sacred objects, such as Ugwu, Orji, Umuagwo, Ogboenwe, Nnewi, Nnenwe, Imerienwe, Umuohiagu, Umuapu, Umuofo etc. The omu-nkwu or palm frond as an Igbo cultural and religious sacred symbol is first given to the one who committed the abominable crime of killing the totem as a warning sign. This serves the same purpose as the red card given to any dangerous player during a football/soccer competition to send him/her out.

*Cf. Green, *Igbo Village Affairs*, 28. Here, the author narrated how the village of Umueke regarded themselves as having a special affinity with the leopard. The people believed that they could fondle a leopard without being harmed. They held that the older people of the village could transform themselves into leopards. The leopard is further a symbol, if not a very powerful one, of the identity of the village.*
of the playground. When the *Omu* is issued, the offender is banished from the village only to return when he/she has accepted and performed the joyless ritual sacrifice of purification and atonement to appease the ancestors and the deities, especially the earth goddess *Ala*. At this point, it would be necessary to explore the symbolism of *Omu Nkwu* as an Igbo sacred ritual object.

In the view of Onyeneke, “every culture has its own score of symbolic objects for external manifestations of deep-seated states of mind like guilt, innocence, the holy, and the sacred. The process of inculturation of the Christian Church anywhere must attend to the people’s symbolic structure and systems in order to use them as effective and suitable vehicles for presenting the Christian message and its rituals in ways familiar and natural to the people.”

*Omu Nkwu*—the sprouting tender palm frond, is the Igbo cultural object used to draw people’s attention to a sacred space/place or sacred object or to issue a warning. It is used to barricade the space or is tied to the object. Onyeneke analyzes the symbolism of *omu nkwu*, the tender branch of the palm tree grown in every part of Igboland. When *omu* is tied to any object, it represents a warning to respect the object. The author explains that “*Omu* is the Igbo name for the young tender branch of the oil palm tree. As a tropical plant, the oil palm grows easily and abundantly in Southern Nigeria.” Onyeneke further says that the word “*omu* means the young leaves of the branch that still lie pressed together in a bundle along the mid-rib of the branch, making the bunch appear somewhat stiff like a stick at the stem but remaining soft and pliable at the top, where the individual leaves are already starting to separate. The upper tips that have seen a bit of sunlight will be green, but the portion still held in the rib bundle will be pale-white and

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272 Ibid.
nearly yellow.\textsuperscript{273} The mature green parts or the leaves are called \textit{igu nkwu} in Igbo, while the \textit{omu} is the tender part in the strict sense.

\textit{Omu} has many significant uses among the Igbo people. It could be used as a symbol of peace, a sign of danger, or as a warning sign, to barricade a crime scene, mark boundaries of farmland, and protect any property left outside the house by its owner. It is also used to mark the sacred forest, sacred tree, or animal, as well as the location of ancestral shrines and a house of the gods (\textit{Ulo agbara} or \textit{ihu agbara}) as a sacred spot. Igbo village messengers use it as a summons given to someone to attend a meeting, or worship ritual at the shrine, or peace-making exercise or function. Sometimes in Igboland, when a vehicle has an \textit{Omu} on its front and rear, it has the right of way in traffic, like an ambulance with its lights flashing. Other vehicles must respect this sign.

The traditional religious priests or \textit{Eze Mmuo} also wear \textit{omu} on their hands during their ritual sacrifices. When the \textit{Eze Mmuo} places the \textit{omu} between the lips, and on the head, it signifies there is a sacred ritual to be performed and so greets no one while going along the path to the shrine. \textit{Omu} is used to barricade disputed land till the controversy surrounding it is settled. It is also used during funerals. \textit{Omu} is also used to decorate an \textit{mmanwu} (masquerade), and it is worn by the dancers. It could be used in a protest march, as was the case during the Aba women’s riot of 1929.\textsuperscript{274}

When the \textit{omu} is placed on any object or space, there is always a sense of awe, inspired either as a warning or as a reminder that one is approaching something sacred. Traditionally, the Igbo do not usually place a written sign on any object. The \textit{Omu} is enough to visualize and to draw

\textsuperscript{273} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{274} Cf. Ibid. In 1929, Igbo women from the Southeastern part of Nigeria held \textit{Omu}- palm frond, in their hands and marched to the then colonial office in Aba to protest the imposition of income tax on all Igbo women. This led to the shooting and killing of most of the women protesters by the colonial police who did not understand the cultural meaning of holding \textit{Omu} among the Igbo, which is their symbol of peace and social harmony.
the attention needed to stay clear. “There is no need for a written signpost announcing, ‘Beware, you are approaching a sacred space!’ In fact, written (or even spoken) language is grossly inappropriate in conveying the awe required in representing the sacred space. Silent visual communication such as the marking of the given space carries enormous impact. In spite of the fact that the meaning of the sign may be elusive to outsiders of the culture, or may be different in their own culture.”275

Onyeneke further provides three levels of the use and significance of Omu in Igbo culture as follows: “First, it is used to single out some object (usually a disputed object) for attention and special preservation. Secondly, it is used to create sentiments of innocence, freedom from guilt and victory which comes from justice. Thirdly, it marks the presence and closeness of the action of the supernatural and spirits, the lowest level of which is its dramatic presentation through the masquerade, Mmanwu.”276 In every encounter between human beings and the supernatural, Omu comes to the fore to signify respect and reverence. People dare not trespass any boundary barricaded with the omu; otherwise, the anger of the gods would be aroused to fight back. “There is a general understanding that in all the three levels of the omu symbolism, the supernatural ultimately enforces or defends what is proclaimed.”277

From the Igbo understanding that omu signifies the interaction between the human and the supernatural, the author advocates for the reinterpretation of omu symbolism to align with Christian cosmological understanding. “The Omu symbolism should be retained because it belongs to the Igbo culture but only the meaning needs to be transposed in terms of the Christian

277 Ibid.
cosmology.” Here, the author echoes the teachings of modern popes and the Second Vatican Council’s resolve to foster cordial relations between the Church and non-Christian cultures. Biblically, *omu* is important for liturgical purposes. During the Passion Sunday liturgy, *omu* is used to signify the Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and those saved, in Revelation 7:9, are portrayed as holding palms in their hands. In this sense, *omu* symbolizes the palm or the tree branches on display as Jesus was entering Jerusalem.

Onyeneke suggests that *omu* should be used for experimenting liturgical inculturation. “The *Omu* should be used in many ways in the Igbo Church for decorating places and objects for liturgical worship. A string of the *Omu* tied around the altar or in front of it marks it out as the place for the sacrifice.” The author is optimistic that tying *omu* to the altar would inspire a deep-rooted aura of worship and greater respect than the costly foreign lace materials used in decorating the altar in the Igbo Church today. It is also suggested that decorating areas close to sacred spaces, such as the confessional and the baptismal font, with *omu* would convey a more meaningful sense of the sacred among worshippers than using other objects. While enumerating other uses of *omu*, the author argues that “[t]he *Omu* could be worn as part of the priest’s vestments when administering the sacraments. The *Omu*, won on the wrist or on the head, has a more familiar language than the Roman stole for the Igbo mind.” All these descriptions of the *omu* show that the Igbo Church has many objects to appropriate within the process of liturgical inculturation through interreligious dialogue with Igbo traditional religionists to ascertain their meaning.

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278 Ibid.
283 Ibid.
However, many problems may arise from within the Igbo Church itself. Onyeneke strongly affirms that the modalities of using *omu* in Igbo Church should be fashioned and thought out properly. “The principle is, first, to accept that the *Omu* symbolism for strongly sacred moments of interaction with the supernatural is genuinely an Igbo cultural institution and, secondly, to allow the *Omu* idiom fully into the Christian liturgies of the Igbo. In effect it is called to plant Christianity in Africa in the expressions of the local African culture.”284 All of this demonstrates that the *omu* as an Igbo sacred object serves multiple purposes. The use of *omu* ranges from sounding a warning for one to beware of a sacred space or object where it is tied, to evoking awe and a deep-rooted worshipping ambience for an encounter with the supernatural. Appreciating *omu* as a sacred object marks it out for proper use in the Igbo Church, which requires interreligious dialogue between the Church and the practitioners of African Traditional Religion in Igboland today.

3.6. Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted certain issues required in reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue. Thus, the Church in Igboland should not neglect interreligious dialogue in dealing with the already existing traditional religion. The issue is that the Second Vatican Council’s document *Nostra Aetate* and the visits of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II to Africa, which gave the clue for recognizing the good values in other religions, are under-utilized in Igboland. These opportunities should have been used for proper dialogue and the inculturation of Igbo religious and cultural values in the Church.

To foster this, an analysis of the principles of liturgical inculturation in Vatican II’s document - *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, is made. The Church’s liturgy requires the active

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284 Ibid.
participation of all the faithful because it has no rigid uniform technique. The question about the possibility of liturgical inculturation is cherished by Africans in general and the Igbo in particular. Judging from John Paul II’s appraisal of the rich values of African religion and culture, liturgical inculturation is a possibility. Hence, African Traditional Religion and culture should be treated with respect. Igbo people have a mature sense of religion, sense of the sacred, and belief in a Supreme Being (Chukwu). They also have a deep sense of solidarity and community life, sense of the sacred, awe-inspiring sacred objects and spaces. Some of these should be studied for liturgical inculturation.

Nevertheless, Igbo religiosity began to lose its bearings when it encountered Christianity for the first time. This made the realization of Igbo liturgical inculturation difficult. Igbo Traditional Religion is rich in sacred symbols and objects. These could facilitate liturgical inculturation. The Igbo traditional religious worship is not dull but an active exercise. Hence, the outcome of liturgical inculturation and its reshaping is cordial human interaction, which leads to a potential life-centeredness. When we gather together during the liturgy, we celebrate love, unity and peace which also epitomize the cordial relationship between the living and the ancestors.

There is need for Igbo self-determination to initiate the liturgical inculturation process. One of the ways to self-determination is respect for the ancestors. Other ways include community spiritedness, solidarity, and sense of belonging. All these point to the benefits of liturgical inculturation. The Igbo communicate with the ancestors and recall their achievements through worship. This remembrance—anamnesis—of the ancestors whose spirits are believed to protect their offspring shows the continuity of life after death. The Igbo sense of community and solidarity are important and should be considered as values for inculturation in the Church. For the Igbo, an ancestor is one who lived a virtuous life while on earth and received a befitting burial rite. This is
like the cult of the saints in Christianity. The role of Igbo ancestors should be properly studied and proposed for inculturation within the Church in Igboland. The process requires dialogue for proper diagnosis.

Igbo ancestors used certain objects and spaces during their worship for spiritual and moral upliftment which should be appraised. Such sacred objects and symbols have been proposed as elements for dialogue with Igbo traditional religionists. These objects include, *Mbari, Ofo*, and *Omu* among others. These should be studied through dialogue for proper understanding. It should be noted that *Mbari* depicts the beauty and strength of the gods, especially, *Ala* - the earth goddess. The beautiful *Mbari* houses are like the grottos of the saints in most Churches in Igboland. Some grottos in Church premises in Igboland constructed in images alien to Igbo art work could be replaced with *mbari*. Among the Igbo, *Ofo na Ogu* represent the Igbo experience of justice, authority, and moral probity. This needs a serious analysis so that the Igbo clergy could use it and be addressed as holders of *Ofo – Ndi Oji Ofo*. On its part, *Omu* indicates the decorum for proper worship at a space specially dedicated to the deities and ancestors in the form of shrines or totems and sacred objects.

A critical study of *Omu* indicates its relevance for inculturation into the liturgy of the Church in Igboland today. Since the letter from the secretariat for non-Christians calls for respect of peoples’ genuine cultures, the Church in Igboland ought to respect and preserve what is noble, true, and good in Igbo culture. This implies that the Church in Igboland should dialogue with the practitioners of Igbo Traditional Religion regarding the symbolic use of the ritual objects. Such objects as, *Ofo* and *Omu*, and sacred spaces as the *Mbari* houses should be recognized as elements of interreligious dialogue. While *Ofo* and *Omu* should form part of priestly regalia, *Mbari* houses
should replace the grottos constructed in European style found in most church premises of Igboland today.

In the next chapter we discuss the issue of making the Church in Igboland a truly Igbo and truly Christian Church in union with the universal Church. This will help to properly identify and confirm the basic Igbo cultural and sacred objects as well as sacred spaces already enumerated. It will also propose ways of promoting genuine Igbo Christian faith through the liturgy.
Chapter 4: A Truly Igbo and Truly Christian Church in Union with the Universal Church

4.1 Introduction

This study stresses the point that the Church in Igboland retains foreign practices. The hierarchy of the Church in Igboland is aware of the deficiency of Igbo culture in different aspects of the church’s life. Much of the liturgical celebration in the Church in Igboland still shows the imprint of a European style and mode of worship with minimal inculturation. The Latin liturgical text is verbally translated into Igbo language. Hence, genuine inculturation or incarnation of the Gospel message into Igbo culture to make the Church in Igboland a truly Igbo and truly Christian Church is yet to be firmly established.

The reason for this lack of adequate inculturation is that there has not been genuine and sufficient interreligious dialogue between the Church and Igbo Traditional Religion. Igbo cultural life patterns, such as the Igbo mode of dressing, community life, and extended family system are being phased out. Igbo cultural symbols and sacred objects such as, *Ofo*, and *Omu* are not seen as genuine objects for worship by the Church. The crucifixes and statues, rosary beads, church building styles and shapes, and altar bread and wine used in the Church in Igboland today follow European models. All these need to be studied along with Igbo cultural elements to consider their possible reshaping and constructing a truly Igbo and truly Christian Church in Igboland.

Monsignor Martin Maduka had earlier advised that it is time to embark upon such a change.

Much has been said and written! But it is DOING, ACTION that changes the face of the world. It is indeed overdue to bring the good things of Africa, our way of life, into the Church. It is a task that must be done! We are not Europeans! We shall never be Europeans! Thank God, we are Africans (Igbos, Yorubas, Hausas, etc.)! Europeans are Europeans; and thank God who made them so! They should not try to be Africans in Europe. They should try to act like Africans in Africa as we should
try to act like Europeans when we are in Europe. It is a simple and sane rule of ‘conviventia’ (living together of peoples).¹

This is the time to make the Church in Igboland a truly Igbo and truly Christian Church in communion with the universal Church. To achieve this requires interreligious dialogue which will involve both the leaders of the Church in Igboland and Igbo traditional religionists. The aim is to study the importance of Igbo sacred objects and ritual symbols to be considered for liturgical inculturation within the Church in Igboland. Their proper study and approval for use in the Church in Igboland will also enrich the universal Church. They will also serve as the creative vision fashioned out of the local Church in Igboland to enhance the growth of the universal Church.

Such an input from the local Church to the universal Church is needed this time the world is becoming a global village and communication is faster than ever. It also shows that the Church is not limited to only one cultural pattern. Hence, the emphasis of the Vatican II on unity in diversity within the Church is being realized. For this reason, Maduka enjoins missionaries to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, the proto missionary. “He who was not Jew from the beginning, he who was God from all eternity, he who came from heaven became a Jew in all good Jewish things. He used Jewish language in speaking to the Jews, ate Jewish food, wore Jewish dress. He did not bring any of these from heaven! All who carry Christ’s message to other lands from their own land should act like Christ.”² To act like Christ requires coming down to the level of the local people to learn their cultural patterns and use them to evangelize the people.

Those who evangelize other peoples should not only act like Christ, they should also learn and understand the cultural and religious ambience of the local inhabitants through dialogue. The

² Ibid.
time has gone when certain local cultural elements not studied by the missionaries were branded as superstitious. Those involved in the training and preparation of future ministers in mission lands should endeavor to make the Church at home with the people’s culture. In most major seminaries in Igboland today, this cultural training is conspicuously absent, and no effort is made to revitalize the dying Igbo indigenous cultural values. This is still happening after Pope John Paul II had emphasized the need to introduce African cultural studies in Catholic institutions. Certain cultural ethos like the uses of Ofo, Omu, mbari houses, the Mmanwu, the ritual celebration of the yearly festivals, traditional dances, and Igbo mode of dressing are gradually phasing out of Igboland.

Thus, Maduka wonders why priestly vestments used in the Church in Igboland today come from Europe. “When our people are demanding a change in the Church, we should understand them to mean changes of a cultural nature. I do not see why Bishops, Priests, etc. should not adapt Church vestments and their habits to African forms… For the Bishops of Nigeria or Africa to be talking about wearing soutanes and similar clothing in present day Nigeria and Africa, is not only ridiculous but dangerous, shortsighted and absolutely archaic.”

The author advises the Igbo clergy to adopt the mode of dressing that reflects their native identity. “Expecting us one day to become full-fledged Europeanized Christians is absurd.” This is one of the major challenges to the Church in Igboland today. The Church in Igboland will be unique “when we build an indigenous Church, economically independent, self-supporting and self-propagating. This is the goal of incarnation!” We do not have to be Europeans or rely on foreign assistance to be good Christians in Igboland.

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3 Ibid., 204.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., 208.
Therefore, the Church in Igboland should be a Church built and groomed by the people, for the people, and within the mainstream of their culture. This implies that the Church in Igboland should also be guided by the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which emphasizes unity in diversity. Vatican II also emphasizes the need to recover the historical contexts that make the local Churches strong, despite issues bordering on centralization. Hence, it is believed that “[t]he Second Vatican Council brought in its wake a radical shift in virtually every significant aspect of life of the Church, particularly in the areas of the Church’s understanding of itself and its mission in the world.” This idea will lead us towards the maintenance of unity in diversity within the Church today. Such unity is symbolically enshrined in the Igbo extended family system.

4.2 The Igbo Extended Family as a Model of the Church

The Church of our time needs a new way of evangelization that might be different from the isolationist method adopted by the early European missionaries to Africa, especially in Igboland. When Africans speak of extended family, fraternal charity, cooperation, and solidarity are the basic elements involved. The extended family implied in the Church transcends blood ties.

