ROOTED IN THE EARTH: AN IGBO SACRAMENTAL NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE, A MODEL FOR IGBO CHRISTIAN ECOLOGICAL ETHICS

Kenneth Oguzie

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ROOTED IN THE EARTH: AN IGBO SACRAMENTAL NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE, A
MODEL FOR IGBO CHRISTIAN ECOLOGICAL ETHICS

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Kenneth Ujunwa Oguzie

May 2022
ROOTED IN THE EARTH: AN IGBO SACRAMENTAL NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE, A MODEL FOR IGBO CHRISTIAN ECOLOGICAL ETHICS

By

Kenneth Ujunwa Oguzie

Approved April 8, 2022

Dr. Daniel Scheid, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology
Department of Theology
(Committee Chair)

Prof. Elochukwu E. Uzukwu
Professor of Theology
Department of Theology
(Committee Member)

Dr. James Bailey, Ph.D
Associate Professor of Theology
Department of Theology
(Committee Member)

Dr. Marinus Iwuchkwu, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology
Chair, Department of Theology

Dr. Kristine L. Blair, PhD.
Dean, McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts
The contemporary Igbo society faces a lot of challenges. These include political, religious, and moral crises. These crises affect the environment in many ways. They threaten the peace and harmony of the Igbo society. As a result, it touches on faith. The Igbo society holds a holistic view of life. Whatever affects one aspect of life affects the other areas. Ecologically, various factors are responsible for the crises. These include changes in lifestyle from the traditional way of living to modern style of life with its penchant on consumerism. Also, colonialism and its lingering residues, civil unrests, politics, population growth, poverty, and corrupt practices are factors that contribute to ecological degradation among the Igbo people. This dissertation examines how these mounting ecological crises in Igbo land have both political, religious, and economic grounds that empower and enhance ecological disaster. However, it argues that the erosion of the traditional Igbo earth-affirming rituals and the ethics of interconnectedness has done a great deal of harm to the Igbo
society ecologically. It affects faith likewise the environment. The contemporary Igbo penchant for consumerism and some Christian fundamentalists’ attitude towards the Igbo traditional culture and religious practices, in some ways, contribute to ecological dereliction, leading to wanton desecration of the traditionally held sacred view of the universe. The traditional Igbo society had conservatist values, customs and ways of life rooted in its sacramental nature of the universe. Such a way of life promoted and preserved the harmony of the environment. This work, therefore, argues that the traditional Igbo sacramental view of the universe and its ethical practices can effectively address the ecological crises and ameliorate their impacts in Igbo land, reduce the major impacts of ecological degradation and maintain harmony. The church can learn a lot from the Igbo religious universe and practices and, seek better ways to partner with it in dealing with the mounting ecological issues in Igbo society today.
DEDICATION

To my mom, Victoria Egobingonye Oguzie, and all victims of environmental crisis
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My unalloyed gratitude goes to God, the Creator and Sustainer, who has always guided, saved, and protected me from destabilizing ill-health. I am indebted to Dr. Daniel Scheid, my supervisor, a candid listener, for always being there, advising and encouraging me to not give up. I am very grateful to Prof. Elochukwu Uzukwu and Dr. James Bailey of Theology Department for their immense support and understanding.

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My family members have always been there for me through thick and thin. We cry it out and console each other. Also, we laugh it out and lift everyone and everything up to God. In a very special way, I wish to thank my mom, Mrs. Victoria. My priesthood and education are a reality today because of her. She stood by me against all odds. My elder brother, Chris, who forfeited every pleasure that life could offer to ensure that I and my younger siblings went to school. May God replenish all your years eaten by the locust! Ernest, Ndidi, Goddy, my lovely younger ones, you are amazing. To my nephews: Emma, Henry, Kingsley, Adonis, Royal, Jideofor, and my nieces: Mary-Chris, Vivian, Madonna and Olileanya, may you all be sustained and protected by God’s grace. To Ogechi and Uloaku, my sisters-in-law, and Eze, my brother-in-law, I am grateful.

Finally, I am grateful to all environmental activists the world over. May your efforts to protect God’s creation from abuse not be in vain!
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<tr>
<td>CBCN</td>
<td>CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE OF NIGERIA</td>
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<td>CCC</td>
<td>CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH</td>
</tr>
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<td>CCC</td>
<td>CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFC</td>
<td>CHLOROFLUOROCARBONS</td>
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<td>CGO</td>
<td>CATHOLIC GIRLS’ ORGANIZATION</td>
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<td>CMO</td>
<td>CATHOLIC MEN ORGANIZATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWO</td>
<td>CATHOLIC WOMEN ORGANIZATION</td>
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<tr>
<td>CYON</td>
<td>CATHOLIC YOUTH ORGANIZATION OF NIGERIA</td>
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<td>GBM</td>
<td>GREEN BELT MOVEMENT</td>
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<td>INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE</td>
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<td>JPIC</td>
<td>JUSTICE PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION</td>
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<td>LSM</td>
<td>LAUDATO SI’ MOVEMENT</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION</td>
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<td>RECOWA</td>
<td>REGIONAL EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF WEST AFRICA</td>
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<td>SCC</td>
<td>SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES</td>
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<td>UNCCC</td>
<td>UNITED NATIONS’ CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE</td>
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<td>UNEP</td>
<td>UNITED NATIONS’ ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>UNITED NATIONS’ EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION</td>
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<td>USCCB</td>
<td>UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS</td>
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<td>WMO</td>
<td>WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION</td>
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INTRODUCTION

0.1 Background to the study

The Igbo of southeastern Nigeria are a religious set of people. They are also a critically minded set of people who thoroughly scrutinize every activity in nature for proper understanding and right relationship. As they proverbially say, “mmadu anaghi anu na odi iri ma chiri ya chii na-akpa,” i.e., a person does not just hear that an item is ten in number and unquestionably pockets them. In other words, one does not take things hook, line and sinker on the face value. Critical thinking and questioning are needed to get to the desired and reasonable goal. Austin Echema notes that the Igbo are “mentalistic” in the sense that they can be too critical and can easily read minds and movements of things in their complex universe. The complexity of the Igbo world demands questioning to understand the harmony, the coherence of the world that is believed to be holistic with complex communion and communication between the supernatual and natural world.

Therefore, the traditional Igbo critically reflected on their environment and the mutual interaction that exists in nature, the origin of the world and all the mystical aura it exudes, the human position and relationship of all life forms, and came to the conclusion that Chukwu di, i.e., God exists, that Chi na-eke, i.e., it is God who creates, and that God is equally the upholder of the world, (Osebuluwa), who lives above and has God’s garment spread on the earth, Olisa bi n’igwe ogodo ya na-akpu n’ala. Given this belief, the Igbo see the world as alive, is purposeful and sacred. Life is meant to mutually integrate. For none can stand in isolation of the others. Humans

1 Austin Echema, Igbo Funeral Rites Today: Anthropological and Theological Perspectives (Germany: LIT Verlag Fresnostr, 2010), 7-10.

2 Echema, 11-12.
need the nonhumans to survive. Expectedly, humans have the duty care for creation for the survivability and harmony of all beings and the elongation of the earth through diligent and salutary engagements to safeguard life in all its forms. For the Igbo, it is almost a way of life to be ecologically conscious, to naturally live and allow other lives to bloom. They recognize the mutual interaction of beings in their universe and therefore advocate for the ethics of relationality. With this type of ethics, the danger of bio-extinction is minimized. This is anchored on their sacred view of the earth, a medium of divine benevolence and a sacred space that is home to all life entities. Hence, the focus of this work, *Rooted in the Earth: An Igbo Sacramental Nature of the Universe, a Model for Igbo Christian Ecological Ethics*. The earth, for the Igbo, is like the footstool of God, a part of God such that God is not absent to the affairs of the world.

From the point of view of faith tradition, this work concentrates on the Igbo traditional religious understanding of their ecological system and their relationship with God and other life forms in the society based on the sacramental nature of the universe in Igbo cosmology. God is so central in the life and organization of the Igbo. One does not need to engage in any debate on the existence and activities of God in the world. According to the Igbo Cosmic order, “God who resides in the sky with all the sky deities has on the land, the Mother Earth.”³ As Francis Arinze notes, “the Earth Spirit is the most important spirit after Chukwu and she is the Great Mother Spirit in the Igbo hierarchy of beings.”⁴ In a certain sense, it is logical so to say the earth is everything


⁵ Ibid.
for the Igbo. It is argued that life will become unbearable without the benignity of Mother Earth. The Igbo see themselves as inextricably rooted in the earth from the inception of their life to its end. Therefore, all their actions and words are tailored to earth affirming and harmonizing rituals that promote the dignity of the earth and all her tenants. These rituals, their religious language or communication techniques equally have an ecological base.\(^6\) One does not pollute or desecrate the earth. Indulgence in such actions is not only a sign of ingratitude for the gifts of the earth, but also an affront to the Earth, a violation of the harmony in nature. It is said to be punishable by Mother Earth. The Igbo live in a religious universe that is “open-ended and fundamentally relational”\(^7\) and is based on the principle of right and ethical living (Egbe bere, Ugo bere) that seeks the good and health of all creation (Ndu miri, Ndu Azu). The Igbo world is therefore a commodious, democratic, sacred space for the thriving of all life forms. It is a pro-life world, charged with religious values.

This sacramental understanding of nature in the Igbo traditional society proclaims that all forms of life lie with God so that on the part of humans, they need to maintain the order in creation for health and balance in nature. Although the traditional Igbo ethics, like most societies of the world, generally follows an anthropocentric philosophy, which places humanity at the center of whatever forces that exist in the universe,\(^8\) in their religious and ethical life, the Igbo believe that they do not have a monopoly of nature. Nature has its respect which must be accorded to it lest humanity suffers for it. Therefore, the Igbo seek to preserve their environment in line with their


\(^7\) Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, 60.

traditional system not just for their present generation but for the generations unborn and in honor of the traditions of the ancestors and worship of God whose presence permeates everything in nature. In a strict sense, the Igbo traditional system is replete with weak anthropocentricism or weak instrumental values of the environment. Inasmuch as people need to make use of the environment to realize their purposes, such uses are not to be irrational, not to be abused freely.

Therefore, the maintenance of balance and order was paramount in the traditional Igbo society. It forms the basis on which right relationship is built. Mutual respect and environmental stewardship are anchored on balance and order in the community. Thus, there was a high-level sense of responsibility, commitment, and sensitivity to every life form, to preserve, conserve and perpetuate same in line with the culture and traditions of the land that uphold the pervasive sense of the sacred in nature and synergy.

This work examines this sacred view of the world and the human-nature relationship, which characterized the traditional Igbo understanding of their universe. It argues that this traditional earth-spirituality and practices could be of immense benefits in fashioning some ethics that can help the Igbo Catholic Church in combating the spate of ecological crises in their context. It contends that environmental problems and the sense of insouciance and dereliction of fiduciary obligation that are so common in the present Igbo toward environmental protection were not in larger scale in Igbo land prior to the modern times that seem to be caught up in consumerism and carefree attitude to nature. Colonialism, politics, poverty, and the wrong interpretation of the Christian message to the Igbo land also contribute, in their respective small ways, to the ways the modern-day Igbo look at their environment more like a commodity at the disposal of humans.

There is no doubt that there are perceivable spiritual, moral, and psychological disconnections between today’s Igbo Christians and the natural environment. The sense of the
sacred in nature and respectful relationships seem to be disappearing with greater speed. Tragically, human, inter-personal relationships are breaking down. There seems to be a severe alienation from nature as there is a sense of isolation from the depth of the self, from interactions with others, and invariably, from the divine, mysterious, presence of God. As such, human beings and the rest of creation are impoverished, experiencing the bite of degradation and pollution in various ways. As Richard Louv puts it, today’s humans are suffering from a real “nature-deficit disorder,” which is leading humans increasingly away from committed and engaged awareness of their responsible and responsive involvement in the natural world.

Losing contact with nature in its sacredness means losing the practical and responsible source of care for nature. This means abandoning nature’s life-sustaining gifts. To arrest this “virus” affecting the environment, the sense of the sacred in nature needs to be revisited and restored. The deficiency of the sense of the sacred in nature will frustrate any efforts at ecologically changing the human relationship with the earth. For what we do not love and respect for what they are, it will be difficult to save them and regard them as intrinsically valuable. Equally, it will be hard to love, save or respect what we do not see and experience as sacred in which we are rooted to thrive. The earth is a sacred home, not a commodity to be commercialized or exploited. Rather, the earth is a live entity and a sacred gift to be respected. This work argues for the sacramental conception and approach of nature as a veritable model for fashioning ecological ethics and spirituality for the Igbo Catholics. This work is convinced that such a concept will instill an ecological consciousness in the Igbo, raise awareness of the danger of ecological amnesia among

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the current generation of the Igbo. In this way, this work brings insights in ecology, environmental sustainability, and biodiversity conversation through Catholic faith lens.

0.2 Statement of the problem

No century has ever witnessed such concerted, global, and multidisciplinary efforts towards making the planet earth livable, as it is the case in the present time. Series of conferences and international climate summits have been organized on various levels. Binding agreements also have been signed. All these are premised on the belief that no genuine progress can take place if the environment is not taken care of. Not even faith can thrive meaningfully in a hostile, uninhabitable environment. For the environment provides humans with the support systems they need to thrive. In other words, a healthy environment is a requirement for sustainable, integral, or holistic development and relationship, be it physical or spiritual. Hence, the Rio declaration,\(^\text{10}\) while adopting “a more nature-centered approach towards environmental problems,”\(^\text{11}\) espouses a kind of development that promotes harmony between humans and nature. It calls on all people across faith traditions, political, academic, and economic or business lines to be mindful of their sacred duty to care for the environment which hosts humanity.

Incontestably, the quest for effective strategies of attaining a sustainable future has been the major concern of the United Nations and the international community. Christianity and other religious traditions, also, join hands with the United Nations and International community to chart

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\(^{10}\) This refers to the document which was produced at the end of the Conference on Environment and Development organized by the United Nations in the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro from 3 to 14 June 1992. The document contains 27 principles which should guide countries in their quest for a sustainable future.

some ways forward to ameliorate the harms humanity has caused to the environment. Consequently, from the first United Nations Conference on Environment organized in Stockholm in 1972, through the Kyoto protocol\textsuperscript{12} on climate change and the climate change conference in Durban, South Africa,\textsuperscript{13} to the adoption of the climate change agreements during the Climate Change Conference in Paris, 2015, all the discussions bring this into focus. These environmental summits agree that the reality of climate change, which precisely characterizes most global treatises in the modern society, has its roots in certain unrestrained human activities. In this respect, the acceptance and endorsement of the Paris Agreement can be regarded as a breakthrough achievement for a sustainable future. Keeping global warming below 2 degrees Celsius will go a long way in combating and reversing the devastating effects of climate change.

Interestingly, Nigeria, the homeland of the Igbo, Southeast of the country, is one of the countries that signed and ratified the Paris Agreement. As reported by one of the Nigerian Newspapers, Vanguard, the Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari, notes that Nigeria is committed to “reducing greenhouse gas emissions unconditionally by 20 percent and conditionally

\textsuperscript{12} The Kyoto Protocol is an international pact that came into existence because of the recommendations that were made at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Kyoto, Japan. It was organized by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). All the countries that signed it agreed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. This treaty was adopted on the 11th of December 1997 in Kyoto and implemented on the 16th of February 2005. The Kyoto protocol contains binding commitments which countries that signed it must adhere to. This is one of the objectives which the UNFCCC seeks to achieve.

\textsuperscript{13} At the Climate Change Conference in Durban, South Africa, which took place from 28 November to 11 December 2011, negotiations were made on how to bring all countries to accept certain principles that must be respected while dealing with the environment. Such an agreement should be legally binding. It was expected to enter into force in 2020. In fact, the foundation for the articulation and subsequent implementation of what is now known as the “Paris Agreement” was laid here. Also, it facilitated the adoption of the governing instrument for the Green Climate Fund (GCF) which was discussed in Copenhagen, Denmark.
by 45 percent in line with Nigeria’s Nationally Determined Contributions.”

Beautiful as this sounds, precisely, on paper and before the camera, probably for political correctness, the implementation of this agreement in practical terms is another issue given the level of dereliction of the Federal Government to critical issues facing the country. That raises the question as to, what does the signing and ratification of the Paris Agreement mean to most Igbo communities, that have suffered major setbacks from the federal government as far as infrastructural development and other issues are concerned? Also, what does this mean to the many other inhabitants of the Niger-Delta in Nigeria who are victims of environmental degradation caused mostly by oil pollution and other factors, including ignorance of the crisis even as its effects are felt within the communities?

The Igbo land, the purview of this study, like most places in the world, faces enormous ecological degradation. In some ways, many people seem to be ignorant of this crisis and do not know the impacts their daily activities have on the environment. And so, these concerns do not seem to receive the serious attention they deserve community wise, locally, regionally, and


15 The Niger-Delta region of Nigeria is a coastal environment rich in biodiversity. It is the bedrock of the Nigerian oil and gas industry and accounts for more than 95 % of the country’s total export. As such, it is the major source of Nigeria’s revenue and foreign reserve. Nevertheless, Niger-Delta is hit by series of environmental challenges. Some environmentalists regard this area as the global capital of oil pollution. See Caroline Duffield, “Nigeria: ‘World Oil Pollution Capital,'” BBC News, Niger Delta, http://www.bbc.com/news/10313107, (accessed December 12th, 2020).

16 This is partly because there are no functioning institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of environmental laws and regulations to create more awareness of environmental protection in people. See National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency, http://www.nesrea.gov.ng/aboutus/, (accessed December 4th, 2020). As S. I Omofonmwan and G. I. Osa-Edoh note, environmental management of Nigeria focuses most of its laws on areas of interests to the government and so are “narrow in scope and spatially
statewide, even on individual, family basis. Some argue that environmental crises are problems of the Western world who tend to stoke fear in people with exaggerated claims and others are ignorant of the reality of the crisis and the negative impacts of the actions to the environment. The tragedy is that those who are aware of it seem to lack the courage to confront the challenges squarely. Similarly, in many others, over presumption that the earth’s resources are so bountifully unlimited as not to be exhausted by humans and their activities are partly responsible for such misconceptions. Politics and business corporations, on the other hand, contribute immensely to frustrating efforts in raising awareness of the gravity of ecological crisis.

It is much more concerning when the Catholic church in Igbo land has, apparently, not done so much in practical terms to advance and implement the vision of Pope Francis’ encyclical, Laudato Si, which calls the world’s attention to the increasingly precarious state of our common home and the need to rise strongly to arrest this threat. For the multiple “cracks in the planet that we inhabit” are too evident and detrimental to be ignored. Laudato Si’s compelling utterances are not to be ignored in any way or treated with levity. So, the people of faith cannot remain indifferent to the increasingly desperate “Cry of the earth and Cry of the poor.” The pangs and cries of the earth are of pastoral concern. However, denied or affirmed, the fact remains that the

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19 Pope Francis, Laudato Si’: On Care for our Common Home (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015), #163. Hereafter cited as LS.

20 LS., #149.
earth is rapidly imperiled and polluted\textsuperscript{21} by mostly dangerous, harmful anthropogenic activities that are constantly interfering with the climate system.

Very recently, a new report by 11, 258 Scientists from 158 countries of the world from a broad range of disciplines, biology, and ecology inter alia, raised alarm, warning that “the planet ‘clearly and unequivocally faces a climate emergency’”\textsuperscript{22} if no urgent changes in lifestyle and unbridled interference from pollution and deforestation are made. According to IPCC,\textsuperscript{23} this human interference, as it were, “represents an important additional stress, particularly to the many ecological and socioeconomic systems already affected by pollution, increasing resource demands, and non-sustainable management practices”\textsuperscript{24} currently going on in most parts of the world. This is precisely the case within the Igbo region of the world that is so much ravaged by political marginalization, and consumerism, leaving the region much more impoverished.

Therefore, it is no overstatement to say that whatever severity or extent of geographical distribution of environmental degradation impacts, it is mostly the vulnerable, the poor and even

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\textsuperscript{22} Andrew Freedman, “Climate and Environment,” \textit{The Washington Post}, November 5\textsuperscript{th}, 2019.
\textsuperscript{23} IPCC stands for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. This scientific body was jointly established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Geneva. The IPCC assesses and provides the political leaders with accurate scientific information on climate change, environmental and socioeconomic effects of climate change and to articulate response strategies to curb excessive anthropogenic activities that are contributing adversely to the climate change in the world.
generations yet unborn that are disproportionately affected. According to IPCC report, “Projected Sea level rises could impact low-lying coastal areas in densely populated nations of the developing world. Storms are most likely to strain the fragile housing infrastructure of the poorest nations.”

Detailing further on the scope of the problem in the areas of health, the IPCC report indicates that “The migration of diseases could further challenge the presently inadequate health care system of these same nations.” Also, the report notes that “Droughts or flood, …, will afflict regions already too often hit by famine, hunger, . . .” This is “because the number of days with high heat and humidity are likely to increase, heat stress impacts will also increase, especially among the elderly, the sick, children, and the poor.” These realities cannot be denied in Igbo land today.

Currently, the level of environmental degradation in the Southeastern Nigeria is devastating. It validates the IPCC warnings and reports on the impacts of environmental


26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

degradation in poor nations. For example, in the recent years, news of environmental degradation and its devastating effects has so much been reported in Nigeria, especially in the Southeastern Nigeria that experiences more rain fall, amongst other ecological crises, than other regions. Since the year 2012, flooding has remained a recurrent nightmare in the region, destroying lives and properties, and posing health risks to the population. The situation is very disturbing that despite the huge devastations already witnessed and the forewarnings about further threatening occurrences of flood both in Igbo land and beyond, one hardly notices any serious strategies to either initiate changes in lifestyles and ways of relating with the environment that are ecologically friendly, checkmate the menace or substantially mitigate its effects on people and the environment.

This deplorable situation, which is fast becoming a way of life in the contemporary Igbo society, shows how derelict virtually everyone has become towards ecological balance. It is a change in the wrong direction, which is not only affecting humans and nonhumans adversely, but they also reveal the moral or ethical lacuna in humanity and the loss of the sense of the sacred in the universe. This attitude goes contrary to the traditional decency, the sense of commitment and conservationist values and customs that preserved and promoted the community of life, protection and safety of the environment as a sacred obligation toward their religious universe. Arguably, it is a total divorce from the homage to the earth and sheer breakaway from the patronage of the mother nature which humanity had long enjoyed. That there is an urgent need to engage in comprehensive, interdisciplinary activities and conversations to find pathways of ameliorating the


effects of the crisis in today’s world, especially in developing nations, like the Igbo land, is a wholesome idea that needs all hands-on deck from various faith traditions and disciplines.

This work argues insistently that faith traditions can be the moral compasses on environmental crisis in Igbo land. Because, religious values shape people’s lives and actions, give direction and purpose to their lives in ways that the secular incentives often do not. Nature is so sacred in Igbo traditional life. When people are reminded of this religious value, it will strike a chord in them to protect the sanctity of nature which houses them. The voice and commitment of the church in this area brings moral authority to the ecological conversations. While science can come in with the facts, the church can come in with theology and ethics, doing the right thing, the moral obligation to be stewards of creation. This moral force or voice of the church, when it integrates with the traditional Igbo moral life, can be a milestone in protecting the environment. Apparently, this voice has not been so much heard in the field of ecological ministry and vocation as it is heard in other areas of life in Igbo land. It is as Peter Knox would argue that “theology in Africa is normally associated with issues of inculturation…while ecological theology is more often associated with churches of the more developed and industrialized countries.” However generalized Knox’s view is, it is pertinent to the church in Igbo land. Ecological theology, vocation, or ministry is yet to receive the attention it needs. This seeming silence in the face of

32 Anthony Asoanya argues that the attention of the Catholic church in Igbo land is more on constructing gigantic church projects. Many times, some church authorities, in attempt to source for financial support to execute some of the project tend to compromise their prophetic voices while the environment continues to decay. See Anthony Asoanya, The Ecological Crisis in Africa as a Challenge to Lasting Cultural and Sustainable Development: A Theological Approach (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang GmbH, 2004), 275-278.

ecological crisis in the land is itself a problem. There have not been any concrete ethical plans or serious ways that need an ethical action in the right perspective to combat and put to a halt the spate of environmental degradation in the land as an ethical, justice, spiritual or theological issue from the church authority in Igbo land. Thus, Anthony Asoanya laments that environmental concerns hardly feature in sermons or in other church activities.\[^{34}\]

Similarly, there are yet no such things as Lenten pastoral letters of the local bishops, seminars, or conferences both in the grassroots, local and regional levels up to the diocesan and inter-diocesan levels to raise awareness of the threat posed by human greed and unrestrained activities to the environment in Igbo land.\[^{35}\] There seems to be no available pastoral plans to engage governmental, non-governmental and independent organizations and political stakeholders on environmental issues. One hardly hears of any form of encouragement to people on the need to embark on some initiatives like tree-planting days that will help to reforest and checkmate erosion nor revamp the agricultural rituals of blessings by way of re-instilling in people’s consciousness the sacredness and benevolence of the earth so that people can treat the earth with dignity.

On the academic level, one equally wonders to what extent environmental issues are discussed in the teaming Catholic Seminaries, Religious Institutes of Consecrated life, Colleges,

\[^{34}\] Anthony Asoanya, *The Ecological Crisis in Africa as a Challenge to Lasting Cultural and Sustainable Development*, 279.

\[^{35}\] As at the time of this current work, calls were made to most Catholic Secretariats in Igbo land to find out any concrete plans the various dioceses have for ecological concerns in the place. Surprisingly, there are no plans yet nor on-going conversions in response to this challenging concern. What is left unknown is the extent environmental education features in catechesis, religious education, or other pastoral engagements to educate the teaming population of Christians in Igbo land on the need to care for the environment as a scared duty.
and schools within the confines of Igbo land.\textsuperscript{36} For the level of noticeable ignorance of the crisis in most candidates in these institutions and even among priests/pastors of the churches in Igbo land reveals a lot. And how sad and painful it is that the very same people meant to be the vanguard of the poor, including the environment or creatures other than humans, do not seem to have a fairer idea of the environmental crisis going on in Igbo land!\textsuperscript{37} Arguably, this seeming ignorance of the crisis of environment, despite “the rise of religious environmental ethics and ecological theology,”\textsuperscript{38} in the international stage, is itself a major problem. This means that the spate of ignorance and ecological degradation in Igbo land will, probably, continue to skyrocket if nothing drastically is done to halt this cataclysmic way of life and relationship to the environment.

This raises serious questions that are central to this work:

- In what ways can the Catholic church in Igbo land be actively and effectively engaged in ecological stewardship considering the corporate identity of the Igbo that is rooted in the earth, Igbo earth-friendly rituals, without compromising her belief and mission?

\textsuperscript{36} Izunna Okonkwo, \textit{The Eucharist and World Hunger: Socio-Theological Exploration} (USA: Xlibris Publishing Corporation, 2011), 471.

\textsuperscript{37} Equally, calls were made to some of the major seminary schools- Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu; Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri; Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu and Claretian Institute of Philosophy-, in Igbo land to ascertain the inclusion of Environmental theology/ethics in their course works. As at the time of this work, it is only Claretian Institute of Philosophy that has a quasi-reference to it. Spiritan International School of Theology has organized a symposium on Theology, Faith and the Environment in 2010. However, there is no inclusion of environmental theology/ethics in their curriculum yet. The dean of studies of Bigard Memorial Seminary said it is not yet in their curriculum. Probably and hopefully, these religious institutes will wake up to reality to deem it necessary to include Environmental theology/ethics into the program of studies and formation.

• How can ecological ministry become a reality in the Igbo Catholic church to coordinate efforts across agencies and disciplines, politics and interfaith communities to create resilient ethical eco-friendly incentives or eco-responsibility and awareness in people who are mostly dependent on subsistent agriculture and those who are caught up in mostly unhealthy environmental practices and consumerism to re-strategize their focus and energy into promoting healthy lifestyles that will respect the sanctity of the earth?

• In what ways can living in a sacramental universe or worldview help shape the Igbo Christian ecological ethics?

Thus, this study does seek the possibility of integrating the Igbo understanding and reverence for the earth and other gifts of nature into the Christian ecological ethics for more ecological therapies based on Igbo cultural and religious heritage. This does not mean a complete return to what was in the past. That would not only sound anachronistic, but it will also be an effort in futility. However, there are some lingering values embedded in the wisdom of the ancients that the contemporary Igbo Christian can learn and employ them in light of Laudato Si’ clarion call to save their environment from further degradation. The church in Igbo land can tap on some of these traditional religious values local to her to improve upon herself without losing sight of other sources outside of the Igbo reality to mitigate ecological degradation.

Committedly, this work calls the attention of the church to the growing crisis of the environment starting from the grassroots levels to the wider society. It argues that ecological crisis is a such a serious reality around the Igbo nation, experiencing serious loss of biodiversity, deforestation, flooding, pollution of various kinds at various quarters, etc. The church needs to partner with the traditional, local communities and the government for comprehensive and interdisciplinary measures to check the spate of ecological crises in Igbo land.
0.3 Literature review relevant to the study

While it is easier to talk about the broader perspective of the Igbo life and relationships with their world in general, it is a herculean task to pin down some works that are specifically devoted to the Igbo ecological ethics. This is because, firstly, within the Igbo world view, as in most African societies, the environment, nature, or ecology, is conceived as Mother Earth which is an embodiment of various values. And secondly, it is because everything is interconnected in the Igbo world so much that it is difficult to talk about a reality without linking it to other issues. Aside from the fact that ecological issues are relatively a ‘new’ reality in Igbo land, scholars who have reflected on the spate of environmental degradations do so in reference to other issues affecting lives in Igbo land. This validates the sense of interconnectedness of things in Igbo traditional worldview. Reflecting on this, Eugene Uzukwu notes that the Igbo world “is not a one-dimensional world: a thing stands and another stands beside it.”39 As Emmanuel N. Okafor puts it, “the Igbo holistic understanding of the inter-relationship that exists in the eco-system negates the nature-culture, rural-urban polarization” for “the nature of the Igbo spirituality cherishes the need for the interaction of beings for efficacy”40 without which harmony is not achievable.

However, the sense of interconnectedness of things in life in ecological ethics is not only limited to the Igbo world. Scholars are of the view that this understanding is also present in some other cultures of the world in their own ways. For instance, St. Francis of Assisi known for his simplicity and spirituality of oneness with nature lived interconnected life and sees God present in every creature which imposes on him the vocation to love every creature as a family member. In

39 Eugene E. Uzukwu, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, 43.

40 Emmanuel N. Okafor, “The Concept of Igbo Spirituality and Environment,” Prajna Vihara 17, no.2 (July-December 2016), 146.
the *Omnibus of St Francis*, Marion A. Habig presents Francis of Assisi’s ways that are akin to the Igbo relationship with the creation. For Francis, God is the source of all creation and is ever present in creation and creation reveals God. This belief is foundational to Francis’ conviction for love of nature. Because nature harbors and relays the divine aura, Francis lived interconnected life with both humans, non-humans and with God. John Hart calls this way of life a “sacramental consciousness” for people who view the earth as “sacramental commons” and have the sacramental duty to “care about and for creation as a whole; care about and for members of biotic community; care about and for members of the human community who are denied needed goods of creation.”

Hart argues that the world is a sacramental universe and being so, it is a sacramental commons.

As a sacramental universe, the entire creation is totally “infused with the visionary, loving, creative, and active power of the Spirit’s transcendent-immanent and creating presence.” And as a sacramental commons, creation is not only a sacred space, it is “a moment and locus of human participation in the interactive presence and caring compassion of the Spirit who is immanent and participates in a complex cosmic dance of energies, ….” As a sacramental commons, creation actualizes the meeting “place in which people of historical time integrate the spiritual meaning of sacramental with the social meaning of commons, and consequently is characterized by a sacramental community consciousness that stimulates involvement in concrete efforts to restore

41 Marion A. Habig, ed., *St Francis of Assisi Omnibus of Sources: Writings and Early Writings: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St Francis* (London: SPCK, 1973), 1-7.


43 Ibid.
and conserve ecosystems.”

In other words, the notion of creation as a sacramental commons informs both ecological and social engagements in the community. Hart wants his audience to see the ethics of reciprocal relationship among creatures of the earth. The principle of reciprocity rules out the notion that the earth exists mainly to serve humanity. This belief is not only selfish, but also destructive of other life forms because the earth is a sacrament and commons to every creature.

Leaning on this divine-creature interplay and mutual interaction of biota in the universe, Sallie McFague, “to balance the heavy transcendence of the Christian doctrine of God,” employs the metaphor of the body with various valuable parts and argues that the earth is best viewed as the body of God. Like Hart who sees creation as a sacred “moment” and “locus” of interaction of creatures in which God is immanent as the sustainer and force behind creatures, McFague argues that “The world is our meeting place with God… as the body of God, it is wondrously, awesomely, divinely mysterious,” which imposes a sacramental obligation on humans to relate respectfully to the earth. This model presents a holistic way of looking at the universe without leaning so much on clear-cut demarcation between the sacred and the profane prevalent in the Western Christian theology. In talking about the earth as God’s body, McFague says, is “embodiment,” which invites humanity to contemplate on how everything is woven in and bodied forth from God who empowers creation with the breath of life. Insistently, McFague reiterates that humanity is invited to “think about God and bodies” with a moral conscientization against greed, selfishness, and destructive tendency “to understand sin as a refusal to share the basic necessities of survival with the other

44 Ibid.


bodies” and for everyone to consider themselves “as inspired bodies profoundly interrelated with all other such bodies and yet having a special distinction of shared responsibility with God for the well-being of our planet.”

Belief in God should inspire environmental protection and respect. Exploitation of nature in any way, either in gender discrimination, racial injustice, or the degradation of other forms of life, the nonhumans, by humans violates the dignity of creation and thus constitutes an offense against the body of God who is embodied in those parts being violated. McFague argues that the cries of women who are discriminated based on gender by male chauvinism and feeling of entitlements, and the structural injustices seen in racial profiling are ecological violations. For they are “the profound oppression that some human beings experience due to their divergence from the ‘norm’ of the white, male, heterosexual body” and “the physical violence” to nature are all parts of the ecological sins and rupture to the body of God which invites humanity “to think and act differently, to think and act as if bodies matter.”

Without mincing words, McFague is arguing for transformation that will bring a new way of relationship with all earth’s entities. Humane treatment or respect for fellow humans will reflect in our relationship with the earth in which everything is rooted. McFague and Hart in some ways agree with the Igbo sacred conception of the world and mutual interaction that affirms the dignity, the freedom of others without denigrating them although there are abuses of these values in the society.

On the African front, the mounting ecological crisis in the continent has seen some African theologians and scholars calling for a reinvention of the traditional African world views that make no clear-cut separation between the profane and sacred, a world view wherein nature is seen as the

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47 McFague, vii-viii.

48 McFague, viii.
medium and arena for God’s action and interaction with creation. This world view holds that the earth is inspirted and there is constant interaction between creatures within the ambit of the fundamental relationship with God. Thus, humanity is close to themselves as they are to nature in relation to God. Consequently, any theological discussion relevant to the African world must speak to the core traditional African value of wholeness.

Consequently, John Pobee, a Ghanaian Scholar and Theologian, argues that in the mystery of the incarnation, “Christ assumes the totality of humanity and the Cosmos.” Based on this, Mercy Oduyoye, an African theologian from Ghana, notes that the creation narratives both of the Judeo-Christian theology and that of the African world view reveal that God is the source and owner of the universe so much that there is a mutual dependence of God’s people and God’s world in relation to God. In relating to nature, the traditional African person, aware of the sense of the Sacred in the world, does so accordingly in respect for the Spirit that indwells nature and again, for their good or livelihood. By far, there is a sense of neighborliness or a network of relationships between creatures in the African traditional understanding of life in the world. Oduyoye, in her book, Beads and Strands, develops an eco-theological concept of the “neighbor,” which includes “all creation, seen and unseen.” She argues that “Loving our neighbor has come to mean recycling, reforestation and cleaning up the waters around us.” It is about commitment to save, to be frugal, and preserve, not to exhaust and destroy recklessly. In corroborating with Oduyoye, Kwesi Dickson, an African scholar and theologian from Ghana, talks about the centrality of the Earth in traditional African religion so much that to understand African religion, one needs to carefully

understand the African attitude toward the Earth for the traditional African see themselves as bonded to the earth as a child is to its mother. Dickson argues that the Africans have a fellow feeling with the earth and that creation in general plays a vital role in the apprehension of reality.\textsuperscript{51} Any attack on nature disrupts relationships in nature and it boomerangs on “the community of life.”\textsuperscript{52} This captures and validates the focus of this study, rooted in the earth from which all life forms share. Any crisis somewhere disrupts the harmony elsewhere.