While analyzing the proposal of the Synod Bishops for Africa which places a “new metaphor” on the Church as “family of God,” Uzukwu affirms: “This new metaphor adopted by African bishops wishes to introduce into the life of the church the caring and warmth characteristic of the multiple channels or links of kin relationship grouped under the term ‘family’ in Africa. In our ‘church-family’ we are brothers and sisters because we have the same mother and the same father.” This idea has some caution that requires an explanation. It means that the gospel transcends all cultures.

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7 Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 66.
“The idea of church as family should, however, not be construed to mean that the African cultural experience will set the terms for the construction of this ‘new family of God.’ On the contrary! One already notices this tendency in the Synod’s ‘Message to the People of God’ when it links the notion of family with the spiritual ‘Paternity’ of its priests. This metaphor must be stripped of all the characteristics of patriarchal dominance. The novelty of the gospel must predominate.”

Every culture needs to be transformed by the gospel so that its message becomes part of that culture. In this process inculturation has taken place. Therefore, the Church in Igboland should gather as a family—Ezi na Ulo—reflecting the experience of the early Church of the New Testament times when its members met freely from house to house (kat’ oikon). Within the family circles, the identity of each member is not lost amongst the others. Each person is unique, and so are everyone’s ideas. The family promotes the talents of its members. The family exemplifies the domestic church where basic learning about God, humanity, and the world starts. The transforming effect of the gospel strengthens the family. All humans are products of the family. The extended family model used here refers to all those who belong to Christ by baptism. This is why Uzukwu argues that “[n]egatively, the church-family in which we live is not an association of clans and ethnic groups, but a brotherhood and sisterhood beyond the frontiers of blood relationship, clan, ethnic group, or race. A primordial uprooting is needed in order to be admitted to membership in this new family.”

Every member of the family asserts his or her personhood through contributing useful ideas, suggestions, and gestures, which help the family to grow stronger. A typical Igbo family has an extended ancestral lineage that grows into villages united as kindreds or umunna. H. N. Nwosu

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8 Ibid.
10 Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 67.
affirms that among the Igbo, “[t]he primary political unit was the extended family system known as *Umunna*. The *Umunna* is a generic and flexible term which included the children of one father (nuclear family) and the widest range of recognized patrilineal kinsmen.”\(^{11}\) This idea of family unity and extended lineage or clan found among the Igbo leads to a conglomeration of related villages, which grow into a community or town. Nwosu also asserts that “[a] collection of a number of extended families formed the village community.”\(^{12}\) This collection of a number of extended families form strong ties united not by blood but by common belief and membership of the community. Hence, Simeon Eboh notes that

> The African sees organic unity in the world and this unity extends to the community, the family and similar social groups. A community is an organic unity – a harmonious alignment of dynamic entities. For instance, among Ndigbo, extended families (*umunna*, lineage) are component parts of this organic community. The Igbo political structure is defined by blood lines. People with common ancestry aggregate. The social organisation begins with the umunna as the primary unit – the central or basic unit in Igbo society. Umunna is made up of descendants in the male line of the founder ancestor by whose name the lineage is sometimes called.\(^{13}\)

> The basic information Igbo extended family as a model of the church conveys is the fact that Africans usually start life from the immediate family, and from there one identifies with one’s age-grade, joins the *umunna* or the clan, then the village, and then the entire community. “African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa, it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed, community life in African societies express the extended family.”\(^{14}\) From time to time, the extended families of Igbo

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\(^{12}\) Ibid.


extraction, gather together to celebrate one festival or the other. Kwame Gyekye gives an elaborate
description of African structure of extended family system in the following excerpt:

One outstanding feature of the communal structure of African society and the ever-
present consciousness of ties of kinship is the emphasis on the importance of the
family. It is a matter of common knowledge that when one speaks of family in an
African context one is referring, not to the nuclear family consisting merely of
husband, wife, and children, but to the extended family, which comprises a large
number of blood relatives who trace their descent from a common ancestor and who
are held together by a sense of obligation to one another.¹⁵

Thus, Igbo religious and cultural values as they concern the family in its extended nature
should be appreciated as models of the Church. This is because Igbo attachment to the family is
very strong and will make the Church in Igboland an important arena for the inculturation of Igbo
essential cultural values. The importance of the African family was noted by Pope John Paul II in
Ecclesia in Africa as follows: “In African culture and tradition, the role of the family is everywhere
held to be fundamental. Open to this sense of the family, of love and respect for life, the African
loves children, who are joyfully welcomed as gifts of God.”¹⁶ This joyous sense of welcoming
children is enshrined in the Igbo respect for their ancestors who occupy a prominent position in
every Igbo family circle. The ancestors are believed to have come back (reincarnation)¹⁷ to their
families in their offspring, who will continue the lineage. Therefore, Igbo extended family
embraces both the living and the dead ancestors whose spirits still protect the living members of
their earthly families.

Hence, the Church as a family in the African context is all embracing, including the

¹⁶ John Paul II. Ecclesia in Africa, no. 43.
¹⁷ Cf. Maduawuchi S. Ogbonna. “Truly Igbo and Truly Christian.” in Interface Between Igbo Theology and
Nigerian Criminal Jurisprudence.” Ogirisi: A New Journal of African Studies 7 (2010): 15. Here, it is said that
reincarnation is a widespread belief among the Igbo people. It is defined as, “a process by which a man after death
comes back to this earthly life.”
deceased and unborn relations traceable to a given African lineage. Mbiti clarifies this point: “The family also includes the departed relatives, whom we have designated as the living-dead. These are, as their name implies, ‘alive’ in the memories of their surviving families, and are thought to be still interested in the affairs of the family to which they once belonged in their physical life.”¹⁸

The idea behind classifying Igbo extended family system as a model of the Church needs further clarification. Doing so will help to understand the sense it conveys. According to Nwosu, Just as in the Greek city state, an individual in Igboland could fully actualize himself as a citizen only as an active and articulate member of a family. He was born into a family and socialized into the norms of the society through the family. He participated in most community functions as a member of a family. His sense of belonging to the family, of being a member not a subject, was as acute. As an administrative unit within the Igbo political system, the family ensured the welfare of its members from birth to the grave.¹⁹

What we learn from this is that the Church in Igboland feels alienated from Igbo cultural background. The Igbo sense of belonging to the Church appears remotely controlled by the legacy left behind by the early European missionaries devoid of the legacy of Igbo ancestral heritage. Reiterating a point developed by Robert Schreiter will help in further clarifying the need for an Igbo local Church as a family that needs to rediscover its lost heritage within the universal Church.

Schreiter uses the term “ethnification” to illustrate the experience of the Canadian people when they encountered the Europeans. The author describes this term as an identification with one’s own local cultural values that have been scattered by encountering another culture. A people’s coming together as a family to identify with and reconstruct their culture enhances mutual communication. Most people feel much at home when their local cultural values are remembered and relived. This keeps the cultural memory alive. The author moves on to describe what ethnification involves.

Ethnification involves memory, and memory is necessarily selective and creative, since any group involved in ethnification by definition lives in changed social circumstances … For example, native peoples in western Canada are going through a process of reconstructing an identity shattered by the encounter with European settlers. Much of their language and many of their customs have been lost, and so they borrow freely from neighboring and even distant peoples in order to supplement their own tradition.  

Such is the case with the Igbo people whose culture lost its historical bearing when it encountered the European missionaries. Through this process, the Igbo people can now identify some cultural values that can be employed in mixing with other cultures if they are allowed to rediscover their lost cultural glory within the Church as their family. This idea establishes a context whereby the local is equipped to contribute towards the enrichment of the universal as an extended family or multi-cultural institution. Schreiter, in this context, affirms that “it is easy to recognize the logic of ethnification at work in the rise of contextual theologies, especially in those contextual theologies that have stressed culture. One can see this in the debates in Africa as to whether cultural reconstruction as a basis for theological construction should look back to the villages or ahead to the cities.” Since each member of the family is allowed to express his/her opinion freely for the good of other members, the Church in Igboland should be free to assert itself in the same family. 

The idea of the autonomy of the local Church in communion with the universal Church could be explained through the model of the Igbo extended family where all members are united. Hence, if a member of the extended family is sick other members should identify with such a member to save the life. When the member recovers fully the whole family will be happy and be enriched by the presence of their healthy member. The Church in Igboland is in search of its lost cultural ethos. When the lost cultural identity is recovered, it will become strongly equipped to enrich the universal Church which is part of the extended family. This issue at stake hinges on

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21 Ibid., 25.
recognition. That is, recognizing the autonomy of the Igbo church which is still fully in communion with the universal church. The model of the extended family applies here where all members have sense of belonging even though they may think differently, they belong to the same family.

This observation provokes a pertinent question that needs to be clarified. The question goes like this: Is the Church in Igboland considered worthy to bear the Good News of Christ authentically and to communicate the same effectively in its own cultural expression? The answer to this all-important question leans on its being recognized as a truly mature local Church, which can contribute reasonable cultural values to the universal Church. For this reason, Eboh argues that “the consciousness of being a recognized community gives one a sense of belonging...”

The logic of the extended family in this sense is, if a member’s efforts are recognized or acknowledged, such a member feels loved and the tendency is to do more with renewed vigor. The oneness of the extended family is anchored in their belonging to the same lineage with one ancestor as the original founder. This is the same with the church. As the family of God, the Church is united under one Father. “This church is a real family which has God as the only Father.”

The quest for recognition of the local Church as one with the universal Church was highlighted in the debate between Ratzinger and Kasper, and the outcome was that “in every particular church the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and active.” This implies that the “[p]articular church and the universal church are in a relation of mutuality; they are perichoretically in one another.”

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25 Ibid.
Hence, Uzukwu asserts that “wherever Jesus of Nazareth, who preached the good news of the Kingdom and died for it, is recognized as alive and risen, there the church is born. Such an emergence of the church is always a communal experience. Such an experience is never outside the community and is never had by proxy.” The author moves on to illustrate this with the encounter between Jesus and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection, as seen in the Gospel of Luke 24: 13ff.

While the two disciples traveled along with Jesus, they could not actually recognize him. Jean Luc Marion observes that “in effect, the disciples, like the people in the Temple, rub shoulders with Christ without coming to recognize in him the gift of presence: the concrete corporeal proximity here prevents, rather than facilitates, the recognition that demands a blessing.” The recognition occurred only when the real meaning of the gift of the presence of God became clear to them. They were moved to invite him to their family house where he presided at the Eucharistic table and opened their eyes to understand what was said about him in the Scriptures. “They recognized him at the ‘breaking of the bread’ – as all communities will recognize him in that familiar foundational action. It is the arising of the church.”

When the two disciples on the road to Emmaus recounted their story, the apostles welcomed their testimony and, as such, a local narrative has become a universally accepted story in the entire Church today. This is a typical example of the contribution of a local Church to the universal Church as an extended family. It occurred at a time when most communities were afraid and could not openly assert themselves as followers of Christ. The assertion was motivated by the need to maintain the truth of faith in the risen Lord truly as a unique group. In their uniqueness,

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the disciples believed the story as they recognized him at the breaking of the bread in their family circle.

Thus, the main issue in the quest for autonomy of the Igbo local Church is an emphasis on modelling the Church after the Igbo extended family setting. This idea refers to the most basic truth about the Church in Africa in general. When this basic truth is identified and recognized, autonomy becomes easy and realistic. Dialogue is required to discover this truth. The truth is simply that “[t]he African family as a model of the Church compels the Church in Africa to evolve a proper liturgy that is homely to the people. This incidentally has been the clarion call of the reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council and the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*. The reformed liturgy of the Second Vatican Council demands the creation of liturgical forms which will be imbued with the cultural values and genius of the people.”

Mbiti describes an African family in its broader sense in contrast to the European narrow concept of the family.

For African peoples the family has a much wider circle of members than the word suggests in Europe or North America. In traditional African society, the family includes children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children, and other immediate relatives. In many areas there are what anthropologists call extended families, by which it is generally meant that two or more brothers (in the patrilocal societies) or sisters (in the matrilocal societies) establish families in one compound or close to one another. The joint households are together like one large family. It is the practice in some societies, to send children to live for some months or years, with relatives, and these children are counted as members of the families where they happen to live.

In exploring the African image of the Church as a family, which has been adopted by the Synod of Bishops for Africa, Uzukwu affirms that this image

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is linked to the church’s intent to transform the unjust and violent conditions of life in our world through a new type of witness. Envy, jealousy, racism, war, division of the human race into first, second, third, and fourth worlds, cult of wealth, disparity between nations, and exploitation and humiliation of the African continent through the debt burden and unfair trade agreements or by the media are all going to be changed when we live the church as family in the image of the trinitarian family.³¹

The author links this idea with the early Christian communities that “bore witness to the resurrection of Jesus… The resurrected one is the founder, the foundation and initiator, of this eschatological group…. Thus, his resurrection and bestowal of the Spirit (Jn 20:22) gave birth to the new group.”³²

Moving further, the author draws from the analogy of the “Blood and Water” that flowed from the pierced side of Christ from the early Christian Fathers such as Augustine, as depicting the foundation of the Church and its sacraments. Uzukwu argues further that faith experience anchored in the resurrected Christ gives birth to the Church. This is illustrated by the reception accorded Christ by the Samaritan community as narrated in the gospel according to John 4:42.

As soon as this faith in the resurrection is experienced, the new birth as church takes place…. However, the full manifestation of the church is in the deep encounter of the Word welcomed and rooted in a particular community. This is the work of the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of God, a Spirit which ensures the oneness of the church and endows each particular church with a resilience to bear witness to the Kingdom, breaking down thereby the artificial barriers erected by groups and peoples. The Samaritan community took the initiative of giving hospitality to Jesus…. And through this intimate reception of the Word the local community became empowered to live and proclaim the one faith in its own right and independently of the apostles or messenger. It asserted its autonomy while manifesting its character as the one church.³³

When the Word is welcome and rooted in a community, such that the gospel expresses itself with the people’s mode of life, through dialogue, inculturation has been established. In this

³¹ Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 47.
³² Ibid., 47-48.
³³ Ibid., 49.
sense, Uzukwu underlines two ways the new face of the church as a family challenges the world of our time. “(a) Only a local church which is aware of its autonomy and universal mission, based on the experience of the resurrected one, may hope to be a challenge to the world – in other words, the one church is realized and bears witness to the Christ only as local church; and (b) the ministry of service in the following of Jesus is the greatest challenge to the violence and domination in the world of today.”

From this African/Igbo perspective of the Church as a family, we can locate the concept of the church as the “Body of Christ” and “the people of God” as advanced by Vatican II. For Dulles, “the idea of the Church as the Body of Christ is found in Paul. In Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12, the main point is mutual union, mutual concern, and mutual dependence of the members of the local community upon one another.” This mutual dependence upon one another is the basis of the Igbo quest for autonomy while still in communion with the universal Church. This idea will become clearer with an examination of Uzukwu’s appraisal of the ecclesiology of Saint Cyprian.

4.2.1. Uzukwu’s Appraisal of the Ecclesiology of St. Cyprian of Carthage.

The idea of both autonomy and unity within the Church is associated with St. Cyprian of Carthage. The modest appraisal of Cyprian’s ecclesiology by Elochukwu Uzukwu has proved that the local church, though, is from one source with the universal church, yet it could be autonomous. This autonomy does not sever the communion of the local Church with the universal Church. What this means is that the local Churches with their diverse cultures can at the same time be in communion with the universal Church. It also means that cultural diversity does not divide

34 Ibid., 48.
36 Cf. Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 51.
the church, rather it keeps the Church ever united because it originates from one source. Uzukwu describes this unity of the church under one source following the ecclesiology of Cyprian.

Cyprian of Carthage, in the third century of our era, and the North African church painted a touching image of the local church in order to coherently bear witness in a troubled world. First and foremost, the bishop of Carthage underlined that the church is one because it arises from the one and only source, the one and only origin. The episcopacy, or rather the priesthood, which is one and fully enjoyed by each bishop, is, in its unity of communion, the sign of the unity of the one church.37

The author also analyzes Cyprian’s book, *The Unity of the Church*, wherein “Cyprian used the imagery of the sun’s rays, the branches of a tree, and streams arising from one source to describe the church’s unity.”38 Although Christ is central in the teaching of Cyprian on the unity of the Church, administratively speaking, the appointment of the bishops is essential to its unity. “The unity of the Church’s corporate life is based primarily, but not solely, on the legitimate appointment of its bishops who are the successors of the apostles in the teaching and guidance of the believers. Their authority comes from Christ as much as does baptism itself, and nothing which Christ has instituted can be ignored. Each bishop is master in his own church, but needs to work in harmony with the other bishops.”39

There is a clear indication here that Cyprian preached unity in diversity within the Church, as is reflected in the imageries he used to describe the authority of the bishops and the unity of the church.

The authority of the bishops forms a unity, of which each holds his part in its totality. And the Church forms a unity, however far she spreads and multiplies by the progeny of her fecundity; just as the sun’s rays are many, yet the light is one, and a tree’s branches are many, yet the strength deriving from its sturdy root is one. So too, when many streams flow from a single spring, though their multiplicity seems scattered abroad by the copiousness of the welling waters, yet their oneness abides by reason of their starting-point. Cut off one of the sun’s rays – the unity of

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
its light permits of no division; break off a branch from the tree, it can bud no more; dam off a stream from its source, it dries up below the cut. So too the Church glowing with the Lord’s light extends her rays over the whole world; but it is one and the same light which is spread everywhere, and the unity of her body suffers no division. She spreads her branches in generous growth over all the earth, she extends her abundant streams ever further; yet one is the head-spring, one the source, one the mother who is prolific in her offspring, generation after generation: of her womb are we born, of her milk are we fed, from her Spirit our souls draw their life-breath.  

Hence, the ecclesiology of Cyprian in this regard finds expression in the New Testament, wherein the early Church rallied round the apostles as they assembled and moved from one house to another. “The earliest ekklēsia gathered in homes.” Though they assembled in different houses, yet, the binding principle found expression in listening to the teachings of the apostles and the breaking of the bread. Uzukwu’s appraisal of Cyprian’s ecclesial unity finds expression in reference to the letters of Paul and the Acts of the apostles where the Churches assembled in different houses. Their binding source is the Eucharist they all shared as one church.

Pauline letters and Acts make frequent references to such churches, which assembled in the houses of Prisca and Aquila (1 Cor 16: 19; cf. Acts 18:18-18), Mary the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12), Chloe (1 Cor 1:11), and Philemon. A common faith in the risen Lord whose Spirit guides the assembled community, a common hope, fundamental ethical principles dominated by love (agape), and the cult (especially of the Eucharist, which breaks all boundaries) bind these churches together as the one church.

Prusak also observes that

The ideal of the earliest ekklésia was disciples of Jesus joined in ‘communion, peace, and love.’ Union with Christ and with one another was effected and manifested in the celebration of the Eucharist within local churches or assemblies. In Christ, and later also through the bishops, those assemblies in many distant places were all bonded to one another within a catholic or universal communion of churches. As John Chrysostom said, “[Christ] made them one body; the one who sits in Rome considers the Indians members of himself” (Homily on John 65.1).

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40 Ibid., no. 5, 65-67.
41 Prusak, *The Church Unfinished*, 76.
42 Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 52.
Making the multi-cultural nature of the church clearer, Prusak reiterates Augustine’s ideal of the City of God on earth. Even under confusing circumstances Augustine believed that the destiny of the Church was not tied to the preservation of any one cultural or historical system. In his vision of the heavenly city on earth, the universal Church was a pilgrim community uniting citizens from all nations, calling them to live not in a selfish love of self and power, but in a love that seeks to serve… A Church that was Catholic did not annul the cultural diversity of customs, laws, and traditions that worked for human peace, as long as they were not detrimental to Christian faith and worship.…  

No wonder, then, did the Church spread from Jerusalem to other parts, such as Judea and Samaria. The disciples began spreading outward starting with Philip who also baptized the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8). The visit of the angel to Cornelius and the vision of Peter led to the founding of the Church among the Gentiles as they gathered in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10). Those who listened to Peter received the Holy Spirit and were baptized just as the apostles themselves had received the Spirit. To the surprise of many, it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11: 26), demonstrating that the Church founded outside of Jerusalem was acknowledged as one with the Church in Jerusalem.

Uzukwu asserts that there were various ways the early church communities both of Jewish-Christian and non-Jewish groups operated in matters pertaining to the observances of the law. “It was not evident what aspects should be considered binding for all or what should be local. In the crucial question about table fellowship and the Eucharist there was no unanimity about where the boundary between Jewish and gentile Christians should be drawn. In clear ways the churches maintained their localness (and autonomy) in the realization of their oneness.” Hence, in their localness and cultural diversities the unity of the church was intact.

45 Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 52-53.
For Cyprian, the cultural diversity seen in the various ancient churches did not militate against their autonomy and oneness. Uzukwu maintains that “[t]he picture which emerges from the New Testament and which is confirmed in the church of the Fathers is that the one church is recognized in its many features. The emphasis on unity may not be confused with uniformity. Indeed, what is manifestly incontrovertible is the localness and autonomy of the churches.”\(^{46}\) This shows that the ancient church witnessed both diverse cultures and diverse liturgical rites that never encroached into its unity. Many have argued that the Church thrives in its diverse liturgical rites. This is why the Eastern rite differs from the West. For Cyprian, those who think differently should be welcomed for their innovative ideals.

In this sense, Uzukwu affirms that “[t]he division of the Eastern and Western church into various liturgical rites and families is the most eloquent testimony of the localization and autonomy of the churches in the one church.”\(^{47}\) The author asserts that “[v]ery influential metropolitan centers such as Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople, became focal points for the regrouping into larger units… the North African church under Cyprian and after him offers a telling example of autonomy in the one church.”\(^{48}\) There is need to welcome creativity from the various local churches. The reason is that “Christian liturgy insofar as it is ritual-gesture, insofar as it is symbol, creating an environment for the encounter between God/Christ and the assembly, must be particular.”\(^{49}\) This particularity enriches and enhances the growth of the universal church.

Uzukwu also appraises Cyprian’s description of the oneness of the Church under the bishops as *concordia*. “The Petrine privilege is the symbol of the one priesthood; and the moral unity, or communion (Cyprian uses concordia), among the bishops is a testimony of the unity of

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 53.
\(^{47}\) Ibid.
\(^{48}\) Ibid.
\(^{49}\) Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language*, 265.
the one church. However, all the bishops are equal, and each is answerable to God for his ministry."

Though Cyprian was so keen at preserving the unity and oneness of the Church, he maintained that liberty and respect should be accorded people who hold different opinions. “One should refrain from passing judgement on those who think in a different manner; and the differences should not lead to the breaking of communion.”

Thus, there should be diversity while maintaining the communion since liturgically, the “principle of particularity is evident in the diversity of Churches the apostles left behind. It was acknowledged from Irenaeus of Lyon to Gregory the Great.”

The particular ways a people uphold their moral standards which are not detrimental to human life and wellbeing should be respected and allowed to enrich the Church.

While emphasizing on the need for the Church to maintain its diversity of cultures, Cyprian also held firmly to the fact that the unity and oneness of the Church should not be broken. He used the analogy of the Lord’s long garment that was not divided by the soldiers who rather cast lots to determine who takes it. Hence, the unity of the Church revolves around the bishops. “For Cyprian, the concordia or moral unity (communion) of the bishops is vital for the manifestation of the one church. Pastors must always bear in mind that there is one flock which they have been chosen to feed. Divergences in the understanding of elements of the faith or in the practice of moral discipline should not lead a pastor to break communion with another church.”

Uzukwu’s appraisal of Cyprian’s ecclesiology has opened the avenue for local churches to come together and be enriched by their diverse cultures. However, to learn from another culture requires dialogue. The interlocutors should be open to listen to each other for proper understanding. This aspect of dialogue needed more emphases while appraising the ecclesiology

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50 Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 53.
51 Ibid., 54.
53 Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 55.
of Cyprian. This is because, Cyprian maintained a rigorous firmness in matters pertaining to ecclesiology. For instance, he maintained that

You cannot have God for your Father if you no longer have the Church for your Mother. If there was any escape for one who was outside the ark of Noah, there will be as much for one who is found to be outside the Church. The Lord warns us when He says: ‘He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth.’ Whoever breaks the peace and harmony of Christ acts against Christ; whoever gathers elsewhere than in the Church, scatters the Church of Christ. ⁵⁴

This excerpt shifted grounds from Vatican II ecclesiology today. The fact is that Cyprian had existed long before the Second Vatican Council was convened. Otherwise, one would have expected that Cyprian’s ecclesiology should have been harmonized with the Council’s teaching on the possibility of salvation outside the Church. At the same time, Cyprian appears to have ignored the Gospel of Mark, which says, “He who is not against us is for us” (Mk. 9:40). The main issue is that the Church today has opened its doors towards interreligious dialogue.

Another chance which the ecclesiology of Cyprian opened is that of autonomy and communion. In this sense, Uzukwu’s appraisal of Cyprian’s ecclesiology is encouraging. But Uzukwu did not visualize dialogue as a necessary tool for ecclesial communion. Neither did Cyprian’s rigorous ecclesiology see the use of dialogue necessary in maintaining both autonomy and communion. In admitting diverse cultures, dialogue with the local church is important. However, Uzukwu’s appraisal of Cyprian’s ecclesiology is yet an opportunity for African bishops to assert the autonomy of the Church in Africa, while still maintaining its communion with the universal Church. Dialogue would be the focal point to ascertain the authenticity of each diverse culture. These issues of autonomy and communion also need to be further explained.

Autonomy in this regard should be understood in terms of self-reliance. The Church in Igboland today is of age and should be self-sustaining instead of depending on resources from

⁵⁴ Cyprian, De Lapsis and De Ecclesia Catholicae Unitate, no. 6, 67.
outside. Jacques Dupuis, in an interview with Gerald O’Collins, “stressed a sense of self-reliance and of dependence on local resources rather than continuing to depend principally on foreign funds and help – an attitude detrimental to the witness of the local church as well as to its legitimate autonomy.” Autonomy of the Igbo Church would require that local resources found in Igboland be used to sustain the Church. The local resources range from cultural elements to socio-economic materials. Over-dependence on foreign aid alienates the local Church’s autonomy. The Church in Africa and Igboland in particular, while maintaining strong communion with the universal Church, needs to devise a means of self-support. It should send and support missionaries outside its locality. For this reason, it will be necessary to explore the need for Igbo hospitality as a creative initiative within the Church in Igboland.

4.2.2 Igbo Hospitality as a Creative Initiative Within the Church

The saying, “respect is reciprocal” could be interpreted in Igbo terms as: Gi nyem Ugwu nkem, mua enye gi ugwu nke gi ("if you respect me, I will respect you as well"). When this applies to a people being evangelized, missionaries should respect them and acknowledge their culture as something important. Those evangelized should in turn welcome the evangelizers with respect and hospitality. Igbo hospitality deals with generosity in human relationships and with one’s manner of welcoming or receiving guests with respect. The guest might be either a friend or relative, or a foreigner who is to be received into a given home or community. According to Olikenyi, “… hospitality is concerned with the welcoming of strangers (guests) which involves the whole process

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of shared friendly relationship – a partnership, so to say – between hosts and guests – whether or not they already know one another – which takes place in an affable atmosphere.”

Africans, especially the Igbo of Nigeria, pay undivided attention to the rubrics of hospitality. In the words of Uzukwu, “[t]he minimum that the African expects from his kith and kin is hospitality. Despite the destabilization of traditional life by colonialism, foreign world views, technology and modern living… African hospitality has held rather well to the extent that it could be described as a way of being African.” This core African sense of hospitality gives every foreigner to the African continent a sense of belonging. It also promotes dialogue and respect for human dignity. To welcome a visitor is a thing of joy among the Igbo people. They would rather generously spend time, money and energy to give a warm reception to the foreigner. “To them hospitality is a major social obligation. Inability to meet it is a humiliating experience for the Igbo… But unwillingness to meet the demands of hospitality is another matter: it leads to loss of prestige…. Igbo hospitality is a simple and spontaneous affair.” It is a duty which every Igbo person owes to the other, no matter one’s status in the Igbo society.

Uchendu gives two principles of Igbo hospitality: direct and indirect reciprocities. The first is an expectation from one’s neighbors that demands direct reciprocity, whereas the second implies that when a guest receives hospitality from the host, it is imperative that such a guest should do the same to other guests in return. While describing the forms of hospitality, the author indicates that greetings rank first in importance among the Igbo people. This is expressed in the Igbo saying: *E kwee ekene ihu asaa* (“a handshake brightens the face”).

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59 Cf. Ibid., 71-72.
Among the Igbo people, after the exchange of greetings between host and guest, the next form is the presentation, breaking, and sharing of the kola nut. The breaking and sharing of the kola nut involves prayer and invocation of the ancestors and the deities. Agbasiere describes how the traditional kola nut ceremony acknowledges the presence of the invisible Igbo ancestors.

The cult of the ancestors is chiefly observed through the Igbo traditional ‘kola nut’ ceremony (icho oji) which takes place on various social occasions. The procedure usually includes the showing of the kola to be broken to the ancestors who, though invisible, are supposed to be present. This is followed by the breaking off of a portion of the nut and throwing it to the ancestors with a petition for their blessings upon all present. Only after that may any of those present partake of the kola.60

This is followed by eating and drinking, at which point the guest discloses the intention of the visit. The Igbo are very generous at sharing meals and kola nuts with guests and neighbors. “For the Igbo, this is not just mere courtesy; it is sincere. To refuse this hospitality is considered a grave insult. The host may feel that he has been snubbed or is suspected of sorcery.”61 To avoid doubt or suspicion of foul play while drinking together, both host and guests drink from the same cup. This indicates that the host has clean hands and has no ill-feelings against the guests.

Therefore, while sharing palm wine among the Igbo, the host tastes it first to show innocence and a clear conscience before passing the same cup to the guests. To show how important and to what extent Igbo hospitality goes, a visitor is often given a take home gift - oji ruo Ulo/Uno. This might be in the form of a kola nut, farm produce, or anything else that is special to mark a memorable visit to a family or community.62 In this regard, Uchendu affirms that “[t]he pattern of Igbo hospitality is simple but it is a serious affair. This hospitality cannot be truly evaluated in material terms. It is for the Igbo a matter of great sentiment, around which has grown

60 Joseph-Therese Agbasiere. Women in Igbo Life, 55.  
61 Uchendu, The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria, 73. 
62 Cf. Ibid.
important rituals.”

Thus, ritualized Igbo hospitality is often dramatized in the procedure of presenting and breaking of the kola nut. God is invoked, then the earth goddess, and the ancestors. Culturally, the Igbo people attach much importance to the kola nut, a fruit produced from the kola tree and grown mostly among the Yoruba ethnic group of Nigeria. While the Hausa-Fulani from the North mainly consume it, the Igbo people celebrate it ritually with religious rituals and cultural reverence. This is buttressed by an Igbo adage (as confirmed by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*), which says, *Onye wetara oji wetara ndu, onye tara oji tara ndu* – “(He who brings the kola nut brings life, and he who eats the kola nut eats life).”

The kola nut hospitality could become an object of interreligious dialogue between the Church and Igbo Traditional Religionists. The reason is that “the Igbo of Nigeria present kola-nut – in and through which life and values of one’s universe are shared (as the prayer for the breaking of the kola-nut shows). European missionaries who worked in Africa were beneficiaries of this hospitality: they were made welcome. For example, at the principal landing places of missionaries in Igboland… the missionaries were invariably received by the chiefs and given land to build…”

Through their hospitality, the Igbo have made much progress in making foreigners feel at home and protected among them. Uzukwu affirms that “African hospitality contains certain nuances which would help to clarify its use as a model for a theology of evangelization.” Hence, the visitor who comes with peace and harmony and whose coming is anticipated by the host receives a special welcome, unlike one whose visit jeopardizes the corporate existence of the people by causing hatred or division.

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63 Ibid., 75.
64 Cf. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria*, 74. Uchendu here narrates all the rituals and ceremonies involved in the breaking and distribution of the kola nut during Igbo gatherings. It is the symbol of love, hospitality, unity, and mutual relationship among the Igbo people of Nigeria.
The Igbo are so welcoming that strangers are sometimes allotted plots of land by the host community to build and cultivate on. “But the receiving community insists that the adopted stranger conforms to the laws of the land; stands on one leg, like the proverbial fowl, to see whether others are standing on one or two legs.”68 The principle is that the visitor is not supposed to dictate the way the host should behave; rather, “where the guest insists on dictating to his host, the community assembles, defines its orientations, tells the stranger what is done in their land.”69 The average Igbo person is often fascinated by something new because they want to learn; they welcome changes and receive visitors with enthusiasm and generosity.

Nevertheless, the Igbo do not swallow the stranger “hook, line, and sinker” nor all that he might bring with him, such as waging war, robbery, killing, poisoning, or kidnapping an indigene. “Africans are hospitable but not at the risk of jeopardizing life in the world (community). The stranger should thus learn what life means for the community.”70 It is believed also that a stranger should have a positive impact on the host community as well. Uzukwu uses the term “luck” to describe such a stranger. “The stranger is welcomed as luck because he brings with him the wisdom of his community – smiting, artifacts, dances. Medicine, fortune-telling, religious practices, etc. These enrich the host community and are shared informally… Thus the accepted stranger makes his contribution to the life of the community on all levels including questions of ultimate reality and meaning. He does not impose his world, he shares with his hosts in dialogue.”71

From such an open and dialogical relationship between the host community and the guest, Uzukwu gives three “principal points” for an African hospitality model of evangelization. The three hospitality models include, but are not limited to, the following:

68 Ibid., 160.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., 161.
(i) The stranger is welcomed. This is done with open arms if he is expected or with a modicum of reserve if unexpected or unknown. He is protected and adopted (e.g., given land to build on and cultivate).

(ii) The stranger is integrated within the receiving community. Refusal to integrate leads to a formal break.

(iii) The stranger makes his contribution, in dialogue, to life in the host community, by helping to solve problems of human existence (thereby bringing real salvation).72

Because these points are basic to human relationships, one could rightly affirm with Olikenyi that “African hospitality aims at establishing and sustaining human cordial relationships and community.”73 The way this process of community hospitality works out in the Church depends on how seriously Igbo local and cultural values are taken to be dialogue elements between Igbo Traditional Religionists and the Church in Igboland today. The ritual aspect of Igbo hospitality ought to be considered within the Church as an Igbo creative initiative towards inculcation. The reason is that “hospitality is ritualized in traditional African societies. The person of the stranger is sacred…”74 This sacredness of the stranger buttresses the Igbo saying: Onye nwere mmadu ka onye nwere ego “(One who has human beings is wealthier than one who has money).” Hence, Igbo hospitality places the human being higher than material wealth and also encourages solidarity for the good of the community. This communitarian aspect of Igbo culture is very important in fostering cordial human relationship. Through the community essential elements of Igbo religious and social life are enhanced. For this reason, this study will go further to explore Igbo community orientation in relation to Christian solidarity.

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72 Ibid., 161-162.
73 Olikenyi, African Hospitality, 106.
4.2.3. Igbo Community Orientation as an Essential Model of Christian Solidarity

The Igbo usually live in communities, which help them to maintain genuine sense of belonging. In most rural communities of Igboland, people rally in solidarity to raise funds for community development projects. According to Patrick Chibuko, “Solidarity is the key word for development. Solidarity excludes passivity. It presupposes interdependence, established on the principle that the goods of creation are meant for all.”