Thus, ecologically expressed, it is the assessment of most African theologians that life is ontologically interconnected. For example, in his books, \textit{African Religions and Philosophy} and \textit{Concepts of God in Africa}, John S. Mbiti, a theologian from East Africa, describes the ubiquity of spirits in African cosmology. It is the common belief that God and deities can inhabit and manifest in any creature or in animals. In other words, creation is susceptible to divine possession and manifestation and as such, there is a close-knit of relationship between creatures. Mbiti argues that the traditional African persons offering sacrifices or prayers to them do not do so on the basis that they are God but on the ground that they are indwelt by the God\textsuperscript{53} to whom the prayers are made and not to “the object or phenomenon.”\textsuperscript{54} This is because the African universe is more of a symbolic world. Therefore, Mbiti advises that the relationship between God and animals should not be taken too far beyond the face value but in a symbolic way.\textsuperscript{55} Though Mbiti is of the view


\textsuperscript{53} John S. Mbiti, \textit{African Religions and Philosophy}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} revised and enlarged ed. (Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1989), 50-51.

that with time, given the advancement in scientific investigation and knowledge, that chances are that the belief in the ubiquity of Spirit on the natural phenomena may fade. This view is shared by a former Nigerian Catholic prelate and Biblical Scholar, Stephen Ezeanya. Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite the advances so far in Scientific know-how and even the fast growing of the Christian faith among Africans, this traditional belief is still present in most parts of Africa who do not touch or harm certain creatures, animals, and trees, for they are regarded as totemic creatures believed to link humanity to the cosmos. However, the point here is not based on whether such belief will endure or fade with time. It is on the vital importance of such beliefs, the ecological ethics that they instill in people to preserve the natural environment from indiscriminate abuse by humans. This point is validated by Samson K Gisau, an East African Biblical Scholar, in his book, *Environmental Crisis*. Gisau, develops an eco-theology that is rooted in African cosmologies and Biblical tradition. He argues that the biblical teaching on stewardship has a lot in common with the traditional African religious expressions and practices that understand and treat the earth as sacred which instills a healthy relationship in humans towards the environment. The sense of the sacredness of the earth has far reaching consequences for the Africans. Because the earth has both metaphysical and physical realities, she commands ecological consciousness in Africans in the relationships between themselves and nonhumans for she is home for and common to all.

55 Mbiti, 91.


Contextually, in his books, *Mmanwu and Mission among the Igbo People of Nigeria: An Inculturative Dialogue*, Adolphus C. Anuka, an Igbo scholar and theologian, notes that the Igbo nation of Nigeria precisely see themselves as inextricably tied to the earth from the beginning of life to the end of it. For everything in life both physical and spiritual is owned and sourced from the earth. Anuka illustrates this view by employing the Igbo expression, “*Ala nwe Mmadu niile* meaning that ‘the earth is the owner of all human beings.’” 58 Validating Anuka, Austin Echema, an Igbo Catholic prelate and scholar, puts it more elaborately that “*Ala zuru Igbo onu, Ala onye nwe, Ala muru, Ala na-eri mmadu niile, na-echekwa omenala na mba niile* (The earth covers all Igbo, she owns, gives birth, eats everyone and is the custodian of all traditions in every society.)” 59

Rooted in the earth, for the Igbo, expresses the idea and understanding of the cosmos as a home. Hence, a conscientious effort to ensure preservation of the integrity of the earth through harmonious relationship and living since as Bonaventure Ugwu, an Igbo scholar and theologian, rightly observes, “people do not usually want to have their homes destroyed rather they do everything possible to protect and preserve it.” 60 However, this view does not seem to reflect the reality in the contemporary Igbo society judging the wave of ecological crisis in the place and the apparent dereliction virtually in many contemporary Igbo people towards the preservation and protection of the environment. Huge loss has been seen integrally in all facets of life and relationships including the gradual loss of Igbo language and environment so much that

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sustainability is a serious issue in Igbo life and culture today. It is against this background that Charles Alaribe takes on the issues of “sustainability in the Southeast Nigeria through indigenous environmental education.”

The primary aim of Alaribe is to educate his readers to see the reason for the decline in indigenous knowledge in Igbo land. He conversely proposes that the same reason for the decline could be a hone to sharpen and re-awaken in the contemporary Igbo, some ecological consciousness that can harness positive energies in re-generating traditional indigenous education for the sustainability of the environment and to save Igbo language from extinction.

All these scholars, in various ways, agree with this work on the sacredness of the Igbo traditional world and the interconnectedness of life in the Igbo community. This belief, however, holds true of African traditional society. Ecological crisis is not limited to the Igbo world. It is African as it is a global problem. The novelty of this work lies on its ability to integrate the ritual and the ethical life of the Igbo, drawing on the various traditional practices as a benchmark, to present an ecological engagement and consciousness to the contemporary Igbo Christians some of whom seem to fare without reference to the sense of the sacred in nature due to changes in lifestyle among other variables. This attitude has given rise to unbridled consumerism and ecological degradation. It argues that ecological problem reveals more of moral and faith crises in human heart, so much that people seem to fare without reference to the environment through which God sustains their life. This happens in a context where people tend to doubt, forget their historical roots, and deracinate themselves from the cultural and religious matrix in which they were socialized as indigenous people. In this way, they remain afloat without any strong identity or spirituality to fall back to, which can have drastic consequences on their environment and

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worldviews. This is one of the major problems of most contemporary Igbo people. They have the penchant to learn other people’s ways of life, imbibe by them to the extent of forgetting or looking down on their indigenous way of life.\(^6^2\) This attitude has a way of impacting adversely on the environment and other lifestyles in the community. It breeds negligence and irresponsible attitude towards the least of creation. It also affects the human community. The contemporary Igbo should be reminded that unless the least of creation is taken care of the best of creation cannot emerge. And this is one of the compelling culture care and spirituality that was prevalent in the traditional Igbo community, the practice of *Onye aghala nwanne ya* (Let no one abandon their kin).

The Igbo Church needs a rethink on the dignity of creation, and the church’s integral mission to creation, drawing inspiration from the traditional Igbo view of the ‘God indwelt world,’ a sacred space of interaction between God and creation. If salvation is integral and if God is the author and sustainer of creation, then the natural environment and its needs cannot be neglected. A model to reclaim this vision and instill same into the minds and practices of the contemporary Igbo is that of the sacramental nature of the universe. It calls people to a simple lifestyle against the culture of grabbing, consumerism, and dereliction that seems to be prevalent in the contemporary Igbo society. Equally crucial is the fact that, the sacramental worldview imposes a sacred duty on all to save the common home because everyone and everything is rooted in the earth. For one cannot claim to love the earth and mistreat or pollute her. The culture of care, therefore, is of utmost importance to preserve and save the integrity of the earth.

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0.4 Purpose of the Study

The basic assumption of this research is that things in nature are interrelated and have their origins from God and being so, creation has intrinsic values. The Igbo ecological ethics as rooted in *Omenala* (traditions) lays huge emphasis on respect for created order. Actions contrary to this order amounts to distortion and desecration.

Since for the Igbo, good life or upright living is cherished as a prerequisite for embracing ancestorship, this sense of upright living consists in careful observance of the traditions (*Omenala*), one of which respect for nature and the created order is an integral part. The Igbo ecological ethics worthy of the name should, therefore, reflect the traditional Igbo values as contained in the traditions of the land (*Omenala*), which are under the precinct of Earth-deity who is “the Queen of the Underworld,” the mainspring of life and the owner of everyone, dead or alive.  

The sacramental power of Mother Earth and the Igbo idea of maternity in domestic life is, above all, an expression of mutual dependence, communion and sustenance between humans and nature. Therefore, sustainable environment in Igbo land through the re-evaluation of Igbo spirituality of the earth is a significant means to addressing the current ecological crises that besiege the Igbo communities. Noteworthily, the Igbo spirituality values both humanity and the natural environment in which they live and operate.

Hence, the central purpose of this research is to present the Igbo cosmological world view in her spiritual, ethical ecological foundations rooted in the earth and the traditions of the Igbo as a model for Igbo Catholic ecological springboard. The specific objectives of this work are to: (i) expose the richness of Igbo Sacramental view of the universe and seek out ways to establish a

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Christian ecological ethics based on the foundations of the better elements of the Igbo worldview; (ii) to derive an ethical ecological model that is local to the Igbo which would enable them to relate well with both nature and the God of creation; for the safety of their lives and that of the natural environment; (iii) to draw the attention of the contemporary Igbo Christians to see nature as gifts to be cherished and preserved and so assume their proper role which is to relate with nature in ways that do not violate her dignity but promote the mutual interactions among creatures.

0.5 Scope and limitation of the study

This work focuses on the Igbo sacramental nature of the universe with the view to using this traditional spirituality to fashion out an Igbo Christian ecological ethics. This basic concern already limits the scope. However, it recognizes the vastness of African traditional spirituality. For precision, it focuses more on a given context, which is the Igbo, that is also vast in its own way. This work cannot exhaust the entire body of knowledge as found in the notion of harmonious, commodious environment in the Igbo sacred universe.

Secondly, the Igbo is a vast ethnic group of people with subtle differences in cultural practices as there are also dialectical differences although they are mutually intelligible. These subtle differences are perceived in some of the dialogue partners in this work. Some either focus more in the areas well known to them or try to make a leap to embrace all. Similarly, the Igbo worldview is holistic and complex. In this sense, it is difficult to talk about a reality in isolation of others. In so doing, one runs the risks of constant repetition of the same reality in different or similar nuances. This work acknowledges this limitation ahead of time. Also, as crucial as it may be, a precise study of Igbo religion is not given any independent consideration in this work. It has been so to avoid unnecessary repetitions of the same ideas. For in several ways, the Igbo belief system will always be talked about during the study. Again, this work uses environment and
ecology, nature, or creation interchangeably. It has been so to focus on the reality of interconnectedness of things. Regardless of whichever concept that is used, our concentration is on interaction of all life forms that are open to God, that can be permeated or inspirited by God for various or specific purposes.

The term church here is gregariously used although the Catholic church remains the major focus of this study. However, environmental issues embrace everyone in Igbo land. In various ways, Christians in the contemporary Igbo land mutually interact and consume the same messages, especially the charismatic or Pentecostal movements in either of the churches or centers of worship, adoration, crusade, etc. Many times, some of these movements organize a community, village, or family prayers, (“liberation” as they call it), which embrace every willing person in the community or family. When this happens, most times, people tend to carry out whatever orders the ministers of such programs give to them as a remedy to their problems. For example, the order could be to clear some common groves in the community scapegoated as the harbinger of evil.64 Most community members, whether Catholics or Pentecostals, carry out this order that is detrimental to the health of the environment. Instances of such will be seen in this work that may raise the question of which church is being talked about.

Despite these limitations, this work tries to bridge the gap in knowledge on how the Igbo appreciate their traditional religious values based on their worldview. As a result, this work will be limited on constructing a much coherent platform for additional work on the subject matter by

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way of supplying insight into the communal values of the Igbo, looking at some remarkable ideals and practices as they relate to harmonious environments.

0.6 Significance of the study

The international multimedia agency, Voice of America, (VOA), had reported sometime, in November 2008 and 2009, on the menace and havoc erosion wreaks in Nigeria. It designated the whole of Southeastern Nigeria, which is the geographical location of Igbo land, as an ecological disaster area due to erosion. On the local news, Okechukwu Aziatika, a News reporter of The Nigerian Voice, (TNV), reports on the dose of environmental disaster in the Southeastern Nigeria, with reference to Anambra, among other states where “erosion ogre has progressively been an albatross in Igbo land” due to indiscriminate human activities. Aziatika cautions that “greater ecological disaster” is eminent “if no serious intervention is structured to combat the awful degradation” going on Igbo land. Although serious ecological problems exist everywhere the world over, including various parts of Nigeria, the focus of this research is on Igbo land, the Southeastern Nigeria. The research is significant because it raises the awareness of the loss of the traditional Igbo ecological practices among the majority of Christians in Igbo that was based on the traditional Igbo religious and cultural systems and practices, which I argue contributed immensely to the ecological crises in the area. The loss of the traditional ecological ethics and


67 Aziatika, (accessed March 10, 2019).
rituals is itself a greater form of erosion of a peoples’ identity and narrative. As this work will observe in the recommendation section, ecological amnesia is dangerous. A wake-up call is important in this direction for the church in Igbo land to embrace ecological theology and ministry as an integral part of the universal church’s life and ministry. Chapter three of this work will dwell more on this reality both from the Biblical, theological, and traditional perspectives. This work contributes, howbeit small ways, to providing key insights in ecology, environmental change, natural resource management and biodiversity conservation as well as the spiritual awareness that weaves through these realities.

Therefore, unearthing some Igbo past ethical and ritual traditions are, no doubts, an invaluable reservoir and source for environmental lessons and practices for the contemporary teeming population of the Igbo to fall back to, especially on the sacredness of the land on which the Igbo depend for life. The Igbo have a tradition that is deeply rooted in nature and nature is respected for what it is, as a scared space. The importance attached to nature in the customs and traditions of the Igbo explains the sense of community of life in the Igbo world, the consciousness that all creatures are part of all others, that humans share the same home with nature. This research seeks how best to renew desire in some socio-historically constituted forms of knowledge that kept the fauna and flora of the Igbo society in check from falling into extinction as witnessed currently so that these knowledge forms can co-exist in conjunction with and inform rightly the apparent western world view that the Igbo people have embraced.

Significantly, it is my view that ethics of ecology that is structured according to the good sentiments embedded in the traditional cosmology of the Igbo people will, no doubt, serve as an added incentive for the Igbo natives to embrace the Christian faith even more tenaciously without losing their ecological cultural traditions and practices and be poised to constructively embrace
interreligious dialogue with faith traditions on environmental issues. The environment and its components are suffering from abuses, sometimes more from those who already profess faith in Christ. This dissertation, due to its local texture, will contribute to addressing this ill-behaved tendency and inspire greater respect for nature especially within the Igbo context. Equally, it will lead to a greater appreciation of the sacraments in the church. An indigenous research worthy of the name can only be significant when it is beneficial to the context for which it is carried out. This study thus presents the opportunities for promoting ecological sustainability in Igbo land and contributes to the growing literary corpus on eco-theology, albeit in a unique fashion.

0.7 Research Methodology

Being an effort to develop within the precinct of the current ecological crisis in Igbo land, the pastoral and ethical relevance of the constant need for peace and oneness with the environment, this research follows the methodological tools of expository analysis of the sources of the Igbo cosmological view, which is holistic in nature. It comprises the historical, analytical, and prescriptive approaches engaged in doing the research.

A historical review of the shifts in traditional way of life in the Igbo religious and cultural society is engaged to gain the necessary historical background of the work. This sheds light on the core question of dialogue or integration of the traditional ecological life to Christian ecological ethics. Historical insight is necessary for a strong ecological spirituality. The importance of this is captured in the words of Pope Francis,

Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A cultural, spiritual
and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.\textsuperscript{68}

Thus, a historical approach to this work gives credibility to knowing where and how such history either marred or shaped our current experience and relationship with nature, without which ecological theology and or spirituality remains shaky. Studying these historical invaluable pathways is much more pressing during this era of global climate change and cultural identity in combating the crisis starting from local communities to regional, national, and international levels. One of the dominant clichés here is the emphasis that this work does not advocate a total return to the past. However, it argues that it is of historical interest to know what the conceptions and practices of the traditional life about the environment were.\textsuperscript{69}

As a theological reflection, this implies that this research reflects more on the sacred nature of the Igbo relationship with their natural environment, how this worldview shapes their life and identity as a religious people who seek union with God through the natural environment. Also, it examines theological discourses of the Catholic Magisterium and encyclicals on nature. This is necessary to build confidence in the Igbo Christians some of whom have been wrongly styled to believe and relate with nature as a mere matter. Jesus’ incarnation and relationship with nature has a profound theological significance on nature. On this basis of this, we can fall back to the rich

\textsuperscript{68} L.S., #202.

\textsuperscript{69} This requires an explanation of the traditional Igbo worldview which influences the way they organize themselves and their society and erect those social control measures and ritual elements that define their attitudes to the environment. It is worthy of note to say that regardless of the enormous changes in the contemporary Igbo society culturally and environmentally, there are still some vestiges of the traditional life found in the contemporary society. At least, the languages and institutions of the modern Igbo society, which apparently, are in contradistinction with the traditional ethics and religion, have still, albeit in small measures, some elements that are patterned on traditional models. However differently, the Igbo society still has their myths, proverbs, rituals, and songs that reflect the spiritual, moral, and aesthetic messages about the environments and their relationship with the natural world like those of the traditional society.
cultural and religious heritage of the Igbo and their Christian heritage to fashion a balanced ecological ethics for the Igbo Christians.

This methodology utilizes important written works on ecological issues in Igbo land. The literary method is of great benefit since it shows to what extent scholars have researched and written on the subject. This involves library resources, electronic and mass media as well as conferences and symposia held on global climate change and environmental issues in Igbo land. Books, magazines, booklets, posters, etc., form part of the literary search. This means that this methodology is meant to be expository, analytical, integrative, and contributive to draw the attention of the Igbo Christian community to the traditional ecological ethics of simplicity and preservative or maintenance culture for ecological balance and spirituality.

0.8 Chapter Analysis

Dissertation shall be presented in four Chapters. Chapter one deals with the identity and geographical location of the Igbo people in Nigeria, their organizational structures for effective leadership and the extent of ecological crisis in the land. The chapter maintains that the organizational structures in Igbo land have their various ways of interacting with the environment and maintaining balance in the community. Therefore, it behooves the various family heads, village heads, elders, parents, and significant others to ensure the observance of law and order in the society for the maintenance of cosmological balance. It is logical to assert that the traditional Igbo leaders, by their roles as ‘moral agents’ and beacons of light, are Earth’s moral overseers. This is tied to the religious life of the Igbo. Everything within this world, apparently, resolves

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70 Uchendu, 12.
around religion.71 Ecological awareness, however the novelty of the expression, is not entirely new in the Igbo society. This reality holds true of other African communities, equally.

Understanding the nature of ecological crisis in Igbo land is very important. However the context, this works is aware that ecological crisis is not limited to the Igbo world. It is a global reality although, as noted earlier in this work, the crisis has more devastating impacts on poorer nations and communities. Hence, the need to not only be aware of the severity of the crisis but also, there is a need for communities, institutions, individuals, etc., to be proactive, to develop strategies to deal with the crisis locally within their context. This is the thrust of the later section of this chapter, which is majorly on the causes of ecological crises in Igbo land currently.

Igbo traditional values, social, religious, and otherwise are declining with an alarming pace due to undue influences and the penchant by the average Igbo to copy and adapt easily to foreign way of life. This form of colonization is felt both in cultural and religious expressions and as a result, the environment suffers lots of violence. Here, emphasis is laid on the damage and abuses now witnessed in Igbo land, especially regarding environmental degradation. Apart from natural causes, which are not deniable in this work, most environmental degradations in Igbo, as anywhere else, are basically the consequences of human actions. Poverty, ignorance, political irresponsibility on the part of the ruling elites is an integral part of causes of ecological crisis in Igbo. Other factors include changes in lifestyle, population growth.

Besides, one of the areas of growing concern in some Igbo communities that is impacting seriously on the environment, this chapter argues, is the excesses of some Christian liberation

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71 Religion permeates all aspect of life from procreation, economic and political life, even to storytelling. See Rems N. Umeasiegbu, *Words are Sweet: Igbo Stories and Storytelling* (Leiden: Brill 1982), 3.
movements championed by Pentecostal denominations or simply known as radical Christian evangelism. Incidentally, this unorthodox way of conducting ‘family’ or ‘communal liberation’ and exorcism is gradually infiltrating into the Catholic and mainline churches. This has led to some “priests going purely charismatic in their celebrations of the liturgy, appearing like healers to retain their congregation. As example is when a priest blesses salt … and directs the Christian in question to pour them on the farms to ward off danger.”

Some claim that the evil spirits disturbing an individual, a family or a community are inhabiting in some trees or the scared grooves around. And so, the way out, as many claim, is to fell down the trees and destroy the sacred grooves. This work argues that this form of Christian evangelism denigrates and violates the traditional Igbo worldview. In a society, like the Igbo, where the cultivation of the land is among the fundamental societal concerns, Mother Earth is of paramount importance in its worldview. Attacking or denigrating this sacred cult that constitutes everything for a people, a kind of “war on culture,” means a destruction of people’s narrative. It argues that the erosion of some Igbo values due to unhealthy influences “that began in the Colonial Era and persisted through present-day neo-colonialism” impacted on the way the Igbo relate to nature today. The instrumental values placed on nature in the contemporary Igbo society goes contrary to the intrinsic values that characterized relationships in the traditional Igbo society.


However, this does not imply that everything within the traditional Igbo society was ecologically okay. But there was respect for the cosmic order and the sacred institutions. This respect helped in protecting and conserving nature. The emphasis here is that if the tendency to abuse nature and destroy environmental resources is not curtailed, Igbo land will suffer drastically from lots of desertification, erosion, greater loss of biodiversity, morality and faith than what is witnessed presently. There is a need to draw lessons from the ecological friendliness and rituals that helped the traditional Igbo society to maintain balance and lived harmoniously with their environment. This chapter seeks to establish that the ecological disaster in Igbo land today mirrors the moral crisis in the heart and could be regarded as sinful. It is in a way a crisis of faith with overarching consequences on health. In a certain sense, it is a crack on the sacramental nature of the Igbo universe.

Chapter two reflects on the deeply symbolic and sacramental nature of the African Igbo conception of the universe. In fact, the Igbo in particular, the universe is spiritual; everything that happens in the physical is considered to have spiritual implications. Hence, there is an intimate connection between the physical and spiritual realms in the Igbo worldview. Almost everything is spiritualized. Thus, this chapter examines the compenetrating nature of the Igbo world. It finds out that this holistic view has some prospects to understanding the incarnation of the Divine Word whose coming into the world changed the course of nature. With Jesus, the world is charged with more sacred aura. It thus lays a foundation for mutual interaction that seeks the good and wellness of the other. Hence for the Igbo, the world is God-indwelt. Nature for the Igbo is therefore a sacrament; a sign that points to the immense power and goodness of God (Chukwu); and so, they

75 Josephine McKenna, “Pope Francis says destroying the Environment is a sin,” The Guardian, September 1, 2016.
make conscious effort to protect the resources of nature in their environment from abuse or desecration. This is done through rituals.

As the chapter establishes, the Igbo world is laden with rituals from birth to death. Like everything in this world, rituals are like a way of life. Virtually, these rituals have ecological significance. Constant involvement with them renews life, the creative energy to continue to revive and sustain life. To maintain this sacred world view for balance, the Igbo devised some social control measures to check the human excesses.

Since language has a huge psychological impact, the Igbo devised a means of linguistic competence in proverbial forms, folklores, songs to preserve ecological life. Noteworthy is the fact that Igbo proverbs have ecological significance. They feature not only on daily interactions but also in communion and communication with God, the deities and even addressing natural phenomena in personified ways. The ability to know and use the proverbs creates and furthers ecological awareness and practices.

This work argues that the Igbo worldview contains deep respect and reverence for nature that could help to construct an ecological ethics that would be of greater benefit to mitigate against ecological crises. Environmental protection and conversation are a way of life for the traditional Igbo. Therefore, the chapter maintains that the church in Igbo land needs to study these religious values to formulate a much broader ecological ethics that speaks to the values of the people to solve their local problems as well as contributing to the global summons for ecological preservation.

As noted earlier, this must be conscientiously studied to sieve out the wheat from the chaff. This is because there are some beliefs and practices espoused by the Igbo religious worldview that
are not entirely wholesome considering the Gospel and contemporary time. Elements of fear needs
to carefully be examined. Therefore, this chapter asserts that love and respect, not irrational fear
should inform people’s attitude to nature.

Following the thoughts in the previous chapter, chapter three draws heavily from the
church’s magisterial teachings, and traditional practices and beliefs to propose models for
constructing an Igbo Christian ecological ethics. As earlier noted, the Igbo society, like other
African societies, has traditional values on which their life and interaction with the natural
environment are grounded. These values speak meaningfully to the Igbo and will, therefore, help
them to appreciate deeply their faith as Christians in response to their obligation to care for the
earth as God’s creation more than anything dressed in exotic garb that is foreign to their
worldviews.

However, aside from God, the deities and the ancestors, the Igbo spirituality and life are
anchored on humanity and their environment. Therefore, if it is true that no one knows a story
better than the mere actors of the same story, then the Igbo historical narratives can be more valid
from the Igbo viewpoint. Deductively, the local resources available to the Igbo can be employed
to solve their ecological problems. Insights from movements in Zimbabwe and Kanya with green
and tree planting initiatives as rooted in the traditions of Ubuntu/ukama (relatedness or
bondedness) and Harambe (togetherness) show to what great extent that local knowledge can go
in combating ecological disaster. This is the crux of “Nku di Mba na-eghere Mba nri, (the firewood
in a place cooks the meals in the place), which situates the Igbo ethics of Egbe bere, Ugo bere
(live and let live) and the traditional rite of Ndu miri, Ndu azu (the community of life- health for
the fish, health for the river) within the context of ecological conversation for the Igbo Christian.
These values are of vital importance in constructing ecological ethics that speaks to the very heart and spirituality of the Igbo given the spate of the crisis in place.

Similarly, theologically speaking, Christian ecological ethics in Igbo land will make sense more when talks about the ecological Jesus or cosmic Christ is approached from the Igbo understanding of their ancestors who lived harmoniously with the environment and with their fellow humans and thus stand as models for upright living that emphasizes on the dignity of created order. Having the mindset or thinking like Christ who loves and cares for the tiniest of creatures will ultimately create a proper attitude or the manner of behavior in imitation of Christ and subsequently our attitude towards nature and our neighbor. This chapter, following Pope Francis, calls for ecological spirituality, which involves a daily conversion, change of lifestyle to realize the desired change to make the environment much greener, likewise faith and life.

Chapter four wraps up this work. It evaluates the theses of this work. While it argues that the traditional Igbo practices and ecological wisdom can be a great asset to the Church in Igbo land to fashion out for itself some principles and practices to meet with its local needs ecologically, it is also not oblivious of the fact that the Igbo traditional beliefs and practices were not entirely wholesome. Some areas need modification for them to be appealing to the contemporary Igbo community. Inasmuch as the world and the church today seek support from indigenous cultural practices for their “hidden source of wisdom,” which does not “dominate nature”76 distilled listening and conscientious study of the traditional values need to be done to avoid any form of cultural romanticism and to not engage in “another oppressive form of colonialism”77 from within

the cultural milieu. In response to this, the work recommends that a catechism of creation that considers the ecologically friendly Igbo traditional values be put in place.

Besides, it recommends that the church should establish ecological Sunday with suitable readings that would feed the people of God in the homily or teaching of the said day on the integrity of creation. It argues that the faith communities should be admonished to care for creation not necessarily as a duty reposed on them but because nature is a sacred gift. This might be of immense help in curbing ecological degradation when people are reminded of their oneness with nature and the need to protect it through humane and moral practices.

Tree planting practices among others are to be encouraged among the faithful. Sequel to this, the church needs to establish environmental society that will cooperate with the governments and non-governmental organizations in putting ideas together for ecological healing of the land. On ecological education, the work recommends inclusion of ecological ethics in the various houses of formation and Mission schools and Institutions in Igbo land. Ecological education together with publications like diocesan newspapers, media houses of the church (television/radio stations), diocesan Lenten pastorals and communiques of the regional conferences of Catholic bishops and seminars of the priests and religious and non-ordained ministers within provincial levels can go a long way to reinventing and promoting the simple lifestyle of life and preservationist culture that thrived in the Igbo traditional society into the contemporary Igbo Christians. In addition to these, the chapter proposes that church must not forget the centrality of women and the youth in decision making and implementation of any policy for a proper and lasting solution without ecological amnesia continues to reoccur. It challenges the Catholic church in Igbo land to rise to her

ecological vocation and mission as a veritable means of realizing the harmony and peace of the Gospel of creation. The environment is itself a mission field that needs “evangelization” through care and salutary relationship to preserve and conserve its sanctity. However, the environment also is missionary to humans in various ways since it is a divine ambassador, a sacred space for encounter with the God who nourishes us through the fruits of the earth. Greater attention is to be given to environmental needs. Therefore, negligence to this great area of mission can no longer be condoned in the wake of global warming, environmental issues most of which are affecting the Igbo society today.
CHAPTER ONE

IGBO SOCIO-CONTEXT AND ECOLOGICAL ISSUES IN THE LAND

1.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the life and governance of the Igbo people, and their location in Nigeria. It establishes the centrality of communal life which embraces the socio-cultural contexts of the human persons as well as the non-human persons that constitute an integral aspect of life in the community. Community is so important to the Igbo traditional society, and together with the family and other structural units, it plays greater role in the organization of life and harmony of all earthlings. Normally, life is organized from a group of families that claim a descent from a common ancestor, forming what is traditionally called Umunna, kinspersons. This monogenetic unit defines and shapes the religious, political, social and the military life of an ethnic group. This includes environmental issues that affect the community. As a result, this unit of families helps in the formation of ecological consciousness in the young minds through the quotidian life and other socio-cultural practices that help in the socialization processes in the family and the community.

Like other places, ecological practices are a crucial duty within the Igbo community. They factor in most decisions and actions of the Igbo about homesteads, settlements, health, agricultural life, wellbeing of all, etc. As a result, this chapter also examines the Igbo concept of ecology and some of the factors responsible for the current ecological crisis in the land. The Igbo traditional society has a democratic space for the thriving of all life forms so that ecological problem is perceived as a threat to this life-enhancing space. It argues that the contemporary Igbo society has more ecological crises owing to a variety of factors like urbanization, consumerism, dereliction, quest for materialism and western life. Other factors include the colonial and missionary adventures to the Igbo land that tended to undermine most traditionally held beliefs which helped
in keeping the community or the environment from exploitation and pollution. A reclaim of some of these traditional values or heritages can be of great help in (re)instilling ecological consciousness in the contemporary Igbo. It can also be a boost to the Church in the fight against environmental degradation.

In most ecological dialogues of today, religion features prominently. In other words, religion plays key roles as far as environmental issues are concerned. Findings reveal that creation owes its origin to God. Therefore, it behooves to faith and reason to recognize the dignity of creation. This renewed religious consciousness is believed to make people cultivate the attitude of respect and care for creation as they engage in various developments. This chapter concludes with the religious contributions to environmental discussions. It makes sense even more as the Igbo society, like other Africans, is a religious universe. A balanced religious disposition towards the environment can help in appreciating nature as a gift and a channel of relationship, communion between humans and God and with nonhumans to maintain harmony.

1.2 Understanding the Igbo People of Nigeria

The Igbo form one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Some scholars estimate that the Igbo population is about 27 million of which 19 million are believed to be in Nigeria and about 8

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78 Orthographically, there are “Igbo” and “Ibo” in some Igbo texts. The most appropriate and commonly used by the indigenes is Igbo. Scholars root this misspelt appellation to the colonizers and missionaries. They could not pronounce the ‘gb’ in a word and chose to go by ‘Ibo’ or ‘Ebo.’ See Theophilus Okere, Philosophy, Culture and Society in Africa (Nsukka: Afro-Orbis Publications Ltd., 2005), 123-124. See Elizabeth Isichei, A History of the Igbo People (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1975), xv.

79 Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation with more than 250 ethnic groups and over 500 native languages. The dominant ethnolinguistic groups are the Hausa 30%, Yoruba 15.5%, Igbo 15.2%, Fulani 6%, Tiv 2.4%, Kanuri/Beriberi 2.4%, Ibibio 1.8%, Ijaw 1.8%, other 24.7%) represent the members of the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria. The official language is English while the three major native languages are Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. See Central
million living in other parts of the world. Augustine Okwu contests this statistics, reasoning that it decimates the Igbo population for political reasons. According to Okwu, “Today it is fair to estimate the population to be between thirty-five and forty million.” If Okwu is right with this estimation, it means that by now this number has increased more than it was when Okwu was writing. However, whichever number one decides to go by, between 27 million to 40 million, the fact remains that the Igbo is one of the densely populated regions and a major ethnic group in Nigeria. They constitute one-third of Nigeria’s 180 million population, which, according to Worldometer, is 2.64% of the world’s population. No doubt, the Igbo have a great population which can be considered as strength and weakness ecologically. All the same, this great population contributes greatly to the economical and religious life of the region and beyond.

The word ‘Igbo’ refers to “The community of people.” It is both the people, language, and territory, all the cultural and religious expressions termed Igbo, as distinct from other tribes in Nigeria or Africa, although there are similarities existing among the African peoples and cultures. The Igbo people speak a common language, Igbo, with dialectical variations. Similarly, there exist some cultural variations among them. This raises the question of homogeneity of the Igbo. While


C. K Meek is of the view that the Igbo are not homogenous but have a lot in common and so could be best described as a tribe. T. U. Nwala opines that “The diversity and variation found in Igbo culture have been attributed to the diverse ecological situations in which Igbo people are found and partly to factors such as the influences which other cultures have had on their own in the course of contact.” The language, which serves as one of the unifying factors among the Igbo, as some Igbo historians and cultural anthropologists agree, belongs to the Kwa group of languages of the Niger-Congo. Kalu Ogbaa and Catherine Acholonu are of the view that the Igbo people belong to the Sudanic linguistic group of the Kwa division. According to Ogbaa, the Igbo language “is a member of the Kwa language subfamily of West Africa, which was developed as a special language about 4,500 years.” Similarly, Acholonu corroborates with Kalu and argues that “Based on our ethno-semantic analysis of the relationship between European, Asian and languages of the Niger-Congo family of African languages, using the Igbo example, we can comfortably assert that Proto-Indo-European was a language of the Niger-Congo family, not unrelated to the Kwa family of languages.” However, what we do not know from these scholars is the extent that this subfamily linguistic similarity helps in fostering development and mutual understanding among the Kwa group of language speakers. What relevance does it have to the contemporary speakers

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87 Nwala, 15.
in the fast ecologically degenerating society amidst other issues that beset most African communities?

Speaking for the Igbo particularly, the language and the name, ‘Igbo,’ as Nwala argues, promote unity, cultural interests among other issues like kinship structure, cult symbols, food, etc.\(^{90}\) In other words, despite the dialectical differences that exist among the Igbo, they understand each other when they speak. This confirms the Igbo proverbial saying that “Igbo na-asu n’olu n’olu mana akwa a ukwara oburu otu” i.e., the Igbo speak in different dialects but when they cough it becomes one. This means that there is a central Igbo, called Igbo izugbe, which is written and understood by all the Igbo people. The language is mutually intelligible.

Uniquely, the language is characterized by its tonality, an absence of inflectional endings and the monosyllabic root-words. Being tonal, Igbo language is polysemous and musical. Therefore, context and stress on a particular syllable are important in determining the meaning of what is being referred to. For instance, “the word akwa could mean four different things, …‘clothes’, ‘bed,’ ‘egg,’ or ‘to cry.”\(^{91}\) Regarding the musicality of the language, Sonia Bleeker notes that “the variation in connotation makes it a rich and musical language.”\(^{92}\) This is of great value in enriching and preserving both the language and the culture of the Igbo who tend to see their world, every action and experience, and their environment musically. Cajetan E. Ebuziem observes that “the average Igbo person likes to accompany his or her work with music…. In a more traditional setting, there are varieties of music for various occasions,” seasons “and as


experience shows, in the middle of the night.”\textsuperscript{93} However, it is worthy to note that the Igbo do not play music just for fun. For the Igbo, music has a compelling force or spirit that helps to recreate the society, to educate the young about life and the preservation of the sacred traditions, protection of the environment and maintenance of the created order. This point is well noted by Emmanuel Obiechina in his 1994 Ahiajoku lecture, which explores the creative imaginations of the Igbo in preserving their culture through music and creative storytelling. Obiechina argues that, “… whether in the past or present of Igbo life, storytelling, music, holds a prominent place among the people and affords them the best chances for defining and enhancing their humanity.”\textsuperscript{94} Among all story forms and uses, Obiechina talks about the value of “akuko ala (stories of the earth) and akuko ifo (made of tales about human beings, personified animals and animated trees, nature and spirits, that constitute the large corpus of Igbo oral stories.”\textsuperscript{95} All these, Obiechina says, play crucial roles in keeping the flora and fauna intact. They transmit Igbo values to the “young participants at story sessions” and through them “the widest varieties and textures of words are acquired.”\textsuperscript{96} This validates the point earlier noted about the socialization process in Igbo land and the roles that families and the kinspersons play in teaching morals and ecological consciousness to the young through the quotidian life and other cultural expressions.