This Igbo sense of solidarity is in line with the social teachings of the Church as initiated by Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum* of 1891, followed by other Popes’ encyclicals such as, John Paul II’s *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, issued in 1987. Pope John Paul II, in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, was concerned about integral human development, solidarity and interdependence. All these are aimed at promoting the common good and with emphases on respect for human dignity and care for the poor. Along this line of thought, the Igbo enthusiastically support whatever is beneficial to the community at all levels. Onwubiko affirms that “the African sense of community and solidarity is important for Christian community building in context today…” This community spirit is fostered by the strong bond of unity existing among the Igbo which depicts their strong faith in God. Hence, “Faith reveals just how firm the bonds between people can be when God is present in their midst.”

Thus, the Igbo community solidarity is summarized by the name, *onyeaghalanwanneya* (let no one abandon his/her brother or sister). This gives way to a very active Igbo community life. The name also embodies the Igbo sense of solidarity, brotherhood, complementarity, and

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78 Onwubiko, *The Church in Mission*, 82.
communalism. The bond of unity is so strong that, under war situation the Igbo will fight as one.\(^{80}\) Addressing the Igbo sense of solidarity and community orientation, Simeon Eboh describes them as a people strongly knit together by a special natural force. The author further gives the features of an African community structure. “A community is a society of a special kind. It is a natural society. It is a form of a society in which men are more intimately bound by specific ends and natural force. The family is the smallest unit of a community. An assemblage of families with a common ancestor is a typical African community.”\(^{81}\)

The bond of unity also extends to in-laws, friends, age grades, and women from the same village (\textit{umu ada}) who are married outside the community. Automatically, their children (\textit{umu nwa-nwa}) are also included in the extended family circle. The Igbo family extension and community relationship promote unity for the common good. This bound of unity and solidarity among the Igbo is also seen among other ethnic groups in Africa. In this regard, Gyekye defines community following this African expression of solidarity and unity as follows:

\begin{quote}
A community is a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds – which are not necessarily biological – who share common values, interests, and goals. What distinguishes a community from a mere association of individual persons is the sharing of an overall way of life. In the social context of the community, each member acknowledges the existence of common values, obligations, and understandings and feels a loyalty and commitment to the community that is expressed through the desire and willingness to advance its interests.\(^{82}\)
\end{quote}

As the saying goes, “a tree cannot make a forest.” Outside the community, an individual cannot function effectively because life is fully realized in relationship with others. “This is the reason why each individual member of the family is brought up to think of himself or herself always and primarily in relation to the group of his or her blood relatives and to seek to bring honor

\(^{80}\) It should be noted that the Igbo fought as one nation called “Biafra” during the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970.  
\(^{81}\) Eboh, \textit{African Communalism}, 82 – 83.  
\(^{82}\) Gyekye, \textit{African Cultural Values}, 35-36.
to the group.”83 For Benezet Bujo, “[t]his means that the individual becomes a person only through active participation in the life of the community.”84

Bujo further illustrates this community dimension of human complementarity through a Bahema proverb, which says, “Even a hawk returns to the earth, in order to die there.” This proverb criticizes the behavior of those members of a community who avoid contact with it and want to develop themselves independently of it. One who behaves in this way ought to know that he does not become fully human, and that his enterprise will ultimately fail – and precisely when it fails, he will see how necessary the community or other people are for him…”85

The necessity of this community solidarity is further explained by Gyekye, who maintains that “Members of a community society are expected to demonstrate a concern for the well-being of others, to do what they can to advance the common good, and generally to participate in the community life.”86 This idea tallies with what it takes to be actively involved in the life of any given African community. Active participation in an African community life involves having dialogue, deliberating on matters affecting both individuals and the community in general. Gyekye further argues that “African society places a great deal of emphasis on communal values. The communal structure of African society has created a sense of community that characterizes social relations among individual members of the African society. This sense of community is an enduring feature of the African social life on which many writers on Africa have constantly remarked.”87

83 Ibid., 75.
85 Ibid., 115.
86 Ibid., 115.
87 Ibid., 36.
This African sense of community solidarity is a standard value that serves as a guide to African socio-economic and socio-political life. Gyekye uses the term “communal values” to describe “the type of social relations, attitudes, and behavior that ought to exist between individuals who live together in a community, sharing a social life and having a sense of common good. Examples of such communal values are sharing, mutual aid, caring for others, interdependence, solidarity, reciprocal obligation, and social harmony.”

Hence, the African community model needs to be considered for inculturation into the Church in Igboland for proper cooperation and solidarity among all the members. This calls for proper study and genuine dialogue since, “[g]enerally, Africa is regarded as the soul of the world because of the spirit of community pervading the African lifestyles.” The Church in Igboland needs to take the initiative to begin a process of true human relationship and solidarity among its members, with dialogue being the central point of focus as a beginning. The reason is that dialogue promotes and accelerates cordial human relationships. When dialogue is used to bridge the gap between different cultural and religious inclinations, mutual respect becomes possible.

The use of dialogue to maintain a cordial relationship between the Church and Igbo Traditional Religion will enhance rural development as an after effect. Hence, the Igbo saying: “When the right hand washes the left, the left washes the right, both will be clean,” will be realized. Accordingly, while the Igbo people learn Christian spirituality through the Church, the Church will also learn from Igbo culture the importance of Igbo community solidarity and interdependence. The fact “[t]hat the left arm cannot wash itself is of course a matter of everyday

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88 Ibid.
experience. It is when two arms wash each other that both become clean: thus, the need for interdependence."  

This interdependence is a genuine model for Christian solidarity which the Igbo already have in their cultural setting. The salient point to bear in mind in this process of community interdependence is, “[i]nstead of the community swallowing up the individual, the gifts of individuals are brought together to create humane community living that satisfies the aspirations of each and all.”  

Hence, everyone knows and understands what to contribute towards the well-being of both the family and the community.

Uzukwu also clarifies this Igbo commitment to community life and interdependence through the process of reconciliation and renewal of relationships, which is practiced among the Igbo. The practice reforms and renews cordial relationships and marks the Igbo out as unique.

The Igbo people of Nigeria have a cultural-religious practice of frequently renewing relationships which are endangered by well-known human limitations. Marriage in crisis and relationships between families, business associates, clans, and village-groups are ritually renewed when endangered by betrayal or failure. The ritual for this renewal is called igba ndu (binding life together, or making a covenant). God, ancestors, divinities (Especially the powerful Earth Spirit), and the entire community act together in the rite to re-create the society. The terms for renewal are spelt out. The participants call on all the divinities to bear united witness of their commitment to the life enhancing terms of behavior. This ritual has been Christianized and has been yielding interesting results in the healing and renewal of relationships of all types.

This ritual aspect is what we should look at in the process of liturgical inculturation to facilitate genuine Igbo Christian faith. Hence, “in the church-family where caring, solidarity, acceptance, dialogue, and trust are characteristics of the warm relationship in the Spirit, the newly born Christian is fundamentally liberated to live an integrated, related, wholesome, holy life. This

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90 Gyekye, African Cultural Values, 37.
91 Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 106.
92 Ibid., 86-87.
image of the church-family, which is fundamental to the call for a renewed African ecclesiology, demonstrates that inculturation is very far from watering down the Christian experience.”93 This was the major concern of the recent African synod.

Uzukwu cites Cardinal Thiandoum, who maintains that inculturation touches every aspect of the African Christian life. “Inculturated ecclesiology draws both the church-community and individual Christians into greater intimacy with the Lord-Spirit. African ecclesiology moves each believer to a dynamic relationship with the Lord and with the community of faith.”94 This shows that Igbo genuine Christian faith is facilitated and expressed within the liturgy when put into practice. Hence, liturgical inculturation is very important to facilitate genuine Igbo Christian faith.

4.2.4. Promoting Igbo Genuine Christian Faith through the Liturgy

As we have already witnessed in chapter three, the Second Vatican Council’s document on the liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, emphasizes liturgical reform. This needs further explanation with regard to evolving new rites. Aylward Shorter notes that although the document calls for the renewal of the liturgy of the Church, “the Council did not envisage the possibility of creating new rites… Notable liturgists, such as A. Chupungco and E. Uzukwu, have argued that liturgical inculturation demands the creation of new rites…”95 Shorter further observes that “[n]owhere in the constitution is it suggested that a Eucharistic prayer could be created locally and receive approval.”96 The document rather emphasized “adaptation,” which was seen as outdated by the

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93 Ibid., 108.
94 Ibid.
95 Shorter, Toward A Theology of Inculturation, 192.
96 Ibid., 193.
African bishops in 1974.\footnote{Uzukwu, \textit{Liturgy Truly Christian Truly African},} According to Uzukwu, despite this reluctance in the constitution to approve local Eucharistic prayers, “under the supervision of A. Shorter, the \textit{All African Eucharistic Prayer} was created in 1969, and later, in 1973, three more: the \textit{Kenya}, the \textit{Tanzania} and the \textit{Uganda Eucharistic Prayers}, were composed.”\footnote{Uzukwu, \textit{Liturgy Truly Christian}, 42-43.} All these are seen as systematic creative innovations in liturgy from East Africa. The Western part of Africa, especially Igboiland, is hereby challenged to show interest in liturgical inculturation to promote genuine Christian faith.

However, Uzukwu appraises the change of attitude by recent pontiffs towards multiple rites. The author strongly advises that “Africa, evangelized by Churches of the Roman rite, has the right and duty to invoke this principle which has found such strong defenders in the Roman pontiffs and the bishops of the universal Church, in recent statements and synods.”\footnote{Ibid., 20.} Recent synodal statements imply that Africans could develop their own rites, as stipulated in \textit{Sacro Sanctum Concilium}, no. 37. However, the insertion of “adaptation” in nos. 38, 39 and 40 of the same document limits the development of an autonomous liturgical rite.\footnote{Cf. Ibid., 22. Here, the author expresses the view that “adapting” the Roman liturgy to Africa yields no greater results than tropicalizing a made-in-Japan car. For this reason, African bishops rejected “adaptation” and approved “incarnation.”} The recent motu prioprio - \textit{Magnum Principium} of Pope Francis, wherein he amended canon 838 might be of help in this regard. The emphasis is to maintain collegiality and to respect the autonomy of the regional bishops. Hence, liturgical books could be translated into the vernacular of a particular region for the understanding of the local people and approved by the regional bishops of that region who will notify Rome for its recognition.

This notwithstanding, since Igbo Traditional Religion is rooted in the African ancestral worshipping style, there is need for a new rite for the Church in Igboiland today. According to
Shorter, the provisions of *Eucharistiae Participationem* of 1973 have paved way for the approval of the Eucharistic prayers “for Germany, the Philippines, Switzerland, Australia, the Netherlands and Brazil among others.”¹⁰¹ What about Africa? By way of an answer, Uzukwu notes that “[a] close study of the official positions of Paul VI and John Paul II leads us to conclude that the establishment of African liturgical rites is not only desirable but obligatory.”¹⁰² It is anticipated that Pope Francis’s *Magnum Principium* is in line with the approval of the *Zairean rite* which was submitted in 1983. While the need for a new liturgical rite in Igboland and Africa in general is urgent, the unity and communion of the universal Church in diverse cultures should be maintained.

The Igbo quest to think differently is a creative initiative within the Church in Africa. Even though the origin of Igbo Traditional Religion is not recorded, the Igbo past that sustained the traditional or ancestral religion can hardly be forgotten. The reason is that the Igbo ancestors prepared a conducive environment that shaped their behavior and mode of worship. The Igbo traditional religious mode of worship is vibrant and practical. It is vibrantly expressed in bodily movement through gestures and dancing.

Such Igbo gestures point the way to the variety needed in the Church today. “The Second Vatican Council paid extensive tribute to the diversity of Eastern rites in its Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, noting that such diversity does not harm, but actually contributes to the unity of the Universal Church.”¹⁰³ Thus, unity in diversity was highly encouraged during the patristic era.¹⁰⁴ In the same vein, popes Paul VI and John Paul II were both in favor of this idea of unity in diversity in the Church. Their declarations could be interpreted by

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¹⁰¹ Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 193.
Africans as ignoring *Sacro sanctum Concilium* nos. 38, 39 and 40, to usher in “African rites.”

Any new rite should be systematic and creative and should have the Eucharist as its center.

Uzukwu notes that certain systematic creative centers already exist in some parts of Africa.

1. In Eastern Africa, the Association of the Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) and its Pastoral Institute in Eldoret, Kenya;

2. In French-speaking West Africa, the West African Episcopal Commission for Catechesis and Liturgy, with its centre in Bobo-Dioulasso, Upper Volta;

3. In the Diocese of Yaounde, Cameroon;

4. In Zaire, the Episcopal Conference.

The Church in Igboland should also endeavor to establish its own liturgical center. The task of such a center is to coordinate and harmonize the procedure of liturgical inculturation among the dioceses in Igboland. This is because, during the liturgy, the Igbo people intermittently raise their voices high in praising God through songs. Their body movement is profoundly vigorous, showing happiness and joy. Worship among the Igbo is rejuvenating, demonstrating that

> [t]he task of liturgical inculturation in Africa is to integrate successfully the various dimensions of the gesture into Christian worship. The voice is raised in song and prayer; the hand and the whole body are poised in orientations of prayer, dance and the execution of liturgical arts and architecture; and the Christian person at prayer, inserted within the wider society, is summoned to display responsible behavior (the ethical dimension of worship). Inculturation becomes one way in which African Christians participate in re-creating the continent, a task consonant with the Christian vocation to re-create the world.

Therefore, to worship God in the Igbo traditional context is a happy phenomenon and not a sad event. In the past, the arena for Igbo worship could be either at the shrine, under a special tree, or at the foot of the mountain, where sacrifices are offered to the gods and the ancestors. The

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105 Ibid., 22: 26–27. Here, the author analyzes “African liturgical rites in the making.”
106 Ibid., 38.
worshippers do not kneel as is done in Christian worship. Igbo traditionalists stoop down while praying and pouring libations with palm wine to their gods and the ancestors. Hence, both the living and the dead participate in the sacrificial meal simultaneously. The priest takes a sip of the palm wine and then invokes God, heaven and earth, the ancestors, and the deities to have their own share of the wine.

Though it is inevitable that things change over the course of time, certain basic elements of Igbo traditional worship remain intact and act as guiding principles for the inculturation of Igbo values in the Church today. According to Alex Ekechukwu, “we are challenged to study with depth the traditional religion of our people as well as the Christian faith and in the process, allow both religions to interrogate each other.”108 Everything has a background, a locus from where it originated. Igbo Traditional Religion emanated naturally from Igbo ancestral religious experience and a cultural milieu which is not recorded in any book, rather, it is in the hearts of the Igbo people.

Christianity, likewise, has roots in Judaism because Jesus and his disciples worshipped in the Jewish synagogues of his time (cf. Luke 4:15–28). Hence, what is done in both religions during worship is living “memory” of the past. “We could also say that memory, when it is specifically religious in nature, has its origin in the worship celebration.”109 As Christian worship is the memorial of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, so also Igbo traditional religious worship is the memorial of their ancestral heritage. Therefore, Igbo ancestors are often invoked as partakers during ritual sacrifices. Their legacies are remembered during Igbo traditional worship.

Angelus Häussling affirms that “[t]he Church’s liturgy is we ourselves at worship, but the Church’s liturgy, the worship of the ‘new, true’ Israel together with that of the Israel first and enduring chosen, is just as certainly the memorial of something past.”\textsuperscript{110} The Igbo ancestral past forms the background of Igbo worship, and this needs a serious study to unveil the major worshipping style as it was celebrated by Igbo ancestors. This poses a challenge to both the Church in Igboland and to Igbo Traditional Religion as the host institution. The way forward is that the two religions should engage in interreligious dialogue to understand what each has as the major objects of faith and worship. Interreligious dialogue will facilitate the process of inculturation.

From this background, we see the need for what Paul Knitter calls “a ‘paradigm shift.’” A paradigm shift represents a turn that is both genuinely different from, yet dependent upon, what went before.\textsuperscript{111} This implies that the Igbo past has a part to play in building the present and the future, especially in constructing a liturgy that allows creativity and takes cognizance of the people’s way of life. Hence, liturgical inculturation of the Igbo cultural values in the Church in Igboland presupposes a genuine knowledge of the Igbo past in the traditional sense.

This idea tallies with the findings of Louis Bouyer, who archeologically links the origin of Christian worship with certain primitive places. Bouyer argues that “[a]rcheology has shown what might be called an obvious kinship between the arrangement of the synagogues contemporary with the origin of Christianity and that of the primitive places of worship like them that still exist, particularly in Syria.”\textsuperscript{112} The Didache also shows that Christian worship did not start in a vacuum; rather, it originated from the already existing patterns and modes of worship practiced in the Jewish

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synagogues. Jesus and his followers frequently entered the Jewish synagogues for prayers. For example, in the Gospel according Luke we read:

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it is written: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. (Lk 4: 16-20).

Bouyer further affirms that “[t]his discovery of a Hebrew original of a eucharistic prayer from the Didache emphasizes one final fact that leaves no longer any room for doubting the genesis of the Christian eucharistic prayer from Jewish prayers.” Since this is the case, it makes sense to admit that we learn from the past. Whatever flourishes today has its roots in the established ways of doing things in the past. Therefore, an in-depth study of how Igbo ancestors worshiped traditionally can serve as guidelines for an Igbo creativity towards genuine liturgical inculturation.

The Church in Igboland met an existing traditional religious practice, which needs to be studied for proper understanding. The study may lead to the inculturation of certain Igbo cultural values into the Church’s liturgy. This process of inculturation helps to maintain a cordial relationship between religion and culture. To have an Igbo Church that relates well with Igbo culture gives a sense of belonging to the people and motivates them to approach God prayerfully.

Emmanuel Ifesieh points out that in prayer, which is an act of worship, the Igbo recognize God as their ontological source. “Prayer (ekpere), thus, brings out the most interior life of religion to action. For in it, next to sacrifice, are the fundamental acts of adoration, worship, reverence, and veneration of God through which Christians as well as practitioners of Igbo traditional religion

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113 Ibid., 27.
manifest their strong belief in God.”\textsuperscript{115} In this pattern, we see the model of Igbo worship that corresponds with the Christian manner of prayer, which depicts total dependence on God. Prayer as an act of worship occupies a prominent place in both Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion. Just as Christians offer worship to God through prayer, so do the Igbo. We shall demonstrate this.