\textsuperscript{93} Cajetan E. Ebuziem, Doing Ministry in the Igbo Context: Towards an Emerging Model and Method for the Church in Africa (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 34.


\textsuperscript{95} Obiechina, 25.

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
1.2.1 Identity of the Igbo

Generally, the Igbo possess certain traits which identify and distinguish them from other ethnic groups in Nigeria. These characteristics include linguistic traits with various dialects as noted above; a significant measure of cultural traits; a political trait that is republican in nature; an egalitarian social structure; economic traits; a distinct marriage system; comparable family life; traditional forms of religion among others.\(^{97}\) Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, one of the eight generals to rule Nigeria since after her independence from the British 1960, an elder statesman and the first Nigeria’s elected President after sixteen years of nightmarish military dictatorships, made a protracted research on the three major ethnics tribes in Nigeria namely, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. He remarks that the Igbo are “the most westernized, most enterprising, most astute, most dynamic, most intelligent (smart), and the most technically gifted tribe found among the black race. The Hausa/Fulani and the Yoruba have limitations. But an Igbo man [sic] doesn’t see any limitation. An average Igbo man [sic] is highly competitive unlike the Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani.”\(^{98}\) These great traits or qualities of the Igbo stand them out in so many aspects of life in Nigeria and beyond. In a certain sense, Obasanjo’s observation is right. However, Obasanjo fails to observe the humane or humanizing aspect of the Igbo who are said to be loving, caring, respectful, hospitable and can build bridges of relationships across the nation and beyond. In other words, the Igbo are friendly and relatable. They believe in being good both to their guests and their hosts by way of maintaining comic balance since it is believed that hospitality to one’s guests, hosts or neighbor strengthens


life. It is also a form of generosity or respect to the ancestors who can come visiting as guests or anyone. This will come out more when we consider the Igbo cosmic relationship in the later chapter two of this work.

Aside from these features, traditionally, the Igbo are well known for their zest for trade, industry and adventure and are known to survive difficult situations in life. Noting this fact, Nzewuba Ugwu asserts that

Even though ‘ala’ Igbo is the only territory the Igbo call a home, there is no part of the earth the Igbo do not find abode- ranging from their homeland to the New World, the Artic and the Alps, they are seen in all walks of life- from ghettos of the dirty world to the Hollywood villages, from the streets and toilet cleaning jobs of the world, to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Offices of Americas.99

There is no gainsaying that the Igbo are hardworking and outstanding in their search for survival in life. Like most people of the world, their strength can also be their weakness in their pursuit of material things. Oftentimes, the Igbo assertiveness and quest for survival has had negative stereotypes on them in Nigeria that they are profiled by others as too domineering, arrogant, elitist, and materialistic, cunning, although they have manifest egoistic and individualistic tendencies that tend to contradict their sense of communal and concentric way of life. Well-educated and versatile they are in so many ways, the Igbo have enormously contributed to the growth and development of Nigeria in various facets of life.

1.2.2 The Location of the Igbo in Nigeria

It is primarily important to note that the Igbo geographical area under study is what some scholars would call a culture area by which is meant “a geographical area occupied by peoples

whose culture exhibits a significant degree of similarity with each other as well as significant
degree of dissimilarity with the culture of others.”100 That said, geographically, the Igbo people
are located at the Southeastern part of Nigeria. In the contemporary dispensation, the Igbo region
covers the States of Anambra, Imo, Enugu, Abia and Ebonyi, and some parts of Rivers, Delta,
Benue, Kogi, and Cross Rivers States, among the 36 States of Nigeria, with Abuja as the Federal
Capital Territory. The territory of the Igbo lies latitude 5 to 7 degrees north of the equatorial rain
forest region and longitude 6 to 8 degrees east of the Greenwich line, occupying an area of about
15,800 square miles.101 While a good number of Igbo communities are found in Rivers, Delta,
Benue, Kogi and Cross Rivers States respectively, the Igbo mainly are found in the five Igbo States
of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. For political reasons, these Igbo communities in other
five States were merged to those areas by the government of the time mainly as a way of
decimating the population of the Igbo. Another important reason is economically motivated,
mainly because of the mineral resources in them, mostly in Rivers and Delta States.

Though mostly located at the Southeastern Nigeria,102 the Igbo people virtually live all over
the world given their penchant for travels for commerce, education, work or for some other
reasons. While the other two major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Hausa and the Yoruba, inhabit
other parts of Africa, the Igbo are found as an indigenous people in no other country in the world


101 Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture: A Study of the Interaction of Christianity

102 A recent study detailing the settlements in Igbo land shows that ‘with a density of about
1,000 persons per square kilometer within an area of about 40,000 km², Igbo land is the most
populated region of Nigeria and the part of West Africa with the thickest density of people.” See
Adolphus C. Anuka, *Mmanwu and Mission among the Igbo people of Nigeria*, 31. See also Apollos
O. Nwauwa and Ogechi E. Anyanwu, eds., *Culture, Precepts, and Social Change in Southeastern
Nigeria*, xii.
other than their present location in Nigeria. On this point, Kalu Ogba insists that beside the Igbo speaking people of Nigeria, “there are no other Igbo-speaking peoples elsewhere in the world.”

Given this, it is most unlikely, therefore, that the Igbo migrated from elsewhere to their present geographical location. However the varied accounts of origin of the Igbo, which are not so relevant to this work, what is not disputable is the fact that Igboland had been peopled by the ancient Igbo prior to the advent of Bantu migration, that began about 500 BC and AD 200 and had reached an outstanding degree of development and cultural complexity by 500 BC and AD 1000.


104 The origins of the Igbo are quite controversial and very convoluted. There has not been any generally accepted narrative of origin. Scholars like Adiele Afigbo points variously to the Niger-Benue confluence and Nri, an ancient Igbo kingdom, as the monolithic point of origin and dispersal to other parts of Igbo land. Others like P. A. Talbot, H. Henderson and G. I. Jones locate the epicenter of the Igbo origin around Orlu Isuama axis. See Percy A. Talbot, *Some Nigerian Fertility Cults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), 1-9. See also George H. Jones, *The Earth-Goddess: A Study of Native Farming on West Africa* (London: Longmans and Green, 1939), 1-4. In recent years and in contemporary discussions, there have emerged the Igbo-Jewish origin or the lost tribe of Israel. This account has been thrown into mix and is popularized by most Igbo publicists, some self-acclaimed historians and romanticists who seek to ascertain the identity and origin of the Igbo. Some have gone into tracing the Igbo-Jewish ancestry connection by conducting a DNA analysis and comparison in Houston, Texas. See Polycarp Nwafor, “Jewish/Igbo Relationship: Jewish Scientists Storm Nnewi to conduct DNA Test,” *Vanguard News*, w.w.w.vanguardngr.com/2017/02/jewishigbo-relationship-jewish-scientists-storm-nnewi-conduct-dna-test/ (accessed February 4th, 2021). Others, conducting cross-cultural research comparing Igbo and the Jews, reveal that “the word ‘Igbo’ evolved as a corruption of the word ‘Hebrew.’” See Chika Oduah, “Nigeria’s Igbo Jews: ‘Lost Tribe’ of Israel?” *CNN*, w.w.w.cnn.com/2013/02/01/world/Africa/Nigeria-jews-igbo/index.html, accessed (December 1st, 2020). Others- missionaries and ethnographers like George Thomas Basden, while laying claims to the Igbo-Jewish similarities in ritual practices like naming ceremonies and some common traditional practices which include circumcision of male children eight days after birth, refraining from eating ‘unclean’ or tabooed foods, celebration of the New Moon and conduction of marriage ceremonies under a canopy, advises prospective missionaries to Igbo land to pay great attention to the Levitical Laws on their affinity to the Native Law. See George T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (North Charleston, South Carolina: CreateSpace, 2017), vi. All these accounts are attempts to determine the origin of the Igbo. However, what is generally accepted by Igbo elders is that the Igbo are indigenous to their current location and did not migrate from anywhere.
For the interest of non-Igbo speakers and readers, a brief account of Igbo history might be helpful to throw some lights in understanding the Igbo claims of non-migration from anywhere to their present geographical location.

Various accounts abound with special significance to the Igbo wholistic life and culture, and relevant to the environmental life and heritage of the Igbo people. However, for the purpose of focus, Ugwuele, Nsukka, Afikpo, and Igbo-Ukwu accounts are considered here without undermining the relevance of other historical accounts that mark the Igbo life as a people.

According to the account drawn from the archeological discoveries carried out in Ugwuele Uturu area of Okigwe in Abia State, there is strong evidence that seems to suggest that humans lived in the Igbo country during the stone age around the period above. The discoveries indicated the largest hand-axe factory in Nigeria and apparently, it gives the earliest evidence of human settlement in Nigeria.\(^{106}\) Relatedly, archeological discoveries of pottery, dated back to about 5,000 years BC, were said to have been discovered in the Northern Igbo areas of Nsukka and Afikpo. Writing on this, Elizabeth Isichei notes that “Excavations at Nsukka, in the most northerly part of Iboland, and Afikpo, near the present rain forest Savannah border, show that Neolithic men [sic] were living there as early as 3000 BC, and were making stone stools, including ground stone axes, pottery.”\(^{107}\) Adiele E. Afigbo is of the view that these pottery skills and works share some similarities both in form and pattern to the present day pottery art in Igboland.\(^{108}\) Other similar

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\(^{105}\) John N. Oriji, *Traditions of origin: A Study of Pre-Colonial Population Movement in Africa* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994), 4-16.

\(^{106}\) Oriji, 15-16.

account, regarded as a landmark as far as the historical reality of the Igbo people is concerned, was made by one Isaiah Anozie, a local villager from Igbo-Ukwu in the present day Anambra State, in 1938. Isichei details that Anozie, while digging a pit beside his homestead, made a sudden discovery of bronze objects which drew the attention of some Europeans already in Igbo land at the period when both colonialists, anthropologists, missionaries, scholars, traders had special interest in tracing the history of the ancient Igbo people. This excavation at the homestead of Isaiah Anozie, alias Igbo Isaiah, gave rise to the discoveries of the other two sites that came to be regarded as Igbo Jonah and Igbo Richard respectively. These names were given after the owners of the homesteads or fields where excavations were made. Discovered in these fields were assorted bronze articles. Others like ceramics, jewelries, iron objects and copper were also found. A spectacular discovery, amongst others, was the mausoleum or grave with some elements indicating that the carcass inside of it was festooned with chieftaincy regalia and artifacts. These items were dated to the 9th century.\(^{109}\) Other accounts of religious dynasty around the 11th century, embracing the first Eze Nri (Priest King of Nri Kingdom) with some cultural ties and close affinity to Igbo-Ukwu area are also noted by Isichei.\(^{110}\) These historical accounts, at least the much that can be known, apparently, show that the Igbo have occupied the current geographical location where they are living from the earliest times, back to the Neolithic age. They also show an ancient rich culture already in existence and thriving in Igbo land prior to and after this time with well-defined systems, rituals, economy, institutions, and technology. However, what these scholars did not say much was


\(^{109}\) Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, 245.

\(^{110}\) Isichei, 247.
whether those who lived in the areas under study were originally Igbo people or other ethnic groups that lived and migrated to somewhere else. Again, it is not too clear as to whether the people were the first occupants of the entire geographical area called Nigeria, although Nigeria was more of a later creation and naming. However, in the absence of any known other ethnic group(s) said to have lived in these areas, what these accounts seem to portray is, first, the rootedness of the Igbo in their current environment as their ancestral land where they lived, moved, and thrived, and ecologically related harmoniously with all earth’s entities and kept the environment healthy for their future progenies. Secondly, it shows that the Igbo have been in this present geographical location known as the current Southeastern Nigeria with all the natural and human resources and ecology. As said earlier, this dismisses the various accounts of origin of the Igbo from various places to the current location.

1.2.3 The Igbo Neighbors and the Climatic Reality of the Igbo region

Good neighborliness is important for the Igbo. The same holds of the Igbo neighbors for so many reasons, at least, mutual interaction is extremely crucial. Hence, the Igbo say, agbara obi, agbara uto, meaning that with good neighborliness, friendship, cohesion, or exchange of pleasantries become possible. Similarly, the Igbo proverbially say, Mmekorita ahu bu uto ndu, meaning that mutual interaction makes life gratifying. In other words, good neighborliness prolongs life, both human and nonhuman lives. Obviously, good neighborliness is one of the essential features of life. The Igbo have a proverbial saying that, “Agbataobi mmadu wu nwanne ya,” i.e., one’s neighbor is one’s kin or relative. Therefore, good neighborliness promotes solidarity and security, harmony, amongst other values, that are essential to people.

Remarkably, the Igbo share common borders with the Idoma and the Igala on the North; the Ijaw and the Ogoni on the South; the Ibibio and Yako on the Eastern boundary and the
Warri/Isoko and Bini on the West. It is common to experience constant interactions through business, education, agriculture, inter-ethnic marriages and other cultural contacts between the Igbo and their neighbors. This bears huge influences on Igbo culture. Thus, Nwala’s claim above on the variations witnessed in Igbo land that seem to question the Igbo homogeneity is validated.

Climatically, the Igbo region has a tropical climate with average temperature of about 80F. There are two principal seasons, the rainy and dry. While the former starts in April and can last till October, the later begins from October till March. However, there is a period known as harmattan, which is characterized by a dry and dusty but chilly northeast trade wind blowing from across the Sahara Desert. Normally, this takes place between December and January. Sometimes it encroaches into February.\textsuperscript{111} However, with the reality of climate change all over the world, there are alterations to this season as it is to other seasons where people witness either severe dry air or lesser and sometimes little to no felt experience of harmattan.\textsuperscript{112} Also, sometimes the region witnesses severe rainy seasons with serious flooding and erosion threatening lives and properties. In other times, the rains delay in coming during their normal seasons when they are usually expected.\textsuperscript{113} These current fluctuations in the seasons, blamed on climate change, affect farming and other ecological activities in the region. For example, when there is little or no harmattan, the productivity of fruit-bearing tears is affected. And with much rain, the farms are inundated. As a result, there will be low harvests from the farms because the crops are mostly destroyed, washed

\textsuperscript{111} Augustine Okwu, \textit{Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions 1857-1957}, 1.


away by the floods. In most cases, the trees are buffeted and downed by mighty winds. This affects the human lives who depend on them for survival. It affects biodiversity as well when it is seriously flooded—wild and aquatic lives are affected and gullies are created, making roads impassable.

Evidentially, a quick clink on the internet/Google about some major cities in Igbo land like Aba in Abia State, Owerri in Imo State when it rains, for instance, reveals an environmentally degraded place. The picture below shows a residential place sitting in the flood.\textsuperscript{114}

![Picture](image)

Picture two below, so much trending on the social media currently, shows the deplorable state of the commercial city of Aba. Aba, in Abia State, is well known beyond Nigeria to most West African countries for its economic hub and excellence. It is home to many economic activities like Ariaria international market, shoe manufacturing industries, textiles, timber harvesting and wood

\textsuperscript{114} Charles Ogwo, “Floods overtakes Aba city, commercial activities brought to standstill,” \textit{Business Day}, September 6, 2021.
works, enamels, and ceramic industries, etc., aside from agricultural activities, oil explorations and educational institutions. Blessedly, it is one of the major rain forest regions of Igbo land. Paradoxically, these blessings have environmental nightmares at par with them. Few pictures speak volubly about the horrible state of the environment in the area. Similar pictures, with gory sights, abound on the internet of the deplorable nature of the place, especially when it rains. A Facebook handler and blogger, Emmanuel Okwuluora Okoh Onyeka, who is equally an environmental journalist and historian, broadcaster, etc., takes it upon himself to expose most of the environmentally deplorable places in Lower Niger and Congress-USA, “Environmental neglect, decay in Aba (Enyimba City), Abia State Nigeria- Matter of Public disgrace and shame!” https://www.lnc-usa.org/blog/residents-of-aba-cry-out-for-rescue-from-deadly-plights-flooding-infrastructure-decay/ (accessed December 13, 2021).
Igbo land where much rain constitutes nightmares to the indigenes and residents of the places.¹¹⁶ Some places include Umu Ogbuefi Village, Ebenebe in Awka North of Anambra State, Amuri Nkanu in Enugu State, Itu Ezinihite Mbaise in Imo State, etc., where the roads are impassable due to excessive rains said to be raining more than usual. This makes life extremely hard for people. Also, the natural environment is polluted, posing severe health hazards to the residents.

Notwithstanding these relatively current environmental problems, the Igbo land is blessed with rich ecology. This makes the region more green, agriculturally viable and livable for humans and nonhumans. However, for political marginalization, many Igbo people, especially the youths, emigrate to other regions of the country for greener pastures or white-collar jobs.

Regarding ecological features, aside from mountains and hills especially in the northern part of Igbo, there are four principal rivers in Igbo land, agreeable by Igbo scholars. These include the Niger, Imo, Anambra and Ulasi rivers, with the Niger river dividing the Igbo into two uneven areas with the bulk of the Igbo population occupying the East of the Niger while the other part lives on the West of the Niger.¹¹⁷ Despite the division between the east and west of the river Niger, the people share a common sense of family, village, clan, organizational life. This, arguably, is regarded as extensions of blood ties, which are important units of social, political, and economic structure. The Igbo closeness to their families and blood relations are reflected on their philosophical and political organization. How this organizational structure is played out in Igbo society is the focus of the next of section.


1.3 The Political Structure of the Igbo Society

In contrast to the contemporary Igbo society where communities are grouped into geopolitical zones and their ancillaries, the traditional Igbo society has no such form of federated system of governance. As a result, those who studied Igbo society during the colonial times, as John Oriji, while citing R. Horton’s work, notes, dubbed the Igbo “‘a stateless or acephalous society’ that lacked an organ of law-arbitration.”\(^{118}\) For Oriji, this assertion sounds both erroneous and misleading. It was based on an opinion of a foreign system of governance and not on the truth of the nature of governance among the traditional Igbo society. The Igbo society is not acephalous nor are they a stateless people. Oriji argues that the Igbo live in villages and have village groups that define borders or mini states and a government of their kind “with central organs of law-making, law-application and law-arbitration.”\(^{119}\) As will be noted, the Igbo have their system of leadership which is vehemently opposed to feudalism or monarchy such that is seen and practiced respectively in the Northern and Western regions of Nigerian.

Gwilliam I. Jones, validating Oriji’s positions, critiques the stateless assertion on the Igbo on the ground that such a view fails to do justice to the traditional Igbo mini-state organizations since it is based on comparison of what is obtainable in other areas to the Igbo society. According to Jones, “An Igbo village [Village-group] possesses the requirements of a state in that it has some centralized administrative and judicial institutions, and cleavages of wealth and status corresponding to the distribution of power and status.”\(^{120}\) Jones’ view is validated by some micro


\(^{119}\) Oriji, 265.
studies of the Igbo society that confirmed existence of political systems, which thrived in Igbo traditional society where women and men exercised greater leadership roles. For instance, studies by Nwando Achebe in the Nsukka areas of Igbo land showed that women played active roles in governance as priestesses, goddesses, and diviners. Similarly, Ifi Amadiume and Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu note the existence of gender flexibility in Igbo society that help in the organization of life in the community. In other words, women are not passive in the Igbo traditional society. Arguably, before the recognition of the right of women in the Western world, the traditional Igbo society had figured out how best to make their women politically relevant through the revered *Umuokpu* and *Umuada*, agnatic leagues of daughters of the land and *Ndi Iyom*, the women’s league. Igbo women had always been powerful in the society in so many ways with strong voice on issues affecting life, and even environmental issues in the society.

Therefore, leadership in Igbo traditional society is not based on personal aggrandizement nor for mere political chauvinism that submerges the rights of others into one’s interest. This is premised on the fact that leadership for the Igbo society has a politico-religious, cosmological dimension, a form of jurisprudence that is rooted in religion for the welfare of the society in all its life forms.

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Relevantly, Georges Balandier’s discussion on the role that religion plays in shaping the worldviews of traditional societies applies to the Igbo in their political organization. According to Balandier, “Every society links its own order to an order beyond itself, and in the case of traditional societies to the cosmos. Power is sacrality because every society affirms its desire to be eternal and fears a return to chaos as the realization of its death.”

Balandier’s view agrees with Oriji’s idea of sacred authority and political organization in Igbo mini states. Using Igbo-Ukwu community as a case study, Oriji alludes that political organization in Igbo land has wider ecological integrity, the well-being of all forms of life. This is because God, the divinities and their priests and priestesses are involved in governance and are associated with their agrarian environment. It is therefore beholden of any office holder invested with sacred authority to act in accordance with the dictates of Ofo which has overarching implications on the Igbo life. This is crucial in maintaining cosmic balance as well as ecological dignity in the understanding that an officer holder is meant to be exemplary and ensure that the moral forces necessary for control measures are observed.


124 John Oriji, “The End of Sacred Authority and the Genesis of Amorality and Disorder in Igbo Mini States,” 266.

125 Ofo is a scared symbol of authority in Igbo society. Made from the branch of Detarium Senegalense tree, it embodies truthfulness, justice, and righteousness. Among the Igbo, it is believed that God purposely created the tree to be sacred, and by the manner its branches fall off unbroken, God symbolizes the way families grow up and establish new extended families and lineages. Ofo is said to embody the abode of the ancestors. Hence, the authority and sacredness of Ofo, as well as the special place given to it as the emblem of truth, unity and indestructibility for the individual possessing it. See Francis A. Arinze, Sacrifice in Ibo Religion (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press 1970), 17. See also Christopher Ejizu, Ofo: Igbo Ritual and Symbol (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co., 2002).
From the above, it is without doubt that the Igbo traditional society had its strong and unique form of organization. It was not stateless nor acephalous. Comparing the traditional organization with the modern federated system or what is obtainable in nontraditional Igbo societies would not do justice to the traditional structure put in place by the ancients who were people of their times. Leadership and or organization in the traditional society was religiously tailored as well as political since there was no way of separating the two. Crucially, it was inclusive to some extent, which challenges the modern form of leadership that tends to relegate women to the background.

However, basic to a more organizational structure in Igbo society are the *ezí n’ulo* (family), which constitutes the prime unit and the center of socialization; the *Umunna*¹²⁶ (kindred) ensemble that makes up the basic unit of political organization or what Uchendu describes as “corporate aggregate” for “they are capable of taking group action;”¹²⁷ and the *Ogabe* (the village meeting) normally named after an ancestor. Also, there are other structures like the *Oha-Obodo* (community gathering), the *Umuada* (daughters of the land), *ndiiyom* (women’s league), *otu ogbo or ndi ebiri*, (age grade or age group), *ikwunne* (matriliny), *ndintonobia* (youth wing). These structures embrace a network of relationships that everything is tied closely to each other, and they carry both social and political, as well religious heavyweights. Religion, law, justice, and family structure are so interwoven with one another that it is difficult to speak of one without mentioning the others. Though complex, these structures, comprise small units from various grassroots for effective

¹²⁶ *Umunna,* literally translated as children of the father, is a gregarious word. It can be applied to folks from the same kindred, village and the community.

management and equanimity in the society.128 These structures are important for easy identification of a person and for political dividends and civic responsibilities. This holds same for leadership or organization structures.

Besides, and relatedly, central to the Igbo organizational structure is agnation. There is no doubt that the Igbo is a society with a strong patrilineal emphasis, which refers to the father’s agnates that can trace their relationship to a common ancestor. Given this, agnation regulates virtually everything in the society. It determines the membership of a family group, the line of inheritance and succession to name and office. It controls how a person takes most of their jural rights in land and in social, economic, and political positions. Agnation, for the Igbo is like a ladder needed in social climbing. It is so crucial to the Igbo that to be cut off from it is considered tragic. As Victor C Unchendu notes, agnation plays greater role in life and organization of the Igbo who cannot do without their agnate. This finds expression in the saying that “Umunna bu ike (The agnates are the source of one’s strength).”129 Also, considering the political structure of the Igbo, Peter Osuchukwu notes that “The Umunna is the backbone of the Igbo political system. It is where political actions begin and it is what makes and unmakes the Igbo... the agbata ebe (the place beyond which man cannot run for protection), the orientation system that characterizes the Igbo.”130 Thus, from Uchendu and Osuchukwu, it can rightly be said that solidarity with one’s agnates is essential; that the community is the bedrock of the Igbo experience of life in its fullness. That a person should be in good relationships with one’s patrikins is accentuated by the fact that

the ancestors are the heads of the lineage who care for the welfare of the community. To be cut off from the patrilineage, therefore, entails losing the protection of both the living and the dead. In a society like the Igbo, and indeed other societies in Nigeria, for example, where the state does not offer the much-needed protection, the individuals depend so much on the kinspeople. As a result, to be without one’s kins, by chance or war, crisis, or other disasters, is to be in danger, to be completely helpless. For the Igbo, kinship is the basis for survival. Not to be in communion with *Umunna*, agnates, is like being uprooted from the source of life. Conversely, some agnates also can be one’s weakness, even death. Sometimes, the major sources of threats to life, both human and non-human lives, come from some agnates. Bad elements exist everywhere, and the Igbo are not exempt from such bad elements among them. Often, some frenemies camouflage themselves as agnates or friends to deal with their targets ruthlessly. Such ugly tendencies and occurrences do occur in the Igbo society under the pretext of agnatic bonds. However the abuse often witnessed in some agnation, the merits outweigh the demerits. Agnates exist to boost the communal spirit since nobody can stand in isolation of others. Environmental issues also need the collective efforts of the agnates to deal within the community. This makes belonging to *Umunna* or the agnatic groups essential. The aim of agnation is for enhancing interaction and inter-relationships among people. It also includes social control and security, and to ensure smooth leadership and the organization of life in accordance with the laws of the land, including environmental laws and protection in the community.

In terms of leadership, the Igbo society, highly stratified and autonomous in various levels, is governed by responsible adult members of the community and the council of elders. As Francis Arinze rightly observe, “Members of the council of elders are respected persons who speak truth to power, people who do not stay at home and watch goats give birth while tethered. They are
people who have social status, knowledge and wisdom, wealth, patriotism and religious honor, and these people are ready to use these qualities to serve the community.” The elders are respected for their closeness to the ancestors. Given this, they are expected to act with probity and equity. As Arinze rightly noted above, elders “do not stay at home and watch goats give birth while tethered.” This means that they speak truth to power. They call a spade a spade and should not engage in any form of travesty of justice. The services the elders render to their communities are, therefore, expected to correspond with the Igbo Omenala (the laws of the land) for the holistic health of the society, which include equality, communalism, egalitarianism at all levels and cosmic balance. To achieve these values in the society, listening ears, not imposition, are of utmost importance. Elders are, thus, extolled for this virtue. It helps to deal with issues amicably in the community to ensure that the rights of everyone and everything is respected.

Therefore, leadership does not constitute intimidation or authoritarianism irrespective of the statues of the elders economically and otherwise. It is not to be abused. It can vehemently be opposed once abused. A leader, irrespective of their age and status, does not impose their wills on others. That is not acceptable to the Igbo. Hence, the Igbo proverbially say, “Asokata Eze anya, ekpuru nkata gwa ya okwu,” i.e., to avoid compromising the truth and when matters come to the worst, for fear of stigmatization, people can wear a mask to tell their leader the truth about how they feel with their leadership. Irrespective of one’s role, people do not shy away from expressing the truth about their concerns. Respect is earned and it is reciprocal. In this form of political system, everyone counts likewise their views about things. This means that for the Igbo leadership is not for intimidation nor imposition. Elochukwu E. Uzukwu notes that while the head of the eldest clan

presides over the assemblies of the village-group attended by other heads, “decisions that affect the life of all the clans constituting the village-group necessarily involve consultation on family, kindred, and clan levels. Orders which come from the top without prior discussion or negotiation are ignored.” Uzukwu’s view is validated by Adolphus Anuka who rightly asserts that “The Igbo political mentality is strictly on dialogue,” such that “Nothing is taken in isolation” and nobody is intimidated from expressing their views on issues, because “truth is placed above personal and communal grandeur,” and this “marks the Igbo political philosophy.” Traditionally, the Igbo society is not based on a monarchic or oligarchic system of governance where a few persons lord it over to others. It is a democratic system of its own kind, which goes beyond a form of blind democracy of a crowd. In other words, the Igbo democracy does not believe that the majority is right all the time. Issues or matters of communal interest are critically deliberated upon and painstakingly considered. As a result, matters are, sometimes, postponed until clarity is ascertained. In such rigorous processes, several references are made to past events and experiences. Also, references are made to the wisdom of the ancients with the aim of knowing how related issues were handled and concluded in the past. Given this, it is reasonable to assert that the act of voting is not traditionally known to the Igbo society. This is to avoid getting the


133 Adolphus C. Anuka, Mmanwu and Mission among the Igbo people of Nigeria, 37.

134 Ibid.

135 Rafael M. Affam, Traditional healing of the Sick in Igboland-Nigeria (Aachen: Shaker Verlag, 2002), 34.
wrong persons in the positions of power. It can have devastating consequences in the society both on the human and natural ecology when the wrong persons are in key positions of leadership.

In a nutshell, the Igbo system of governance is a dynamic and yet a thorough system of winnowing the chaff from the grains to ensure quality, respect, and harmony in line with the traditions of the land. It gives room for everyone to air their views freely, fearlessly, and respectfully before conclusions are drawn. It is a system where “democracy, gerontocracy, socialism and republicanism are practiced while autocracy (dictatorship) is rejected outrightly.” Following this distilled method, scholars like John Oriji holds that the Igbo traditional republican or democratic system can be compared to the modern Western world. Others like Elechukwu Njaka stresses the idealistic and normative features of the political system of the Igbo labelled as “Ohocracy,” which emphasizes on egalitarianism, individuality, competition, and the participation of adults in governance. Whichever way, the fact is that the Igbo traditional society is not stateless nor acephalous. It has its own unique organizational or political system which ensures that fairness and equity is maintained. As earlier observed, leadership in the traditional Igbo society is not for personal aggrandizement nor for a show of affluence, power and thus lordship over to others. Mostly, character, good name, moral probity, etc., form the criteria for leadership. This is because leaders are custodians of truth and justice. They are meant to be models especially to the younger generations. Abuse of powers contradicts the Igbo traditional egalitarian and republican-

136 Ibid, 34.

137 John Oriji, “The End of Sacred Authority and the Genesis of Amorality and Disorder in Igbo Mini States,” 263.

democratic values, and it is thought to shake the flow of life in the society which can impinge on ecological health of the place. In the event of any abuses, they could be opposed vehemently for the good of the society. On the contrary, leaders are praised and supported for doing what is rightly expected of them and the office they hold. Because of the aura they relay, they are respected. Hence, the Igbo traditional society, including the flora and fauna, was calmer and the ancestral laws, which include the environmental laws, are respected. This system transmitted values to the young for whom the future belongs. As part of the culture, melioristic practices that keep the flora and fauna protected are not just enacted or re-emphasized by the leaders who see that they are strictly followed at various levels of organization, i.e., kindred, village, community levels, they are happily embraced as part of the civic and sacred duties to keep the community environmentally healthy. However, this does not mean that the traditional Igbo society was perfect nor are her leaders angels. But driven by the quest for the maintenance of sanctity and sanity of the society, people heatedly oppose straying leaders until the right thing is done for the dignity of all life forms and balance in the society. This challenges the contemporary Igbo society and leadership where might is apparently power with its devastating outcomes ecologically and humanly. Quality and selfless leadership, good stewardship is a boost to the economic, religious, social, and spiritual life of a people including the environmental concerns that punctuate life and growth of a community. For the traditional Igbo, these were well embraced and effectively handled to maintain balance in the society.

1.4 The Igbo Economy and Land Tenure

One of the innate qualities that depicts the Igbo is the element of hardworking spirit, unrelenting strive for achievement and industry. Giving an account of the Igbo industry and doggedness, Olaudah Equaino, a freed Igbo slave and incidentally the first Igbo person to write an
autobiography, notes that “Igbo are habituated to labor from the earliest years. Everyone contributes something to the common stock, and as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have no beggars. The benefits of such a mode of living are obvious.”

Equiano’s description bears strong witness to the economic culture of the Igbo, in which a child is taught and helped from the onset to practically imbibe the spirit of industry and the zeal to pursue economic and social success. M. M. Green writes that “Children help with the work of farming from an early age. When a boy begins to grow up, he is given yams by his father to plant for himself.” However, girls are not left out in economic and domestic works that train and enable them to be both home and community builders. Given that there are roles along gender lines, every child is introduced to the value and dignity of labor. One thing so crucial about this early disposition of children to agriculture or hard work is the ecological values it instills in the young minds. Land is thus valued and respected, befriended and inextricably tied to the very being of a person. The psychological and spiritual attachment this practice relays to the young minds has enduring marks on the way the Igbo tend to their environment jealously as gifts. They value the environment as precious and as a fellow community member with dignity. This leads to their appreciation of the gifts of nature in the awareness that they depend more on nature than nature depends on them. Therefore, they become stewards of the earth and receive the gifts of nature with grateful hearts and contribute in no small ways in preserving and conserving the integrity of the earth.

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Economically, the Igbo thrive more on subsistence farming. The main agricultural products are yams, which are planted more by men, and cocoyam by women. Ekwunife Anthony observes that “many religious rites and sacrifices are centered around the cultivation and harvesting of these food-stuff”\(^{141}\) making them the chief, principal crops among others in Igbo land. Other crops include cassava, rice, beans, maize, vegetables, and gourds. The main economic trees are palm-trees,\(^{142}\) breadfruit-trees among others. Besides these, horticulture and animal husbandry are mutually practiced in large extent. Chickens, goats, sheep, cattle, pigs, dogs, etc., are among the commonest the Igbo rear both for economic purposes and as part of the community of life.

Other areas of economic vibrancy include smithing, carving, cicatrization and pottery. In the riverine areas, fishing is pursued on relatively small scale. In a large scale, many Igbo are skilled in commerce. Suffice it to say that if agriculture is the basic occupation of the traditional Igbo, trading is a close second. Arguably, whereas they farm of necessity, they trade not only of necessity but also for pleasure and acculturation. Green, asserting that markets are one of the main features of the Igbo economic life, notes that “trading is the breath of life… and the vigour with which bargaining, and haggling are conducted is evidence of the prestige attached to successful commercial enterprise.”\(^{143}\) It is interesting to note that the art of bargaining for the prices of goods and services, arguably, is original to the Igbo. Unlike some parts of Africa and, like Zimbabwe,


\(^{142}\) Palm trees, *elaeis guineensis* are serious cash crops and can be regarded as the king of all economic trees in Igbo land. See C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in A Nigerian Tribe: A Study in Indirect Rule* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), 16-17. See also the appendix II of this work for more details with pictorial evidence of the value of Palm trees in Igbo land.

\(^{143}\) M. M. Green, *Ibo Village Affairs*, 37.
where there are fixed prices or price tags on goods and services, and where malls are operative, it is not the same in Igbo land where open, flea markets are common. However, bargaining is not to be understood as cheating techniques or falsehood as some Igbo critics are wont to believing. Normally, in every transaction, the seller of any goods or the provider of any services would ask for prices above the value of the goods or the services to be provided. The buyer or the receiver of the services would normally offer prices that are much lower than the value of the goods or the services.\textsuperscript{144} Hence, the art of bargaining starts. The brain is therefore set to tax while oratory and experience automatically come into play. Through this exercise, the Igbo normally challenge themselves to thoughtfulness, alertness, and prudence, and most times it is a true test of morality. However, there could be instances where people outsmart others through bogus claims and inflation of prices of goods and services. While this is not the spirit of bargaining of prices of goods and services, opportunists and greedy folks take advantage of their unsuspecting customers who probably are foreigners or ignorant of the values of goods and services they are either rendering or receiving. This form of abuse can have far reaching consequences in human relationships and to creatures other than humans. Most times, this same commercialization is carried under the guise of religion to abuse or usurp others. Some could falsely invoke God’s name or whatever they worship and respect just to achieve their aims, which is driven by the disposition to get-rich-quick syndrome.