According to F. Anyika, “Among the Igbo, the first thing the head of a family does in the morning is to salute Chukwu (the Supreme Being) with prayer. This is an inescapable filial obligation to one’s maker.”\textsuperscript{116} The author argues that “[t]he Supreme Being receives indirect worship in terms of regular morning prayer throughout Igboland. He receives direct worship in terms of sacrifices and offerings in many parts of the Igbo country. These aspects of worship were developed in the dim past and they feature only among those who have not been converted to any of the historical religions.”\textsuperscript{117}

The Igbo past had much to do with the worship of God, Chukwu, through the deities (umu agbara/alusi), and the ancestors (ndi Ichie), who are considered visible agents of the invisible God. All the deities are very well respected, yet the Earth goddess (ala), occupies prominent position, and is revered as “Mother.” For this reason,

[t]he Igbo consider the ala to be a spiritualized subject or a deity intimately connected with the entire life of the community such that in every kindred, clan or village there are shrines, sacred places and groves dedicated to the earth deity. It is one of the modes through which the transcendent creator of all things, God, is immanent in the activities and life of the people. Thus, it is of great symbolic significance for the Igbo people.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 18.
According to Arazu, “efficacious prayer in Igboland must take account of the achievements of the race especially with regard to the *ofo*. The kola nut (*oji*) summons the Igbo man to prayer.”\(^{119}\)

Arazu further states that:

Praying with the kola nut reminds the Igbo man that in the forgotten past of the race even eating was a religious exercise. Man receives everything including his life and the means of sustaining it as a gift from the spirit world. The kola nut which our ancestors told us, came to us with the *ofo*, became the sacred bond of unity between the living and the self-conscious “dead.” One should remember the spirit world when breaking kola-nut for he owes much to them.\(^{120}\)

The idea of the spirit world indicates that the dead Igbo ancestors never lost their way. They are rejoined with the spirits of their fore-fathers in the land of the dead (*ala mmuo*). This recapitulates the parallel existing between the Christian cult of the saints and the Igbo postulation of the cult of the ancestors, whose presence is felt in their earthly families. For this reason, the spirit of the ancestors is invoked during the breaking and sharing of kola nuts so that they participate in it. Hence, the Igbo ritual celebration of the kola nut evokes the spiritual presence of the dead ancestors among the living.\(^{121}\)

Igbo prayer is presided over by the eldest man of the family or the priest (*Eze mmuo*). *Ofo* is a prominent object with which God and the ancestors are invoked. Many Igbo scholars often refer to the significance of the *ofo* and kola nut in Igbo prayer models. This shows the importance attached to both *ofo* and kola nut among the Igbo people. In a typical Igbo morning prayer model, God, *Chukwu* or *Chineke*, is invoked first to eat the kola nut. This is followed by invoking the deities, such as *ala*, the earth goddess, and the ancestors.

\(^{119}\) Arazu, *Our Religion*, 140.

\(^{120}\) Ibid., 140-141.

The earth goddess (ala), is always given a prominent place among the Igbo. Hence, “an Igbo is truly himself when in his consciousness he is one with the earth. To be one with the earth is to be one with the whole of reality”\textsuperscript{122}; hence the saying, *ala nwe mmadu nile* (the earth owns everyone). For this reason, every Igbo man or woman aspires to be interred in the earth after life. The Igbo prayer model invokes God (*Chukwu*) first and *ala* takes its share in the hierarchical order. The model Igbo prayer involves pouring the libation with palm wine while God (*Chukwu*), the earth goddess (*ala*), and the ancestors are invoked to participate in the drinking.

Another significant image of Igbo prayer is that *Chukwu* – the Big God, the spirits and deities, the ancestors and the living human beings participate in the eating of the kola nut simultaneously. As for the head of an Igbo family, the day is considered to have begun after the morning prayer and the sharing of kola nut had taken place.\textsuperscript{123} After morning prayers, the family members can now feel free to go to farm or market and other daily activities.

Anyika analytically enumerates seven characteristics of a model Igbo prayer. “Homage is paid to the Supreme Being. Ancestors are remembered because they are an essential segment of the family. The Supreme Being is besought to send His blessings not only on the family but also on the rest of humanity. Evil is despised with rancor. Retaliation is a legitimate weapon for redress. A curse is pronounced on ill-wishes and pardon is sought for faults committed.”\textsuperscript{124}

Therefore, to study and use an Igbo prayer model in the Church would promote liturgical inculturation. It will also become the facilitator and expression of Igbo genuine Christian faith. “Roman Catholic local churches in Africa have come of age. There is a gradual maturing awareness in these churches of the responsibility to give unique expressions to their faith-

\textsuperscript{123} Cf. F. Anyika. “The Supreme God,” 15.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 16.
In Igboland, the ironical side is that “while many Igbo people are Christians, it is self-evident that the values of Igbo Traditional Religion still play significant roles in their everyday lives.”[126] The role of the Igbo Traditional Religion sometimes generates conflicting tensions. The reason is that “[t]he fervent Igbo Christian is conflicted in his or her religious practices because he or she guards or defends with equal vigor both Christian values and those of Igbo Traditional Religion.”[127] Dialogue between the Church and Igbo Traditional Religion is necessary here.

Furthermore, “the life of Igbo people is steered more by the principles and values of Igbo traditional religion than by the Christian faith. The belief in reincarnation to date has a dominant influence in Igbo society.”[128] To avoid these conflicting nuances, both theological and cultural, it is important that certain Igbo religious values be studied and considered for inculturation in the Church to facilitate genuine commitment to Christian faith. The need for the inculturation of genuine Igbo cultural values in the Church is to avoid doubt about which way to follow.

For the inculturation of Igbo cultural values to take place effectively on the local level, “experts must be designated to offer the necessary stimulus for community creativity. Committees for liturgy and for liturgical music, for drafting religious education programmes for school and parish have to be set up. Moreover, institutes for pastoral training need to be given free hand in the formation of community leaders who will thereby be encouraged to use their gifts creatively.”[129]

Such an aspiration requires creativity and the active participation of Igbo Christians in the liturgy of the Church, as recommended by the Second Vatican Council’s document, Sacrosanctum Concilium. The document emphasizes the need for liturgical renewal or restoration that will

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125 Uzukwu, Liturgy Truly Christian, 27.
126 Ogbonna, “Truly Igbo and Truly Christian,” 142.
127 Ibid., 141-142.
128 Ibid., 141.
129 Shorter, Toward a Theology, 264.
stimulate the active participation of all the faithful. “In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.”\textsuperscript{130} This full participation helps to build up healthy stability in one’s chosen faith.

It is surprising that after one hundred years of existence, the Church in Igboland has not developed its own worshipping style. Hence, genuine inculturation of the Gospel message through interreligious dialogue is yet to be realized in the Church in Igboland. For this reason, the Church is labeled, \textit{Uka Fada}, meaning, the Reverend Father’s Church, because the central focus during worship is the Reverend Father celebrating. If the Reverend Father is not available no celebration would be held. The Igbo lay faithful are in the Church as spectators in most liturgical functions except in singing or dancing, which may involve all present.

To date, the Church in Igboland has no room for lay extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. The permanent diaconate is not yet allowed in the Church in Igboland. Young females are not trained or allowed to be alter-servers; they only decorate the altars while the males serve during Masses. On Holy Thursdays Igbo females are not allowed to have their feet washed; only the male faithful are washed.\textsuperscript{131} Igbo sacred or symbolic objects (like the \textit{omu nkwu}, \textit{ofo}, \textit{oji} and palm wine), which were used in Igbo Traditional Religion are not recognized as sacred objects in the Church in Igboland. To date, the wine used in celebrating the Holy Mass in the Church in Igboland is imported from Europe, while the local palm wine tapped from the palm trees grown in Igboland is discarded. “Authentic African liturgy demands new creation that is distinguished by


\textsuperscript{131}To some extent, Igbo Traditional Religion does not allow women to participate actively in certain ritual sacrifices, especially, those in their menstrual period.
originality and full of innovations. Africa needs to evolve a liturgical form that is native, indigenous, reliable, trustworthy, suitable, proper and at home with the African people.”

Uzukwu critically evaluated the attitudes of both European colonialists and missionaries to Africa and observed that “African behavior patterns – from sexual and family ethics to sociopolitical and religious practices – were in principle discriminated against. In the war against superstition, magic, paganism, and idolatry, genuine human values were not recognized.” Since Igbo people respond positively to matters pertaining to their culture, liturgical inculturation is required in the Church in Igboland so that Igbo Christians will be at home and will participate actively in Church activities.

Another important Igbo cultural and religious value to be considered for inculturation into the Church in Igboland is the Igbo aesthetic value. The symbolic object that draws the attention of the Igbo public to aesthetic values is the omu nkwu: the palm frond. It is used in decorating the Igbo masquerade, which fascinates the people who pay attention to its performances, inspiring awe in people as the symbol of peace and social order. As an aesthetic symbol, omu may also be used to beautify the masquerade that performs a dance in a public arena. African aesthetics are full of symbols that not only beautify a scene but also arouse attentiveness to what they symbolize. The omu, when used to decorate the altar, would help the people to regard it as something sacred.

Gyekye underscores this attentiveness while defining aesthetic values. “Aesthetic values refer to those features of objects, events, and scenes that are considered worthy of sustained appreciation, attention, and interest.” The author also describes how aesthetic value is characterized. “The aesthetic is characterized by delight, interest, and enjoyment experienced by

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human beings in response to objects, events, and scenes. It holds the attentive eye and ear of the person and arouses his or her appreciation and enjoyment as he or she looks and listens.”\textsuperscript{135} A masquerade wearing the *Omu* in Igboland is admired not only for its beauty but also for the fact that it inspires the sense of the sacred. A village or town errand-man holding *omu* is listened to with attentive ears.

Aesthetic values beautify the scene of events such that full participation and attention are aroused in the beholder. The symbolism attached to an Igbo work of art—painting or a piece of music accompanied with drum beats—finds expression in body movements such as clapping, dancing, and singing choruses. In this respect, Gyekye affirms that “[t]he objects that are traditionally considered worthy of sustained appreciation and enjoyment in African cultures include painting, sculpture, music, and dancing.”\textsuperscript{136} In this sense, *Mbari* houses should be considered for inculturation because of the artistic paintings and the beauty displayed in them.

Liturgical inculturation manifests itself when a certain local cultural value, such as the *omu* or work of art, is used within the Church. “It is an all-involving-active participation for everyone.”\textsuperscript{137} In this regard, the suggestion made by Raymond Arazu that the detached branch of the *ofo* tree could be used to mount the image of the crucified Christ should be considered seriously in the Church in Igboland. When Igbo cultural values are inculturated in the Church, they will motivate undivided attention and active participation by all. The craving for foreign made art works will give way to appreciating indigenous African art. As it is now, “[a] propensity for foreign-made goods still dominates the choice of liturgical art. This is an eloquent testimony of the estrangement of African Christians who wrongly believe that they have to import European

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
and American icons to express their encounter with God in Jesus Christ; yet African artists are beginning to *speak* their communities’ faith through images.\textsuperscript{138}

Nevertheless, it is ridiculous that in the Church in Igboland, the lay faithful have little chance of taking up functions during the liturgy. The clergy play a dominant role such that the role of the laity is eclipsed. Active participation of the laity should be encouraged in the Church in Igboland through the reduction of the seemingly dominant role of the clergy in the liturgy. This could be done through the appointment of morally sound lay faithful to become extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. The lay faithful should also be allowed to become permanent deacons, which is still lacking in the Church in Igboland today.

On the diocesan level in the Church in Igboland, no lay persons are employed as diocesan liturgists or as diocesan masters of ceremonies during liturgical functions. Virtually all diocesan liturgists in the Churches in Igboland are priests. At the parish levels the lay faithful are also not employed as parish liturgists with a pronounced office. The parish priest is both the parish administrator and the liturgist. Sometimes, lay catechists who are not well educated are employed, but their functions are limited to booking of masses and making long announcements at the end of Sunday Masses.

Thus, a strong suggestion for making the Church in Igboland a true home for contextualizing the Gospel message is that the lay faithful be allowed to take part in certain important functions in the Church in Igboland of our era. This will enable the Church to attract and train young Igbo adults who would become future extra-ordinary ministers. Whatever involves the youth is always lively and spells brighter future for the Church in Igboland today. The Church in Igboland has the human resources it needs to become a true home for contextualizing the Gospel.

\textsuperscript{138} Uzukwu, *Liturgy Truly Christian*, 35.
4.2.5. The Church in Igboland As a True Home for Contextualizing the Gospel Message

Reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation in the Church needs concrete evidence of an existing cultural environment to contextualize the Gospel message. Igboland is one of such concrete place where the early European missionaries failed to engage in dialogue with the existing culture to make a true home for the Gospel. The abundant cultural heritage of the Igbo people could enrich the Church. Making Igboland a true home for contextualizing the Gospel in this sense means using the Igbo concrete human situation (which includes their cultural heritage), to present the Gospel message to them.

Wachege explains what employing a people’s concrete situation means through an analysis of *Gaudium et Spes*. “In *Gaudium et Spes*, the word culture refers to ‘all those things which go to the refining and developing of man’s diverse mental and physical endowments.’ The concept of Inculturation is, therefore, an attempt to assist Africans to live the Gospel Message in a way that is ‘truly African’ and ‘truly Christian.’”\(^{139}\) Hence, the effort to be African should not imply a copy-cat attitude or the plastering of the existing European system onto an African way of worship. Otherwise, “these efforts will never constitute full, genuine creativity, because they are strait-jacketed within a pre-fabricated system.”\(^{140}\)

Olikenyi gives a clue on how to use African cultural symbols to make the Gospel message relevant to African people. “… the message of the gospel can be relevant in Africa only if it is articulated using cultural symbols (containing values or meanings compatible with those of the gospel) proper to the African culture or cultures which presupposes, of course, a thorough

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\(^{139}\) Wachege, “Inculturation and Salvation,” 28-40.

investigation into those aspects of the culture that are very much alive.”

Emmanuel Ifesieh also maintains that “Vatican II, by its openness to the God-given values in African traditional religion and culture, has initiated a new era for the Church in Africa, when Christianity will no longer appear as a foreign religion but as one that brings to fulfilment the deepest longings of African religiosity.”

Obviously, Igbo community experience is very much alive and active and should constitute a proper channel for the contextualization of the Gospel message in Igboland. For this reason, “contextualization of the gospel is, therefore, indispensable not only because it corresponds to the nature of the gospel itself, but… because… the gospel is to be lived by the recipients.”

Hence, every human being has a given cultural environment where cherished human values and concrete human situations are witnessed and lived.

Like other cultural groups, life is very important to the Igbo people. “Nothing was more fundamental to them than life (human life, ancestral life, spiritual life, material life and Godly life). Life means so much to them that they have to celebrate it with music and dance. There are all kinds of life dances proper to diverse age groups, occasions and events.”

Thus, making the Church in Igboland a true home for contextualizing the Gospel message must be through inculturation and interreligious dialogue. To go about this involves proper study and understanding of Igbo culture and making the Gospel message go deep into their lives.

This study suggests that during the liturgy in the Church in Igboland, the Gospel should be carried into the Church in procession after the responsorial psalm (in place of the alleluia verse) while all keep standing. The errand-man or the town crier will announce that the book of the gospel

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is entering into the Church by striking the iron gong three times. *Gom! Gom! Gom!* The Holy Gospel is coming in, let all stand! The procession should be accompanied with *Igba ndi eze* dance. As soon as the book of the Gospel is placed on the lectern to be read, the people should sit down to listen to it. The reason for sitting down is because, in Igbo culture, children sit down around their grandfather or an elder to listen to important stories. Doing so enables them to grow into wise and responsible adults. Igbo audiences are usually very attentive while sitting down more than when standing up. During public gatherings, the Igbo prefer sitting down to listen to the proceedings while the speaker stands up to address the audience. For this reason, during such public gatherings, elders customarily ask one of their grandchildren to carry their private seats to the arena where they could sit and listen attentively.

The proclaimer of the Gospel should draw the attention of the congregation by using the Igbo popular ovation: *ndi Uka Logara kwenu!* The Logara community would respond: *Yah! Kwenu! Yah! Kwezuonu! Yah!* Then the proclaimer announces the theme of the Gospel in the following words: *Ndi Logara, too nu nti n’ala nuru ozioma nke dinwenu dika Jon siri dee ya n’akwukwo nso* (Logara people, let your ears be attentive to the Gospel of our Lord according to John). The Logara community would respond: *Gaa n’iru guputara anyi ya maka otito nke dinwenu* (Go ahead and read it to us for the glory of the Lord). Then, the acclamation and response at the end of the reading would read as follows: *Ozioma nkea si n’aka Chukwu bia* (This Gospel came from God’s hand). The people might respond: *Anyi anabatago ya n’esighi agugo!* (We have accepted it without doubt). The homily should follow and could be illustrated with Igbo wisdom stories. This procedure would attract much attention and the people would happily welcome it.

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145 Logara is used here as an Igbo Church community in context. Logara is one of the Catholic communities in Owerri Archdiocese, Nigeria. It has St. Patrick’s parish as its church.
Again, instead of kneeling down during the consecration of the Eucharist, people might sit down. This was the practice of Igbo traditional religionists when they worshipped or offered sacrifices at the shrines. They do not kneel because, kneeling evokes an aura of punishment on the worshipper rather than respect for God. When traditional Igbo religionists gather to pray and offer sacrifices to the gods, they normally stoop or sit down. Sitting down depicts a relaxed mood, yet an eagerness to hear what the gods wish to communicate to the one offering the sacrifice. Sitting down also keeps one on the alert, not permitting tiredness or boredom. The one who sits during worship relates deeply to God in a relaxed mood because worship among the Igbo is a joyous moment, not a sad event, except when the worship involves the joyless sacrifice.