Besides, there exists among the Igbo the economic act of capital acquisition. This may take the form of landed properties, palm tree or other economic trees, crops, plants, domestic animals or even clothing materials.\textsuperscript{145} Economic investment is notably appreciated and highly encouraged

\textsuperscript{144} Victor C. Uchendu, \textit{The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria}, 30.

\textsuperscript{145} Rafael M. Affam, \textit{Traditional healing of the Sick in Igboland-Nigeria}, 48-49.
among the Igbo. While some are individually run like investing in oil storage, cereals or legumes, others usually take social dimensions. An example is the *isusu* or *oha* (economic thrifts or tontines) in which money or other valuables are usually contributed by several individuals or associations for a common interest of saving the funds contributed until the amount a person contributed comes to them. Affam notes that the periodic contributions usually come back to each member contributor in a huge sum accruing from the contributions of the other members. In this way, “one saves gradually and reaps a heavy and secure deposit of his [sic] savings after a period of time.”¹⁴⁶

Further, Affam argues that this system is much better than the modern banking system because there is no amount of unexpected pressure or personal needs that make a person to tamper with the periodic savings unlike “the modern banking system, where one can be forced by circumstances to break into his or her saving schemes.”¹⁴⁷ As good as Affam points may sound, he fails to acknowledge the risks involved in this method of saving. Some greedy people who keep the funds as treasurers could have their ways at will with people’s contributions. In the events of theft, fire outbreak or flood that sometimes happens in some places, who accounts for the loss of the funds since there is no insurance to these traditional economic thrifts or tontines? Again, if miscreants could manipulate their ways into the modern banking system even with all the computerized systems and sophisticated gadgets in place to dupe or cheat on their customers, how much safer is a system that is less computerized and protected? There is no point for comparison. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages as well. However, on a much larger scale for business expansion, the merits of the modern banking systems outweigh the Igbo economic thrifts or

¹⁴⁶ Affam, 49.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.
tontines. Contemporaneously, greater number of the Igbo who are into imports and exports operate with the modern banking systems, which is safer and easier to hold.

Furthermore, and vitally important is the highest premium the Igbo place on land. As earlier noted, the chief occupation of the traditional Igbo is agriculture. Being so, land, is the basis of its existence and an understanding of the land tenure system is necessary in Igbo life. According to Uchendu, land means many things to the Igbo. “It is the domain of the earth-goddess, a burial place for the ancestors, a place to live on and make a living.”148 Given this, land, therefore is the most important asset to the people. It is the source of security. This explains why the Igbo are so much attached emotionally to the land and are ready to die in defense of their land and its boundaries from intrusion, alienation, and desecration. Among the Igbo, there is no amount of land that one has which is considered enough and any opportunity to acquire some rights in land are not to be lost. In the same vein, ownership of land is vested in the community, family, or village with the peasants usually having free rein regarding the use of the land allotted to them with the sole stipulation that they cannot alienate it from the community. For the sacredness that it evokes, land, according to the Igbo custom and native law, cannot be sold to strangers, for it conveys the feeling that land is lost or desecrated.149 Thus, the Igbo try to protect their land from any form of violation through some form of exploitation or abandonment.

Culturally, the concept of land tenure is used variously to cover economic, political, legal, and social customs connected with the proprietorship of land. Therefore, land tenure in Igbo land


149 M. M. Green, *Ibo Village Affairs*, 34.
is an integral part of the entire system of social organization and social control. As understood by the Igbo, land tenure prescribes the rights of individuals or groups over the land they use. This includes how such rights may be acquired, their content, the security enjoyed in them, what sorts of transfers can be made, and the succession to them. Among the Igbo, these rights in land are exercised over compounds, homesteads, sacred, and common lands. Traditionally, as will be seen most often here, land is communally owned but with the changes in the current times, most residential lands are now privately and individually owned.

Gwilliam Iwan Jones talks about three cardinal principles on which the Igbo land tenure is based: “that the land ultimately belongs to the community and cannot be alienated from it without its consent; that within the community the individual shall have security of tenure for the land he requires for his compound, his gardens, and his farms; and that no member of the community shall be without land.”\textsuperscript{150} Unlike Jones, Uchendu details four principles on which land tenure is based in Igbo land. First, ownership, i.e., all land in Igbo land is owned. There is no such thing as “abandonment of land” or “no man’s land” among the Igbo people.\textsuperscript{151} Whether land is left fallow or cultivated, it belongs to somebody or a group of people. Green adds that the village does not communally own any land except some pieces of bush sacred to the village deities and in some cases, bushes regarded as \textit{ajoo ohia} (evil forests). Green goes on to say that ownership of land is divided up among small groups of nearly related kinsmen, branches of the various kindreds except for land which may be the property of an entire kindred.\textsuperscript{152} Green’s point agrees with Uchendu’s

\textsuperscript{150} Gwilliam I. Jones, “Ibo Land Tenure,” \textit{Africa} 19, no.4 (1949): 313.

\textsuperscript{151} Victor C. Uchendu, \textit{The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria}, 22.

\textsuperscript{152} M. M. Green, \textit{Ibo Village Affairs}, 33.
second principle which is that land belongs to a lineage. The third which is related to the second principle is that individuals, within their lineage, have assurance or security of tenure of land that they need for shelter and farming. Sequel to this, the fourth principle which, as Uchendu notes, is that no member of the lineage is without land.\textsuperscript{153} This is important in the understanding that not only are the Igbo considered rooted in the earth, land is so crucial to the Igbo for agricultural purposes to inspire hard work, husbanding, which contributes greatly to the development and wellbeing of the society as well as ecological stewardship of the land and all that it is home to.

However, aside from these principles upon which land tenure is based in Igbo land, scholars identify some procedures or systems that distinguish land tenure. Critically, in Igbo land, girls or maidens, women in general, do not traditionally inherit land from their fathers. This is because they must marry and leave their native place and henceforward have definite farming rights in the village of their husbands. But they are not landowners by right of inheritance. Thus, the chief basis of transmission of land rights is through inheritance and generally this goes from father to son.\textsuperscript{154} In the wake of gender equality of the current times, this might be termed gender bias and discrimination. However, what is not deniable in Igbo land tenure is what Uchendu calls “the flexibility of land tenure” in which case, women, strangers, free born and slaves can acquire land for farming.\textsuperscript{155} In this sense, one can acquire land by pledge, which, most often, is the commonest type of land tenure. The essence of pledge is that it is remediable at any time subject to the proviso that crops growing may first be harvested on payment of original pledge price.

\textsuperscript{153} Victor C. Uchendu, \textit{The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria}, 22.


\textsuperscript{155} Victor C. Uchendu, \textit{The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria}, 23.
However, this rule or term varies from one Igbo community to another in terms of usufructuary interests in a piece of land as security for the money lender. What is certain in land acquired on pledge is that the pledgee is not allowed to either plant permanent trees or build on the land. While the pledgee has right to cultivate and harvest their crops, they may not harvest the economic trees like palms or Iroko. These trees or any other trees could be pledged when one needs some money unless otherwise included in the terms of the original pledge.

Another form of land tenure is land held on lease or a leasehold. Uchendu and Chubb agree that leasehold is distinguished from a pledge in that it is not terminable at the whim of the landlord, and it is usually for a fixed term, which may or not be renewable. Leasehold gives usufructuary rights to tenants normally for one or more farming seasons, “usually at a consideration reflecting the economic value of land at that place.”\textsuperscript{156} Subject to the agreement or the nature of relationship, land could be given almost free of charge to individuals to farm on. The lessee could reciprocate such a favor by making out some days to help the lessor to work on their farms. As said above, this is based on the understanding between the landlord and the responsible cooperation of the tenant. However, in Igbo land, anybody can acquire a leasehold anywhere since it is not based on right of inheritance, freeborn or slave in this way, women as well as men, irrespective of their statues, are eligible to acquire a portion of land they can cultivate, which helps to boost the local economy in addition to ensuring that nobody is without land. Relatedly, there is a form of land tenure known as “kola tenancy,” by which rights in land are transferred for a little or no consideration other than the gift of kola from a tenant to the grantor.\textsuperscript{157} Understandably, a gift of

\textsuperscript{156} Uchendu, 23.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
kola is not a purchase price, and the grantor reserves the right of reversion on the death of the kola tenant or the absence of heirs. However, there are other forms of land tenure among the Igbo, which scholars like Green, Uchendu, Chubb and Meek, say vary according to the understanding and practice of various communities in Igbo society. All these point to the fact that land is so precious to the Igbo whose life revolves around land and its benevolence. Therefore, it is not by accident that the Igbo see themselves as earthlings, and why they strive to ensure that the sanctity of the earth is maintained, industry encouraged to shun consumerism, laziness, and dereliction towards the land. It is almost true to assert that land tenure system in Igboland ensures that there are no landless families. There are also some families which do not provide from their own farms a major part of their food supplies due to scarcity of land because of increase in population. The danger in this is that the population growth may increase beyond the limits of productivity of the land. This has almost given rise to a non-agricultural floating population with nothing to give in exchange for the food it requires. This is one of the problems facing the contemporary Igbo where most of the population do not seem to have regards for agriculture and the reverence for the land, which the Igbo hold in high esteem. This has negative ecological consequences.

Land, which the Igbo so much revere and in which they are rooted, can be a blessing and crisis to them. Land disputes are so common among most Igbo families and communities. It is almost an age-long issue. It can be between families, intracommunity or interstate, and most times between communities and governments, and between communities and churches. And when this happens, the consequences can be much. Most times, cases of homicide, destruction of crops,

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economic trees, destruction of properties and the fauna and flora through lighting by fire, wanton
destruction by irate mob actions, etc., have been recorded. The yearly statistics of internally
displaced communities and losses of lives and properties due to land disputes are enormous.¹⁵⁹
Notwithstanding the incessant crises from land disputes and their overreaching consequences, land
remains a sacred and supreme gift among the Igbo.

1.5  Nature of Ecological Crisis in Igbo land

This section focuses on the Igbo understanding of nature, ecology, or environment. It
examines the nature and causes of ecological crises in the land. It establishes that ecological crisis
is a reality that cannot be denied in Igbo society. The crisis affects every aspect of life, moral,
spiritual. It is both social life as well as faith. Since the Igbo world is interconnected, whatever
affects one invariably affects the other. Therefore, there needs to be interdisciplinary conversations
and efforts to proffer solution to the crisis.

1.5.1  Concept and Nature of Igbo Environmental Ethics

Generally, in Igbo land, as in most African societies known to the scholars of
environmental conversation, there appears to exist no precise word corresponding to the concept
nature, ecology, or environment. This observation is crucial. It means that “in most African
societies, nature means totality of life.”¹⁶⁰  As, Aniekan Etim Nana observes, the Igbo concept of

¹⁵⁹ Vanguard Nigeria, “How Land disputes consume lives, destroy properties in Igboland,”
https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/06/how-land-disputes-consume-lives-destroy-properties-in-
igboland/ (accessed March 7th, 2021). See also Anambra Broadcasting Service, “Nnekwe decries
incessant land disputes in Igboland,” https://www.absradiotv.com/2020/10/18/nnekwe-decries-

Theology,” in Good News for Animals? Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being, eds. Charles
ecology is all-embracing. It is inclusive of human and nonhuman entities. It connects individual; women and men, children variously related with one another as members of families, societies, groups, and all that is rooted in the earth and beyond. Similarly, Nana goes on to say that the concept includes artificial objects like tools, furniture, machines, decorated materials, etc., not excluding plants and animals. In this broad spectrum, “Natural or Cosmic objects as sun, moon, mountain, air, etc.,” and “events and happenings such as the rising and setting of the sun, moon, rainfall, changing weather are also aspects of this ecology.”

Within this purview, the environment, as a community of organisms, is a vibrant nature at complex levels of interaction unfolding in various sketches between creation with an underlining spiritual forces that are responsible for the thriving of all the elements of nature. This belief that spirits inhabit nature disposes the Igbo to nurture and take proper care of nature for what it is.

As with most traditional societies, so for the Igbo, mountains, trees, water, stones, land, nature as a totality is viewed as sacred. Various elements like the mountains, seas, stones, land, valleys, trees, etc., in the human environment are meaningful to the Igbo since they indicate a reality beyond themselves. Traditionally, respect for the environment in Igbo land is shown in the ways the Igbo relate to animals, plants and all the forces in nature and what meanings nature relays to them. Harvey Sindima captures this form of environmental ethical notion and practice in ways that stress much on mutuality; “how we live in the web of life in reciprocity with people, other creatures, and the earth, recognizing that they are part of us and we are part of them.”

Reciprocity

imposes some sanctions on what or not to do, what or not to eat either for their religious, mystic symbolisms or just for letting such entities be themselves and flourish. Such beliefs and practices, otherwise known as totems and taboos assist in preserving and maintaining various life forms and the environment. Subject to various communities, certain trees, animals, days, and times are considered special and respected for what they stand for. The positive effects of such beliefs and practices significantly help in preserving such species of lives and seasons. In a certain sense, this is a philosophy of life that enhances peaceful co-existence not only between humans, but also the rest of God’s creation. It guarantees that harmony between nature and humans exists. Rightly, this can be called an indigenous Igbo theology of nature and the environment. In this regard, scholars like Nwala, Metuh, etc., agree that Igbo environmental ethics is based on their concept of land or earth as spiritual entity that is home to all creatures. This understanding of environmental ethics is not separated from land ethics, Omenala, which is very much built on nso ala. (land taboo). This covers every form of prohibition that touches on land use and treatment. Right treatment and relationship promote harmony and health of the community whereas the opposite constitutes threats to all life forms and thus an offense.

The Igbo ecological psyche resonates in harmony with nature. Anthony Asoanya, notes that “for the Igbo man or woman, the gifts of nature are not mere objects to be owned and explored. They are subjects out of which they are born and through which they are sustained.”

Given this socio-ecological orientation and matrix, everyone, each community, is called upon to respect, defend and protect or even revere these gifts. Defense of nature is a defense and affirmation of life and harmony. Thus, the Igbo ecological view is not mechanistic in which entities are viewed as lifeless commodities to be understood and approached scientifically and to be used for human ends. Rather, it is a life-centered ethics for it stresses the interconnectedness, the bondedness of creatures. Humanity is part of nature, which, conversely, is looked upon as a cosmic body, the life-giving and sustaining mother. Being the case, humanity is subject to the spiritual forces that inhabit and permeate the earth. They are expected to observe the codes defining relationships with the spiritual forces, or arusi mnuo and things of this world, as Isichei puts it. It is believed that the violation of this cosmic body amounts to crisis or confusion, which is a sign of the earth’s rebellion against human trespasses. For example, “fathers may have sexual relations with their daughters and mothers with their sons.”

For the Igbo, this is an abomination against the land, and it can upset peace and harmony. Sacrifice is therefore needed to pacify the earth and to restore balance.

1.5.2 Environmental challenges in Igbo land/Niger Delta Experiences

With an old-fashioned name, Oecologie, the term ecology came to prominence in the early 1890’s. Proposed by Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), a German Biologist, ecology is a derivative of

166 Anthony Asoanya, The Ecological Crisis in Africa as a Challenge to Lasting Cultural and Sustainable Development: A Theological Approach (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 58.

the Greek prefix *eco*, which means house or dwelling place. Today, ecology has become a household word. In a common parlance, it is fitting to say that ecology is the study of home, of the interactions between organisms and the physical environment.¹⁶⁸ Scientifically, it deals with the interrelationship in and between organisms occupying or living in a larger household; the entire environment in which all living and non-living organism exist.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, ecology is not something out there. Humans are in nature and nature is in humans as are other entities in nature.

As humans, we are constantly interacting with nature and vice versa. Rosemary Radford Ruether explains that “ecology is the science of biotic communities; it identifies the processes or ‘laws’ by which nature, unaided by humans, regenerates and sustains life.”¹⁷⁰ On the other hand, the word environment has a French root, derived from the word “environs,” which is a plural noun that means “surroundings” or “surrounding area.” The dictionary definition has it as “the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors (such as climate, soil, and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival.”¹⁷¹ Thus, environment is made up of two components that interact with each other: the biotic or living organisms, and the physical environment. For the Nigerian agency accountable for the protection of the environment, “environment includes water, air, land and all plants and human beings and/or

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animals living therein and the interrelationships, which exist among these or any of them.”\textsuperscript{172} In other words, it encompasses the physical and human elements on the planet earth and their interrelationships. Sequel to this, it follows that ecology and environment are used interchangeably. Often, references are made either to environmental or ecological crisis. Both deal with every aspect of life and the society as ecological or environmental crises affect all life forms. However, there may be times, when contextually, the crises are restricted to a particular environment. Hence, ecological, or environmental challenges in Igbo land/Niger- Delta region of Southern Nigeria.

Now, what then is ecological crisis within the context of Igbo/Niger Delta region? Explaining the term as it is applicable to the Igbo situation, Asoanya asserts that “ecological crisis is adopted as a necessary consequence of the so-called contemporary way of thinking, first by specialized scientists, then by desperate city dwellers who managed to retain some memories of the ‘good old days.’”\textsuperscript{173} The “old good days” expression resonates with the Igbo traditional society when the sacred quality of the ecological systems were recognized for the purposes they served; as dwelling places for God, the spirits and divinities likewise as the medium through which God could be reached and vice versa. Proverbially, the Igbo would say, “Mgbe elu wuuru ala osa” (when the vaults were the abodes of the squirrels), which means when, “essentially, there was

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\item Anthony Asoanya, The Ecological Crisis in Africa, 21.
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‘harmony between the traditional pattern of lifestyle with the environment’. It also describes the variety of ecological features which the Igbo traditional society was blessed with the result of which scholars were encouraged to divide the Igbo territory into some key ecological areas. For Uchendu, they are riverine, delta, central, and northeastern belts; Michael Onwuejeogwu divides them into the scarplands of south-east, the southern half of the lower Niger basin, the mid-west lowlands, the Niger delta, the palm belt of the southeastern Nigeria and the Cross River basin; while Daryll Forde and Gwilliam I. Jones give five divisions which are the northern or Onitsha Igbo, southern or Owerri Igbo, Western Igbo, Eastern or Cross River Igbo and northeastern Igbo. All these regions had rich natural and human resources and each, in its own ways, relayed the sense of the sacred, instilling, and furthering harmony between humans and the natural environment. This “old good days,” it has been discovered, has been upset by the influence of secularism and modernism and most times, fueled by some Christian fundamentalists that dissociated the sense of sacred from nature with huge concentration on nature as matter meant to serve the human needs and wants, leading to the bastardization of the environment.

Environmental problems have not spared any part of the Southeastern/Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. The Niger-Delta region is made up of the six states: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers, in the south-south geo-political zone; two states: Abia and Imo, from the south-east, and one state, Ondo, from the south-west. This region is the bedrock of the Nigerian
oil and gas industry and accounts for more than 90% of the country’s total export.176 Placed within the tropical rain forest zone, it is rich in biodiversity and consists mainly of mangrove, swampy and lowland rainforests. As such, it is the major source of Nigeria’s revenue and foreign reserve.

Yet, Niger-Delta is shaken by series of environmental challenges. Some environmentalists regard this region as “the global capital of oil pollution, with tragic consequences of the traditional livelihood of the local people, wanton destruction of the natural resources on which people have depended and thrived for centuries.”177 Adversely, the oil induced environmental dislocation of the area has not only windswept traditional livelihood, it has also led to series of communal conflicts among and within communities, and between communities and the oil companies resulting in loss of human lives and all sorts of ecological disasters.178 While some of these ecological threats are the result of climate change, such as sea level rise, coastal erosion and flood, others are directly from oil exploration, drilling and transportation, land pollution and the government failure to hold the oil corporations accountable and to develop the area. The use of unsustainable methods in the extraction of oil has dealt a death blow to the Niger Deltan environment and fuels global warming.

Other communities in Igbo land that do not fall within the Niger delta zone are not spared of ecological degradations. Gully erosion has devastated many communities. As reported by This


178 Ibid.
Day Newspaper, it is no longer the notorious old Agulu-Nanka erosion. Other communities like Ekwuluobia, Oko, parts of Oba and Nnewi in Anambra State have experienced gorges created by gully erosion. According to This Day, Anambra State alone has more than 960 active erosion sites.\(^{179}\) Also, the documentary by News Express Newspapers verifies the report by This Day Newspaper and describes the pathetic situation of Anambra State as deplorable. With the active erosion sites identified by the Government of Anambra State, the Governor, Willie Obiano, raised alarm about the growing threats of gully erosion saying that “with the over 950 gully erosion sites existing within a land mass of 4,844 sq kilometers,” clearly, “unless something drastic was done, Anambra could be washed away by erosion.”\(^{180}\) The list of this can go on and on not just within Anambra State but all the states in Igbo land where the highest severe concentration of erosion is found in Nigeria.\(^{181}\)

Again, Enugu areas are not spared. As Abraham Akpen Jov notes, human activities have worsened the Enugu Port Harcourt highway. The road is in terrible shape, with the half of the bridge that keeps the road motorable collapsed due to heavy weights of trucks. Jov also observes that the rivers and ponds in the area, Atakwu community precisely, have been taken over by the Fulani herdsmen with their free range and unrestrained grazing practices contributing immensely to the destruction of the fauna and flora of the community that was formerly an ecologically rich


environment. Crops, which are part of the area’s flora are often destroyed by the herds. Painfully, Jov avers that “The Fulani herdsmen seem readily disposed to attacking anyone who opposes their uncontrolled grazing practices” as they attacked some families mostly at nights, murdering a seminarian of the Spiritan International School of Theology “for the same reasons hinted above.” Unfortunately, this ugly incidence has continued to replicate itself unabated not only in the Southeastern Nigeria but everywhere in Nigeria. Killing, kidnapping, raping, destructions of homes, businesses, properties, livestock, etc., are so much common in Nigeria currently that no place, nobody, no region is safe, leading to a lot of ecological problems. Arguably, the environmental situations in Igbo land/Niger Delta region are worrisome. It has serious implications on faith and morals as well as the economy of the people.

Consequently, a clear-cut observation has shown that ecological crisis in Igbo land has not been treated as an issue which has deep connection with faith in God. Instead, it has been treated either economically, politically, sociologically or psychologically. This is especially clear when we consider the fact that “most Bible-totting church goers in the land may have never heard a sermon related to the ‘environmental crisis’ which has become such a concern to so many around the world,” and not even when a church hierarchy cherry-picks “migration” as much more crucial “than climate change and abortion” instead of treating them holistically. This lack of


184 Asoanya, 1.

185 Patrick Egwu, “Nigerian Bishop ranks Migration a bigger Issue than abortion, Climate change," *EarthBeat: Stories of climate crisis, faith and action,*
attention by most Christians is perplexing specifically since many of the environmental problems, as Lynn White and his followers postulated, are rooted in the Christian faith and actions.\textsuperscript{186} Apparently, this attitude continues to further an irrevocable disaster in the land. While some are yet to fully realize that years of successive unrestrained exploitation of nature would wreak havoc on the planet earth, denial and over presumption that the earth’s bounty is unlimited have fanned into flame the embers of the crisis in many quarters. The fact is that human actions have exerted enormous pressures on the earth’s resources. Regrettably, many people are yet to understand the degree of the ecological threat to their faith, economic and psychological life.

1.5.3 Tracing the possible causes of Ecological crisis in Igbo land

In the modern times, human attitude towards the environment, generally, is unfriendly. Lynn White notes that “we are not, in our hearts, parts of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim.”\textsuperscript{187} This is basically true considering the increasing disruption of the environment through human actions in various works of life that humans are involved in, which are designed, consciously or not, to subdue and exploit nature. Ecological crisis mirrors the crisis in human hearts. Apart from the natural occurrences sometimes, too many human factors are responsible for ecological crisis in Igbo land. Attention here will be limited to few due to their salient roles in the life and faith of the Igbo.

\textsuperscript{186} Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” 24-28.

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid.
1.5.3.1 Colonialism and its impacts on Igbo tradition and psyche

Colonialization and evangelization of Igbo land moved at par with each other. Christianity’s expansion was supported by the British colonial efforts in Igbo land primarily through trade and political control. Regarding the situation of the Igbo within this period, Chibueze Udeani, quoting E. A. Ayodele, states that the Igbo society was much less open than Yorubaland to direct outside influences like Islam and Christianity until the beginning of this century, when series of military expeditions threw open their village communities … The administrator and missionary intruded into the community about the same time. There was no question of the people accepting the one and rejecting the other.¹⁸⁸

Colonialism in Igbo land had a violent phenomenon. No Nigerian ethnic group tenaciously opposed colonialism more than the Igbo for almost three decades.¹⁸⁹ Of a truth, colonialism in Igbo land is the extension of the British political influence and authority into its territory in every aspect of Igbo life. The colonizers were resolved “to occupy lands which did not belong to them, and to impose forced labor on populations to extend their domination and to develop their home economies,”¹⁹⁰ while impoverishing the colonized.

Colonialism in Igbo land brought about a paradigmatic shift in the traditional Igbo way of life. It was a complete overturn of the entire Igbo system and organization. Its rippling effects are felt on the social, religious, ecological, linguistic, and indeed the overall cultural milieu of the


¹⁸⁹ Udeani, 101.

Igbo, and with a superior ideology, which is totally to dominate and impose the British rule on the colonized. As Uzukwu rightly observes,

The colonial ideology is that of domination and exploitation of the colonized, intended to derive maximum profit from minimum investment. To realize this objective, the colonizers went ahead to deny the being of the colonized, their person, the culture, their worldview. In its place was installed the person, the culture, and the universe of the colonizer for the realization of the interests of the latter. The successful implementation of this ideology alienated the colonized. The machine for the successful of the colonial ideology was both technical (colonial military superiority) and religious (Christianity).\footnote{Uzukwu, 29.}

In other words, like the colonizers so were the Christian missionaries, in Western garb, to Igbo land. The missionaries worked hand in gloves with the colonizers in their evangelism. With their ideology of superiority, “Some indeed wanted to castigate and dramatize the inferiority of the enslaved/colonized African who is unable to conceptualize God as the enslaving, colonizing and missionizing Christian European” and thus justify “the three-pronged interrelated movements that followed the abolition of slavery: colonize, civilize and Christianize.”\footnote{Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, \textit{God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness: Appropriating Faith and Culture in West African Style} (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 53.} Colonization and Christianization functioned as the two sides of a coin that exerted huge impact on the Igbo. While they differed in methods of operation, both had European superiority complex and tradition that misunderstood the Igbo, their world, culture, and religion. Uzukwu and Udeani, respectively, argue that even if some missionaries opposed the style of the colonizers and their tolerance of Islam that was rival or threat to the missionary ideals, it was difficult to cut ties with them, for the missionary saw the colonial policy as a material instrument of civilization, and evangelization was integrally linked to colonization.\footnote{Uzukwu, 29.}
Civilization through Western education was introduced and was principally run by the missionaries. This was a strong tool to impact the colonial ideology alongside Christian religion. Hence, the birth of a new culture, installation of new technologies, politics of divide and rule, inequality. Igbo land was Christianized and Western Christian cosmology and concepts of person and community were introduced to either contest with or displace the traditional cosmology. This was a strong paradigm shift in the life of the traditional Igbo society that remains notable among the Igbo till date. Uzukwu strongly advises that the close connection between the Christian religion and the political powers in the conquest of Africa must not be forgotten in the effort to reconstruct the continent.\textsuperscript{194} The daunting task here is that of decolonizing the African mind to think creatively African and fashioning out an educational and catechetical scheme that reflects African values. How these values can address the local needs of the people adequately or relatively without an outright dependence on foreign ideologies, powers, help, which promote consumerism and neocolonialism in African minds, remains a herculean task facing African scholars and technocrats, religious men and women, politicians, etc.

Evidently, as to colonialism, the Igbo traditional society fervently resisted Christianity. Felix K. Ekechi notes that the Igbo did not contemplate the regenerating power of Christianity, as preached by the missionaries, relevant to their needs. People held to their traditional faith, which they believed was better for them than the new religion with its colonizing effects. Mostly, people listened to the missionary ‘propaganda’ but remained outside the church. Ekechi argues that those who embraced Christianity before 1900 were mostly people who were alienated from or at the margins of the society or suffered from “certain social disabilities or experienced certain natural

\textsuperscript{193} Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, \textit{A Listening Church}, 29. See Chibueze Udeani, 102.

\textsuperscript{194} Uzukwu, 30.
misfortunes,”¹⁹⁵ “the nobodies” as Uzukwu calls them, who eventually became political stooges to the colonizers in administrating the affairs of the Igbo communities.¹⁹⁶ These “no bodies” became more or less like catalysts that quickened the breakdown of traditional Igbo life with the roles they played. Consequently, the traditional institutions, sacred authorities were shaken, defaced, and reduced to nothing. “Every member of the society was reduced to the level of the masses, including the chiefs and rulers. The local hierarchy was replaced by an administrative representing a foreign autocratic regime.”¹⁹⁷ This experience advanced the deterioration of the Igbo traditional value systems hence the emergence of a new class of Igbo who would take over from the colonial administration.

Furthermore, with the British military occupation of Igbo nation, the social and political disruption that followed led to an upsetting social environment. The British were involved in extensive military tours in the Igbo communities where “...the soldiers molested the villagers, seized their livestock and often ravaged their crops.”¹⁹⁸ The entire Igbo land was exposed to military expeditions and exploitation. As noted above, those who enjoyed some protection from the military harassment were the Christians. Henceforward, the Igbo lost total control of their local politics and economy to the pillager. They “were no longer the originators of their own designs, nor were they the projectors of their own schemes or the creators of the events that led to their destiny,” everything was “done for the interest of the predators. It was not public service for the


¹⁹⁶ Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 30

¹⁹⁷ Uzukwu, 30.

well-being of the society,” thus, cheating and lies started fermenting among the locals to survive and get some leisure from forced labors with mere pittance.\textsuperscript{199} In the long run, this attitude affected the Igbo relationship with their environment in their search for greener pastures. The result was exploitation of the environment and flouting of the once held sacred norms that provided safety or haven for the natural environment, even to the human ecology as well.

Religiously, the same subversion was extended to the church as “Latin rituals or rituals of other churches were indiscriminately introduced with their patterns of initiation and they were all closely linked with the school system. Consequently, the native rituals of initiation were not only discouraged but were declared diabolical.”\textsuperscript{200} Similarly, affected in this were other customary rituals like land or agricultural rituals, taboos, and in some places; various festivals, ancestral veneration, the social and religious systems that made each head of a clan the caretaker of their family stool. These were proscribed, termed obnoxious, pagan, unwise and unwholesome.\textsuperscript{201} Remarkably, these rituals in various ways are connected to the earth or land integrity and protection of creatures other than humans. Given the holistic worldview of the Igbo, any action or disconnection somewhere invariably affects others. Augustine Okwu argues that the proscription of the ancestral veneration was one of the major factors that destroyed the force and unity of the Igbo which paved ways for the violation of the laws of the land. Armed with the zeal of their newfound religion, converts to Christianity engaged in a crusade of disregarding and destroying traditional and religious symbols and heritages.

\textsuperscript{199} Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, \textit{A Listening Church}, 31.

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{201} Augustine S. O. Okwu, \textit{Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions 1857-1957}, 196.
Clearly, Okwu noted the 1912-1919 report by Sir Frederick Lord Lugard, the then Governor General of Nigeria who acknowledged and pointed out that there had been a lot of unnatural inclination on the part of Christian converts to renounce the authority of their chiefs, and to ignore and flout native customary laws. Accordingly, “Young people, mostly Christians, in various areas of the Eastern territories, had resisted … the Native chiefs… And thinking that the missionaries would defend them…, in the passion of the new faith, violated the various taboos associated with the secret societies, sacred animals, sacred grooves and rivers, to the anger of the elders…”  

The unrests that this action had on the Igbo politics, life, property and the environment was enormous. Agreeably, this was a complete deracination of the Igbo human and socio-religious ecology, the genesis of “the famous anthropological impoverishment of Africa,” which, Uzukwu, as earlier quoted, talked of as the denial of “the being of the colonized, their person, the culture, their worldview. In its place was installed the person, the culture, and the universe of the colonizer for the realization of the interests of the latter.” This would impact other areas of life since life is interconnected in the Igbo worldview.

Obviously, the Igbo exposure to colonialism introduced the process of modernization, which has continued till date. However, with industrialization and modernization, the transition from primordial to pre-industrial and to a much more complex society of consumerism and throwaway culture. The Igbo, who were essentially living commodiously and harmoniously with nature, have a more exploitative relationship with their environment. In the Igbo traditional society, clearly, people lived in a religious universe where nature and humans were partners. As

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202 Ibid, 203.

203 Ibid.
noted above, ecology, environment, or nature has no single direct term or translation in Igbo language, also of other African languages. Everything was conceived in a unified, cosmic order so that any infringement anywhere is believed to boomerang on the others. Thus, exploitation of the natural resources was far from the norm. Following the colonizers who commodified the natural and even human resources in Igbo land for their interests, development of their homeland economies, “the Igbo became restructured to external stimuli” which were “operative in both secular and sacred domains.”

The biased cultural background of the colonizers and the missionaries about the Igbo worldview and the introduction of modernization without a gradual process of transition led to the Igbo dissonance with nature.

Agreeably, colonization has lots of positive impacts on Igbo land. However, its negative impacts abound, one of such being the colonizers’ aggressive mercantile mind of seeing their colonies as areas of business and profit-making. Indiscriminate downing of trees, selling of lands, and destruction of the natural environment came with the money-market economy where virtually everything could be sold for money and people seem to flow with mercantile mind to earn a living. As Francis A Oborji observes, “In the traditional African society, basic needs were met for example, by exchanging goods among families, and not by making huge profits through the exploitation of the needs of others.”

The reverse seems to be the case in the contemporary Igbo society that tends to lean more towards commercialization of everything.

204 Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 31.

With colonial times, a new form of sustainability was introduced to Igbo land, which was aimed at exploiting and transforming human and natural resources principally for the benefits of the colonizers. “Cash crops… and mineral products … were produced or extracted for the colonial industries of the West. No such industries were established in the colonies.”

The result of this instrumental value was “a mental shift in the perception of the natural environment from being a factor to secured sustenance, to being a factor that had to be conquered, overcome, subdued or transformed to promote human welfare.” As a result, “the natural environment came to be seen as an obstacle to development, and to this day, any area that still has a wide expanse of natural vegetation, for example, is ‘described pejoratively as uncivilized, undeveloped, backward…’”

This disparaging attitude is also applied to some people who strive to defend the traditional values from erosion. Most times, they are described as being too Igbotic, i.e., backward by some of those who see themselves as progressive, civilized, or well-educated and travelled. Psychologically, this weakens people from defending the values that are ecologically friendly. The environment suffers the brunt of this dereliction, exposing it to more violation, exploitation, deforestation, and destruction.

Drastically, land use was affected and apparently, it lost its sacred value and aura. The attachment of monetary values to land encouraged individuals and private ownership, which diminished the availability of land for rotation in the farming practices. This forced many people with fewer portions of land to utilize shorter fallow periods and over-cultivate their farms.

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208 Ibid. See also Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 31.
Following this quest to exploit the natural resources, especially forests, majorly for overseas markets, most indigenous belief systems were largely undermined. As earlier said, the Christian missionaries, in alliance with the colonizers, played greater role in dislocating the traditional practices of the land use and the protection of natural resources as most of the practices were termed pagan and unwholesome. In lieu of this, a modern concept of forest reservation was developed and introduced, primarily for the interest of the colonizers; to protect and preserve sources of economic products like rubber and timber and ultimately to protect vital watersheds. Some forests, traditionally regarded as evil forests or bad bushes, were handed over to the missionaries for religious, health and educational purposes. Eventually, the available areas for operating the rotational Igbo farming systems were more and more weakened and people were alienated from the reserved forests. Invariably, with all the missionary meta-narratives, the local people’s regard for the forests was disorientated. With this, indiscriminate and poaching behaviors were stimulated, leading to greater loss of biodiversity that most wild-lives are either scarcely found in their natural habitats or totally extinct in Igbo land today. As a matter of fact, most of these animals only exist in names, not in reality any more. Perhaps, many migrated to the Igbo neighboring communities. Possibly, some are kept in some zoos in Nigeria.

Additionally, with colonization came some changes in the Igbo settlement patterns and practices. Suddenly, there was an increased in urbanization and modernization among the locals.

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209 As Chinua Achebe wrote in his fictional classic, *Things Fall Apart*, of the Igbo, ‘Every clan and village had its ‘evil forest.’ In it were buried all those who died of some diseases. It was also the dumping ground for the potent fetishes of great medicine-men when they died. An “evil forest” was, therefore, alive with sinister forces and powers of darkness. See Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London, 1958), 119.

Hence, the agricultural Igbo who lived and survived through the centuries as a sustainable society in a subsistence economy, trading on goods and keeping separate identities, with modern development, which is based on profit-making or cash economy, was required to live in large agglomerations. The result of this was the growth of large settlements with rapid urbanization and industrialization to the detriment of the natural environment, with inadequate and poor drainage systems, sewage and refuse disposals constituting nuisance in most places: cities and towns.\textsuperscript{211} Since the town system was more heterogeneous than the normal village life, interpersonal relationship was more foreign and official than cordial or familial. This affected the traditional sanitary practices, which imposed a sacred duty on people to communally engage in environmental sanitations usually done on agreed days by various communities to ensure the cleanliness of the villages. Traditionally, “individual homes and their surroundings was the responsibility of the household while communal grounds were maintained collectively often by appointing special days and defining the groups to participate in such activities.”\textsuperscript{212} Environmental sanitation had a compelling force on everyone that “A non-conforming individual, household or compound could find itself being excluded from participating in group activities, could be avoided in terms of trading exchange and could generally find itself being ostracized, in addition to being required to make customary observances.”\textsuperscript{213} These practices were no longer possible to observe in the cities and gradually, in the villages.

\textsuperscript{211} Asoanya, 84.

\textsuperscript{212} Eric O. Ayisi, \textit{Introduction to the Study of African Culture}, x-xi.

With the overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions, it meant a total breakdown in the societal control of unsound environmental habits. This poor management led to serious health crisis like typhoid fever, bubonic plagues, tuberculosis, and cholera to most people living and worshipping in the affected areas who would, in turn, spread these epidemics in the rural areas through mobility. Asoanya notes that there were environmental policies and practices instituted by the colonial masters but most of these were mainly directed to their residential areas and to themselves for their protection. Incipiently, the traditional environmental consciousness experienced some ruptures. And with the local government dereliction, since the unitary and cohesive life anchored on the traditional worldview had been shaken and neglected, the Igbo environmental sanitation, protection and conservation have not been the same again. Efforts by most local governments to propagate more widely positive ideas and practices about environmental sanitations, sometimes, meet with resistance from some people in some communities. While some, for their Christian belief, have a total disregard of the traditional preservation and conversation of the environment, others, due to money-market economy and its politics, have a more exploitative concept of the environment than the traditional commodious and harmonious understanding in which people saw it as a sacred duty to preserve and care for the environment, which nurtures them and feeds their spiritual insights about God. “Unfortunately,” as Wangari Maathai notes, in general terms to what has become of Africa with colonialism and


215 Asoanya, 84-85

the Christian missionaries, “many of us have become detached from the natural world through industrialization, urbanization, and habitual loss” so much that “the original ideas and thoughts of the founders of religions and traditions were distorted or modified to suit the custom of people who embraced them.” And with time, “the followers became distant from what was initially conveyed by the founders.” For instance, “in the Christian tradition, aspects of the original faith were disconnected from care of the earth, when carriers of the faith became politically entangled with the expansionists, colonialists, and exploiters of peoples and the planets. They at once facilitated and created the wounds that need to be healed today.”217 However, the Igbo, like any other African society, are not opposed to urbanization, opportunities for industrialization nor is there a call to a complete return of what was in the past. That will not only sound anachronistic, also it will amount to effort in futility. Rather, what is condemned is the exploitation of the natural environment and its attendant violation of the laws of the land that do not respect the values of the people and impact negatively on the ecosystems and food cultures. Sadly, the present-day political clime and even some fanatic Christian sects have continued the exploitation of the environment from where the colonialists and their missionary counterparts stopped, even more than the colonialists did. Like wildfires, it has continued, albeit in another way, to burn and to destroy the vestiges of the past values left.

1.5.3.2 Post-colonial era and Politics of the day

Colonialism exerted enormous and lasting influence in the governance and life of the Igbo. Like slavery, colonialism “was devastating to the Igbo society and culture that the very precincts

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of the sacred were not spared.”218 It spearheaded mistrust among the Igbo and furthered the rupture of what was left during the invasion. Although officially over with the achievement of Nigeria’s independence, October 1st, 1960, from the British rule, the vestiges of colonialism are still far from being over in the Igbo society. Arguably, the post-colonial leadership simply acquired both the ethos and strategy of development of the colonial government.

While blame for whatever is wrong with the Igbo leadership may not go entirely to the colonial era, it should not be forgotten that colonialism has lasting impacts on the colonized, positively and negatively. Arguably,

the major problem with colonization of the Africans is the incomplete nature of such colonialism which bothers on the traces of ill-intention of the colonizers who often saw their colonies as areas of business and profit making. This resulted in the resistance of such colonial actions as imposition. Nevertheless, these negative intentions of the colonial masters affected the African assimilation of the positive acts of colonialism including education, readjustment of worship, and basic acts of human freedom. In the final analysis, Africans found themselves in a situation of cultural crisis.219

This cultural crisis has, in great ways, affected most people’s, especially public office holders’ conceptualization of the environment and influenced their relationships with it. Aside from the natural attitudes in humans to possess and abuse trust, it is arguable that the ill-intention of the colonizers who saw their colonies as areas of business and profit-making serves as a template for most politicians who model their political and economic aspirations and environmental views on the colonizers with the result that development and the environmental processes are understood mainly in terms of subjugation and exploitation of the environment and its people. This, among

218 Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, A Listening Church, 25.

others, has continued to fan into flames the embers of corruption and greed that seem to blight the Igbo leadership as well as the entire leadership of Nigeria.\textsuperscript{220} Similarly, businesspersons, like their counterparts in the government, no longer see the forests as sacred reserves and gifts to be cherished and cared for. Instead, it is seen as sources of materials like timber, leaf manure, fuel, and other business purposes. This, as in exchange of baton in a relay race, goes down to the village persons, institutions like schools and churches who also follow suit in commercializing and abusing the environment for various purposes that go contrary to the traditionally held and respected ethos that protected the environment.

Crucially, Billy J. Dudley observes that “the constitution handed over to the new African nations was not founded on African cultural and environmental traditions.”\textsuperscript{221} This was more like indirect rule, independence in principle but ruled by proxy through some loyalist agents who do the biddings of the foreign powers. Eric O. Ayisi avers that the constitution handed over to Africans had no strong social base and, like a green snake in a green grass, it was an apparatus for orchestrated violence within African communities and “relied for compliance on coercion rather on authority.”\textsuperscript{222} Such is the case, for example, of Nigerian constitution that is blamed for most of the crises in the nation since independence. Allegedly, it did not emanate from the people, but “a military decree masquerading as a constitution.”\textsuperscript{223} Hence, the calls from most Nigerians for a


\textsuperscript{222} Eric O. Ayisi, \textit{Introduction to the Study of African Culture}, x-xi.

review of the constitution to reflect true federalism\textsuperscript{224} and perhaps take into consideration environmental concerns that are directly or indirectly aided by most politicians who manipulate it for their selfish interest, and perpetuate a form of imperialism in Igbo-Nigerian garb as seen in ethnic and religious polarity that has continued to oppress others, leaving them ecologically poor and devastated.

Also, it is probably for the same imperial reasons that seem to favor the North over and against the South, precisely against the Igbo who feel marginalized and cheated by the constitution. As a result, there have been series of crises including the Nigeria-Biafra war that ensued shortly after independence from colonial authority. The war, lasting for almost 3 years, claimed millions of lives and properties, leading to serious environmental problems, especially in the Eastern Nigeria.\textsuperscript{225} Most environmental crises, by extension, could be attributed to the constitution that seems lopsided, exerting negligence to critical issues, including environmental issues, especially in the Niger Delta regions and in Igbo land by the elected officials most of whom are shareholders in most of the multinational corporations. It is interesting to note that most of these corporations are owned by Western countries and individuals whose activities exert huge degradation of the environment and endanger human and nonhuman lives, a total desecration of the sacred aura of the place.\textsuperscript{226} Most government officials are either sponsored by these corporations or have shares


in them. Some are not clean themselves; they are caught up with the reign of corruption. Therefore, they cannot criticize nor checkmate the environmental hazards and pollutions from these multinationals. Again, the government efforts to attract and keep foreign investors relax their scrutiny regarding the impacts these foreign projects have on the environment. An example is the case of the continuous shifting of the deadline for the ending of gas flaring\textsuperscript{227} since 1969 by the federal government of Nigeria in a bid to keep the International Oil Companies from going for Angolan oil fields, to avoid losing valuable revenues but human lives and the health of the environment. This shows either lack of political will towards doing the right things to save the environment or that the governments are ignorant of their sacred duties towards the environment and posterity. It could also be that they are deliberately abdicating their duties for the sake of political expediency. The result is that these oil magnates have continued to violate the laws of the land with impunity. The impacts of the oil flaring to aquatic, aerial and terrestrial communities are unquantifiable. For the flaring exposes the entire place to intense heat, toxic smoke, chemicals, and roaring noises on daily basis. Also, the incineration of the gas produces sulphur oxides which are released into the atmosphere. When these compounds combine with other atmospheric components, like water and oxygen, the result is acid rains that produce several negative impacts on the environment. Specialists advise that oil flaring leads to the emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere while the venting of gas without burning releases methane\textsuperscript{228} Carbon dioxide and methane are the main greenhouse gas that contribute to global warming. In fact, gas flaring does not only harm the environment, also, it is a huge waste of a cleaner source of energy that, when

\textsuperscript{227} Femi Asu, “Oil Companies to continue to flare gas beyond 2015,” \textit{BusinessDay}, February 16, 2014.

harnessed, can generate the much-needed electricity in the region and beyond. Arguably, the continued operations of gas flaring in the region are an indication that the Nigerian government and the multinational oil companies are insensitive to the plights of the environment and the people of this region. They are guilty of environmental degradation.

Besides, the locals, like the Niger Deltans, who are hosts to these corporations do not receive the commensurate share of the benefits of the natural resources in their land. There seem to be no thorough cleanups of the polluted environment, no infrastructural developments nor any gainful employments of the youths of the place. According to reports,

Apart from owning and operating oil blocs, these oil asset operators have also incorporated several companies with which they do lucrative oil servicing contracts that ought to be done by local people within their bloc areas. Even employment opportunities that are supposed to be given to the host communities are given to the kindred of the Nigerian assets owners to the detriment of the...host communities.  

The unpleasant situation is best described as “an internal colonialism” as most of the operators introduce practices that amount to more or less of internal slavery of the Niger Delta host communities.” Civilly, there is no respect for the law of the land nor its peoples by these multinationals and most politicians, especially politicians from the Northern Nigeria, who own most of the oil wells in the region. Statistically, the Premium Times Nigeria Newspaper provides


230 Ibid.

supportive evidence to this reality. According to Times, Senator Ina Enang, the chairperson of the senate committee on rules and business, gave a shocking revelation on the senate floor that “83% of the oil wells are owned by people from the Northern Nigeria.”\textsuperscript{232} The question is, how are the oil wells or blocs awarded to the owners that they seem to favor more Northerners than people from the oil producing regions? To this, Times records that it is done “at the discretion of the [Nigerian] president through the petroleum minister without any transparent process.”\textsuperscript{233} Given that Northerners have so much been in power, both in the military and democratic dispensations in Nigeria, one does not need to ask further questions about the sense of entitlement that the Northerners have till date in Nigeria that seems to fuel most of the crisis of imbalance in the Nigerian polity. Un patriotically, informed by greed and exploitative proclivities, most of the northern political elites make some inflammatory claims that every Nigerian land and its resources belong to them.\textsuperscript{234} So, they can do as they want insofar as the environmental pollution of the place does not affect them directly. Such callous and insensitive words capable of setting the environment ablaze continue to exacerbate tension in the polity that is already sitting on the keg of gun powder awaiting explosion. The inflammatory words from the political elites are translated into actions by their minions who, inspired by their political rhetoric, carry out civil, village


\textsuperscript{233} Ibid.

unrests, leading to destruction of lives, farms, etc., displacing people from their homes. It stalls any infrastructural developments and creates more tensions.

Consequently, most communities in the Niger Delta areas are agitating against these multinational oil exploring companies and the government partly because they feel that their lands are being desecrated. The issue is not simply that the environment is being destroyed but that the abodes of their deities are desecrated. Some communities have had to stop the construction of roads or bridges because their sacred bushes or trees or rivers are being tampered with. Their reaction is, at times, motivated by the fear that disturbing the dwelling of the spirits would bring disaster on the entire people.\textsuperscript{235} Hence, the spate of crisis has continued in various ways, robbing the communities of both human and natural resources in greater extent, leading to more of environmental crisis and abandonment of the sacred vision of nature, respect, and confidence in sacred authority of the land.

1.5.3.3 Economic Issues

Poverty, hunger, population, and inappropriate land use, apparently, cut across continents although at various magnitudes. They are among the issues engendering ecological crisis in most parts of the world. As the saying goes, “hunger is the worst enemy of humanity.” Poverty and hunger are tied together. In most families, poverty has remained a bane to decent life. Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, continues to wrestle with the issues of hunger and poverty amidst the rich natural resources she is blessed with. It is reported that “Nigeria has already overtaken India as the country with the largest number of extremely poor.”\textsuperscript{236} making her the poverty capital

of the world. Oxfam, the International Charity, reveals that “the number of extreme poverty in Nigeria has skyrocketed to 94.4 million people, with three million having been added to that unhappy lot in a mere span of six months.” This, being true, means that nearly a half of Nigeria’s population is virtually condemned to the nightmare of the Middle Ages. While it could be argued that poverty level is higher in the Northern Nigeria, most times, it is a ploy by the Federal government to direct attention to the North in giving federal allocations and other national benefits. The Southeastern states are often neglected. This exacerbates the level poverty and hunger in Igbo land.

The Igbo, as earlier noted, constitute one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Though hardworking and resourceful in nature, they have had a fair share of poverty and hunger issues likewise population and inappropriate land uses with their torturous experience of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war (1967-1970). The war was pictured as the cause of severe hunger and famine and responsible for the impoverishment that most Igbo still pass through today. It disrupted agricultural production and disposed many people to serve starvation and death and the destruction of the environment. According to Obi Iwuagwu,

It is important to note however, that this war had several consequences on the Igbo economy and in particular its food production systems. It has been argued that five major factors contributed to the breakdown of the indigenous food production systems of Eastern Nigeria during the period: the influx of refugees; total economic blockade; mobilization of men and materials for the Biafra Army; military

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operation resulting in population displacement; and, the capture of the food surplus areas of the Cross River Basin especially Ibibio, Bende, Abakiliki and the Rivers areas by the federal troops in the early months of the war.²³⁹

Poverty, the inability of an individual to afford the basic needs of life, leads to hunger, anger, disease and consequently, death. When the poverty and hunger-stricken persons cannot afford decent living by the standard means, they resort to non-standard means as alternatives to meeting their needs. Often, these non-standard alternative means are unethical and debasing, leaning heavily towards the disequilibrium and destabilization of the social and ecological communities. This impacted negatively on the environment variously. An Igbo proverb has it that, “Kama nwa dibia ga-anwu, o ka mma ka akwukwo di ohia gwu” (instead of the child of an herbalist to die, it is better for the leaves/trees in the forest to finish). Far from justifying an unethical and unwholesome means of living, it is undeniable that self-preservation is an irrevocable law of nature. Survival instinct can push any person whose life is threatened by hunger and poverty to do anything, even to take down the entire environment if they believe that doing so will save them from hunger, poverty, and disease.

Similarly, the quest to meet the demands of hunger through boosting of food production has encouraged temporary farming on vacant lands. Of course, with the increase in the Igbo population, apparently, there is scarcity of land to accommodate the growing population. This affects lands uses. As noted earlier, the Igbo depend heavily on land for agriculture, which is one of their major sources of economy. Given this, Low-income families cultivate excessively and indiscriminately on any available plots of land next to their houses and areas meant to be fallow

are not spared. This leads to untold environmental degradation in form of erosion and flooding. It relates to inappropriate cultivation methods and blockage of runoff channels as well as the defacement of the landscape.\textsuperscript{240}

Equally, the quest to survive has also led to various proliferations of small-scale businesses and craft stands almost everywhere in Igbo land, thus constituting inappropriate use of land. Open mechanic workshops, shoeshine and shoe-mending shops, vulcanizers’ corners, illegal kiosks, stalls, and batchers, etc., street hawking and trading have all become common sites, especially in the urban and semi-urban areas, both in open and enclosed spaces. Activities of these small-scale businesses contribute enormously to environmental degradation. Okechukwu C. Aguokonye notes that government has not been forceful enough to check the ecological degradation from these activities. According to Aguokonye, “the Enugu State Government has once attempted unsuccessfully to concentrate all mechanic operating in vacant plots of fence the premises as a means of masking their nuisance effects; but enforcement of the policy fell far short of expectation.”\textsuperscript{241} Because these activities are not well checked, the result is poor waste management. This has almost become common in most cities and villages in Igbo land. “Many street, gutters, paths, and underdeveloped plots of lands in Owerri, Aba, Umuahia, Onitsha, Enugu, and some burgeoning urban areas like Nnewi, Orlu, and Ekwulobia are now littered with refuse. This causes serious air pollution as health threatening odor oozes out from the heaps of uncleared wastes…”\textsuperscript{242} Areas with heavy commercial, industrial, and administrative activities, and not only


\textsuperscript{241} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{242} Ibid.
domestic dwelling places, are filled up with refuse- littering of plastic bottles, cans, various papers and most times, human wastes due to lack of restrooms in most places, unsightliness of polythene bags and table water or ‘pure water sachets’ as people dispose these things indiscriminately. Sometimes, these refuse heaps constitute road jams and with the heavy rains, at times, they are carried to every nook and cranny of the cities and communities, constituting nuisance. The Champion and Guardian Newspapers give a vivid description of refuse and polluted situation in one of cities in Igbo land:

I couldn’t think of any place worse than Onitsha, the commercial center of Anambra State and one of the nation’s highest-ranking commercial cities. Having lived in the city for a good number of years now, I have watched it gradually grow into a city of dirt of all kinds. From Nkpor to Upper Iweka, to Head Bridge back to Fegge, Odakpu, and other parts of the town, you see innumerable heaps of refuse on the roadsides, some even covering the roads. In some cases, you see an unbroken chain of refuse heaps stretching up to half a mile or more. Virtually all the streets and roads in Onitsha are littered with refuse to an alarming indecency, and people practically walk on them. All the gutters have become convenient dustbins where people complacently empty their wastebaskets and their bowels! The numerous markets are the worst hit by this development given the quantity of rubbish they generate. People literally walk, eat and trade very close to and at times on top of stinking wastes that you begin to wonder at their orientation.243

The above speak tellingly of the poor sanitation in most commercial cities and places in Igbo.

Unfortunately, people seem to fare with these unhealthy situations ignorantly or for lack of choice. The government does not seem to care by ensuring a lasting and proper management


and provision of sites and recycling processes to help keep the environment clean. As a result, the circle of dirt and pollution goes unchecked, normalizing what seems abnormal. Given the religious clime in Igbo land, it would be no exaggeration to say that religious activities, church buildings are cited in these places, as virtually people pray on the market squares, carry out market evangelism, revival, and crusade programs regularly. This confirms the point that “ecological crisis is both a physical crisis and a spiritual one” that needs a new understanding that humanity “belongs to a larger family of life on earth.” The situation in Igbo land validates this claim. The crisis in mostly more spiritual that reflects massively on the physical life. This work thus provides key insights in ecology, environmental change, natural resource management and biodiversity conservation as well as the spiritual awareness that weaves through these realities.

1.5.3.4 Christian Marauders: Lagwa (Mbaise) Monkey as a case study

Belief system is another growing cause of ecological crisis in most communities in Igbo land. Recently, some of these beliefs have taken the worst widespread bigotry in religious superstition. While it is true that the traditional Igbo, as other African traditional societies, believe in the ubiquity of spirits, which will be considered in this work, this belief was mostly geared towards the care and protection of the environment and to promote harmony between humans and nature. At least, this belief is not merely built on sentiments. Underneath it lies some insights that recognize the alterity of creatures other than humans, their dignity and right to life and thrive like other beings, their sacred aura and participation in the community of life.

On the contrary, there have been references to unscientific claims by pastors with detrimental bearing on the health of individuals and negative impacts on the environment. As

244 Wangari M. Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth*, 25.
Francis D.A. Ibanga observes, “some people, however highly educated they are in the Sciences, just believe any piece of information, however absurd, because a pastor commanded them to believe.”\textsuperscript{245} Validating this claims, Ibanga, quoting C. Ndeokwelu and H. Ofobike, alludes to the incidents of the Ebola crisis where “a vast majority of Nigerians bathed and drank hot salted water because it was rumored that certain revered pastors recommended the bathing and drinking of hot salt water as prevention against Ebola epidemic.”\textsuperscript{246} This sort of debasing, malady of religious bigotry and superstitions are extended to the natural environments and sometimes to human ecology where some of the popular pastors, ministers or priests instigate environmental crisis by designating some people, animals and plants as witches and wizards. Ibanga argues that

some pastors are telling their congregations that every animal is a candidate of witchcraft embodiment and that every plant is a possible abode of witches and wizards. In many communities, forests and wilderness have been set ablaze, sometimes with the aid of pastors. These pastors have gone to the extent of naming cats, dogs, owls, spiders, gecko, rats, snakes as possessors of demons; and they have equally named trees like obeche, iroko, and mahogany as the homestead of evil spirits. Because of this, … these animals and plants are hunted and axed by individuals, groups, and communities, to set the community free from evil spirits. In most communities, … these species of plants and animals are marked as candidates for destruction.\textsuperscript{247}

As indicated above, similarly, some people are dubbed witches or wizards and thus are either tortured, maimed, disowned, or denied basic welfare by family members at the discretion of some pastors. NBC, CNN, CBS, and ABC News, among others, gave some shocking revelations of the


\textsuperscript{246} Ibanga, 7.

\textsuperscript{247} Ibid.
abuse of the human ecology by some pastors who tag some innocent children and adults witches and wizards. One of such reports is the case of a

9-year-old boy who lay on a bloodstained hospital sheet crawling with ants, staring blindly at the wall. His family pastor had accused him of being a witch, and his father then tried to force acid down his throat as an exorcism. It spilled as he struggled, burning away his face and eyes. The emaciated boy barely had strength left to whisper the name of the church that has denounced him – Mount Zion Lighthouse. A month later, he died. Nwanaokwa Edet was one of an interesting number of increasing number of children in Africa accused of witchcraft by pastors and then tortured and killed, often by family members. Pastors were involved in half of 200 cases of ‘witch children’ revealed by the AP, and 13 churches were named in the case files. Some of the churches involved are renegade local branches of international franchises. Their parishioners take literally the Biblical exhortation, ‘Thou shall not suffer a witch to live.’ ‘It is an outrage what they are allowing to take place in the name of Christianity,’ said Gary Foxcroft, head of nonprofit Steppingstone Nigeria.

There is no doubt that abuses like this stem from wrong use of Christianity to perpetuate ignorance and criminality and other acts that are ecologically harmful. While no religion is immune to any form of abuse, no doubt, some Christian attitudes to the environment have been injurious. One should not be blind to the fact that some unfriendly environmental attitudes can be traced to Judeo-Christian interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures. Examples could be found in Leviticus 16:5-19, 21-22 where priests made some animals scapegoats to pay for the sins of humans. Also, in Genesis 1: 26-28, the text affirms the uniqueness of humanity the fact that humans alone are made in God’s image and in the fact that God gave humanity the power to exercise dominion over the earth, plants, and animals. As experts note, the Hebrew word for “rule,” radah, means “to tread upon,

subjugate, prevail against” and the word “subdue,” *kabash*, is a synonym for “rule.” However, both of these terms express superiority in the strongest terms. They have been overstretched by some Christians to mistreat non-human as well as human creatures, especially the weak and the poor. The bizarre cases above are one example of such misapplications of the Sacred Texts that have done a great deal of harm to the environment in the Southeastern part of Nigeria and beyond.

Far from repeating unnecessarily what has been stated above, about the actions of some of colonizers and the early missionaries to Igbo land, it is worth reiterating that the disdainful attitude of most missionaries towards most traditional Igbo values contributed immensely to the local Christians’ disregard of the environment. J.O Ijoma contends that, the coming of Christian missionaries to Igboland had far-reaching effects on the Igbo. Apart from the pervasive ideology of spreading western education, Christian liturgy and norms, the customs and practices of the people were considered primitive and pagan, and consequently came under attack. As it has been noted and will be stressed further, the early missionaries’ disdainful attitude towards Igbo worldview created a psychological dissonance in their adherents of the traditional Igbo life. A review of some of these narratives is necessary for a healthy relationship with nature.


250 This reality is not common to Igbo land only. It cuts across most African communities. Wangari Maathai gives an account of the missionary activities in East Africa, which correspond to their activities in Igbo land. They dubbed the worldview primitive, judged the native rituals and ceremonies as incompatible to Christianity and “demonized or eventually destroyed” most traditional practices, with the full participation of the natives who were their adherents. See Wangari M. Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth*, 21.

However, this does not denigrate nor deny the positive contributions of Christian missionaries to the development of the Igbo. Critically important is the fact that the history of the Igbo cannot be complete without particularly and generously acknowledging the sufferings and works of the Christian missionaries to Igbo land.\textsuperscript{252} While the early missionaries are not entirely to be blamed and exonerated, as well, for the Igbo worldview is extremely complex, their misinterpretation of the traditional worldview abetted in “demystifying nature and extremely drives people’s anthropocentric tendency to exploitation of nature.”\textsuperscript{253}

In what he calls “attack on Igbo culture,”\textsuperscript{254} Augustine S. O. Okwu details wistfully, all the sacred values of the Igbo culture that were vilified and branded idolatry. Totems and taboos restraining people from indiscriminate destruction of certain animals, trees, forests; agricultural laws preventing people from farming on certain days regarded as holy days for each community in Igbo land were all denigrated and flouted. These laws helped nature to heal and regenerate. Okwu argues that these laws, otherwise termed ancestral laws or laws of the land, were “not only a cultural obligation, it was more than anything else a demonstration of the members’ collective filial loyalty and political homage that fostered and cemented the maintenance of law, order, unity, morality, stability and identity in the community.”\textsuperscript{255} Similarly, the traditional Igbo regard and reverence for the Earth deity and various other cults that served as social control measures were


\textsuperscript{255} Okwu, 204.
branded “false gods, gods of woods and stones,” idols which have nothing good to benefit the people rather than to kill and menace their peace and safety. The demonization of these traditional earth-affirming ethics and rituals desensitized in people the traditional moral consciousness and duty towards the earth. The rippling effects of this shift is skyrocketing among many contemporary Igbo Christians.

Apparently, the Christian fanatics, who erroneously flout the sacred totems and taboos, which are the basis of Igbo traditional ecological ethics, unleash attacks to the natural environment, leaving it to kismet. While some lay claim to the Biblical injunctions, “conquer the earth” and “Arise, kill and eat,” others claim that the cause of their economic hardships, diseases and other difficulties in life, including sudden and incessant deaths in the families and communities, are due to the evil spirits said to be inhabiting most of the trees, the flora and fauna around them. In some cases, people are made to believe that part of the solution for effective deliverance from their problems is to denounce their ancestral heritages, destroy whatever is thought to be a point of contact with their ancestors. One of such examples is the case of a man who, in an interview, declared, “I had experienced a series of misfortunes and my pastor told me it was because I had not completely broken the covenant with my ancestors,’ the 52-year-old Nwigwe said of the bonfire three years ago. ‘Now that I have done that, I hope I will be truly liberated.’”

Teachings


like this appeal to people’s sensibilities. As a means of escape from material poverty, they “take comfort in preachers like evangelist Uma Ukpai who promise material success was next to godliness. He has boasted of overseeing the destruction of more than 100 groves and shrines in one district in December 2002 alone.” This number may look exaggerated. However, facts on the ground, with the trend of Pentecostalism in Igbo land and its surrounding neighbors, validate the veracity of the claims. As Codewit News reports, “Generations ago, European colonists and Christian missionaries looted Africa’s ancient treasures. Now, Pentecostal Christian evangelists … are helping to wipe out the remaining traces of how Africans once worked, played, and prayed.” By the way, most Catholics are not immune to this gullible spirituality. In the name of liberation from ancestral curse, as they name it, people fell down some trees, fauna and flora that they believe to be infested by evil spirits hindering their progress or success in life. Beliefs and actions like this smack of ignorance. It sounds gross and incredulous. Ecologically, it is unfriendly and unhealthy. It benefits more of the spiritualists- pastors and other liberation minsters-, who feed on the ignorance and poverty culture in place. As a result, some Igbo communities have abandoned the culture care, while most have embraced the instrumental value of nature, leading to more ecological crisis in the land.

Contestably, proper solution to people’s problem should be sought, which includes but not limited to normalizing the political instability and fighting the corrupt practices and religious

259 Ibid.

260 Ibid.

fideism in the land. While not denying the reality of evil spirits likewise their ability to inhabit some natural objects, for they can possess human beings, also, as allegedly claimed by most Christian healers, and supposed victims of existential realities, the solution to this ‘menace’ to life is not to destroy innocent trees, the fauna and flora. At least, in the contemporary Christian practice of the rite of exorcism, humans who are said to be possessed of evil spirits are exorcised and not killed. If that is the case, why do these pastors, priests or Christian ministers involved in this deliverance movement not apply the same rite of exorcism to trees, fauna and flora and spare their lives? Why are there no efforts made to re-plant to re-forest the environment after their exercise of felling down trees, at least to mark the memory of what was done and as symbol of new life in Christ? This attitude is seriously creating wanton destruction of the environment and loss of the sense of sanctity of life, etc. It constitutes cosmic imbalance. It affects people’s health and residence, pollutes the environment, exposes the community to erosion and leads to the migration of some wild-lives to some areas that may endanger their lives as well. Why has the voice of the Catholic church in Igbo land not been so vocally heard in strong terms against the onslaught of the environment by some of her members? Why has ecological ministry not yet gained prominence among most Igbo Christians? Could it be all ignorance? Lack of interest? Or complicity because of some pecuniary gains accruing from most healing centers and liberation movements? Sometimes, land grabbing penchant in most church authorities for the execution of myriads of projects has made it difficult for the church to speak against indiscriminate use of land. Apparently, this is a crack in the Igbo sacramental world and perhaps an oversight on the side of the church, or lack of interest.
Scholars have written extensively about the various areas of confrontation between Christianity and the African Traditional Religion in Igboland. In some parts of Igbo land, for example, in Mbaise areas, precisely, Lagwa community, which is home to a unique species of monkey called the sclater monkey, some overzealous Christians oppose and disregard these sacred and totemic animals and the grooves that harbor them. They argue that the observance of such totems and sacred animals are unwholesome and should not be observed by Christians. As a result, the lives of these animals are greatly endangered with extinction. This disdainful


263 Lagwa community, which happens to be the home of the writer, is one of the communities in Okwuato, Abob Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria. Lagwa is chiefly known for her unique species of Monkeys called Sclater. Monkeys are treated as sacred and are untouchable by Lagwa community members, who are equally charged with the duty of protecting the monkeys from poachers. Monkeys are totemic animals to Lagwa people who treat and accord them the respect they do their fellow humans. However, for almost 30 decades, there have been series of “human-wildlife conflicts” in the community. Most Christians across denominations rose in protest of the monkeys and the tradition built around them as sacred and totemic. Frist, they argue that it is against the Christian faith to observance such practices since God has given these animals to humans for their good. Secondly, they argue that the monkeys have destructive tendencies to crops, fruits and some buildings. Based on these arguments, they decide to flout the sacred traditions that kept the monkeys from human interference. As result, these monkeys are endangered. See D. I. Edet, A. F. Akinyemi, and C. I. Mbagwu, “Evaluation of Human-monkey Conflict in Lagwa Villages of Aboh Mbaise Local Government Area, Imo State, Nigeria,” *Nigerian Journal of Forestry* 46, no.1 (2017), 13-20. See also P. U. Okorie and K. Ekechukwu, “Tragedy of the commons: Stress and survival of the Lagwa (Nigeria) monkeys,” *International Journal of Science, Environment and Technology* 2, no. 6 (2013): 1099 – 1106.


attitude continues to pave ways for the ongoing antagonistic attitude to nature by some Christians, the results of which are so obvious in the destruction of the traditional Igbo values and ethics that helped to protect the environment. Thus, deforestation is almost common, leading to desert encroachment and loss of biodiversity. As said earlier, this attitude is deeply rooted in the legacy of the early missionaries to the Igbo land and it has been furthered and even, worst now than earlier, by some Pentecostal movements both in Mainline and Evangelical churches and some Catholic priests in Igbo land who are engaged in the healing and adoration ministries. The driving force behind this disdainful and unrestrained treatment to the environment is material wellbeing, the progressive penchant of prosperity Gospel preachers, which seems to be casting serious influence on the Igbo nation making people to have attitudes to everything in life in relation to their natural environment. Sadly, the misconception has, apparently, had lasting influence and thus spreads like wildfires among most Christians in Igbo land. This apparent trending spirituality, with all the truncated theologies fashioned by the promoters of it, needs to be checked by the Christian body in Igbo land. Not only does it give false sense of hope, equally, it is an aberration and abuse of


268 This incident is almost common in some Igbo communities. It is dubbed “Oru ezinulo” (Family or community liberation). They employ all sorts of unorthodox means, prophetic utterances, and visions to make their clients believe in whatever they do. Lots of abuses both economical, emotional, physical, social, and environmental abound in most of these prayer centers and places they carry out activities. Noise pollutions in most of these centers constitute health risks to the local communities. Izunna Okonkwo describes them as “communal/systematic priestcrafting” and pastorpreneurship, that is, “a ministerial/professional priestcrafting,” which, in a certain sense, is a form of religious fraud. Okonkwo notes that this action is reminiscent of the antics of the local juju-men who capitalize on people’s religious favor, fears, and temptations to amassed wealth. See Izunna Okonkwo, The Eucharist and World Hunger: Socio-Theological Exploration (USA: Xlibris Publishing Corporation, 2011), 454-456.
Christianity and religion in general. It is more like an enterprise that benefits the pastors, priests or the ministers who champion it while impoverishing the unsuspecting folks both financially and mentally. At the long run, it breeds more frustration, fanaticism, and destroys the culture care towards the environment. As it is noted, this is an abuse of Christianity or religion which does not invalidate the fact that religion contributes greatly to environmental preservation, an insight that cannot be neglected in any ecological discussion today. The next section will bring this fact out more.

1.6 Religious contribution to ecological Conversations

Dealing with the belief in some supernatural powers, for whom creation owes its origin and sustenance,269 religion shapes the mind and action of people, enabling them to comport themselves in their socio-cultural life becomingly with the created order. C. O. Isiramen notes that the core thing about religion is that it has to do with how an individual perceives their existence and how that existence relates with the supernatural powers that they believe they need to relate to live meaningfully.270 However, considering religion from the point of view of fostering communion between a Supreme Power and humans alone, one runs the risk of leaving out the natural environment. This had been the case that most religions were used to foster environmental

269 There seems to be a general view among Eco-theologians that creation is a theological rather than a scientific term. Larry L. Rasmussen argues that creation many be used as a synonym for nature if nature is understood as a “luminous expression of sacred power, life, and order.” It means “all things together, in, with and before God, all things in their totality and in their differentiation as an expression of the divine life.” Cf. Larry L. Rasmussen, Earth Community Earth Ethics- Ecology and Justice Series (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 105.

crisis due to either dereliction, ignorance or “unholy alliance” with corporations that “poses significant threats to moral authority” to religion in pursuit of “secular political gains.”

Therefore, critics of religion have accused it of not only being guilty of aiding environmental crisis by not confronting squarely the environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity. For them religion has not helped so much, as it should, in disciplining both the individuals and group self-interests who wreak havoc to the environment. The critics judged the apparent passivity of religion as abetting earth’s destruction. For them “the prophetic and ethical role of religion is compromised on the basis that religion seems either to have accommodated and succumbed to the pressures of our times, or it has drifted into irrelevancy, or both.”