This posture of sitting down in a relaxed mood falls in line with the “depth level” description given to inculturation by Uzukwu as something evoking confidence and trust. “Inculturation means taking a people, a culture, in a spirit of deep trust and confidence, and then meeting this people, this culture, at the depth level, where the foundational questions of the world, man, God, the invisible hierarchies, life and death, etc., are posed. This depth level (sometimes called ‘structural history’) is the base which generates the most predictable reactions of a people to crisis situations (‘to be or not to be’) – giving rise to rites of passage.”

The author goes further to describe this process of inculturation as confrontation at depth level.

To inculturate Christianity into Africa would then mean a confrontation at depth level between the fundamental message of Christianity (Kingdom of God, Death-Resurrection of Jesus as it is carried by the living church community, which is the normative witnessing instrument given by Jesus, and by the irreplaceable New Testament, which is the reflection of the Jesus event in its effect on a group of people) and the foundations of African life (the questions of ultimate reality and meaning). Such a confrontation would necessarily yield a theological and pastoral orientation different from the present theology and pastoral policy among the Igbo.

147 Ibid.
What the author is saying here is that Igbo culture and tradition need to be studied so that the process of inculturating the Gospel in Igboland becomes a realized project. In this regard, Igbo cultural and traditional values that are positive and life enhancing might not be lost or abandoned in the process of inculturation. “An important corollary to the study of inculturation… is the theory and praxis of interreligious dialogue.”\textsuperscript{148} This is the method whereby two interlocutors meet to learn from each other’s belief system. Interreligious dialogue between Igbo traditional religionists and the Church is necessary. It demands urgent attention without compromise.

Thus, “[b]randishing a Gospel supposedly cut off from culture and philosophy… or arming oneself with the most recent ecclesiastical pronouncement on impediments… does not alter the fact that in crisis situations, Igbo Christians act from the ground on which their life is based (Igbo tradition).”\textsuperscript{149} Therefore, what is required to make the Gospel message at home in Igboland is dialogue.\textsuperscript{150} When this is followed, the Church in Igboland promotes and encourages interreligious dialogue at all levels. In this sense, Igbo traditional religionists should be approached for dialogue. Attempting to get information about Igbo Traditional Religion through converts without engaging the protagonists directly goes against the principles of interreligious dialogue.

Dialogue cannot be omitted if Christianity is to be firmly rooted in any given culture. Shorter shares this opinion.

At the consultation organized by the Roman secretariat for non-Christian Religions at Gaba Pastoral Institute in 1974 priority was given to the need for dialogue. Dialogue must take place at all levels, but especially in the minds of ordinary Christians themselves. This is necessary, not only for African Christians trying to make their own synthesis, but also in order to identify the distinguishing marks of African Traditional Religion. Self-identification is always the first stage in the dialogue process.\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{148} Starkloff, “Inculturation” (Part 1), 66-81.
\textsuperscript{149} Uzukwu, “Reconciliation and Inculturation,” 275-279.
\textsuperscript{150} Cf. Ibid.
Therefore, the claim to superiority by either of the religions or cultures should give way to mutual understanding and tolerance through interreligious dialogue. Openness is the central point of focus in every type of dialogue. Shorter observes that in the past,

Both African Traditional Religion and 19th century Christianity were closed systems – systems mutually closed to one another. In its own mind, Christianity was self-sufficient; as the fullest and final revelation of God to man, it had nothing to learn from other religions. African Traditional Religion on the other hand, was supremely absorbent. It could absorb elements from any and every religious system that came its way – absorb them, that is, on its own terms. This is what made it so impregnable. Christianity was a religion of the book - a highly literate religion with a long tradition of written learning and scholarship. African Traditional Religion was essentially oral and preliterate. It was even to a great extent non-verbal, preferring symbolic action, concrete imagery and dance as a means of expressing its religious beliefs and values. Christianity became associated with the school, with “civilization” and modernity. African Traditional Religion was associated with the underdeveloped rural areas, with ignorance and poverty. As a result of Christian propaganda it became something of which the educated African was ashamed in public.152

Nevertheless, Igbo people are receptive to change and embrace unity in diversity as dynamic and an expression of divine intervention in culture. Starkloff affirms that “[i]n the patterns of every culture can be found the sources of information shared by a community, which provides programs of social and psychological dynamics that shape public behavior.”153 The author further notes that “[b]elief in some sort of divine intervention emerges out of the context of concrete acts of religious observance. Such ‘cultural performances’ serve as models of what people believe, as well as models for carrying out these convictions.”154

In the Igbo context, cultural diversity is experienced on daily basis because, Igbo people are industrious and can easily move and interact with others. “This is very much in line with the

152 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
Catholic vision of cultural diversity that we find in Vatican II.” Hence, unity in diversity should be the hallmark of the Church. This is also in line with the following observation made by Nicholas Lash.

In the world as it is and has ever been, there is no such thing as ‘universal’ memory or ‘universal’ language. There are only particular memories and particular languages. Therefore, in speaking only ‘from’ some particular circumstances, places and times, the church does not succeed in speaking intelligibly or accessibly to those whose circumstances and experience, language and memory, are ‘other’ than those that it has made its own. And a church which employs a ‘language’ or symbol-stock that is, in fact, not appropriate as its own by other than a portion of the human race (whether that portion be Indo-European or masculine, rural or industrialized, rich or poor) can only be an impoverished sacrament of the unity of all mankind.

For this reason, the church in Igboland as a true home for contextualizing the Gospel message must see cultural diversity as an important dialogue process. “Traditionally, Africans were governed by clearly set up norms that regulated their way of life. It is these traditional values that need to be inculturated into Christianity.” The presence of diverse cultural values in the Church today should be properly adapted to local needs which is the aim of Vatican II’s liturgical renewal. On this note, the next section will examine the moral implications of unity in diversity.

4.3. Moral Implications of Unity in Diversity

The adage “united we stand and divided we fall” has moral implications that might be seen from the perspective of unity in diversity. The diverse human daily utterances and experiences form the platform for contextualizing the Gospel message because cultural dynamism is expressed in human behavior. Bernard Prusak observes that “[u]nity in diversity was crucial in the apostolic

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This is found mostly in the different liturgical and initiation rites of the early Church. Uzukwu rightly notes that Christian rituals branched off from Jewish ritual practices to reduce particularism. “We thus understand why right from the early and Patristic periods of the church a multiplicity of ways of doing things was recognized as legitimate. The many liturgical rites of the East testify to this; and Gregory the Great summed up this penalty principle in the succinct phrase *in una fide nul officit ecclesiae consuetudo diversa* (‘provided there is unity in faith, diversity of practice is legitimate’).”

If this is true, the Igbo quest for liturgical inculturation in the Church in Igboland is legitimate and morally sound. Through cultural diversity, all Igbo Catholics feel free to identify with their culture while in full communion with the universal Church. By requesting liturgical inculturation, the Igbo faithful express the desire to introduce the moral and cultural values that give them a sense of belonging during worship. They do not relate as well to the monocultural style of worship that was introduced by the European missionaries in the Church in Igboland.

Cultural diversity and liturgical inculturation in the Church in Igboland is needed to make the Church part of the people’s life. According to Nicholas Lash, “[t]he reason for this is that we are curious animals which do not only breed and feed, and make social arrangements… We also speak and consider, tell stories, construct policies and make plans. Our cultures, the meanings and values that inform our ways of life, form part of our nature.”

Whereas the patristic church favored and authenticated diverse liturgies, the tendency of the Western missionaries to be monocultural “appear[s] incompatible with the ideal of a

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159 The term, “penalty principle” in this context refers to the replacement of the constrained idea of a monocultural Church with recognition of unconstrained multiple ways of doing things in the Church which merited approval right from the patristic period. Hence, this principle, which supports varied ways of doing things should be respected and applied in the Church in Igboland today.
multicultural church.”162 In the view of Pope Francis, “We would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous.”163 We know that monotony kills interest. Thus, cultural diversity is very important in a Church that is universal. It becomes very boring when one style of doing things persists from one nation to another without contextualization. Hence, the moral implications of unity in diversity require bettering human life.

Pope Francis is also very optimistic that “[w]hen properly understood, cultural diversity is not a threat to Church unity. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, transforms our hearts and enables us to enter into the perfect communion of the blessed Trinity, where all things find their unity. He builds up the communion and harmony of the people of God.”164 Thus, diversity of cultures enriches the universal Church morally and spiritually because “the Holy Spirit, who is the source of that diversity, can bring forth something good from all things and turn it into an attractive means of evangelization. Diversity must always be reconciled by the help of the Holy Spirit; he alone can raise up diversity, plurality and multiplicity while at the same time bringing about unity.”165 This unity brought by the Holy Spirit gives love as the seal of all relationships.

Lash reminds everyone that “[t]he Church according to Vatican II, is called to be the ‘sacrament of intimate union with God and of unity for the whole human race.’ But the Church does not realize its vocation simply by declaring that this is its nature and destiny. It has unceasingly to become, in fact, that which it purports to be.”166 The Church’s universality should not admit monocultural structures that undermine its function as the sacrament of unity for

162 Shorter, Toward a Theology, 241.
163 Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, no. 117.
164 Ibid.
165 Ibid., no.131.
humanity. As the sacrament of unity, the Church should embrace with open arms those cultural values that would make its liturgical praxis a lively one in which the faithful take active part.

Morally speaking, cultural diversity comes as a gift from God to various people. If this is true, the question follows: “How is the unity of God’s gift to appear, to find expression, in the diversity of human experience?”167 Attempting an answer to this question is not an easy task. However, Lash enumerates three elements of God’s gifts that sustain the unity of the Church. “We distinguish, traditionally, three aspects of that single gift: the aspects named as the ‘theological’ virtues of faith, hope and charity.”168

These three virtues are eternal, depicting in a practical way the unity within which the Church operates in various cultural environments. Faith in one God, hope for the eschatology, and love of one another are the fundamental cardinal virtues of Christianity. These are supernatural gifts that sustain the unity of the Church at all levels. Where they are lacking, the Church’s unity and universality are doubtful. These are the cardinal virtues that sustain moral integrity and universal honesty.

Since this is the case, achieving unity in diversity, morally speaking, within the Church in diverse cultures involves appropriating those things that are morally sound in these cultures. In the case of the Church in Igboland, certain moral values (nso ani) involving the forbidden practices that desecrate the land ought to be considered for possible inculturation through dialogue. Igbo people, for example, forbid incest, stealing, killing, or shedding of innocent blood. Violation of any of these is a taboo which is settled through the rite of joyless sacrifice. In cases of divorce and settlements through peace-making or reconciliation, the rite of covenant making (igba ndu),169 is

167 Ibid., 27.
168 Ibid.
required. The process of *igba ndu* in Igbo culture finds antecedents in Bénézet Bujo’s Palaver, which Anna Scheid describes as follows: “The palaver links truth-telling, memory, and reconciliation, reminding us that each is crucial to promoting a community’s well-being and to building a lasting just peace.”\(^{170}\) A culture that has the means to promote peace should be encouraged, and the best way to encourage such culture is through dialogue with its practitioners.

Hence, this Igbo rite of *igba ndu* should form another stepping stone in the process of dialogue with the Igbo cultural values that facilitate justice and peace. When the Church in Igboland acknowledges the moral values inherent in Igbo Culture, the process of dialogue will open. This might lead to the inculturation of good Igbo moral and cultural values into the Church. In this regard, Shorter offers advice to Church leaders as follows:

The Church must be committed to cultural education if it takes inculturation seriously. It must help to give people the means of developing their culture: literacy, group-media of communication, such as printed publications, films and drama, the promotion of cultural groups and so forth. It must encourage people to be creative and to give expression to their understanding of a changed and changing situation. All of this is a precondition for the practice of inculturation itself.\(^{171}\)

Another aspect of the moral implications of unity in diversity is that “[i]nculturation presupposes among the Christian faithful a living and tested faith, not merely a catechetical knowledge and rote repetition of dogmas. Adult Christians should be able to ‘give account of the hope that is in you’ (1 Peter 3:15). Only with this reflective understanding of the faith can one bring gospel values to new, challenging situations.”\(^{172}\) An understanding of unity in diversity helps people of diverse cultures to appreciating one another. In this sense,

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\(^{171}\) Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 262.

it has become obvious today that if we humans do not learn to appreciate each other’s commitments well enough to enable us all to live together in our diversity, if we continue to attempt, as most communities and traditions have throughout the past – to live largely from and to ourselves, moving willingly even to destroy those whom we regard as our enemies, we may well succeed only in bringing all human life on earth to its final end. We live now in a single interconnected and interdependent world, whether we like it or not, and it is no longer possible either to ignore the other ways of being human or to move towards eliminating them. We must learn instead to encounter these others on equal terms, seeking as sympathetically as we can, to understand and appreciate both their insights into the human condition and the forms of belief and practice they recommend and inculcate.\textsuperscript{173}

The moral values inherent in Igbo culture need to be preserved for future generations to learn how they ought to live. The past moral values that sustained our forefathers need to be reintroduced in the present age of moral decadence in Igboland. The outstanding Igbo cultural and moral values of forbidding incest and condemning killings and stealing need to be studied through dialogue and appropriated into the Church in Igboland. To do this involves certain challenges and many hurdles to be overcome. Therefore, it is important to examine these challenging situations of the Church in Igboland, which is genuinely in communion with the universal Church.

4.4. The Church in Igboland Genuinely in Communion with the Universal Church

The universality of the Church finds expression in the communion of local Churches through the governance and interaction of their bishops. In a debate with Kasper, Ratzinger affirms that “[t]he Church of Rome is a local church and not the universal church – a local church with a peculiar, universal responsibility, but still a local church...”\textsuperscript{174} On the other hand we also see that “[t]he central point of Kasper’s ecclesiology is the simultaneity and perichoretic relationship of

the universal Church and the local churches.\textsuperscript{175} This tallies with the view expressed by the bishops of Eastern Africa during their plenary pastoral meeting in 1973.\textsuperscript{176} The bishops, among other things, stressed the need for upholding small Christian communities. Part of the communiqué that represents their unanimous decision reads as follows:

While the Church of Christ is universal, it is a communion of small local Christian churches, communities of Christians rooted in their own society. From the Bible we learn that such local churches are born through apostolic and missionary preaching. But they are meant to grow so that with time they become firmly rooted in the life and culture of the people. Thus the Church, like Christ himself, becomes incarnated in the life of the people. She is led by local people, meets and answers local needs and problems, and finds within herself the resources needed for her life and mission. We are convinced that in these countries of Eastern Africa it is time for the Church to become really ‘local’, that is: self-ministering, self-propagating and self-supporting. Our plan is aimed at building such local churches for the coming years.\textsuperscript{177}

In this noble idea from the bishops of Eastern Africa, one can visualize a truly African Church in communion with the universal Church. The bishops were unanimously anticipating an African Church whereby the Gospel of Christ meets and uses the African cultural heritage to drive its message home on the local level. St. Cyprian also emphasizes the idea that “[t]he Catholic or universal Church is a communion of Churches united by a communion of bishops. Just as the Church of Christ is a single body with many members, so there is one episcopacy harmoniously shared by many bishops throughout the world.”\textsuperscript{178} This is an example of the local Church envisioned in Igboland, which will be genuinely in communion with the universal Church through her bishops. As a local Church, the cultural and rural daily lives of the Igbo people ought to shape its mission and preaching.

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{176} Cf. Shorter, \textit{Toward a Theology}, 264.
\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} Prusak, \textit{The Church Unfinished}, 127.
In terms of the relationship of daily life experience to preaching, Lash notes, “All human utterances occur in a context. And the context in which they occur modify their meaning.” As a local community, the Church in Igboland should be given a free hand to appropriate the good cultural values inherent in Igbo rural lifestyle. This does not mean that the local Church should deflect itself from the universal Church. Rather, the local Church enriches the universal Church with its diverse cultural values. Such will make the Church in Igboland unique and worthy of emulation by others. From its local resources and rich cultural values, the universal church is enriched.

Because both the universal Church and the local Churches face the challenge of animating and nourishing one another, there is need to recognize the individual creativity and gifts that will practically enrich the entire Church. The dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, recognizes the different gifts given to the various members of the Church. Prusak notes that the document provides a vision of what the Church should look like in its various sections.

Section 13 is connected to section 12 by a common interest in the diversity of ‘gifts’ among the faithful. According to the text, the ‘one’ people of God, to which all humans are called, is spread throughout the entire world, but all its faithful are in communion with one another in the spirit… From that perspective, section 13 goes on to emphasize that the Church ‘fosters and takes to herself, in so far as they are good, the abilities, the resources and customs of various peoples.’ By virtue of the catholicity or universality of the Church gathered from all peoples, each part contributes its gifts to other parts and to the whole Church.

The author further states that “[t]he constitution on the Liturgy thus initiated Vatican II’s retrieval of the concept of the particular or local Church, which understands that the universal Church is actualized in and through the community of a particular locale, most especially when it assembles in prayer, thanking God for sharing and transforming our humanity in Jesus and for

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sending the Spirit into our midst.” It should be noted that the early Christian communities, which were located in various houses, were one; yet, they experienced cultural diversity.

What clearly emerges from an analysis of the Christian Scriptures is a portrait of small, close-knit, and yet diverse communities seeking to live the ‘way’ of Jesus. As those early communities grew in number and cultural diversity, their lived faith generated a richness of theological reflection and of structures. The women and men who formed the communities had to resolve difficult questions about how to proceed in implementing a Christian lifestyle for their context, not entirely unlike the dilemmas we face in our own time. Their proclamation of Jesus had to reflect the diverse cultural life experiences, so that his meaning could be understood and lived.

The Gospel message should make meaning within the local Church where it becomes contextualized within the local culture because, “[t]he Spirit is found where the Church is, and the Church is found where the Spirit is.” Through dialogue aimed at inculturation, the Church in Igboland should become a real ground where the Gospel value is lived contextually. Uzukwu cites the example of the Church in Onitsha province:

It is clear that the context of the Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province is quite different from the Roman. The same faith would lead to a mutual recognition between the Church at Rome and the Church at Onitsha. But it would be ridiculous to expect identical practices: in other words, identical expression of the experience of salvation in Jesus the Christ in poetry, song and dance. But for a hundred years this is what we have been struggling to do – express in a Roman body the Igbo experience of salvation in Jesus the Christ.

Although the local Church must genuinely be in communion with the universal Church, it is necessary to consider the context in which the local Church finds itself. In the Igbo context, both the language and cultural expression differ from that of Rome or Poland, but the same message is preached according to their local contexts. This is why the documents of Vatican II emphasize on unity in diversity. Kevin Burke observes that “in terms of genuinely engaging cultural diversity in

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181 Ibid., 275.
182 Ibid., 75.
183 Ibid., 124.
the ways we think and live as a church, we have only scratched the surface.”\textsuperscript{185} This shows that inculturation has not been fully implemented in the Church today. The attempt so far made to inculturate the African Church appears to be in hidden ways.\textsuperscript{186}

As earlier stated, Popes Paul VI and John Paul II have simultaneously acknowledged the creative spirit and the enriching character of African cultural heritage, which, when appropriated, would encourage unity in diversity in the universal Church. Uzukwu points out that right from the time of Gregory the Great up till Vatican II and to the pontificates of Paul VI and John Paul II, diversity has been of great value. “It will certainly be bad hermeneutics to interpret a single phrase in isolation from a whole address of massive evidence of positions taken by two pontiffs in favor of creativity and originality in the African Church. Paul VI and John Paul II are unequivocal in their recognition of the maturity and right to identity of the African Church provided that this maturity and identity be realized in the unity of faith and communion.”\textsuperscript{187}

Acknowledging cultural diversity in the Church makes a great difference. It would appear ridiculous to carve or paint Jesus Christ hanging on the cross in the shape or image of a white man in the Church in Igboland. Rather, the image of a gallant Igboman hanging on the detached branch of \textit{ofo} tree to represent Jesus in the Church would make a deep impression on the people. According to Uzukwu, “The Society for African culture through its organ, \textit{Presence Africaine}, through the numerous important books, and through the sponsoring of many colloquia since 1961, has contributed to the reflection on African Religions and Christianity. This has aided to deepen


\textsuperscript{186} Uzukwu, \textit{Liturgy Truly Christian}, 31. Here the author employs the term, “Hidden or Non-systematic creativity” to illustrate the situation in African faith-experience whereby Western songs (hymnody and melodies) are “plastered” onto African languages.

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 25.
the awareness of the problems and possibilities of expressing the African faith-experience in African concepts and symbols.”\textsuperscript{188}

On their part, African bishops have begun to note the importance of creativity in their local churches. “This official commitment of African bishops to a Christianity thoroughly saturated with the African reality is, as it were, an official recognition of the many years of hard labour by African researchers to lay a foundation for a real African Christian life.”\textsuperscript{189} Liturgical creativity is needed in Igboland as has been already implemented in Eastern and central parts of Africa. Most Africans, and Igbo Catholics in particular, “manifest a genuine disenchantment with an imposed foreign expression of faith-experience, which is itself a contradiction, since a genuine faith-experience should not be expressed in categories foreign to the subject/community who has the experience; these expressions manifest also a determination to authentically rectify this anomaly.”\textsuperscript{190} This is because, “the liturgy is, as it were, the epiphany of the Church, as says Congar.”\textsuperscript{191}

This research has emphasized using Igbo cultural symbols liturgically to make the Church in Igboland an Igbo Church. This does not mean that the Church in Igboland is cut off from others; rather, it is fully in communion and united in faith with the entire Church. Unity in diversity is a unique value in the communion of faith. Unity in diversity also requires a learning process which revolves around understanding each culture as lived experience. The training program for preparing future priests of Igbo extraction should include Igbo cultural studies. From this perspective remodeling the training program of future missionaries within the seminaries in the various dioceses of Igboland shall be looked into in the next section.

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 28–29.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.
4.5. Remodeling Priestly and Seminary Training in Igboland

The seminary training Igbo priests and religious receive has maintained the European style of education from the colonial days. Igbo indigenous priests and religious, who were trained by European missionary priests, rigorously upheld the European culture influenced liturgy and ministry. They were meant to see European culture as superior to other cultures and to believe that European Christianity is the only authentic Christianity. This is why most Igbo cultural writers shift the blame of lack of proper inculturation of Igbo values in the Church to the attitude of the Igbo indigenous clergy and the religious.

P.C. Nzomiwu argues that “[t]he attitude and mentality of the Igbo clergy in general is dominated by the Western culture. It is not an overstatement to say that the average Igbo clergyman is not an Igbo man in mentality. He now thinks and reasons like a European. We must engage in a deliberate struggle to de-Westernize the Igbo hierarchy, clergy and laity. They must be made to think as lovers of their culture.”¹⁹² The brainwashing type of training the Igbo clergy receives has inhibited the process of inculturation in the Church in Igboland.

Most Igbo indigenous priests who succeeded the missionaries have remained alienated from their native culture and have continued to propagate European Christianity as the best way to be Christian. Some of them see foreign missionaries as models for them to emulate, right from their seminary formation days. Thus, the missionaries built their churches and rectories far from the rural people to uphold their superior feelings. This has become a model for most Igbo indigenous clergy and religious. Frank Salamone and Michael Mbabuike observe that

colonial model, condescending to minister to parishioners from time to time and appearing not to be aware of the world they are sworn to serve. Many have refused even consideration of bringing together the precepts of the church with traditional religion, insisting on preserving the foreign nature of Christianity and imposing it on Africans. In fundamental ways they are more Roman than the Roman Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{193}

Another reason for this European missionary model in most Igbo Churches is the influence of colonial rule on Christianity in Sub-Saharan West Africa. It is believed that while the missionaries were propagating Christianity, they were simultaneously promoting colonial interests. Richard Gray notes the argument that “Christianity … made its rapid advances precisely because its emissaries, the missionaries, were so closely linked with the apparatus of colonial rule.”\textsuperscript{194} This is another major problem that Christianity in Igboland is facing today, the influence of colonial rule which alienates the people’s cultural values in both social and religious levels. The solution to this problem is remodeling and reshaping seminary training to include African cultural studies as directed by Pope John Paul II’s \textit{Ecclesia in Africa}.\textsuperscript{195} This will reorient the formation of Igbo indigenous priests and religious to embrace their culture as something valuable.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated how a truly Igbo and truly Christian Church can be in communion with the universal Church. This could be realized through seeing the Igbo extended family system as a model of the Church. This family model does not mean relationship by blood but extended to embrace diverse cultures. The autonomy of the Igbo local Church in communion with the universal Church should be emphasized. This is seen in the appraisal given to Cyprian’s


ecclesiology by Uzukwu who maintains that this autonomy does not imply separation from the authority of the Chair of Peter in Rome. Cyprian emphasizes autonomy and communion (concordia) as that which unites the bishops of local churches to the universal Church.

Hence, the Church in Igboland should make African culture part and parcel of its expression. That is, it should use the Igbo lifestyle of hospitality to properly incarnate the Gospel message into the Church in Igboland. The Igbo community orientation, which promotes solidarity is an essential model of Christian life. The various Popes, starting from Leo XIII to John Paul II through their encyclical letters encouraged solidarity for the common good. This, along with liturgical inculturation and the implementation of unity in diversity, can enrich both the local and universal Church. The liturgy, when celebrated with Igbo cultural symbols and objects promotes genuine Igbo Christian faith. To make the Church in Igboland a true home for contextualizing the Gospel message, the rich and diversified Igbo cultural values should be given the chance to survive in the Church in Igboland. The use of Igbo cultural symbols and objects like the ofo tree branchlet, the omu nkwu, the local palm wine, and molding the statues of Jesus or the saints to depict an Igbo human figure should be encouraged. During the liturgical celebrations Igbo traditional mode of greeting should be introduced such as, Igbo kwenu: Ya! The use of all these objects do not imply severing communion with the universal church.

The moral implications of unity in diversity require using the moral values of a given people to present the Gospel message to them. For this to be effective, the lay faithful in Igboland should be given a chance to participate actively in the Church’s liturgy. This would minimize the existing situation wherein the Church in Igboland is dominated by the clergy, which has given it the nickname Uka Fada, meaning “the reverend Father’s Church.”
The lay faithful should be encouraged to take an active part in the liturgical functions of the Church in Igboland. As examples, the permanent diaconate should no longer be neglected in the dioceses of Igboland, and the lay faithful in the Church in Igboland should be trained as extraordinary ministers of the Holy Communion. The priestly seminary training should be remodeled to include studies of African/Igbo culture in their formative years. The next chapter is the evaluation and conclusion.
Chapter 5: Evaluation and General Conclusion

In view of the importance attached to the religious practice and cultural values of the Igbo people of Nigeria, this study observes that the Igbo Christian faith is a dynamic process. This dynamism is nurtured by the Igbo lifestyle of commitment to God and respect for their culture. Culture shapes a people’s lifestyle and ascertains who they are and how their belief system operates. Theologically, the incarnation of the Christian message into a given culture is termed inculturation. The ideal is, when a particular culture is transformed by the Gospel message, such a culture also transforms the message to produce a new reality. Inculturation is still a neologism as expressed by Pope John Paul II. For Shorter, it is “the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures.” As a theological concept, inculturation has a strong relationship to “incarnation,” which refers to the Word of God taking human flesh in the Gospel of John 1:14. A potent factor towards successful inculturation is interreligious dialogue – the coming together of different religions to discuss their faith experiences on how they approach the ultimate - God. Where this is lacking, mutual understanding between different religions will be jeopardized.

This research engaged inculturation and interreligious dialogue in a mutual interdependence. The main argument is anchored on the thesis that the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue between the Church and African Traditional Religion in Igboland has not been adequately implemented. Hence, the Church in Igboland has not yet developed its own liturgical style after many years of its presence in the area. This shows that inculturation is still a mirage in the Church established in Igboland by the European missionaries.

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2 Shorter, *Toward a Theology*, 11.
In the view of most theologians, the dynamics of one religion encountering another motivates a desire for interreligious dialogue. The result of this interreligious dialogue manifests itself in mutual understanding, which is strengthened by respecting the viewpoints of the interlocutors. Prior to the advent of Christianity in Igboland, the people practiced Igbo Traditional Religion. They believed in a Supreme Being called *Chukwu* or *Chineke*, who had other smaller deities as messengers, including the earth goddess, *Ala*, which they respected as “Mother” and they also revered their ancestors. These form the substratum upon which rests Igbo religious belief.

Analogically, Uzukwu constructs a connection between Jewish culture and Christian practice. “Jesus and the movement that took its rise from him were radically rooted in the Jewish way of life. He was a Jew; and his followers, who confessed him as the Christ, were Jewish-Christians. Thus, their practices, no matter how influenced by the social context of the Greco-Roman world, were deeply rooted in the Jewish antecedents.”

Likewise, Igbo Christianity should be rooted in Igbo religious and cultural life. The bequest from Igbo ancestors should not be allowed to rot away; rather, it should provide the platform upon which Igbo Christianity and its liturgical rite should thrive.

During this research, it was observed that Igbo Traditional Religion was not accorded the respect it deserved by the early European missionaries. In their bid to propagate Western Christianity, whatever concerned Igbo Traditional Religion was negatively seen as pagan or superstitious. For this reason, Christianity in Igboland was introduced as a superior religion, resulting in the lack of interreligious dialogue between the Church and Igbo Traditional Religion.

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4 Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language*, 60.
Thus, the expatriate missionaries only succeeded in establishing a Church that celebrates European liturgy in foreign Igboland. Igbo cultural values were not seen as equal to European values.

Most Igbo scholars argue along this line and maintain that there was little or no interreligious dialogue between the incoming Christianity and Igbo Traditional Religion because most of the cherished traditional Igbo practices were underrated and regarded as idol worship. This attitude could be perceived as an attempt to obliterate a tradition that forms the source of Igbo cultural ethos. Surprisingly, some Igbo indigenous clergy and religious are in the habit of believing that Igbo Traditional Religion is archaic. However, most Igbo theologians argue against this by maintaining that Igbo religion and culture have positive values to be cherished today.

Whatever the case, the undermining of Igbo religion and culture caused setbacks in terms of inculturation. This research, whose purpose is to investigate this rather potent factor, has determined that there is an urgent need to procure an inculturated Church in Igboland. This implies that the Church in Igboland ought to develop its own liturgy that would be an Igbo Catholic liturgical celebration in praxis. Preliminary investigations reveal that up to date, liturgical celebrations in the Church in Igboland retain most of the European ways of worship introduced by the expatriate missionaries. Valuable cultural practices in Igboland before the advent of Christianity were unacceptable to the missionaries. The liturgy lacks life-centeredness which is a typical Igbo cultural ethos. The celebration of life in its community sense is the core element of Igbo liturgy. Where this is lacking active participation of the faithful would be jeopardized.

Implicitly, the missionaries showed little or no interest in fostering interreligious dialogue between the incoming Christian religion and Igbo Traditional Religion. The result is that today, the Church in Igboland is more of a Church for the elites. The Traditional religious adherents are
regarded as *Ndi ogo mmuo* (idol worshippers), as old-fashioned, backward, and local illiterates. For Marinus Iwuchukwu, “these foreign evangelizers lacked substantial appreciation and respect for the African traditional religions”⁵ This lack of respect has led to the absence of interreligious dialogue and lack of liturgical inculturation in the Church in Igboland today.

Mimetically, the shapes of the Church buildings in Igboland are replicas of European style of buildings. The sculptors, statues, paintings, and vestments used by priests in Igboland today reflect European styles, and most of these are imported from there. This is still happening after the bishops of Africa and Madagascar rejected the concept of “adaptation,” and opted for “incarnation” during the 1974 Synod of Bishops. This stand of the bishops is a giant stride towards facilitating interreligious dialogue, inculturation, and finding African solutions to African problems.

It is surprising that after more than hundred years of its existence among the Igbo, the Church in Igboland has not developed its own liturgical rite. Cultural diversity and multi-liturgical rites were welcomed in the Church right from the patristic period. The Western missionaries who evangelized Igboland neglected this long-standing principle that has allowed multi-liturgical rites within the Church. Instead, they imposed the European cultural system of worship on the Igbo Church. They seemed oblivious of the fact that the Church does not identify with only one culture to the exclusion of others.

Hence, this study argues that genuine inculturation or incarnation of the Gospel message through interreligious dialogue is yet to be practiced in the Church in Igboland. The Church in Igboland is often called *Uka Fada*, meaning “the Reverend Father's Church,” because, the central

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actor during worship is the Reverend Father. If the Reverend Father is not available, no celebration would hold. The Church in Igboland has no extra-ordinary ministers of communion or the permanent diaconate of which, the lay faithful should actively participate in.

Igbo sacred or symbolic objects (such as *omu nkwu, ofo, Oji* and palm wine), used in Igbo Traditional Religion are not recognized as sacred objects in the Church in Igboland. The mass wine used in celebrating the Holy Mass is imported from Europe, while the local palm wine tapped from the palm trees grown in Igboland is discarded. These are the discoveries this thesis made. In that order, this study makes the following recommendations which would facilitate interreligious dialogue and make the Church in Igboland an inculturated church.

- That interreligious dialogue is urgently needed between the Church and the adherents of Igbo Traditional Religion.
- That Igbo sacred objects such as *Omu nkwu* and *Ofo*, and other sacred spaces in use in some parts of Igboland such as *Mbari* houses, should be utilized to make the Church in Igboland a truly Igbo Church. Through interreligious dialogue, the Church in Igboland would understand the importance Igbo people attach to their culture and make use of it for proper inculturation.
- That Igbo mode of worship which dynamically inspires dancing, singing and body movement, be considered for liturgical inculturation in the Church in Igboland.
- That liturgical committees be set up in the dioceses within Igboland to monitor the proceedings of interreligious dialogue and liturgical inculturation.

All these are in line with the teachings of such Church documents as *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, which promotes liturgical reforms. Pope Francis also makes a clarion call for paradigm
shifts in the Church's traditional practices. The pope, therefore, underscores the idea that the Church should go out of itself and meet those marginalized in the global society. Through interreligious dialogue, the Gospel message renews the people in their cultural contexts. The values of Igbo Traditional Religion could be appreciated when the people express themselves in their local culture. This idea is stressed in Sacrosanctum Concilium, which maintains that local cultures should be considered during the liturgy for full participation of the faithful.

Along the same lines, Pope Francis’s Magnum Principium has empowered local bishops to formulate liturgical texts in their local languages for approval, demonstrating that autonomy and communion admit variety. Developing a new liturgical rite for the Church in Igboland would enrich the universal Church because the Church in Igboland with its new rite would remain in communion with the universal Church. This research has highlighted certain issues relating to the lack of adequate inculturation of Igbo cultural values in the Church owing to negligence of interreligious dialogue. This was to prepare the ground towards reshaping the Church in Igboland which still operates under the parameters set by the early European missionaries.

At the beginning of this dissertation, the introduction provides the thesis statement with which inculturation and interreligious dialogue could be carried out. The Church in Igboland was chosen as the pivotal context for this research in order to have an in-depth study of Igbo culture for proper understanding and to rebut the classification of Igbo Traditional Religion as pagan or animistic. Thus, the methodology, the definition of terms, the literature review, and chapter synopses are laid out in this introductory part to put the dissertation in proper perspective.

The first chapter presents the theology and praxis of inculturation from the Igbo cultural perspective. It inquires whether genuine inculturation through interreligious dialogue has taken
place in the Church in Igboland or not. Further research shows that the early missionaries from Europe imposed their native culture on those they evangelized while viewing the local cultures as inferior and European culture as superior. Hence, becoming a convert to Christianity meant embracing European culture. This attitude undermined the proper study of the cultural milieu of the new converts, and interreligious dialogue and incarnation of the Gospel message into the Igbo Church were lacking. Hence, Igbo myth of origin and cosmology were traced to buttress the fact that the Igbo had culture, religion and the knowledge of God before the advent of Christianity among them.