Notably, Gottlieb, argues that in the past, Religions have been, at times, deeply anthropocentric, other-worldly, ignorant of the facts, or blindly supportive of ‘progress’ defined as more science, more technology, and much more development. The first critical questions about humanity’s modern relation to nature, wilderness, and industry were not raised by prominent theologians or religious leaders, but by freelance spiritual types, anticommmunist Western Marxists, secular philosophers, or nature lovers.

Probably, the belief in most religious adherents that nature was limitless and inexhaustible is responsible for the blind support of the aggressive progress of modernism. This is exacerbated by the claim that the doctrine of creation gives humans the right of domination over the natural world.


As Anne M Clifford notes, it is such an exaggerated anthropocentric view of creation like this that instills in humans the desire to relate to nature mostly in terms of power and control in response to their selfish interests and need. For Clifford, “this erroneous attitude to nature created division between the human and nonhuman members of the world and ultimately ended in exploitation.”

The above claim which seems to attribute eco-hysteria susceptibility on the view that Judeo-Christianity, by its emphasis on dominion over the earth, licensed human greed at the expense of nonhuman nature seems to forget that religion is not solely culpable for all the negative impacts to the environment. Science, technology as well as philosophy also have had negative impacts on the environment more than the harm that the Judeo-Christian misinterpretation of the doctrine of creation has had. Both of these disciplines, in some ways, offered a material explanation of the world where nature is de-sacralized, devoid of spirit and is there to be exploited, tamed to satisfy the human interests and needs. To a large extent, this explains the assault which humans have launched on the environment the result of which is obvious in the present predicament of a world that faces the threats of possible extinction. This happens when and where humans think they are the measures of all things and can exercise their might and wills arrogantly on the rest of creation without recognizing their dignity, right to life and or limits to human activities to the natural world.


\[276\] Roger S. Gottlieb, Religion and Ecology, 6.
Currently, there is a shift in emphasis, “A changed world, a changed faith”\textsuperscript{277} that calls for integrated ways of looking at the world in relation to God. With world religions entering the ecological phase as in other phases in life, environmental concerns are getting the attention they need. Nature, creation, and humanity hence form a dialectical wholeness in which each is viewed as an integral aspect of the other so much that what affects one, affects the other in the web of life. Since humans depend on nature for sustenance, shelter, provision, clean air and even minerals, nature, in turn, depends on humans for protection and appreciation. This is a sacred trust which promotes balance. This view was touted in the 1986 Interfaith conference in Assisi, Italy, which brought together the various world religions that led to wake-up to environmental stewardship.\textsuperscript{278} Following this call, the Parliament for the World’s Religions convened in Chicago, 1993, and formulated a consensual “Declaration Toward Global Ethic” and affirmed a four universal directives for a new global order which include commitment to promote a culture of non-violence and respect for life; a commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order; commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness, justice and peace, respect and strong environmental protection, and the commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.\textsuperscript{279} These directives, arguably, affirm the ancient guidelines for human behavior that are found in various religious teachings and worldviews, which lay out the conditions necessary for a sustainable world order. Among other things, the assembly stressed on the

\textsuperscript{277} Ibid, 6

\textsuperscript{278} Ken Gnanakan, \textit{God’s World-A Theology of the Environment} (Great Britain: University Press, 1999), 208.

symbiotic nature of the whole life and strongly emphasized “respect for the community of living
beings, the preservation of Earth, the air, water and soil.”\textsuperscript{280} Demonstrably, this world assembly,
by its commitment, declares any actions which pillage the earth, actions that militarize the cosmos
and destroy its community of life as outrageous. Such actions wreak havoc on the global world
order. It condemns any of such human brutality against nature and urges humans to oblige
themselves “to nature-friendly ways of life” while noting that the environment is “what God made”
and so, “we must maintain it as we received it.”\textsuperscript{281} Arguably, a total consideration of the things
that God has created along with human beings for health of the earth are very important for proper
understanding and appreciation of the role of religion in environmental issues. As Gottlieb asserts,
“the complex and multifaceted beliefs, ritual and moral teachings known as religion have told us
how to think about and relate to everything on earth that we did not make ourselves. Whether as
‘nature,’ ‘creation,’ the ‘ten thousand things,’ or ‘all our relations,’ humanity’s surroundings were
both a gift and a problem.”\textsuperscript{282} The compelling point in Gottlieb’s argument lies in the elevation of
the mind to appreciating nature, creation, as a gift because it is ultimately God’s creation and
property and not the making or the product of humanity to toil with anyhow. Thus, any use of any
natural gifts without the recognition of the divine seal and ownership of it amounts to violation of
the natural goods of the earth and hence, ecological crises of all kinds,\textsuperscript{283} which are the result of
divorcing faith from creation, placing the instrumental value above the intrinsic values in nature.

\textsuperscript{280} Ibid, 14-15.

\textsuperscript{281} Ibid, 16.

\textsuperscript{282} Roger S. Gottlieb, Religion and Ecology, 3.

\textsuperscript{283} Ibid.
Evidently, environmental issues, being a reality that permeates every aspect of discipline in life, call for an integrated and comprehensive synergy from all works of life to address their drastic effects. Religion is not left behind in this collaborative effort. Hence, it plays a major role in galvanizing various disciplines on environmental discourse. Since the 1990s, significant new dialogues have taken place on the relationship between ecology and theology\textsuperscript{284} the result of which is seen in the formal study of ecology, environmental laws, environmental sciences, natural resource management, environmental policy and in various fields both in domestic, regional, and international levels. In line with this, religious or theological studies in the area of environment and development have become one of the major areas in which Christianity, for instance, expresses concern for ecological issues.

In order that its theological inputs in addressing the environmental concerns are adequate, it becomes imperative to articulate eco-theological agenda or framework that would be capable of responding to the environmental issues and capable of arousing a sense of practical commitments to environmental responsibilities in people. As Gottlieb puts it, “Theologies have been created which stress the spiritual value of nature, our kinship with the nonhuman, and our ethical responsibilities to the earth. New concepts of the divine, holiness, spiritual life, and sin are being formed.” Since these theologies are not just a matter of principle or mere discussions without practical consequences, there is an aspect of cult that stretches into the aspect of “innovative liturgies and rituals” that are ecologically friendly. These rituals are practiced by people with stresses on “a unique sense of moral responsibility” that lays much emphasis on “the

interdependence of our treatment of nature and our treatment of other people” otherwise known as ‘ecojustice.” Today, this is gaining momentum virtually in all works of life. Interestingly, these insights are not only welcomed by theologians, also, they are embraced by academics from various disciplines, various top religious figures and traditions, leaders and heads of schools, notable public figures, and the everyday people. These groups upholding divine imprint on nature, endorse that “We affirm that the world, as God’s handiwork, has its own inherent integrity; that land, waters, air, forests, mountains, and all creatures, including humanity, are ‘good’ in God’s sight. The integrity of creation has a social aspect, which we recognize as peace with justice, and an ecological aspect, which we recognize in the self-renewing, sustainable character of natural ecosystems.” The pressure of the environmental crisis, arguably, has proven that religion can think and act ecologically, that faith is of vital importance in the fight against ecological degradation. At least the above joint affirmation from various bodies is indicative of the fact that the current environmental crises are not only of a secular or social issue, equally, they have religious dimensions.

The religious imperative to the environmental debates, however, is based on the fact that religion does not only address the basic human needs, rather by its nature, as an indispensable aspect of the human life and existence, it is very hard for humans to live in the secular society without reference to any type of worldview or religion that shapes their understanding of and relationship with nature. Irrespective of the several attempts by some secular societies to

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undermine the role of religion, for some reasons, this effort has not entirely been successful. Instead, religions have inspired faith in people to take up the challenges posed by environmental crises and respond with passionate commitment. Validating this view, Gottlieb insists that “Religions have become part of the all too scarce good news on the environmental front— one more element in a worldwide environmental movement.”

Stressing further on why it is difficult for the secular society to suppress religious concerns, Gottlieb, argues that religions not only “morally instruct and comfort us,” give “fresh perspectives on the meaning of life,” they awaken in us the sense of dignity, “that we can find God in solidarity” with nature and so live in ways as to respect and promote the health of the environment and hand same to generations yet unborn. For “if we really love our children, why are we bringing them into a world in which so many environmental indicators are worsening year by year?”

Thus, this question and its preceding logical arguments above, arising from the soul, is a slam and indictment to all materially and power driven politicians, industrialists, individuals and groups of ideologically related minds who ally with business corporations that have infested the society with the virus of consumerism with little or no interest in preserving the environment other than the profit they make, to consider the fate of the environment, which their unborn generations will inherit eventually. Therefore, it is not surprising today that the fight against environmental crisis has garnered some political momentum among religious people who have had to become political and ecological activists and lobbyists. Through this activism, religious environmentalists, employing pious words about “caring for God’s

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288 Hassel Dieter and Larry Rasmussen, eds., *Earth Habitat: Eco-Injustice and the Church’s Response*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press), 103.


290 Gottlieb, 6-7.
creation’ or ‘having compassion on all sentient beings,’” call people to make positive and environmentally friendly changes in what they “produce and consume,” in the type of houses they build and live in, in energy consumptions, to limit their frequent flying trips, lifestyle changes, restrained and disciplined appetites in questing for the goods of the earth. Obviously, “religious environmentalists are mounting a widespread challenge to the prerogatives of property and the complicity of do-nothing (or do-too-little) governments.”

In a certain sense, religious environmentalism is, thus, a way of life or at most a spirituality that challenges everyone to live in consideration of the health of the environment and the place of the unborn generation in the sacred universe that is placed on the care and protection of humans. For instance, some devoted religious bodies “have challenged the World Bank’s development programs” and some other financial giants. They have equally “engaged in nonviolent civil disobedience at the Department of Energy in defense of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge,” have in no small measures “confronted auto manufacturers on automobile fuel efficiency and worked together with …scientists to demand ecologically responsible social order.” Whether these efforts yield the desired results instantly is another thing. At least, ecological consciousness is gaining ground through these means.

However, studies from environmental initiatives suggest that international organizations, national and regional governments, policy planners, corporations, and even environmentalists, apparently, concentrated much attention and emphasized exclusively on the techno-scientific options, while neglecting and undermining the roles of religious and cultural heritages for sustainable developments and environmental protection. As Martin J. Ibe observes, this seeming

291 Roger S. Gottlieb, Religion and Ecology, 7.

292 Gottlieb, 8.
attitude of negligence and undermining of religious values towards environmental conservation is based on fear, the irrational fear that bringing religion into the environmental efforts and deliberations would threaten scientific investigations, compromise objectivity, democratic values and professionalism.\textsuperscript{294} These reasons seem too simplistic and lacking sufficient grounds for such claims and thus are not convincing enough. Obviously, this argument favors only corporations who are interested in the instrumental values of nature and would not want to hear the conscientization of religious voices on the need to respect the dignity of the environment.

Environmental issues, as noted earlier, are a common issue that affects everyone and every discipline irrespective of their sphere of life and so, they need multidisciplinary, collaborative efforts to arrest them squarely. Therefore, environmental explorations are not the exclusive reserve of scientific investigation or perspectives. For scientific methodology is not the only way of acquiring knowledge to solve the myriads of human or environmental issues. There are many ways through which solutions to the environmental crisis could be sought, one of which is through religious and cultural engagements. As Wangari Maathai notes, “Scientists are beginning to recognize that these traditional cultures and their lifestyles were responsible for the conservation of rich biodiversity in their environment.”\textsuperscript{295} Corroborating this view, Ian Barbour asserts that religion has an indispensable role to play in environmental conservation. For Barbour, a religious understanding and attitude contribute greatly to shaping our conception of the world and the

\textsuperscript{293} Branislav Gosovic, The Quest for World Environmental Cooperation (London: Routledge, 1992), xv.

\textsuperscript{294} Martin J. Ibe, Environmental Ethics and Politics in Developing Countries: Case Study from Nigeria (Germany: Schoningh, 2003), 11.

\textsuperscript{295} Wangari M. Maathai, Replenishing the Earth, 21.
dynamics of its institutions and socio-cultural arrangements. Within this matrix, therefore, it is logical to assert that religion or theology and science collaborate closely in the efforts for environmental preservation. Thus, Philip Potter, the former Secretary General of the World Council of Churches, in his keynote address at the Conference on Faith Science and the Future, calls for an increased and sustained dialogue between religion and science as a major way of filling the gap and pulling down the walls of division between science and religion. Arguably, this dialogue is understood as a part of willingness and response by faith communities to engage positively in environmental conversations. Among other things, it is hoped that this dialogue will provide a forum for both religious traditions, theologians, and practitioners of various scientific fields to creatively feel at home for meaningful conversations not only on the meaning and life of the universe but fundamentally on the need to govern the universe and conserve it. Reasonably, this hinges on the dignity of the universe and its capacity to sustain future generations, which calls for restraint to unbridled Anthropocene for the blossoming and continued health of the environment. This can only be so when both religion and science team up together to chart ways of creating a self-consciously moral, ethical, society that promotes environmental preservation that is built on God’s creation primarily, which forms the ground for regulating materialism, individualism, and various other anthropogenic-induced desires to subdue nature.


religious worldviews, the fight against environmental degradation is not complete. This is so because, from the religious worldviews, “there emerges a method for action, from a cosmology there arises an ethics,” new ecological ethics that is crucial for the “task of rethinking human-earth relationship,” and a deeper and critical thoughts about social policies as well as economic priorities. This view is supported by Ernst Conradie, who in citing the works of Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, and Patricia Mischa, argues for the inclusion of religion in ecological concerns. According to him,

It is becoming evident that the abundant scientific knowledge of the crisis is available and numerous political and economic statements have been formulated. Yet we seem to lack the political, economic and scientific leadership to make necessary changes. Moreover, what is still lacking is the religious commitment, moral imagination and ethical engagement to transform the environmental crisis from an issue on paper to one of effective policy, from rhetoric in print to realism in action.

Similarly, Patricia Mischa, as quoted by Conradie, insists that religions must be included in environmental conversions for comprehensive results for “Science and technology alone cannot resolve ecological threats. Nor can governments or the laws they promulgate” do it all alone. Arguing further, Mischa, through Conradie, asserts that the efforts in “Sustaining the integrity of creation …requires not only the external laws governments enact to deal with belligerent behavior, but also inner governance, laws internalized in our hearts and minds and the will to live by them.”


300 Ibid, 11.

301 Ernst Conradie, The Church and Climate change (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2008), 63.
Faith communities, with their rituals and other practices, provide strong basis for effective implementation of ecological healing and preservation. Particularizing on Christianity, Mischa is quoted as saying that “Church praxis has special relevance for the development of inner governance and a culture of ecological responsibility.” Given this, Mischa concludes that “Religions carry the archetypes, the symbols, meanings, values and moral codes around which people coalesce and define themselves, their sense of the sacred, and their relationship with each other and the natural world.”

Considering the above statements, it is reasonable to assert that religious traditions or worldviews are vitally important in ecological concerns. However, there is no denying of the roles of science and technology in ecological concerns, yet these roles need the religious dimension to complement them. And on a much truest sense, the religious vision towards environmental concerns goes beyond the common sense of its times. The hallmark of religions is neither realism nor conformism to the status quo but a prophetic challenge to whatever is the conventional standards of the society. It is this prophetic challenge that helps a society to make alternatives to the deadly environmental culture and to shape what the society is to live for in place of the thoughtless technological inventions and obsessive consumerism which plague the human culture with enormous devastating effects on the environment. Thus, religious values offer a comprehensive moral vision that emphasizes both care for the earth as well as care for the people. It is a moral issue to neglect care of the earth at the altar of technological consumerism. Ecological care, therefore, is both on humans and nonhumans alike in sustaining civilization and maintaining the environment. “If there is one environmental ethical principle on which the world’s religions

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302 Conradie, 64.
seem to agree with near unanimity, it is that human beings ought to regard conduct conducive to the ‘sustainability’ of the Earth as a moral imperative.”

Science, corporations, the consumerism culture of today cannot offer this moral and spiritual imperatives much as religion can offer them and prophetically bear witness to creation as God’s sheer gift and a means of revelation of God’s goodness and a sacred space of encounter with God.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter examined the socio-context reality of the Igbo. It discovered that the Igbo are a unique set of people with rich cultural heritage and a democratic space that enhances all life forms. Ecologically, the Igbo traditional society is well placed. They are hardworking, adaptable to changes than other Nigerian ethnic groups. This is seen in their wealth of experiences through travel, business, and other realities in life.

Vitally, the Igbo have a strong link to the earth for both economic, social, spiritual, and ecological realities. Sadly, through contacts with colonialism and Christian missionaries, the traditional Igbo experienced a significant change both in the positive and negative directions. This change altered the Igbo ecological perspective, leading to so much emphasis on commodification of things of the earth. This has created lots of environmental crises.

The ecological situation continues to deteriorate with the changes in lifestyle. Urbanization has grown by geometric progression and with it, diverse categories of people are attracted in the modern and materialistic sector who are longer tied to the land. The result of this is an evolved, new class of Igbo who run the risk of facing the extinctions of its sacred traditions and moral,

ethical codes that fostered cosmic balance and sacred space. Ecological crisis reveals both spiritual and moral crises yearning for attention.

The answer to this crisis, however global, must be locally sourced. The Igbo is already rich in this area. There is a need to revisit most of the ecologically friendly beliefs and practices of the traditional Igbo society to help check the excesses of modernism and religious fanaticism of some Christian sects. Though desirable, it may not be possible to revive all the sacred past traditions. However, much can be discerned and gleaned from the wisdom and knowledge, and the earth-spirituality that the Igbo ancestors have accumulated over the centuries. This is one of the major concerns of the next chapter of this work.
CHAPTER TWO:

IGBO SACRAMENTAL NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE: ROOTS OF IGBO ECOLOGICAL ETHICS

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the Igbo sacramental imagination of their world. It examines the belief and practices in this worldview which maintain that the Divine Spirit is ever present, uphold and sustain everything in nature. It holds that creation bursts forth with evidence of God's unending love in subtle and apparent ways whose bounty is mediated through the touch of Mother Earth.

The earth is the sacred space where humans and nature mutually interact, the arena where earth entities unfold their potentials, live, and thrive freely to attain their purposes in life. It is therefore a vehicle of God’s grace and benevolence to all creatures. For the Igbo, Mother Earth is imbued with the covert presence or indwelling of God and can be viewed as the dispenser of God’s benignity as well as justice. It goes beyond the material reality to the metaphysical reality that enlivens, nurtures, and entombs all entities.

In this basic understanding, humans are part and parcel of God’s creatures who enjoy the goodness of God through the maternity of the earth. Deductively, this means that everything that is created by God reflects the goodness of God, has life, and equally has every right to live. Whatever assurance or position that humans occupy in this sacred and earth-affirming universe is not an assurance or guarantee for authoritarianism, to abuse the earth and all the entities of the earth. This demands that humans respect all that is created by God, treat everything created by God with care, dignity, and respect in a priori condition as it is enshrined in the consummation of
justice in the universe. This makes much meaning in the idea that the Igbo ethic or morality is Earth-based or related, *Omenala*, which demands that humans act justly to attract blessings and to ensure cosmic balance, productivity and fullness of life. This is empowering and affirming, insisting that the more humans pay attention to the Sacred in their very midst and observing the rules of engagement, the closer they grow to God and the more in peace they live with their environment in the recognition that nature is alive, inspired and is a gift. This ensures cosmic balance or order on which the Igbo world is structured.

Given the problem of the time, arguably, ecological pollution is a form of pandemic of its kind, especially to the Igbo society. Unlike the other pandemics that have vaccines, the only vaccine to this pandemic is a change of lifestyle and vision of the world as alive and a gift. Generally, the chapter demonstrates this belief and teaching, i.e., the Igbo eco-thoughts and proverbs, and religious practices or spirituality, instill awe and reverence in the Igbo in their relationships with the fruits of the earth. It helps to preserve the harmony of the earth for her continued reflection of the beauty, the goodness, hospitality, and power of the Creator. Unearthing this traditional vision of and relationship with nature can help today’s Igbo society to live harmoniously and care for the earth and maintain the cosmic indwelling of God in all creation.

However, critical questions here are: to what extent can the traditional Igbo sacramental view of and their relationship with the world go in sustaining eco-consciousness and responsibility in the contemporary Igbo who seem to fare without much reference to this rich traditional world and heritage? What can the Catholic church learn from this cosmic totality in the fight against

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ecological degradation in the land? Before proceeding further in this work, it is important to explain the key concept of this work.

2.1.1 Understanding Sacramental

Interestingly, the concept “sacramental” permeates every world religion expressly or remotely. Thus, Sacramental, like spirituality, is a gregarious and dynamic concept. It is found in all religions of the world according to their understanding and relationship with God and the world around them. In his observation, Joseph Martors critically notes that “every religion in the world makes use of sacraments” 305 in whatever way that is intelligible to them. Comparably, Edwin Smith argues that every known religion in the world, however place and time, in written or oral form, has a conception about God. In most cases, these conceptions undergo some transformations that correspond with their understanding of the immediate physical environment in which they find themselves. 306 This implies that in any context, tradition, where the concept of God is found and is in use, there is some form of sacramental understanding peculiar to them. It explains their relationship with God and their environment, and the meaning of their world.

Similarly, Brennan Hill asserts that “All religions depend on rituals and symbols,” 307 which, as David Tracy points out, can be of great help to humans in escaping the terrors and nightmares that surround them and enter “true time, the time of repetition of the actions of the


whole at the origin of cosmos.”

However, Tracy further explains that the power of the whole was primarily revealed as sacred and the sphere of the sacred can once again be revealed to us whenever we partake in sacred rituals and symbols. And so, it is through the ritualistic experiences that the various elements in nature like water, trees, rocks, mountains, etc., serve as means by which humans can experience the sacred. These elements are good just as the entire creation is good principally because it reflects the goodness of God. Creation is born from God who is love, and who generously shows Self in a variety of visible forms. This echoes St Paul’s teaching that “Ever since the creation of the world his [sic]eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he [sic] has made” (Romans 1:20).

While other religions may have sacraments in their own rites, it is not a deniable fact that it is only in Christianity that they are called sacraments. As “an outward sign of inward grace,” according to the scholastic understanding, “sacraments are essential to the Christian tradition,” and in relation to the world, “sacraments can put us in touch with the sacred dimensions of the cosmos itself,” transforming “us so that we no longer abuse nature and the cosmos but become committed to their preservation…and help us to see the world as a graced reality that has its origin in and is loved by the Creator.”

In other words, through the sacramental rituals, a community

\[\text{\textsuperscript{308} David Tracy, The Analogical Imagination (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 205.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{309} Ibid, 206.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{310} In this work, it is not being used as a prerogative of Christianity, for other religions, in their various contexts and ways, have rituals or sacraments that define and shape their relationship with God. Like the Igbo, this basic sacramental imagination of the world instills in them the sense of ecological wholeness and solidarity and reminds them that love and care for the environment is love and care for humanity and a demonstration of faith in God.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{311} Brennan R. Hill, Christian Faith and the Environment, 123.}\]
participating in them is enabled to experience the immediacy of God rooted in this world in accordance with the reality that speaks to their values - their symbols and rituals.

Thus, on one hand, it can be said that sacraments are dynamic symbols through which humans relate with the Spirit of God and share or encounter the presence and the power of the Creator actively present in the world. On the other hand, and more importantly, paraphrasing Kenan Osborn, sacraments are not just simply symbols that point to God. For they have a unique dynamism that manifests and reveals the presence and the power of God. It means that sacraments have the capacity to link, connect and bind a people to the Creator and to creation, as well as to themselves. Thus, rituals, sacraments, wherever they are found, have both vertical and horizontal dimensions. Relating to all aspects of life, the essence of rituals and symbols, among other things, is the recreation and protection of the community. In a way, it produces transformation in humans, instills an ethics or commitment to preserve nature. It opens an awareness, however new, that humans are integrally related to the earth, all its resources and all that the earth is home to. As a result, humans have the obligation, therefore, to respect and sustain all of creation as a sacred reality that links us to God. Noting Dieter Hessel, Brennan R. Hill puts it that “God is actively throughout the creation, generating and sustaining life, reconciling varied forms of being. God has a continuing role as a creator-sustainer and expects human creatures to be respectful cooperators.” In their capacity, therefore, Sacramental principles, wherever they exist,


hold that humans can meet God in natural symbols and experience the ‘amazing grace’ of God through the elements in the natural environment.

As part of the community, humans, within the close-knit Igbo world, see themselves as integrally connected to these same entities in nature as knot in a broader cosmic composition which includes Mother Earth and all that she is home to in terms of animals, plants, air, rivers, the moon, stars, sun, etc., In some ways, they are both fellow creatures to humans occupying the same sacred space while at the same they are media of God’s graces to humans, and channels of the Igbo worship of the Creator. This is the foreground of the Igbo sacramental imagination of their world, which has enormous ecological implications in upholding the dignity of creation and culture care towards creation. It makes much sense especially when we consider the fact that the Igbo world is a pro-life world, i.e., life and justice for all creatures, and peace with the earth for continued balance. Of a truth, the essence of sacrament is to maintain balance, harmony intra and interrelationships with God, human and nonhuman creatures.

For the Igbo, the vision of the world as sacramental enables them to see and relate with the world, in the words of Hill noted above, “as a graced reality that has its origin” and sustenance “in and is loved by the Creator” whose self-revelation, bounty, is seen in the beauty and fruitfulness of the earth. Therefore, through sacramental actions, the Igbo in their understanding of the reality of the world and God’s involvement in it, experience the immediacy of God as One who is embedded in this world, animating or inspirating creation.

Thus, the demand of the sacramental imagination is a grounded attentiveness that is central to ecological integrity, which reveals that God is not aloof to the world even as it experiences “hell because of the environmental destruction….hell because of the dehumanization that occurs when people search for riches in the mud and disease of pits and mines and mercury-tainted rivers….,
the wounds”\textsuperscript{315} inflicted by consumerism and dereliction of duties towards the environment that in no small ways affect the health of the environment. It is much same as Anthony of the Desert, even in the barrenness of his environment, believed that nature was a book in which one could read the words of God.\textsuperscript{316} This positive view of nature holds that nature provides the tranquility to encounter God. This reality is so much alive within the Igbo traditional society, a form of sacramental principle which recognizes that nothing in life or on earth, is profane or unsacred. Everything on this sacramental earth interrelates. This thought is continued in the next section.

2.2 The Compenetrating Nature of the Igbo Universe

Like most African world views, in general, too, the Igbo traditional world view is complex. Ogbu U. Kalu argues that “This complexity arises from the predominantly religious world view”\textsuperscript{317} of Africans. It is holistic in nature that things tend to be intertwined and interconnected without clear-cut separation. In most cases, to explain the reality of things in this spider-web universe, Africans generally employ stories with relevant and deep meanings to account for the raison d'être of existence and the universe. Laurenti Magesa explains that for Africans, “…myths explain the origin, purpose, and meaning of the world and humanity’s place in it. They are understood to integrate within them ‘what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it.’”\textsuperscript{318} Myths, therefore, serve as sacred

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\textsuperscript{315} Wangari M. Maathai, \textit{Replenishing the Earth}, 42.
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source materials that help the Africans to explain the reality of their world, social organization, history, their environment, geography, medicine, and life in general. They contain the moral wisdom and deposits of faith that are indispensable means of conserving, preserving, and transmitting religious and cultural beliefs.

The Igbo traditional society has various myths and ideas that embody and describe the creation of the universe. While it may not entirely be verifiable that the universe and all the entities in it originated and now exist in the way that people believe it and share in their stories, certain basic cosmological beliefs can be made from them. For instance, it could be asked if people believe in the created universe, with all its elements originally created in the way they are now or whether people believe in evolution in the way described by Charles Darwin and the ways that modern astronomy and the chemical sciences want their audience to believe. If the universe is created then, what is the relationship between the creator and the created entities? While this view may not be strictly the concern of this work, the issues are nonetheless crucial because belief about the origin and the nature of the universe determines greatly people’s attitude to the environment. As T U. Nwala argues, “If we believe the universe evolved on its own, then no one claims credit for its creation and there is no point in being grateful to anyone, force, or being for its creation and for our very existence.” A look at few Igbo cosmogonies, probably, will offer some insight to what the Igbo believe about the universe.


According to the Igbo myth of creation, “God is the divine power behind the world.” This holds that “Chukwu (or Chineke)- The Supreme Deity- created the universe- the sky (Eluigwe) and the earth (elu-uwa), spirits, man [sic], animals and everything in it.” Basically, for the Igbo, the world and all it contains, both the physical and the metaphysical, is created by God. The Igbo uphold this belief and pass it to generations. Oliver A. Onwubiko, talks about the various myths in Africa. They are culture myth, nature myth, religion myth, ritual myth, and hero myth. Beside the fact that myths contain and transmit stories of origin, explanatory stories, and didactic stories, Onwubiko avers that myth is designed to act as agents of socialization, educational illustrations, and agents of entertainment for psychological and emotional conditioning. As much as they are told in various occasions in life, the Igbo therewith pass vital message about the world, humans, and God on to their progenies. What is crucial in creation account is not much of the philosophical questions of how and from what basic sources God made the world. It is not only that the Igbo have a concept of creation rather the essential concern is that God has a hand in the creation of everything for various purposes.

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320 It must be noted that there are various versions of the myth of creation of things. They vary according to the parts of Igbo land in their understanding and relationship with the environment, though are some similarities. Recall in chapter one of this work that it was established that the Igbo is not strictly speaking a homogeneous community. Three stories of creation would be considered here.


While there are various accounts of creation of the earth, the core of it persists throughout the various versions. This persistent version, regarding the creation of the earth, as Udobata R. Onunwa reports, holds that what is now our earth was once a morass, watery, marshy waste, what the Igbo call *Ala di deke-deke*. As a result, Eri, believed to be the Igbo progenitor who came down from the sky to earth together with his wives, Namuaku and Oboli, but could not find a dry ground to settle, sat on an anthill. Uncomfortable with the waterlogged scenario, Eri complained to *Chukwu*, the Supreme God, who sent down an Awka blacksmith that used his fiery bellows to dry up the land. Thus, the creation of the solid earth that would provide an abode for subsequent creatures that make up the earth’s entities. Strikingly, this account is drawn from the Northwest Igbo subcultural region.

Again, leaning on the South Igbo subcultural area, Udobata R. Onwnwa details the account of the creation of humans wherein *Chukwu Okike*, Creator God, who is also called *Chineke* made humans with *Uro* (clay). The figure remained stiff and motionless until Chukwu breathed into its nostrils who then began to move, speak, and handle things. Enlivened by God’s creative breath, the figure began to make the environment get new vibrancy and a feeling of fullness. Equally, the figure started to tend the garden, feed some of the animals, clear the footpaths. Decidedly, Chukwu called “the new creature- *Mma-ndu*- implying the beauty of life, the essence of life, the dignity of life. The new creature became the center of all moving things in the universe and in effect took control of directing, instructing, and naming all the creature, which Chukwu had made earlier.”

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324 Other accounts from various parts of Igbo land exist. For details, see Udobata R. Onunwa, *African Spirituality*, 37-38.


326 Onunwa, 58-59. Emphasis is original.
In this account, God is seen as a porter, Okpuite, and animator who places on the human shoulders with the stewardship of the earth and all in it.

On the other hand, T. U. Nwala gives what seems to be complementary to Udobata’s account of the creation of human beings, though not particularizing any subcultural area of Igbo land. Uniquely, Nwala names the first people created aside the generic Igbo name for humans presented in Udobata’s creation story. Accordingly,

The first man created was called Ifenta (Junior light) and the first woman was called Obo-omananya. Chukwu himself [sic]- who was symbolized by the sun (Anyanwu) that gives life- was the absolute Being and Force from which all powers radiate. The name Ifenta (Junior light) indicates that man [sic] is next to Chukwu in the order of created beings in the visible world. According to this story, the first word man learnt from the Supreme Deity (Chukwu) is ‘mma-nma’ (which, today is an expression used as greetings among the Igbo). The Supreme Deity told the first parents: ‘This is your home. Everything here is for your good and they are so intended.’ At the beginning man [sic] and every creature lived like brother [sic] and kins-men, spirits, animals, tiger, snakes, birds, and even earth and sky were all together. Men [sic] joked and wrestled with spirits and animals.327

The emphasis in this account is not so much on the creation of humans nor their names but on the close-knit relationship between earth and the sky and the mutual interactions between creatures.

However the local variations that may exist in form and detail of the creation stories, the arguments are common. Firstly, there is a belief in the created universe, which is controlled by a Creator, Chukwu Okike, “who,” as Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, notes, “is the cause from whom other beings derive their existence as well as their power.”328 And by thinking of the universe as created, arguably, the Igbo see the universe from a religious perspective. It points to the fact that the


universe and all that it contains is a sheer gift and speaks of the Giver of the gifts. And thus, it is sacred by the mere fact of its sacred origin and source which sustains it and to which it radiates. Secondly, there is a central position of humans in creation. Humans are endowed with freedom and its attendant responsibility, as duty care and not a violation of creation. It points to the reality that humans are beings among other beings in the world and that every entity in the universe is interrelated. Thirdly and similarly, the stories point out a belief in the unity among beings, belief in cosmic, universal harmony and order in the world. This is the basis of the cosmic model of organization in the Igbo Universe.

Succinctly, Elochukwu E. Uzukwu notes that

The cosmic order is generally presided over by Chukwu (God) resident in the sky and surrounded by the sky deities Anyanwu (Sun deity), Amadioha (Thunder deity), Igwe (Sky deity) and so on. On the land, the Earth Mother, Ala- wife of Chukwu-presides over innumerable deities. Ala and Ancestors (Ndi-ichie, i.e., Elders, or Nna-a-ha, i.e., the Fathers) preside over morality. The important earth deities include Agwu (deity of divination, knowledge and health), Njoku-ji (Yam deity overseeing agriculture, Idemili (Pillar of Water, daughter of Chukwu and Ala, divinity of peace), Ekwensu (deity of war, associated with violence), Agbara (deity of coercion), and so on.

Following from Uzukwu’s description and according to the Igbo traditional ideas, as presented by Nwala, basically, the universe is structured in two main interrelated parts, the Eluigwe (the Sky) and the Elu-uwa/ala (the Earth). According to the Igbo understanding, these two spheres are

331 Metuh, 58.
equal in extension. Metuh notes that “the dichotomy between the heaven and the earth in the visible
world immediately struct the Igbo as an adequate model for organizing the spiritual beings around
the two important divinities- the Supreme Being and the Earth deity. Just as there is the all-
pervading sky above, and the extensive earth below, so there is the Supreme Being in the heavens,
and the Earth-deity below.”334 The worldview described here represents the Igbo model marked
by a host of spiritual beings, spirit forces, who, as shall be seen much later, are believed to meet
the human needs.

Besides, using Nwala’s categorization of the *elu-uwa/ala*, (the Earth), there are two other
realms of existence within the *Ala* reality. They are the *Ala Mmuo* (the spirit world or supernatural
order and the *Ala madu* (the natural or visible world). Nwala gives a brief example to indicate how
these two are related thus, “Very often you hear an Igbo man [sic] wonder whether an event was
happening in the Supernatural world or in the visible order: He [sic] asks: *Obu na mmuo ka obu
na madu?* (is it in the spiritual or in this physical world?) This statement emphasizes how closely
a man [sic] could be to the two realms.”335 The understanding here, according to Nwala’s
description, is that the Igbo concept of land embraces both the spiritual and the physical realities
hence *Ala Mmuo* (the supernatural land) and *Ala madu* (the natural land). John C. Madubuko
employs the concept of duality to explain these spheres of reality. “Far from intending a dualism
or polarization, what is meant here is a complementarity in the nature of things. Little wonder the
Igbo language is replete with doublets in its articulation of things- *Enu na Ani* (Sky and Earth),
*Mmuo na Mmadu* (Spirit and Human), *Nwoke na Nwaanyi* (Man and Woman) … Though the

334 Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 60.
thought of one necessarily calls the other to mind.”\textsuperscript{336} This is like the two sides of a coin that intermingle or dovetail, and jointly support each other. In essence, it is still one world with both visible and invisible realities that interlace each other, never mutually exclusive of each other.

Nevertheless, some scholars like Donatus I. Nwoga disagrees with the apparent strict two-dimensions of the Igbo world. He avers that this two-dimensional categorization is inadequate in addressing the Igbo reality. Therefore, he argues for a three-dimensional composition, which, according to him, are the physical, the spiritual and the abstract beings. These realities are capable of being transformed into each other. They can impinge a person’s life. The physical belongs to the realm that can be felt, weighed, eaten. As well, it can touch one or a person through the sensory, visual organs. The spiritual reality, unlike the physical, may not be touched or seen except by the specially “washed eyes,” (Anyà ndì mmuo ji ahu uzo, i.e., the eyes that see the spirits), but it can impact on the nature and shape of the physical reality. The abstract, as Nwoga puts it “exists and can affect reality by becoming realized in either of the other forms, physical or spiritual. The differences exist in the way they are experienced and the kind of impact they have. They are the three tips of the triangle of being which may stand on any side at a given time depending on circumstances.”\textsuperscript{337} Nwoga’s categorization, interesting as it is, creates some conceptual difficulties. What is the difference between the spiritual and the abstract and what is the nature of the abstract? Anthony N.O Ekwunife and Izunna Okonkwo throw some light to the abstract reality. Although their position may not be representative of Nwoga’s, yet it helps in explaining the Igbo

\textsuperscript{336} John C. Madubuko, \textit{The “Pauline” Spirit World in Eph 3:10 in the Context of Igbo World View: A Psychological-Hermeneutical Appraisal} (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015), 198.

world as an active, vibrant, dynamic reality. Thus, Ekwunife and Izunna agree that the abstract realities include the linguistic designations of things like idioms and proverbs.\textsuperscript{338} This could be under the physical since it is used by humans on earth. Also, it could apply to the Spiritual. But do the Igbo regard the linguistic reality as part of the category of being in their worldview? In any case, the import is that communication between the visible and invisible spheres is crucial. Since the Igbo world is not dumb but alive, language, therefore, links the two spheres ritually and morally. For humans “seek through rituals to maintain an equilibrium and a harmonious relationship with all the beings and forces that impinge on his life and being.”\textsuperscript{339} This makes some sense in the understanding that the Igbo world is a compenetrating reality. However, Nwoga’s position apparently allies with the two-dimensional understanding of the universe instead of a three-layered dimension that holistically interact constantly.

There is no gainsaying the fact the Igbo worldview, like most African worldviews, presents some difficulty in understanding. However, Igbo scholars like Madubuko, Metuh, Chinwe M.A. Nwoye, Christopher I. Ejizu, etc., cast some light to the complexity of Igbo cosmography.\textsuperscript{340} It is one holistic world with physical and spiritual realms that interrelate. The physical world said to be under the control of the Earth-Deity, as noted above, has both the natural land, \textit{Ala madu}, and the supernatural land, \textit{Ala Mmuo}. Based on this categorization, scholars agree that the cosmos,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{339} Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, \textit{African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Jos, Plateau: Imico Press, 1991), 4.
\end{itemize}

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according to the Igbo worldview, embraces a three-stuck structure namely, Igwe (the Sky), Elu-uwa/ala (the Earth), and Ime Ala (the Underworld) with earth, respectively functioning as viable reality. Christopher I. Ejizu argues that “Analytically, a structure of Igbo perception of the universe in terms of space presents a picture of three-tiered arrangement in consonance with popular intuition. There is the sky above, Igwe, then, the earth, Ala, and finally, we have the under-world, Ime-Ala. Each of these layers is thought to be densely populated”341 Whereas the sky is said to be the abode of, Chukwu, the Supreme Being, likewise the region of the major deities, the Enu-uwa/ala, the earth surface, is populated by humans, plants and animals and other natural elements. The Ime ala, the underworld, is inhabited by the ancestral spirits and all the disembodied spirits who, in various ways, are believed to have influences on the land of the living.342 One thing that stands out in this close-knit world is the constant interaction between them, their ability to compeneterate each other to ensure balance and integrity of the cosmos. The diagrammatic representation below, adapted from Alexander. O.E. Animalu, gives some bird’s eye view of the

341 Christopher I. Ejizu cited in John C. Madubuko, 200.

The reality of Igbo cosmology in its three-structure interlacing together constantly.

The above diagrammatic representation of being not only shows orderliness, hierarchy of beings, the harmony that co-exists but also the sacredness that permeates this holistic worldview. From all indication, what can be established is that the Igbo world is one world with three-structures—the

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343 Alexander O.E. Animalu, “Ucheakonam: A Way of Life in the Modern Scientific Age,” Ahiajoku Lecture, http://ahiajoku.igbonet.com/1990/ (accessed April 20th, 2021). There are other diagrammatic representations by other Igbo scholars detailing the three-structured reality of the Igbo cosmology. The general view is the same of the constant intermingling and dovetailing into each other so much that it is hard to separate them.
sky, the earth, and the world beneath. It is predominantly a world of the spiritual realities in their varied categories, and the human, with each interrelated and intermingling with the other.

However, despite the varied nuances and existence of various deities within the Igbo world, there seems to be harmonious relationship between the spiritual forces. Uzukwu argues that “There is no evidence of theomachy similar to what is encountered in Semitic or Mesopotamian mythology. Flexible interrelationship ensures the absence of conflict between God and the deities.” 344 In essence, these deities are plenipotentiaries in charge of various functions in the Igbo communities following the democratic space of the Igbo life. There is no conflict of interest nor the idea of a “jealous God,” but “a supremacy of One God …within a flexible divine hierarchy” who is “inclusive, dynamic and relational.” 345 The understanding within the Igbo structure of the universe is the reality of God and the deities working for the good of the world, to ameliorate harmony in the universe. Everything is “geared towards a therapeutic economy.” 346 Thus, humans are at the center of the scheme of this universe and their sphere constitutes an arena for the beehive of activities which is geared towards the enhancement of life and welfare of the world. As a result, maintenance of balance through right living and good relationship with the spirits is important. This is necessary to ensure that life, both of animate and inanimate entities, thrive in this world for it is more of a pro-life world. Therefore, the notion of compenetrating world of the Igbo is complementarity, relatedness, “life-ing,” 347 or as Nwala puts it, is a “unity which can best be

344 Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, 68.
345 Ibid.
346 Ibid.
347 K. C. Anyanwu quoted in Uzukwu, 66.
described as ‘life confronting life,’”348 a harmonious relationship which finds expression in the Igbo wisdom of *Ihe kwuru ihe akwudebe ya*, i.e., when something stands, another else stands next to it. This way of perceiving reality in pairs of interactive concepts among the Igbo, has crucial cosmological implications. Firstly, it points to two sides of a coin in an inseparably, constant interaction where each mirrors the other. This dynamism establishes kinship among all creatures, hence their ability to mutually interact in the sacred and democratic space called earth. Secondly and consequently, it points to corporate existence, which is so phenomenal in the Igbo belief. Thus, to harm nature is to harm the community and the defense of the earth is life-defense for life depends on the health of the environment to thrive. Thirdly, the ecological implications of this way of perceiving reality abound. In other words, the world is simply not the exclusive reserve of humans. Although in the Igbo world, humans are at the center, there is also a strong sense of the community of life. Every life is sacred and deserves to be treated as such, for it represents a reality higher than it. Inasmuch as humans need food, shelter, clothing and all other basic needs, care is taken to not asphyxiate or extinguish the lives of other entities who together constitute the community of life. The traditional Igbo eats, builds, clothes, etc., responsibly in line with the moral dictates of their religious universe and synergy. Incontestably, living in a moral, ancestral, or religious universe, for the Igbo, all life forms are sacred. To that fact, moral consideration is accorded to them to prevent exploitation of nature. This imposes on the community a type of fiduciary duty towards all life forms in Igbo society for life is considered as paramount. This is because, it is a gift from God. Also, emphasis is placed on relationship and harmony in life. There is constant effort to maintain these core existential values to preserve the integrity of creation and to ensure cosmic balance, which, in fact, translates into true worship and reverence for God, respect for the deities

and ancestors. The next section will show how this divine-infused universe permeates the Igbo world, stimulates, and regulates ecological stewardship of the earth.

2.3 The Igbo God-Indwelt Universe

The revelation of God in history does not happen in a vacuum but through the realities that people can relate and comprehend in their cultural milieu. Thus, Xenophanes of Colophon, a Greek Philosopher, Theologian and Poet, was noted to have said that “The Ethiops [sic] say that their gods are flat-nosed and black, while the Thracians say that theirs have blue eyes and red hair. Yet if cattle or horses or lions had hands and could draw, and could sculpt like men [sic], then the horses would draw their gods like horses, and cattle like cattle; and each they would shape bodies of gods in the likeness, each kind, of their own.”

Subscribing to this view much later, Ludwig Feuerbach, a German philosopher and anthropologist, also notes that “The object of any subject is nothing else than the subject’s own nature taken objectively. Such as are men’s [sic] thoughts and dispositions, such is his [sic] God… By his [sic] God thou knowest the man [sic] and by the man [sic] his [sic] God; the two are identical.”

These thinkers, in their respective critiques of religious polytheism and Christianity, seem to suggest that human beings have the inclination to fashion out their ideas of God according to their own image or likeness. Statements like these suggest a certain arbitrariness with which humans create their ideas of God.

However, the reality is that people’s conception of God, most often, are part of a world of meanings, which they obtain through the social processes of learning, the quotidian, the rituals and


symbols in their culture and environment. A people’s conception of God comes from their implicit interpretation of their universe, which they are integrally part of. Rightly, John Mbiti asserts that “African concepts of God are strongly coloured and influenced by the historical, geographical, social and cultural background or environment of each people.” In validation of this claim, Dominique Zahan remarks that “Africans may use all the materials that their environment puts at their disposal in order to express their ideas about God. For them everything that surrounds them exhibits a sort of transparency that allows them to communicate directly with heaven. Things and beings are not obstacles to the knowledge of God; rather they constitute signifiers and indices which reveal the divine being.” In other words, the universe speaks about and references God.

The Igbo, as other African peoples’ knowledge of God is expressed in various ways such as proverbs, songs or music, short and pithy statements, myths, prayers, names, stories, and religious ceremonies. These media are easy to remember and pass on to generations because there are no written documents in the traditional societies other than the power of narratives and the sacred texts enshrined in people’s heart and culture. The knowledge of God is suffused in the life and activities of the people, in their environment, so much that one does not need to “expect a long dissertation about God” and fundamentally, “God is no stranger to African peoples, and in traditional life there are no atheists.” God’s existence is affirmed without any apologies.


353 John S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, 29.

354 Ibid.
Therefore, it is almost taken for granted that God exists and is very much perceptible within the environment, in nature, for the “Society is anchored on the sacred; and ritual is exercised on various levels...”\textsuperscript{355} Noting an Ashanti proverb, Mbiti demonstrates that “‘No one shows a child the Supreme Being.’ That means that everybody knows of God’s existence almost by instinct, and even children know Him [sic].”\textsuperscript{356} As Luke N. Mbefo puts it, “We do not find in the Igbo tradition any conscious denial of God’s existence.”\textsuperscript{357} Following Mbefo, the Igbo affirm God’s existence and permeation in and above everything. This central conviction, which, as Mbefo argues, “ranks as the first creed in the Igbo system of natural faith.”\textsuperscript{358} The underlying affirmation and confidence in God, among the Igbo, is demonstrated in the names, \textit{Chukwudi} (God exists) and \textit{Chukwuma} (God knows). These names, among others, are constant reminders of the Igbo of a world that is charged with and infused with God’s active presence. Therefore, those who bear this belief as names and even those who invoke them, albeit unconsciously, “become thereby missionaries to Igbo faith wherever they may go” and vanguards of environmental preservation for within this natural environment lies God who sets things in motion and through which God is related with and worshipped.\textsuperscript{359}

Be that as it may, it could equally be argued that the affirmative power of the name, \textit{Chukwudi}, (God exists), implies that people, perhaps, have been led to deny the existence of God

\textsuperscript{355} Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, \textit{A Listening Church}, 15.

\textsuperscript{356} John S. Mbiti, \textit{African Religions and Philosophy}, 29.


\textsuperscript{358} Mbefo, 23.

\textsuperscript{359} Mbefo, 23.
and to affirm the absurdity of the world through the experience of evil and their inability to find some meaningful explanations in the lived contradictions of life in the world. As a common name in Igbo land, most likely, some form of atheism may have been experienced among the forebears of Igbo society. If this had existed, most likely, it did not last long. In the absence of any evidence, Mbefo’s argument seems plausible to hold that the Igbo incontestably affirm God’s existence over and above the experienced mystery of evil and the lived experiences of contradictions.

However, scholars agree that these realities are born out of the Igbo/African experiences; the highs and lows, the miseries and happiness, the famine and bounty, cosmic balance and imbalance, sickness and health, etc., which punctuate every journey of their life from which they consider God to be omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. This is a conviction in which God is recognized, through the various experiences in life, as some necessary source and solace, who embraces the whole world, overshadowing and protecting it. John S. Mbiti, Caroline N. Mbonu, Luke N. Mbefo, Therese J. Agbasiere, Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator are of the view that the African thought patterns are more of concrete than abstract that they go from the known to the unknown; that “the matter and practice of religion,” for the African, “is inseparable from one’s way of life in the same way that a leopard’s spots cannot be erased by repeated dips in the river.” Arguably, the ideas of God are apparently woven in the Igbo people’s everyday experience in the


natural environment, through what Max Weber would refer to as “the breaking point”\textsuperscript{363} of human world of meaning. Hence, there exists in Igbo communities such “a cocktail of captivating epithets that describe God: ‘God beyond human speech’… ‘God of daily experience,’ …’God whose speech is the world.”\textsuperscript{364} In this matrix, Therese Agbasiere notes that “people conceptualize all visible things as endowed with vital force; they also regard them as counterparts of invisible forces, hence the tendency to anthropomorphize all visible phenomena. Thus, trees, rivers and even rocks and such are believed to have their own gods and goddesses.”\textsuperscript{365} Thus, the universe, in the Igbo conception, does not just have the print of God. According to Uzukwu, it “is dominated by God” who is “the Origin of origins.”\textsuperscript{366} It is the reflection of God who is intimately associated with every phenomenon in the universe that it can be said that the Igbo universe is God-indwelt, enveloped by God who is the active force and originator of creation and to whom creation bears witness.\textsuperscript{367}

For the Igbo, as other Africans, the world is a text through which God is self-revealing. It is a signifier of God and a field of divine action and energy.

Going by divine attributes, Igbo names for God speak volubly of God’s active, creative, involvement in the universe. As noted earlier, bearing the principle of creation in mind, the Igbo name God, \textit{Chineke} or \textit{Onye Okike}. When deeply expressed, \textit{Chineke} will formally be written as

\begin{footnotes}
\item[364] Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, \textit{God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness}, 75.
\end{footnotes}
Chi na-eke, (God who creates). Okike and eke are from the verb, ike which is to create or to apportion. Interestingly, Chi is a gregarious and dynamic word. It has lots of variations that most times, it raises controversy. Igbo scholars agree that there are two broad categories of chi. Firstly, B. Abanuka notes that “Chi means day or daylight, but it is usually used for the transitional periods between day and night or night and day. In this connection, we talk about chi ohuho (daybreak) and chi ojiji (nightfall). There is also the mgbachi which is used for that powerful hour of noon that splits the day in two.”

Chinua Achebe calls this time “favoured in folklore by itinerant spirits and feared by children.” Secondly, chi has been translated variously as God, spirit, soul, guardian spirit, portion of divine being and essential being. As the name Supreme Being, chi is translated as Creator, Spirit and God. From the foregoing, it is clear that Chi is enigmatic, multivalent and can be strictly and loosely predicated of everything without exception. In the principle of creation, it is evident that God creates, Chineke. According to Chibueze, “Here, God is portrayed as the one ‘who apportions’ something to creatures. He [sic] ‘apportions’ life to or puts it into creature, hence, becomes ‘God-within’ (Chi).” Following this, it is logical to say that

372 See T. U. Nwala, 41. See also B. Abanuka, 3.
373 Chibueze Udeani, Inculturation as Dialogue, 46.
it is ‘God-within’ who is revealed in creation in various ways and times. Similarly, the same creating Chi, is called also

Osebuluwa (he-who-is-carrying or supporting-the-world…) and were the creating-chi to relax his [sic] hold, the world would relapse into ‘nothingness’… Chi is continually creating- i.e., his [sic] creative activity is believed to be constantly at work…because for the Igbo every manifestation of the forces of nature proves to human experience that these forces are not static nor are they mechanical and they need continual and continuing activity of the creating-chi, a re-enactment of the drama of creation.374

This profound conviction of God-indwelt universe and sustained divine providence, in a certain sense, conflicts with the view of some authors that consider the God of the Igbo as a deus otiosus, a withdrawn God. This presents a paradox in the conception of God as both transcendent and immanent. This paradox is not only common to Igbo religion. Edward Evans-Pritchard calls such paradox common to all religions “the unresolved paradoxes which are found in different religious systems. It is a universal experience…that Divinity to man [sic] is both friend and foe, whom one summons for aid and asks to turn away seeking at the same time union and separation from him.”375 Relevant to the Igbo experience, Evans calls this the paradox of a ‘deus absconditus,’ hidden god, in the sky, and ‘deus revelatus,’ revealed god, in human affairs. As earlier noted, God, for the Igbo, as other African societies, is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient.

As creator, origin and sustenance of all things, God transcends all boundaries, “he [sic] is the chigbo, the aged, but not ageing chi… He [sic] is sublime in status, beyond all spiritual and non-spiritual beings. He is eze-bi n’elu ogodo ya na-akpu na-ala (the King who lives above whose

374 C.O. Obiego in Chibueze Udeani, 47.

lion-cloth touches and rolls on the ground). God’s transcendence, for the Igbo, marks out the uniqueness of God as the creator of all, an attribute uniquely to God who is far away yet constantly on the lips and consciousness of the Igbo, and equally perceptible in the environment. Hence, the Igbo describe this fluid, elusive presence of God as *O di nso eru aka*, the One who is near yet untouchable. Uzukwu throws a heavy weight to this, arguing that “distance or transcendence is of the nature of the One God. Distance does not mean otiose: an otiose African ‘High God’ does not exist except in the mind of missionaries and anthropologists.” Thus, the transcendence or distance of God does not reduce God’s beneficent sweetness, God’s providential presence or nearness, God’s tenderness nor God’s continued involvement in imbuing terrestrial existence with vitality.

Insistently, Uzukwu argues rightly that

If creation came out of the very being of God … to transmit vitality to all existents, if creation flowed out of *Onyame* as divine rivers for human good, the mythical language of God’s departure or distance can never be interpreted as absence. Rather it could be called an imaginative device to affirm strongly equal distance and equal nearness of all existents from God. Wherever God is concerned there is no place of privilege, … Deities … can be grounded, can choose privileged and initiated devotees, can even be instrumentalized by hierarchs, but never God. This is the foundation for the power and weakness of God: anyone can address prayers to God anywhere and at any time to renew vitality.

Understanding Uzukwu would mean that for the Igbo, like other Africans, the world is like the altar of God, a divine infused arena connecting and sustaining all entities. No place is more sacred

376 C.O. Obiego in Chibueze Udeani, 51.


379 Ibid.

380 Uzukwu, 74.
than the others. No place eludes the divine radar. No place is exhaustive of God to the detriment of others. Any place is sacred and fit for communion with God who sustains the people through the fruits of the place.

Therefore, equal distance does not imply aloofness of God to creation but of hierarchy in being and God’s equal nearness is in terms of his ever presence relatability to his creation. This validates the view that the Igbo, as other African societies, “live in a religious universe, so that natural phenomena and objects are intimately associated with God.” While some of these elements are visible, living in the physical universe, others are invisible, existing in the mystical universe. Against this background, T. U. Nwala argues that,

Since the traditional Igbo, like all traditional people have a personal approach towards things, these natural qualities are personal and spiritual. They are addressed in personal terms, some are regarded as the abode of certain spirits and gods and so held in awe and sacredness; others are either pets or agents of the spirits. Certain elements like wind, sun, sky, rain, darkness, earth, etc., are deified and their spirits worshipped. Their activities, their ‘coming into being’ and ‘passing away’ bear some stamp of mystery and so are thought to possess some mysterious attributes.

The idea of relation to objects, most times, is misunderstood by people both members and non-members of the Igbo society or Africans societies in general who share the same view. M. Eliade expresses the view when he holds that

for the religious person, nature is never only natural; but is filled with religious meaning. The cosmos is a divine creation. The world is created in such a way that the religious person finds various forms of the sacred and of being in it. The order, harmony, stability, and fertility manifest themselves in cosmic rhythms. The cosmos, in its entirety, is a real, lively, and holy organism at the same time. For Eliade, ontophany and hierophany meet one another because the cosmos reveals the modalities of being and sacredness as the supernatural for the religious person

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is indissolubly connected with the natural, nature is always an expression of that which transcends it.\textsuperscript{383}

For the Igbo, this means that a sacred object is worshipped, not just because it is an object but because it is sacred. As Chibueze Udeani puts it, “The in-the-objectness of this object’s self-revealing holiness reveals its real being or essence.”\textsuperscript{384} It bears emphasizing that for the Igbo traditional society, nothing stands on its own. Things are conceived as symbols of each other and more of higher or spiritual, sacred reality. In this sense, symbols do not only unify the various or respective objects they symbolize, but they are also believed to share somehow in the reality that they express. This view of the universe holds the following major points that the universe is alive and sacred because it is enlivened and powered by God whose very source and sustenance God is and whose glory and goodness the universe reflects. As a result, every object is sacred, not a mere matter to be exploited and discarded. Therefore, respect for the spiritual and mystical nature of creation is enlisted. Given this fundamental unity in this organic world, all forms of life are united and mutually interact and share in each other’s gift as given by God whom they bear witness to. Thus, created order other than humans must be approached with awe and care. This is not just because of its communion with God, also because of its vital forces, its connection with the ancestors and other deities that fill up the Igbo sacred world.

Arguing for the sacramental nature of the African universe in general, Mbiti reiterates the belief that nature in the African world is not an empty impersonal object or phenomenon. Nature is filled with religious significance such that humans give life where even natural objects and


\textsuperscript{384} Chibueze Udeani, \textit{Inculturation as Dialogue}, 24.
phenomena have no biological life. God is seen in and behind these objects and phenomena. Since these objects are God’s creation, they manifest God, they symbolize God’s presence. Assertively, Mbiti notes that the invisible world is symbolized or manifested by the visible and concrete phenomena and objects of nature. In an interpenetrative way, “the invisible world presses hard upon the visible such that one speaks of the other, and African people ‘see’ that invisible universe when they look at, hear or feel the visible and tangible world.”

For Mbiti, and agreeably, this is one of the most fundamental religious heritages of the African people in general that has kept the flora and fauna intact and constitute a great channel of communion with God. Painfully, Mbiti avers that “It is unfortunate that foreign writers, through great ignorance, have failed to understand this deep religious insight of our peoples; and have often either ridiculed it, or naively presented it as ‘nature worship’ or animism. Traditional African societies have been neither deaf nor blind to the spiritual dimension of existence, which is so deep, so rich and so beautiful.”

Mbiti is right. The spate of attacks unleashed on the environment lately in Igbo society due to this misrepresentation of the traditional religious insights validates Mbiti’s point. The sacred aura that the Igbo attached to nature is thus demonized. This has given rise to a dominant materialistic view of nature the result of which is seen in serious exploitation of nature, growing sense of laxity and dereliction towards environmental protection.

For the traditional Igbo or African, reverence attached to the objects in nature does not constitute idolatry, animism, or naturalism. Within the Igbo mind, reverence is to God whose ambassadors the objects in nature are and whose altar and garments nature, the universe is. This sacred view helps in protecting nature from human exploitation, from being extinct. It sets limits

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386 Ibid.
to the human activities towards the environment. It calls to mind that the centrality of humans in the order of the universe does not in any way imply human license to treat nature without reverence and respect. Arguably, reverence for nature is an essential part of the Igbo moral order of the universe. Humans, therefore, are not the masters of the universe. They are only at the center. As such, they are to exert positive energies as friends and be in symbiotic relationship with nature. They are, by this fact, co-earthlings with other entities in the world. Arguably, humans are co-sacramentals with other earth entities in this sacramental universe.

Therefore, most African scholars have sharply offered a rebuke of animism pejoratively ascribed to the Igbo or African understanding and relationship with nature. Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator offers a deconstruction of the term, construing it to be a basic affirmation of “the belief that all of reality is enfolded in divine caress and animated by the life-giving breath of the Spirit. Trees, animals, and water are sacred elements, and human beings have the duty to care for and protect them. To destroy or pollute them incurs the wrath of the gods and goddesses with which they are associated and also the sanctions of the community.”

Orobator’s point seems to agree with the Biblical view that it is the Spirit that gives life as the flesh counts for nothing. Fittingly, this is in line with the Igbo view of creation seen earlier in this work. The life that is “animated by the life-giving breath,” using Orobator’s words, is not limited to humans. It is the life of the world, all entities in the universe. Humanity is not to stand in the way of this animation. To do so amounts to stifling of life, obstructing the natural course of events, a betrayal of ecological stewardship reposed on humans. Therefore, an ecological commitment is a commitment to service that is seen

387 Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, Religion and Faith in Africa, 104.

in caring for the earth. It is a reverent attitude that signals hallowed opportunities for healing the planet and humanity integrally simply, because, nature is animated by the Spirit of God that lies within it, which it generously reveals.

In a certain sense, it is this Spirit indwelt universe that attracts Africans to respect creation for what it is and nothing else. Like Mbiti, Orobator wistfully longs for a revision of this integral spirituality, albeit in small measure, encapsulated in “the wisdom of African religious traditions, long derided and dismissed as animistic,” for it “offers resources for cultivating sound ecological virtues to stimulate a renewed commitment to humanity’s shared responsibility to care for our common home.” More critically, however, it defines the quality of life of the human community in the universe as well as the quality of life of the universe itself. Also, it entails dedication in upholding the sanctity of creation in daily life. This is because, in the Igbo philosophy of life, all life forms, both humans, animals, plants, insects, the earth, originate and intimately share a relationship of bondedness with the divine life. In this sense, all life is therefore divine life or divinely inspired. Significantly, this means that both humanity and nature are integrally one. They are woven by creation into a fabric or texture of life, a web or fabric marked by mutual dependence among all creatures. Consequently, this living texture or fabric of nature, which includes humans and nonhumans, is sacred. However, its sacredness does not suggest that nature ought to be worshipped. It means that nature should be treated with respect for who it represents. This informs the traditional Igbo people’s relationship with nature.

Agreeing with Orobator in his views, however, his use of the term ‘gods’ or ‘goddess’ apparently betrays his thought. Arguably, that implies polytheism in the Igbo religious matrix, 389


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which is not acceptable. Igbo theologians strongly affirm the Oneness of God in the Igbo religious universe.\textsuperscript{390} However, the Igbo conception of Monotheism, as Uzukwu argues, has a unique and complex hint.\textsuperscript{391} Dismissing the idea of polytheism, Uzukwu, noting Bolaji Idowu, describes the complex reality of the oneness of God amidst the multiplicity of deities as more of a “diffused monotheism,” i.e., diffused exercise of power, a flexible divine hierarchy that is welcoming and accommodating of the deities who act as counselors, administrators in the divine court.\textsuperscript{392} In this flexible interrelationships, there is no jealousy or theomachy within the divine court. It is rather a dynamic, relational, malleable monotheism, an inclusive supremacy of God, in which “God, deities, spirits and ancestors are preoccupied with human flourishing and the transformation of the world.”\textsuperscript{393} Sequel to this, the term gods or goddess is a misnomer. Preferably, Uzukwu’s term ‘deities’ agrees with what is familiar to the Igbo. In many ways, Marie P. B. Eboh agrees with Uzukwu. For Eboh “the traditional Igbo man [sic] calls these spirits \textit{Arusi} or \textit{Agbara} but the anthropologists and some missionaries baptized them ‘gods,’ ‘goddess,’ ’demigod,’ etc. The logic of it is that, as sacrifices are offered to them, they must be gods. Again, they found it difficult to comprehend how the Igbo could offer sacrifices to these intermediaries and yet maintain that they

\textsuperscript{390} See Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, \textit{God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness}, 68-76; Emefie Ikenga-Metuh \textit{m Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions}, 94-115.

\textsuperscript{391} Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, 58.

\textsuperscript{392} This idea follows the social structure, the organizational model of administration within the Igbo (West African) society. The king is not so much seen. Persons involved in the administration of the kingdom, representing all the major groupings- regional village councils and chiefs, queen- mother, rainmakers, priests, etc., - become prominent in a diffused exercise of power. This political reality is opposed to absolutism, neutralizes dictatorship or autocracy. See Uzukwu, \textit{God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness}, 72.

\textsuperscript{393} Ibid, 60.
offered them to *Chukwu*- the Supreme Being."\(^{394}\) For the Igbo, the monotheistic view of God is never compromised. The multiple divinities or divine beings, in collaboration with God, display divine economy. “They are constituted governors of the world, plenipotentiary ministers, and administrators of the world or such parts allocated to them by God for the good of the world.”\(^{395}\) They neither contradict, conflict nor take the place of God who is the Origin of origins. They bear witness to God. Metuh puts it that “the deities are manifestations or refractions of God. They are messengers or vicars. Worship addressed to these deities are said to be ultimately destined for God.”\(^{396}\) This finds expression in the Igbo proverbs that “*Ozi eziri anwuru oku eruola eligwe,*” i.e., whatever message given to smokes inevitably gets to heaven. In other words, the deities are emissaries who carry the human pleas or sacrifices up to God and vice versa for the good of the world. Reasonably, for the Igbo, the deities are like the ears, hands, legs, and eyes of God on earth. They share some aspect of nature and some of the attributes of *Chukwu*- the Supreme Being.

As earlier noted, the sacred, for the Igbo, can manifest itself in objects and in any place. Within this sacramental and “spirit-regarding” cosmology, not only is the world conceived as swarming with sacredness or spirits, and redundant with life, every person, *madu,* and things, *ihe,* are basically spiritual even though everything is integrated within the economic soteriology of the world. Given this, Nwala argues that for the traditional Igbo person, “objects in nature confront

\(^{394}\) Marie P.B. Eboh, *The Structure of Igbo Logic as shown in Dispute Settlement* (Port Harcourt, Rivers: Paragraphics, 1997), 22.

\(^{395}\) Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness,* 82.

\(^{396}\) Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions,* 127.
them as ‘Thou’ as a live presence that reveals the reality in it and is experienced emotionally in a
dynamic reciprocal relationship.”

Reiterating for the sake of emphasis, the Igbo do not worship trees or stones, animals, forests, rivers, mountains as such. Rather, they are revered because they manifest something which is no longer an object, but the sacred, the wholly other. These objects are therefore hierophanies, i.e., conveyors or manifestations of the divine. This is premised on the basis that the traditional Igbo society perceive the world as creation of Chukwu, God, “who manifests in variety of ways as Anyanwu, the Sun, his [sic] power, knowledge and omnipresence are revealed; as Agbala, he [sic] is manifested in the fertility of the earth, animals and human beings; as Chi, he [sic] empowers and strengthens human beings: as Okike, he [sic] manifests in the creation of everything visible and invisible, which is a never-ending process.” This is the sense of the ubiquity of God in the Igbo world. No place, nothing is empty of God’s presence or contact.

The implication of this sacramental or spiritual world view is that the gap between the profane and the sacred in the Igbo experience is attenuated. This carries with it a lot of ecological implications since epiphanies are a part of this religious universe of experience. The preservation of moral order necessary for ecological balance becomes the goal etched deeply in the psyches of humans from the cradle of life that “the moral order is sacralized and human affairs in the journey from birth to death and reincarnation are infused with religious meaning.” Thus, humans act and

397 T.U. Nwala, Igbo Philosophy, 81.


399 Kalu, 115.
speak of creation with avuncular pride and deep interest in the awareness that every entity in creation is a divine agent within the community of life. For the Igbo, all the natural entities that constitute the world are acknowledged as possessing a sacramental aura. This is because they signify God’s presence and the aspects of God’s character.

Therefore, the Igbo world is not an amorphous dumb object. Every entity, no matter how small, has a part to play in the world in line with divine plan. Each, in their own unique ways, contributes to the growth, beauty, hymn and harmony of creation. Isidore O. O. Igwegbe compares the God-pivoted liveliness of the Igbo world to an orchestral group in which every instrument plays a role in an orderly and pleasant-sounding manner. For Igwegbe, “It is like a choir in which every voice is necessary for a harmonious performance. For an average African, creation sings a melody.”

Following this sacred musical order, the architectural structure of the Igbo “cosmos portrays a quasi-sacramental order. Things are more than just ordinary objects; They transmit a message; everything says more than what is perceived.”

Further, exploring the attributes of God as a mystery and a light which shines through and in all things, Igwegbe notes that the transparency of God is seen in all and being so, everything is transparent because of God. As a result, everything changes into a sign of God. Following Igwegbe, this means the world, the earth is a sacrament of God. Comparatively, the Igbo religious vision of the universe tends to agree with the words of St Irenaeus that “in God there is no emptiness, everything is a sign.” Hence, as noted earlier,

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401 Ibid.

402 Ibid.
scholars talk of the Igbo world as a symbolic universe in which concrete realities in this world evokes another transcendent reality. In this religiously charged universe,

What may appear simply as material, wears in the religious eyes of the African a quasi-sacramental garb, it remains for the African a vessel of mysterious forces, a sign through which something beyond is seen. This is what Tradition, Ancestors, Community, Rituals are in the African religious world. They signify more than their face value. Behind them is hidden a higher meaning. They bear some resemblance to the things whose symbols they are.\(^{404}\)

Following this religious mindset, the Igbo, therefore, read “the Permanent in the ephemeral, in the temporal the Eternal. In such a vision, the ephemeral is transfigured into the signal of the presence of the Permanent; the temporal into the symbol of the reality of the Eternal; the world into a great sacrament of God.”\(^{405}\) This constitutes the Igbo spirituality of the world, preferably termed a this-worldly spirituality, where this-world is affirmed, not denied, where there is no other worldliness to run to and allow this physical world to decay, be abused or desecrated. It affirms the synergy of the past, the present and intentionally means well for the future generations. As Chinwe M.A. Nwoye says, the traditional Igbo God-indwelt “cosmology inspires and sustains a religion that is this-world affirming,” where the integral welfare of the world is a central focus of attention.\(^{406}\) For the immanence of God in this world means that the Igbo see and experience God, their Creator, who is invisible in and through God’s visible creation, besides other ways. Theologically, this is the sacramental nature of the universe. It reaches its sublime expression in Igbo belief and practices


\(^{404}\) Isidore O. O. Igwegbe, Sacramental Theological Thinking, 166.

\(^{405}\) Igwegbe, 167.

of treating the features of creation as effective symbols of God in the world and to receive this world as gift.

Admittedly and ecologically, the universe is treated with dignity because of the Reality inherent in it. This translates into respect for and freedom of all creation. Freedom enables animals, trees, rivers, stones, humans, etc., to be fully themselves without undue interference or violation of their sacred nature. It rules out excessive acquisition, greed, consumerism, dereliction, and commodification and or exploitation of nature. Realistically, it instills a sacred relationship with creation and gratitude to God for the gifts of creation. Thus, care for creation becomes a paramount duty, a sacred obligation that is carried out in the understanding that it is part of self-care, a culture or spirituality borne out of love for all that God has made and, uses as means of manifesting God’s benevolence and care.

To not care and respect the universe would mean a violation to the sacred reality it embodies. It risks putting the harmony in nature on a collision course, inviting great penury and pollution to lives. The sense of the sacred in the universe not only strengthens the bond between the spiritual and physical world, but it also underlines the connectedness between humanity and other members of creation as both draw their existence from the one and the same source of life. It wards off any chaos that might ensue if the bond is not respected. This keeps the sacramental universe from degradation, pollution, and preserving it safe for future generations. This ethics is rooted in the Igbo respect for the Earth as a metaphysical and physical reality, the basis of Igbo moral life upon which everything in the Igbo reality revolves. The next section brings out this argument clearly.
2.4  The Hallowed Cult of *Ala* (Mother Earth)

From the previous sections, it is established that the holistic life of the Igbo is deeply influenced by multiple deities which operate within the visible sphere in various ways and degrees for the good of the world. The supernatural powers are classified under two broad categories. The first are those which occupy and control the spiritual sphere under the leadership of the Sky God, Chineke, also called *Chukwu* among other names. The second are those which occupy and control the earth under the general supervision of the Earth Spirit, *Ala, Ana, Ani, Ali, Ane, Ale*. The spiritual and the physical provide the stage where the human drama is played out. Geoffrey E. Parrinder notes that “Men [sic] lift up their eyes to the sky and naturally regard its spirit as transcendent and mighty. But they live on the earth, plant seeds on it, derive food from it and in its depth the dead are buried.” The contiguity between the natural and the supernatural, the physical and the metaphysical, finds no better expression than in the Igbo concept of *Ala*.