Thus, the meaning of culture was further explained for proper understanding of the term. In the same vein certain terms associated with culture and inculturation were examined in this chapter. This is meant to contextualize the research to avoid conflicting outcomes. Thus, the incarnational and contextual models were preferred terms to boost inculturation in the Church in Igboland. Further investigation on the Church in Igboland shows that the procedure for proper inculturation was not followed. This is because, the Christian faith ought to have been adequately expressed in the people’s existing culture through dialogue. Instead of following the practical steps of inculturation, the missionaries imposed their own native culture on the people. This made the encounter between the Christian religion and Igbo traditional religionists an onerous task. The Igbo response to inculturation was very slow because the missionaries did not employ interreligious dialogue. This made inculturation unattainable at the time, and this lack has lingered into the contemporary era.

A review of the method used by the missionaries was made which shows that they started with buying slaves and converting the lower class and removing them entirely from their natural
village environment. They built Christian villages that were isolated from the local people. The Christian village system was very expensive to maintain, and this led to its abandonment by Father Leon Lejeune. The efforts made by Father Ganot to publish *Grammaire Ibo* and *English-Ibo-French Dictionary* in 1900, notwithstanding, the Irish missionaries could not use Igbo language to communicate with the local people fluently. Rather, they used untrained interpreters who were not proficient in English language to speak to the natives. The conversion of certain Igbo chiefs brought up the challenge of polygamy which was not adequately studied to know its origin and proffer solutions to it. The viable method the missionaries employed was to build schools, and hospitals which the Igbo have greatly cherished. Yet, Igbo culture and language were treated with scorn which led to lack of inculturation of Igbo cultural values in the Church in Igboland today.

In the second chapter, this study examined issues bordering on interreligious dialogue and religious plurality. It focused on the issues as portrayed by the WCC, the papal encyclical - *Ecclesiam Suam* of Pope Paul VI, the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar documents. Iwuchukwu notes that The WCC, in line with the United Nations, had prepared the ground for serious deliberations on religious freedom and religious plurality before 1962. As a follow-up to this awareness, the Church since the Second Vatican Council’s publication of *Nostra Aetate*, has opened her windows towards embracing interreligious dialogue with other religions. This effort has allayed the fears which emanated from the earlier teaching that “outside the Church there is no salvation.” However, this issue of religious plurality is yet to be substantially acknowledged in Catholic circles.

Interreligious dialogue has been yielding positive results in promoting peace, tolerance, and mutual respect between the Church and non-Christian religions. Since the Church now
welcomes interreligious dialogue, the issues concerning religious plurality and inclusivity need proper attention. This will promote human dignity and freedom of worship. For this reason, some documents of the Second Vatican Council, such as *Dignitatis Humanae* and *Ad Gentes*, which are geared towards encouraging religious liberty are examined. Some Post-Conciliar documents were also reviewed, which highlighted some of the challenges/fruit of interreligious dialogue and inculturation.

Although African Traditional Religion is not mentioned in the conciliar documents as one of the major world religions, it suffices to say that it belongs to the “other religions” referred to in those documents. It is surprising that the early European missionaries who evangelized Igboland ignored having dialogue with the Igbo traditional religionists. This led to a lack of understanding of the Igbo culture and religious system. Whatever the case, salvation is meant for all human beings through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Hence, Igbo Traditional Religion came not by accident but by God’s design.

This chapter also reiterates the fact that interreligious dialogue between the Church and Igbo traditional religionists is very necessary. The WCC’s declaration of religious freedom shows that it is the right of every individual to choose the mode of worship one desires. In this sense, one could argue that God communicates to individuals in varied ways. Iwuchukwu cites such theologians as Jacques Dupuis, who argue that salvation comes to individuals in various ways and as such, religious pluralism is both a *de facto* and *de jure* means through which the absolute
encounters humanity. The author further argues that this pluralistic position propounded by some theologians has not officially been backed up by the Catholic Church or its documents.

According to Iwuchukwu, in 1948, after the Second World War, the modern society became diversified and pluralistic in nature. Hence, human freedom and religious plurality became major concerns of the United Nations and the WCC. Iwuchukwu further maintains that some religious confessions reject *de jure* religious pluralism owing to their self-acclaimed superior feelings, which arise “because each religion operates on its self-defined understanding of what constitutes valid human response to the divine or absolute.” However, the efforts of the WCC in promoting ecumenism began to be encouraged by various religious bodies of the world. Inspired by the dynamic nature of modern society, the Church, through Vatican II documents *Nostra Aetate* and *Dignitatis Humanae*, began to relax its former rigid position to give room for religious freedom.

Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* also favored the idea of religious freedom and respect for human dignity. This opening-up of the Church towards promoting interreligious dialogue with non-Christian religions has become a major source of its renewal. Pope Paul VI also emphasized the need to promote interreligious dialogue. To the list of the forms of dialogue (dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, and dialogue of religious experience) the Pope added *dialogue of salvation*, which is universal and all-embracing.

The Pope’s choice of dialogue of salvation re-echoes the idea in *Nostra Aetate* that all humans share a common destiny. This idea is aimed at promoting interreligious dialogue. Hence,

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7 Cf. Ibid.
8 Ibid., 82.
Nostra Aetate affirms thus: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.”

A review of the Second Vatican Council’s documents show that salvation is possible for adherents of non-Christian religions through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Neither of the conciliar documents affirmed the possibility that non-Christian religions could mediate salvation to their members directly without Christ. Dupuis believes that salvation could be possible outside the Church, though in an incomplete manner. The Catholic Church, for Dupuis, possesses complete mediation of salvation. Hence, while salvation is universal, Christ is its ultimate mediator. The good in non-Christian religions according to the conciliar documents, allude to the preparations for their adherents to receive the Gospel of Christ. This position makes inculturation and interreligious dialogue an imperative.

Hence, interreligious dialogue is the mutual interaction between members of different religious confessions for better understanding of their different views. Dialogue consists of a sincere and friendly encounter whereby the adherents of different religions meet to learn about the ways each religion approaches God. The need to foster inculturation and interreligious dialogue involves difficulties. Some of the post-conciliar documents reviewed affirm that these difficulties are human in nature and should be overcome.

9 Vatican II, Nostra Aetate, no. 2.
10 Cf. Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, no. 16
The documents reviewed include The International Theological Commission’s Faith and Inculturation of 1988, Pope John Paul II’s *Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate* (1990), and *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991). The document, *Dominus Iesus*, was briefly mentioned. While all the documents favor the use of interreligious dialogue, they also maintain that dialogue should not replace preaching the Word.

In the third chapter, much emphasis is placed on issues required in reshaping the theology and praxis of inculturation through interreligious dialogue. It reiterates the fact that the Church has spread from Europe to other countries of the world including Africa. For this reason, things are bound to change. New cultures other than European are to be encountered. The existence of other cultures and different religions needs to be recognized and acknowledged wherever missionaries proclaim the Gospel. But the missionaries who evangelized Igboland failed to have dialogue with the existing Igbo Traditional Religion. The teachings of the Second Vatican Council on its document – *Nostra Aetate*, which paved the way for interreligious dialogue was not followed.

This chapter also explores the principles of liturgical inculturation as stipulated by the Vatican II document, *Sacro Sanctum Concilium*. This document encourages liturgical reforms through “adaptation.” However, emphasis is placed on active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy. Hence, this research reiterates the possibility of initiating liturgical inculturation through interreligious dialogue. The lack of interreligious dialogue slowed the process of inculturation. However, Pope John Paul II’s appraisal of the rich religious and cultural values found in Africa raises hope that liturgical inculturation could be possible if African values are treated with the respect they deserve. What Africans need is courage to overcome the challenges involved in procuring genuine inculturation. The obstacles militating against genuine inculturation should be
overcome so that the projected outcomes of inculturation could stand out clearly. This could be achieved through interreligious dialogue between leaders of the church and Igbo traditional religionists. This chapter also emphasizes the need for Igbo self-determination to assert the good things in their culture and propose them for inculturation in the Church.

While enumerating the benefits of liturgical inculturation in the Church in Igboland, this chapter points out the fact that the faithful will participate actively when their cultural values are introduced in the Church. The benefits of liturgical inculturation in the Igbo church are potentially enormous. By using local instruments and cultural elements of Igbo origin in the liturgy, the members will see the Church as their own. This will enhance active participation of the faithful as recommended in Sacro Sanctum Concilium. Remembering and appraising the spiritual and moral patrimony of the Igbo ancestors are important components of Igbo culture. Igbo people strongly believe that when they remember the ancestors, their spirits hover around to bless and protect their earthly families. The cult of Igbo ancestors could be compared with the communion of the saints in Christianity. This is because, among the Igbo, to qualify as an ancestor one is expected to have lived a virtuous life and must have received befitting burial rites at the end of one’s life on earth.

The significance of Igbo cultural symbols as well as sacred objects and spaces such as, omu nkwu, ofo, oji, mbari, and others should be studied by theologians. The way forward is through interreligious dialogue between Christian leaders and Igbo traditional religionists. Dialogue facilitates mutual understanding, which paves the way to inculturation and helps to incarnate the Gospel message into the culture of the people being evangelized. Igbo sacred objects, like omu nkwu and ofo, as well as sacred spaces, like the mbari, could become dialogue elements for enhancing liturgical inculturation. Ofo and Omu should be used by priests in the Church as part of
their regalia. While an *Ofo* branchlet could be used to construct the bishop’s crosier with the image of an Igboman representing Christ on it, *Omu* could be placed on the priest’s arm to depict the priestly office which is the purpose served by the stole. *Mbari* houses could also replace the grottos constructed in European style around most church premises in Igboland.

The fourth chapter provides illustrations, with some examples, of the elements required to make the Church in Igboland a truly Igbo and truly Christian Church in communion with the universal Church. Proper inculturation is fostered through interreligious dialogue between the incoming religion and the already existing religion practiced by the people evangelized. In this chapter as in others, this study argues that inculturation was not adequately carried out in Igboland by the early missionaries. Thus, the Church in Igboland ought to be a Church built and groomed within the mainstream of Igbo religious and cultural background, just as Christianity is rooted in Jewish cultural ambience.

Furthermore, this chapter proposes that the Igbo extended family system should be seen as a model of the Church in its universal sense. That is, a family model that transcends blood relationship in the strict sense of the nuclear family. It is a family within a multi-cultural institution that is genuinely united as it continues to spread out. Hence, the autonomy of the local Church does not imply separation from the universal Church. Rather, it allows the local Church to develop ways, means, and methods that will enable the people to participate in Church activities without reservation. Unity in diversity helps the Church to discover the latent potentials hidden within the local cultures and thereby enrich the universal Church with such talents. This means that the Church is a family where Jesus is recognized and all are welcome. In the African context, the family embraces all, including the living and the deceased as well as the yet unborn who are
connected to a given lineage. In the same way, the Church in Igboland is a family, and each member has a special place in it.

Uzukwu appraises the issues concerning autonomy and communion, which were highlighted by Cyprian of Carthage as *concordia* among the bishops of the Church. This communion can also be seen among the Igbo people who are community oriented. Recognizing the importance of Igbo culture in its local expression would enhance liturgical inculturation in the Church in Igboland and enrich the universal Church. Just as the Church enjoys autonomy in communion, so it does with diverse liturgical rites.

This chapter expresses the view that Igbo hospitality and community orientation entail mutual union and mutual dependence on one another. Igbo hospitality deals with the manner of relating with one another and the mode of welcoming guests. Igbo hospitality is ritualized within the symbolism of presenting and breaking the kola nut. The Church can become fully inculturated in Igboland when some good Igbo cultural elements are made part and parcel of the Church’s life and worship. The Igbo welcome visitors and could easily adapt to new innovations that come through cultural change.

Igbo community orientation is another aspect that was emphasized in this chapter. In their community life, the Igbo mutually help one another in solidarity. This has roots from the social teachings of the Church through papal encyclical letters of Leo XIII and John Paul II. The Igbo embark upon self-help projects to keep the community alive and active. The Church in Igboland would be supported through Igbo community orientation. In their community setting, the Igbo settle disputes and resolve conflicts through the process of *igba ndu* (covenant making). This
process facilitates genuine commitment to the Church. Therefore, liturgical inculturation is needed in the Church in Igboland to facilitate the implementation of Igbo genuine cultural values.

Igbo genuine Christian faith is promoted through the liturgy that utilizes Igbo cultural elements during worship. When Igbo local instruments are used during worship the people express joy through bodily movement involving dancing, singing and hand clapping. The use of the Igbo cultural expressions in the Church, such as, the ovation — Igbo Kwenu: Ya! might arouse much interest in the people to actively participate in the liturgy. The Igbo vibrant body movements, gestures, music, and dancing, as well as native songs, would be integrated within Christian worship to enrich the entire Church in Igboland. The traditional mode of worship brings out the best of Igbo culture and this makes the Church in Igboland a true home for contextualizing the Gospel message. The Gospel should be ushered into the Church by the errand man first using the iron gong to announce the procession with the Gospel book in place of the alleluia verse. The Gospel might be accompanied by Igba ndi eze dance into the Church. People may sit down during the Gospel reading for attentive listening. They may also be on their sits and communion brought to them as kola nut is shared while people are on their seats. Morally speaking, unity in diversity requires that a people’s sacred objects be given the respect they deserve even on the universal realm. This makes the local Church to develop its talents to enrich the universal Church. Moral implications of unity in diversity also enables the local Church to open up to the moral values within its environment to enrich the universal Church.

Hence, the autonomy of the local Church does not severe its communion with the universal church. The local Church in Igboland is genuinely in communion with the universal Church even when it develops its own distinct liturgical rite. The debate between Ratzinger and Kasper reveals
that the Universal Church and the local Church are in one another. Both enjoy the fullness of the Catholic and apostolic Church at the same time.\textsuperscript{11} In this sense, the two are not different churches but one and the same in mutual relationship and ecclesial communion.\textsuperscript{12}

While upholding the unity and oneness of the Church, Cyprian also maintains that people who think differently should be respected if it does not break the communion. Hence, the Igbo quest for liturgical inculturation within its local Church should be respected. Above all, the positive attitudes of Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Francis toward the creation of multiple rites in the Church today should be respected. The local Churches need to apply this principle encouraged by these recent pontiffs. Hence, the Church in Igboland should implement this principle and invent a liturgical rite that reflects Igbo culture. By so doing, the dynamism of the Igbo mode of worship would be practically expressed.

There is also a need to remodel priestly seminary training in the seminaries within Igboland to teach the values of Igbo culture. This will reorient the future priests and religious of Igbo extraction to know and value the beauty of their local culture. Igbo culture and religion are not evil, as portrayed by the early missionaries, and this has to be made clear during seminary formation. Hence, Igbo clergy and religious should be taught to love and cherish their cultural heritage as an important element of their training.

General Conclusion

The idea of upholding the good qualities in African religious worship finds antecedents in the Letter from the Secretariat for non-Christians, issued by Francis Cardinal Arinze and

\textsuperscript{12} Cf. Ibid.
Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald on (25/3/1988).\textsuperscript{13} The letter streamlines the ways of understanding African religion and culture. In the letter, the secretariat notes that it is important to respect the wishes of the episcopal conferences of Africa and Madagascar to pay attention to African Traditional Religion, which has been misconstrued as “animism.”\textsuperscript{14} This concept is anachronistic when used to describe a religion still practiced by most Africans even in modern times. African Traditional Religion is still very relevant to most Africans today.

It is important to respect the culture and religious practice of any people being evangelized. In this way, the Gospel message will make meaning to them. It is hard to relinquish one’s religious belief abruptly. Most Igbo families still relapse into the Traditional Religion during difficult times because they do not find immediate solutions to their lives’ hurdles in Christianity, which is foreign to them. If Igbo Traditional Religion is properly studied by theologians, new discoveries would be made. Christianity would draw insights from such discoveries and look for appropriate ways to handle such difficult situations. Interreligious dialogue should be employed in this study.

If such difficult matters are handled properly, the Church in Igboland would become a truly Igbo Church where the members feel at home. These are the major points in understanding the process of liturgical inculturation and the need to explore Igbo culture. The Church in Igboland needs proper reshaping. This implies that the Church of the early missionary era should paradigmatically adjust to a Church that reads the signs of the times. Only such paradigm shifts could lead to genuine liturgical inculturation in the Church in Igboland today.

Based on these observations, this study has maintained that the current liturgical rite used in the Church in Igboland is obsolete. Therefore, it should be reshaped to incorporate good Igbo cultural values into the Church. To achieve this requires dialogue and appreciating the religious values of the community.

\textsuperscript{13} Arinze and Fitzgerald, “Pastoral Attention,” 131-134.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
patrimony bequeathed to Igbo people by their ancestors. In addition to this, the lay faithful should be encouraged to take active part in the liturgical functions of the Church in Igboland. The permanent diaconate which is neglected in the Church in Igboland should be encouraged. The Igbo Catholic faithful should also be trained as extraordinary ministers who could be commissioned to take communion to the sick and home-bound. There is a need to see the Church in Igboland as belonging to the entire people of God and not exotic or the Church for the clergy (Uka Fada). Thus, clerical vestments should reflect Igbo cultural outfit, locally made in Igboland.

The diversified Igbo cultural values which make the liturgy dynamic should be encouraged in the Church in Igboland. This implies, the use of Igbo local musical instruments, such as ngelenge, ogene, ekwe, oyo and igba ndi eze, during the liturgy. The use of Igbo language and cultural gestures such as the ovation, Igbo kwenu! Ya! should be employed to communicate the Gospel message. The homily should include the use of proverbs, and local examples. Igbo cultural symbols and sacred objects, such as the ofo tree branchlet, the omu nkwu and the local palm wine, could be used during the liturgy. The statues of Jesus and the saints found in the Churches in Igboland should be re-molded to depict the figure of an Igbo man and not just a white man. Igbo esthetics such as Mbardi culture ought to be exhibited in the Church premises of Igboland to appreciate the culture of the people and facilitate inculturation.
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