In its philosophical or theological analysis, the Igbo concept of land *Ala* reveals that *Ala* is not just a solid vault under people’s feet. It goes beyond the physical reality. It denotes the supernatural aura and has socio-economic aspects that is so essential to the Igbo life and spirituality. Elechukwu N. Njaka puts it that “*Ala* is a concept as well as the earth. As a concept, *Ala* is the essence, the *chi* of the earth, the source of strength for the living, and the abode of the

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407 As noted earlier, the Igbo Language has many dialects. *Ala, Ana, Ani, etc.*, speaks of the same reality, earth, land or ground, and is commonly understood irrespective of the dialects. See Therese J. Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 51. See also Geoffrey Parrinder, *West African Religion: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Aka, Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo and Kindred Peoples* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), 37. *Ala* will be used here while retaining original as is in authors quoted.

dead.” In the Igbo pantheon, as has been noted in this work, there is only one Chukwu, God. However, Ala is regarded as the “greatest alusi” “… the Earth Mother, Ala- wife of Chukwu presides over innumerable deities.” An aspect of Igbo myth has it that when the Igwe- Sky, regarded as male deity and the Ala, a female deity, mate, the Earth is fructified, hence “the expression Igwe na Ana raa- i.e., Igwe and Ana copulate to produce living creatures.” It is believed that this copulation happens “when Igwe fertilizes the Earth with the water of life- the rain, (invariably the sperm), that the earth becomes productive. The earth is below, and the sky is on top just in the same position couples stay when they make babies. It is the one on top who is stronger and older.” The danger in this myth is that it can be used to justify the suppression of one gender over the other. Especially in a male dominated society, most Igbo believe that the male figure should predominate the female and hence the Igwe is regarded as male who suppressed the female earth. Therese J. Agbasiere argues that such a narrative can factor in the male psyche a sense of superiority of men to women and be used to silence women’s active voice in purely political affairs especially in major decisions affecting the community.

410 Elizabeth A. Isichei, Igbo Worlds: 27.
411 Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, 63.
413 Ibid.
However, considering that the Igbo traditional society was egalitarian, the issue of one
gender dominating or suppressing another does not sound plausible. It could be argued that since
*Ala* is everything for the Igbo, and “is attributed with the creation of metaphysical or moral
universe”\(^\text{415}\) and the cog upon which the wheel of life revolves, the idea of God’s affectionate and
just attributes the Igbo know is through *Ala* though she is not *Chukwu.*\(^\text{416}\) It can further be argued
that the Igbo religious world is more of a divinely-feminine suffused universe than of male-
divinely dominated world. In the psyche of the Igbo, everything in this universe is expected to bear
fruits. For the earth is Mother who gives and nurtures life. Some Igbo scholars argue that the
disparity in gender and the suppression of “the female divinities and their social manifestations in
Igbo land came during the colonial times.”\(^\text{417}\) Saline Jell-Bahlsen insists that

Colonial administrators and their successors were inspired by European male-
based beliefs and power structures and, in addition, were driven by their desire to
control the land and its people. Consequently, researches (sic) on its political and
administrative implementations have focused on the male divinities including those
of ancestor worship and other divinities, and on the conservative male aspects of
custom, *omenala,* at the expense of the dynamic, innovative, and creative female
side of custom.\(^\text{418}\)

In other words, for Jell-Bahlsen, colonialism and all that it represents subverted the traditional
Igbo egalitarian life that recognized the male-female equilibrium as rooted in the Igbo
cosmovision, which would affect other relationships in the society? Most likely true. However, it

\(^{415}\) Agbasiere, 51.

\(^{416}\) Sabine Jell-Bahlsen, “The Lake Goddess, Uhammiri Ogbuide: The Female Side of the

\(^{417}\) Ibid, 38. See also Ifi Amadiume, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex

\(^{418}\) Jell-Bahlsen, 38.
probably safer to argue that there is complementarity of female and male divine attributes said to be responsible for various functions to ensure life and protection in the Igbo world. Given this, it is reasonable to assert that the idea of Igwe being on top and Ala below is more complementary than a dominance of one gender over another. And despite colonial invasion and male-biased beliefs associated with it, the fact is that Ala is so pervasive in Igbo people’s consciousness, and as established in this work, Ala is the feminine aspect of God.

Numerous temples of Ala are scattered all over the villages in Igbo land where major decisions are taken and given a ritual binding force. Besides, Therese J. Agbasiere observes that most families have also a miniature shrine of Ala, referred to as “Ala ezi, ‘Ala as guardian of the household.”419 Her central importance is seen in the veneration and sacrifices accorded to her. Emeka Onwurah notes that “in the traditional morning prayers, Ala is mentioned second after Chukwu...thus Chukwu (God), come and eat kolanut. Ala (Earth) come and eat kolanut. Ancestors (Ndiichie), come and eat kolanut.”420 C.K. Meek validates Onwurah, upholding that “the Earth spirit is the most important spirit after Chukwu. She is the Great Mother Spirit, the queen of the underworld, the ‘owner’ of men [sic] and custodian of public morality in conjunction with the ancestors.421

As a popular deity, Ala has priority over other spirits. Demonstrably, the earth is the most important single factor in the many-sided life of the Igbo traditional community. Everything

419 Therese J. Agbasiere, Women in Igbo Life and Thought, 52.
420 Emeka Onwurah, “The Mother Earth in Igbo Religion,” 44.
resolves around her, and the priests of her cult, Ezeala, are regarded as the principal and greatest of the religious ministers in the community.\textsuperscript{422} The fertility of women and men, animals and crops, plants, the health of the rivers and seas and all that they contain are attributed to her. Thus, “Farmers take permission from her before they till the ground, and at the first fruit and full harvests, sacrifices are offered to Ala who owns the land and who gives special permission for the use of the land.”\textsuperscript{423} In most instances, the blessing of Ala is sought before any building is erected on the land. This is also applicable to other activities that take place in Igbo land.

Principally, land and every activity that goes on in it belongs to the Earth Spirit and the ancestors. As a result, land is regarded as holy and should be treated in that manner, basically for subsistence, not for commercialization and exploitation. Traditionally, the sale of land is unpopular, “it was impossible. The Igbo disliked and still dislike selling land because of their reverence for Ala, and they appease her if it has to be done.”\textsuperscript{424} For the Igbo, land, as noted earlier, is seen as a permanent asset, a gift or even as a loan to be cherished, a common heritage not to be treated at will by any individual person. This view is explicitly expressed in the Igbo idioms like, Ala efo obi, the earth does not migrate, Anaghi apa Ala apa, i.e, the earth is not a luggage that can be carried. The same expression can be inferred from a similar notion, Ala aso onye, the earth is fearless and so cannot move from her position. Inspired by this, the Igbo were ready to defend the sanctity of the earth at all costs and are willing to hand same tradition to their future generation,


\textsuperscript{423} Emeka Onwurah, “The Mother Earth in Igbo Religion,” 43.

\textsuperscript{424} Therese J. Agbasiere, \textit{Women in Igbo Life and Thought}, 52. See Geoffrey Parrinder, 35 and M.M. Green, \textit{Ibo Village Affair}, 34.
hence the aphorism among the Igbo, as other African societies, “Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents; it was loaned to you by your children.”\footnote{Joseph Healey, and Donald Sybertz, \textit{Towards an African Narrative Theology} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 120.} However, it must be noted that this solemn view of the sanctity of the earth which made it almost an offense to sell off land at will in the traditional society has witnessed a great shift. This was well spelt out in chapter one. Despite that, the Igbo consider themselves as bonded to and dependent on the earth for everything in life.

2.4.1 Rooted in the Earth

It is reasonable to assert that for the Igbo, life begins and ends with the Earth-Spirit. The earth is both the womb that gestates and entombs life. Various rites of passages from birth to death in many ways are linked to the earth. Emeka Onwuka confirms that “the Mother Earth is very prominent in all the rites of passage.”\footnote{Emeka Onwurah, “The Mother Earth in Igbo Religion,” \textit{Journal of Dharma: Dharmaram Journal of Religions and Philosophies} 18, no.1 (January-March 1993), 44.} At betrothal and marriage, sacrifices are offered to the ancestors and the Earth Spirit. Among the Igbo, childbearing is considered a major reason for marrying as a process of populating the community. Most importantly, it is the means through which the ancestors are brought back to their community, i.e., reincarnation.\footnote{Emfie Ikenga-Metuh, \textit{Comparative Studies of African traditional Religions}, 255-57} This explains one of the reasons the Igbo strive to preserve the integrity of the earth. Since the ancestors are said to be interested in the affairs of their families, they visit them often and vitally reincarnate in their
grand or great grandchildren or relatives and friends. Therefore, it will be considered a disservice to the ancestors to inherit a bastardized environment, without land and without balance.\textsuperscript{428}

No doubts, the Igbo know and believe that children come from God. However, to show their closeness to Earth, “they would rather follow the ‘right procedure’ by appealing first to the fertility deity, \textit{Ala}. And when a woman becomes pregnant, before the public knows it, the husband would offer a fowl at the shrine of the Earth Spirit asking for her protection over the woman.”\textsuperscript{429} Edmund C. Ilogu talks of the smearing of lose sands on the body of the pregnant woman for blessing, healing or normalizing the body temperature. Most importantly, it is a symbol of sanctity of and union with Mother Earth while at the same time asking for her help throughout the gestation period and during labor.\textsuperscript{430} These Earth-friendly rituals spill over to labor time, the arrival of the baby and naming ceremony, etc. For instance, in some Igbo communities, at birth, a newborn baby is ritually washed or smeared with loose sands to welcome it and to show its earthiness and integration to community. In the words of Onwurah, it is “to depict its connection with \textit{Ala} and to announce to the ancestors that the baby has arrived safely. \textit{Ala} is also invoked during the initiation ceremonies.”\textsuperscript{431} Similarly, once the umbilical cord falls off, it is deferentially buried in the earth “to mark the child’s first sharing in the land owned by the family.”\textsuperscript{432} The Igbo hold that life passes from the mother to the fetus through the umbilical cord. This ritual captures a powerful symbolic

\textsuperscript{428} Metuh, 255.

\textsuperscript{429} Emeka Onwurah, “The Mother Earth in Igbo Religion,” 44.


\textsuperscript{431} Emeka Onwurah, “The Mother Earth in Igbo Religion,” 44.

\textsuperscript{432} Therese J. Agbasiere, \textit{Women in Igbo Life and Thought}, 53.
gesture of connecting every child to Mother Earth, who feeds her children all through life. Uchendu holds that it instills in the child, as it grows, the sense of corporate identity. This is a reminder that it is rooted in the earth. Growing up, the child is constantly reminded to thread with caution as it walks through life, to care for and protect nature with whom it is covenanted, and who feeds and raises it to maturity.

Agbasiere and Uchendu respectively agree that the ritual of burying a child’s umbilical cord is so significant for the Igbo for various reasons. For Agbasiere, it is regarded as an abomination (aru) to cast away the cord. It is like deracinating the child of its rootedness to the earth and striping off its citizenship of the community. Factually, Uchendu writes,

The Igbo who cannot point to the burial place of his [sic] navel cord is not a diala-freeborn. A child whose navel cord was not buried is denied citizenship. For its burial, the mother selected the most fruitful oil palm tree out of the many that the husband may indicate. At the foot of this tree, the umbilical cord is buried. In time, the child is led to build around his ‘tree of status’ such sentiments and emotional attachment which are embedded in the phrase nkwu alom (‘The palm for my navel cord’). This palm belongs to the child. It cannot be alienated. Not only is it a symbol of diala status; it is the foundation for the socially ambitious.

Mention must be made that the burial of the umbilical cord is not strictly underneath the palm tree contrary to Uchendu’s submission. According to communities, options are available for people to decide to bury the cord underneath any tree of their choice. Ilogu validates this point that it could be “underneath the tap root of a fruit tree like ube (native pear tree, dacryodes edulis),” or “by the side of a new germinated palm tree, … or breadfruit” in the belief that “this plant, which from then on is regarded as the child’s natal plant, will become fruitful in proportion to the fame of the

434 Therese J. Agbasiere, Women in Igbo Life and Thought, 53.
435 Edmund Ilogu, Christianity and Igbo Culture, 23.
child’s subsequent achievements as an adult.”\textsuperscript{436} Agbasiere adds that it could be other trees like 
raffia palm (\textit{ngwo}) and plantain (\textit{une}), especially in Ngwa and Ikwere areas of Igbo land 
respectively.\textsuperscript{437} The point is not on particular tree it is buried at but on the symbolism of the ritual, 
i.e., the connectedness between humans and the rest of creation to the Earth, our common home.

This ritual carries with it a huge ecological implication. Arguably, the child is meant to 
develop a tree and earth spirituality, integral relationship, in all that trees represent and do. Firstly, 
trees are rooted in the earth, without which they wither and die. The child is meant to be an earth 
keeper through which it realizes its rootedness in the earth, hence, its commonality with earth’s 
entities so that any attack on the fauna and flora of the environment is self-attack and the wider 
community of life. This is premised on the fact that in Igbo land, “beings in the world are linked 
by a network of relationships. No being is an island, nor are beings a juxtaposition of independent 
forces each operating on its own. All creatures are found in relationship…”\textsuperscript{438} By this very act, an 
average Igbo person is, by default, a relationship enthusiast, an environmental activist, an earth 
keeper, a tree lover and planter, a landscaper, an animal as well as human right activist, all for the 
integrity of the earth in which they are rooted ritually from birth.

Secondly, trees purify the air, ward off erosion, and beautify the environment.\textsuperscript{439} Each 
person in the community is expected to live in such a way as to purify and add quality to the life 
of the earth and all she is home to. Hence, the Igbo spirituality or philosophy of \textit{Ndu miri, ndu azu}.

\textsuperscript{436} Ilogu, 44.

\textsuperscript{437} Therese J. Agbasiere, \textit{Women in Igbo Life and Thought}, 53.

\textsuperscript{438} Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, \textit{Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions}, 69.

Miri atala ma azu anwula (life and health for the river as well as that of the fish. May the rivers not dry up, so the fish do not die). In its integral sense, it is cosmic balance, i.e., the Igbo sense of Egbe bere, Ugo bere (Let the Eagle perch, let the kite perch). This simply means right to life for all earthlings. This guarantees the safety of every being/entity/creature to exist without unduly pillaging or truncating its God existential purpose by another, especially humans. This connotes the reality of community of life, the greenness of all entities under the earth.

Aside from serving as wind breaks, shades to people or protection from the heat of the sun, and provision of fruits, trees provide shelter to creatures-other-humans who make their nests on the branches of the trees. They remind people that they are meant to be fruitful to make the earth roomy and floriated. Fruitfulness of every entity in Igbo land is so much expected with great joy that when it is not forthcoming, the Igbo express serious concerns. In this regard, the Igbo regard themselves as atufue, O mia (we are seeds, when thrown away, we sprout and fructify). This comparison is drawn from the life and spirituality of the tree and the earth. Thus, people are meant to be expansive and accommodating in their dealings with their fellow earthlings. This goes back to the words of an Orthodox Saint, Nicephore de Chio, “If you do not love trees, you cannot love God.” The Igbo love trees, hence their attachment to them for the integral health of the earth.

Relatedly, burying navel cord underneath a tree has an emotional and psychological attachment. It instills in the Igbo the commitment to protect their navel trees from destruction by marauders. It carries with it the tenderness and respect for nature as expression of God’s presence. Arguably, if each person in the community is to jealously guard their navel trees and

440 See the reflections of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople in Bede Ukwuije, 26.
by extension, other trees in the community, then the danger of deforestation and indiscriminate felling of trees is reduced. Hence, it is the beginning of the virtue of environmental protection.

Besides, there are other rites of blessings and even of imprecations or curses that feature the invocation of *Ala*. For instance, because the Earth is considered sacred and respected as such and since she is the commonest thing that is essentially home to all entities on earth, Marie P. B. Eboh notes that the Igbo consider her “a potent *juju* for oath-taking” to either seal a covenant, a deal or to arrive at the truth in place of doubts over disputes.\(^4\) Due to the sacredness attached to her, any Igbo who wants people to believe in the veracity of their claims, touches the index of their fingers on *aja ala*, soil or lose sand, or smear sand on their tongues and swears with it while beckoning on the land to witness to the truth of what is being said. Ernest O. Anyacho notes that “this action does not only make the earth assume the power to kill but also ascribes omniscience attribute to the earth as a spiritual force. Spiritual concept of the land, to a large extent, determines much of the interdependent relationship between humans and other members of the ecosystem.”\(^5\) It therefore behooves on every member of the society to strive to live morally right to not upset the cosmic order because such disorder is believed to carry with it some ecological devastation.

Also, she is very often “invoked in imprecation. For instance, *Ala kugbuokwa gi* - let the Earth Spirit strike you dead – is constantly heard.”\(^6\) Conversely, she is equally used to impart benedictions on people or things. For instance, one, mostly a youth, may request certain elders to

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\(^5\) Marie P.B. Eboh, *The Structure of Igbo Logic as shown in Dispute Settlement*, 20.

\(^6\) Ernest O Anyacho, Harnessing Igbo Traditional and Biblica Environmental Ethics, 64.

\(^6\) Marie P.B. Eboh, *The Structure of Igbo Logic as shown in Dispute Settlement*, 20.
put a pinch of earth into one’s palm – *Itunye mmadu aja n’aka*. The elders normally do so while pronouncing their blessings, wishing the supplicant plenty of blessings materially and spiritually which include children, long life, and the wisdom that accompanies grey hair.\(^{445}\) In the same manner, Eboh observes the symbolic blessing given to women by little children using the lose earth. Because the earth is associated with fecundity, “children playing on sand …, sometimes offer a handful of sand/earth to the women who are returning from the market, asking them to accept the earth of fecundity- *aja omumu*. The women gracefully hold out their hands and receive the gift.”\(^{446}\) Following this, it can be said that *Ala* can be a source of blessing when employed and used justifiably and can be a reproach when the reverse is the case. Analogously, it is like the Biblical two “edged sword.”\(^{447}\) The handler needs to abide by the rules of engagement for positive and efficient use and hence, blessing.

In her hallowed sense, as the mother of all, the Igbo are always aware that the dead ancestors, with whom they shared in the one flesh and blood, (*otu anu ahu na otu obara*), lay reverently and serenely buried in the earth. In the same vein, they are aware that they themselves, who are the living descendants of their ancestors, whose afterbirths, the umbilical cords, also lay ritually buried in the earth, get their nourishments and protection from, and are adorned by the same earth. Besides, the Igbo also reason that the earth, by her benignity, provides and supports innumerable animals and plants, wells, streams, springs, and rivers; also harbors all sorts of minerals in her. Again, they believe that after death, they would also be received by the earth to

\(^{445}\) Ibid.

\(^{446}\) Ibid.

\(^{447}\) Hebrews 4:12.
fellowship with their forebears in the spirit land. Rationally, for the Igbo, this great source, *Ala*, that connects all, both the living and the dead, should be respected. This respect is seen in the treatment of the Earth sacredly and living harmoniously with all entities in tenderly manners as siblings of the same Mother Earth. This spiritual maternity, the motherhood of the earth, is foundational to the Igbo life. Avowedly, it is to protect life; to enhance the sanctity of the earth, the greenness of the environment, cosmic balance, and responsible uses of the gifts of the earth.

Extensively, in the Igbo psychology, Ala enters intimately into the mind and heart of the Igbo that, as noted earlier, she is always invoked not just for blessing or to punish but also as a witness especially “during the sacramental communal feasts (*igba m’obu isu nliko*).” Uzukwu calls it “*Igba ndu* (binding life together, or making a covenant)” for settling disputes and thus to renew life in which case “God, ancestors… the powerful Earth Spirit.. and the entire community act together in the rite to re-create the society.” Furthermore, she is revered as the defender of the weak, which includes nonhuman entities, from the wicked and the powerful. Some personal Igbo names bear this out. For instance, *Achebe*, which is the shorter form of *Anichebe* (may Mother Earth protect), …*Anigbogu*, may Mother Earth resolve the conflict, settle the fight, *Akwuba*, the shorter form for *Anikwuba*, may Mother Earth permit increase, etc., that show the strength and benignity of *Ala*. Arguably, *Ala* is so much tied to every breath and fiber of the Igbo life that

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449 Chieka Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living among the Igbo*, 33.

450 Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 87.

she is readily on the lips of the Igbo. As Chieka Ifemesia rightly observes, it is very much easy to hear every Igbo person, “Christian or traditionalist,” invoke her while pouring libation, “An’Igbo mul’ayi, ayi ekene-i: Igboland which gave us birth, we hail thee! Ala chekwaba anyi, may the Earth protect us.” Therefore, the Igbo reason that Ala, upon which they walk and from which they are sustained is the owner of life from its beginning to the end. “That which was a source and cradle of life, that which produces and nourishes and entombs at last for rest, could be none other than a mother, gentle, serene.” Based on her qualities, the Igbo assert that “Ala nwe mmadu niile (the earth is the owner of all beings).” Hence, the expression, rooted in the earth, which has enormous and all-compassing implications spiritually and morally in the Igbo society.

Unequivocally, as stated above, it can be argued that the divine image and concept that the Igbo know of God is more maternal due to the centrality of Ala in Igbo cosmology and therefore the pride of place and respect for women in Igbo traditional society. In this regard, Bolaji E. Idowu rightly notes that, “Ala is the Archdivinity among the Igbo people.” She is the divinity that coordinates other divinities and spirits according to the Igbo worldview and upon which Igbo ethical life revolves. Given that she permeates virtually in all Igbo life and society, everything about the Igbo is thus sacramental. Her pervasive influence makes it possible for everything to be religiously oriented, connected and interpreted. This sacramental orientation with which the Igbo society is built provides some wonderful ethics that regulate human activities in the land.

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452 Ifemesia, 37.

453 Ifemesia, 35. See also Therese J. Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, 51-52.


2.4.2  *Ala*: Source and Custodian of Morality

The focus of this section is the of Igbo morality. *Ala* is the guardian of Igbo morality. Under her inspiration, moral laws were formulated and handed down to the community by the ancestors. Igbo ecological ethics is thus deduced from the ethical guidelines that help to control human actions. The ethical laws or taboos are applied to land, rivers, animals, human relationship. Arguably, these moral principles are at the services of ecology in Igbo life and culture. It is applicable to all aspect of life without which chaos becomes the norm.

As notably seen in this work, *Ala* permeates every aspect of Igbo life. Together with the ancestors, Ala constitutes the custodian and source of Igbo morality. As Christopher Ejizu observes, “People endeavour to live strictly by the traditional norms of conduct believed to have been ordained by the gods and sanctioned by the ancestors.”456 The moral code of the Igbo is hinged on the Earth Spirit. This is because *Ala* is the chief custodian of *Omenala,*457 literally translates as that which is obtainable in the land, i.e., the Igbo morality. As Ifemesia puts it, “Literarily, *omenala* means ‘actions in accordance with (the stipulation of) of the land.’”458 It can be likened to the constitution of the Igbo traditional society. Although not written down, it relies on orature, which is religiously handed down from one generation to another.

456 Christopher Ejizu quoted in Charles A. Ebelebe, 7.

457 *Omenala* is like an umbrella term that covers all aspects of life in Igbo land be it religious and ethical social, political, economic, spiritual, ecological, etc. It is like the scale that weighs and determines the rightness and wrongness of every action and relationship. When an action or belief is not done in the way it should be or not in line with the traditions, the Igbo say, *Obughi omenala,* it is not tradition. *Omenala* is complex. It is considered an offense to speak against it by any person. Though thought to be rigid, in some cases, it can be flexible and relational according to situations. For details, see T.U. Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy,* 58-62.

458 Chika Ifemesia, *Traditional Humane Living among the Igbo,* 35.
Inextricably, Omenala is bound up with Mother Earth and her tenants, the ancestors, and so cannot be easily altered or repealed by anyone at will.\(^{459}\) Omenala is sacrosanct because it is sanctioned by Mother Earth and thus binding on all members of Igbo community. The violation of Omenala is, therefore, an offense against the integrity of the Earth Spirit. In other words, owing to the divine nature of Omanala, any breach of it is regarded as aru, abomination, in the understanding that the offences are basically against the Earth Deity. In her capacity as that which holds every entity together, the Earth Spirit is the principal legal, sanctioning authority from which stems the notion of nso ala, “the prohibitions of Ala.”\(^{460}\) Thus, aru, abomination happens when nso ala, taboo, is breached. It is an abomination, therefore, to violate any laws put in place by the supernatural powers of the land as revealed to and ratified by the ancestors. Such violations amount to desecration of the land and would need propitiatory sacrifices to wipe away.

Taboos apply to every aspect of life.\(^{461}\) Unwritten as they are, they are coded in the minds and hearts of every Igbo person who, through the quotidian of life, learns and abides by them. Traditionally, “taboos were used to educate and thereby restrict human beings in their social interactions, relationships to animals, nature, period of the year, decorum of speech and ritual processes.”\(^{462}\) In other words, taboos act as checks and are agents of self-control to ensure sanity

\(^{459}\) Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, 22.

\(^{460}\) Therese J. Agbasiere, *Women in Igbo Life and Thought*, 52.

\(^{461}\) Various taboos abound in Igbo land. For example, agricultural taboos, marriage rites, water taboos, taboos that guide the uses of natural resources forests, vegetations, lands, animals, and the ones that regulate the Igbo traditional holy week. However varied, they are all related in various ways and are under the watchful eyes of Ala. See Apollos O. Nwauwa and Ogechi E. Anyanwaa, eds., *Culture, Precepts, and Social Change in Southeastern Nigeria: Understanding the Igbo*, 61-64.
in the land. Ogbu U. Kalu argues that “taboos are like the red light which restricts movement.”

In this sense, taboos restrict people’s rapacious behavior towards nature. Backed up with divine sanctions, taboos regulate the human moral, political, religious, and economic activities. This includes ecological or environmental aspects of life. Arguably, this accounts for one of the major reasons nature thrived and life flourished holistically in the Igbo traditional society. For taboos imposed a kind of diplomatic immunity on things said to be tabooed and by the reason of this, they became a sanctuary. They are so because, generally, nature is viewed as having the imprint of God and consequently sacred. And strictly, some places are specifically consecrated for some purposes, hence the designation sanctuary, and they are reverenced as such. This belief and practice enable and enhance the integrity of creation in the society. Mishandling them or flouting taboos would be, as noted earlier, an act which the community would regard as not only detestable, but an offense against the Earth Spirit, the custodian of Igbo morality.

What constitute taboos and in what does abomination consist of? In other words, what passes for ethical behavior and bad behavior among the Igbo, and who determines this and how?

For some scholars, like M. A. Onwuejeogwu, it is not about whether the Igbo have a concept of good and evil or not. Therefore, what is relevant to understand is what makes an action good or evil or neutral for the Igbo. Onwuejeogwu writes that “Good and evil actions are those that directly affect one’s fellow human beings;” such actions “may or may not have ritual consequences and may be major or minor” while “a neutral action is one that directly affects supernatural beings, 


463 Ibid.

464 Ibid.
animals and things.”⁴⁶⁵ It implies that one should not intentionally set out to do anything that could be harmful or bad to either the land or animals. Breaking of taboos like stealing of yams, incest, conspiracy to commit felony, murder, kidnapping, killing of totemic animals, and desecration of certain designated bushes, shrines, grooves or streams forbidden for some persons other than the priests or initiated persons, etc., would be considered as crimes.⁴⁶⁶ Additionally, Ilogu observes that fishes in the sacred streams are regarded as scared and so are not touched or eaten.⁴⁶⁷ Indulgence in these actions means defiance to omenala and thus a disrespect of the Earth Spirit, and traditionally it would make one onye uru ala, a bad person, a polluter of the land. Absolutely, the Earth is not loosely seen as an inanimate object rather it is an entity with rights and feelings. Given this, the Igbo try to live according to the rules of engagement. For their understanding of good and evil is grounded in the conviction that good is rewarded and evil is punished.

In such a religious universe like the Igbo, not only is good rewarded and evil punished, but they do not also have to wait for one to approach the gates of heaven or hell like the Christians before they are meted out. They begin here and continue hereafter. This world-affirming religious view of the Igbo instills ecological trust and stewardship, the care culture, consciously or not, in people to not abandon creation to rot while in wait for and preoccupation with the home beyond the sky. For salvation worth the name is integral. And for the Igbo, it involves taking care of the


⁴⁶⁷ Ilogu, 24. As usual, Ilogu notes that some Christians flagging in zeal “disregarded of and organized disobedience to these taboos and customs of ritual observances that the conflict between Christianity and Ibo traditional life first started to manifest itself.”
earth and the environment as an integral part of *omenala* in appreciation of *Chukwu* who blesses the earth through the maternity of the Earth Spirit.

In a way, this ethics sharply contrasts the heaven-bound Christians with an individualized form of salvation that, sometimes, leads to the total disregard of the earth as sacred, which portends lack of discernment of the world as a creation of God adjoined to mankind as stewards of creation. The Igbo holistic attitude to their moral universe abhors compartmentalization. As the reality which stands for anything that generates life, the earth is the bond that encompasses all visible and invisible phenomena, the cosmic base on which the vault of the sky rests and the cosmic base for the underworld.

Following the dictates of *Omenala*, therefore, care of the earth commands a holistic approach. Similarly, the understanding and admission that God dwells in creation, which includes heaven and earth, breeds the culture care towards the earth and conscientious efforts to maintain the sacred space for cosmic balance. Hence, the ethical obligation to preserve and develop the earth and all that lives in it as part and parcel of *Omenala*. Actions mitigating the cosmic peace and or the harmony in nature, in any ways, are not in line with *Omenala*. Therefore, they are abominations that require some purification, *ikpu alu* or *ikwa ala*, to placate the Earth Spirit and the ancestors or otherwise, it is believed that the community suffers the consequences drastically. This could be, but not limited to, poor harvest from the fruits of the fields, famine or drought, pestilence, deaths. This is anchored on the Igbo traditional belief that human actions can incur the wrath of nature and make it withdraw her maternal obligations to the humanity. Some other natural calamities are also feared whenever the Earth Spirit is provoked by heinous crimes. Paradoxically,

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the Earth Spirit can be benign to people with probity of life and at times she can be ominous or capricious to offenders.\textsuperscript{469}

As already established, the Igbo cosmology is inherently religious that it makes no clear-cut separation between the secular and the sacred. Igbo morality, therefore, is highly cultic and ritualistic. Charles A. Ebelebe puts it that “The taboo environment is a ritual environment and in this environment the earth deity, \textit{Ala}, holds sway. That is why she has often been referred to as the guardian of traditional morality among the Igbo.”\textsuperscript{470} The sacredness attached to the Earth, arguably, gives force to the Igbo environmental ethics. Based on this, as noted above, anyone who flouts any one of the taboos will be punished by \textit{Ala} and the ancestors who live underneath the earth. Hence the belief that the ancestors who buried in the earth keep watch over the land and never leave their community. Ecological degradation today in Igbo land, due to human greed and mercantile mentality, traditionally would be treated as affronts to the Earth Spirit.

The Igbo environmental ethics considers the impacts that the human activities have on the environment before people embark on any action. For instance, as a people whose major source of economy is agriculture, the Igbo traditional land ethics gave a breathing space to land to remain fallow for up to three to five years before any farm activities could commence.\textsuperscript{471} This period allows the land to rejuvenate. It protects the topsoil, fights erosion and leaching. It provides natural habitats for animals and cover to the land. This ethics is hinged on the sanctity of the land. Everybody adhered to the ethics for the health of the environment in line with the laws of the land.

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\textsuperscript{469} Marie P.B. Eboh, \textit{The Structure of Igbo Logic as shown in Dispute Settlement}, 19.
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\textsuperscript{470} Charles A. Ebelebe, \textit{Africa and the New Face of Mission}, 7.
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\textsuperscript{471} Victor C. Uchendu, \textit{The Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria}, 24.
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Similarly, land taboos in Igbo land forbid tampering with geographical boundaries put by the ancients. This act is thought to “disrupt natural processes like peace in the community and diverting runoff from following a natural channel which has been there for ages. It forbids any activities on the soil which will lead to suffering in the community.”

In today’s Igbo community with high level of dereliction towards the environment, land taboos would forbid the various pollution of the environment and littering of everywhere with plastics, trashes, table water bottles, and rampant defecation, etc. Anyacho notes that taboo forbids defecating in the streams and washing in some streams in some communities. This is because defecating in streams means polluting them for the next persons that may use them. Both chemical and toxic deposits that pollute waters and all other life forms in them come under this law. Customarily, it was an abominable act to defecate, urinate and or engage in domestic washings in the portions of the streams that are meant for drinking. Doing this would be considered water poisoning, itinye nsi na miri. Coincidentally, the Igbo call feces or excretions nsi or nshi. The same word stands for poison, as well. Engaging in such acts is pure evil, therefore. It is harmful to the human ecology and constitutes nuisance to the environment.

Also, blocking of gutters and natural water runoff channels, evacuation of sands in erosion-prone areas, trespassing on sacred grooves, indiscriminate land sells and all sorts of economic activities that jeopardize the well-being of the community would be considered offensive to the Mother Earth. For these disrupt the natural flow of things in the universe and constitute dints to the sacredness of the earth.

In the modern-day ecological awakening, such acts would best be

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472 Ernest O. Anyacho, Harnessing Igbo Traditional and Biblical Environmental Ethics, 66

473 Ibid.
termed ecological sins and for the traditional Igbo, it is abomination that needs amendment to restore healthy living to the community of life. It is important to note that the traditional Igbo society observed these laws without having to be policed. A “taboo is observed by people whether or not environmental law enforcement agencies are there.” It shows how environmentally conscious the traditional Igbo were, which arose from the sacred view of the universe and how people considered themselves rooted in the earth together with all entities in life. It becomes a sacred responsibility to not destroy or defile the earth and all that she is home to. Humans have the moral obligation to care for the earth for the enhancement of all ecological life forms.

Living a good life, for the Igbo, therefore, means to carefully observe the laws, customs, taboos, and the traditions of the land known as Omenala, which is under the custody of the Earth Spirit. Justin Ekennia is, therefore, right in asserting that Omenala is the hidden point of reference in any moral discourses both on human and nonhuman issues among the Igbo. It is the embodied spirituality of any Igbo community, which is meant to protect and sustain all values inherited from the ancestors. Etched in this code, i.e., the moral code of the Igbo, is the ecological ethics under the supervision of Ala who shields and nurtures every entity she is home to. This commands adherence religiously and meticulously on every Igbo to maintain the ecological integrity, the integrity of the earth, the common home. Failure to adhere to the moral codes amounts to a breach or in some cases aru, abomination, that would require propitiatory rituals to placate and restore balance to the society. It is to this that the next section turns to, to examine rituals and their

\[474\] Ibid.

significance in the ecological life of the Igbo, how rituals promote ecological conservation in the Igbo community.

### 2.5 Rituals at the services of ecological conservation

Rituals are an essential part of a community’s life. They are laden with signs and symbols. These could be verbal and nonverbal ways that are akin to a community in their relationship with the world, God and among themselves. Descriptively, Aylward Shorter talks of religious rituals as appeals to spiritual beings or forces who have the power to influence events, undertaken with the intentions that they do so. These rituals could be of redress, of life-crisis or initiation and those of liminality.\(^ {476}\) In another way, Uzukwu defines ritual as “a programmed way of acting that characterizes an ethnic group so that participants express their being part of the group through the ritual gesture.”\(^ {477}\) In other words, rituals confer identity, a way of life to members of a society who strive to act in accordance with the requirements of their rituals.

In essence, rituals are some of the ways of maintaining relationship and communicating with the invisible forces believed to play key roles in life in the society. In so doing, it links the society members together who reaffirm their resolve to fend for life, to ward off any anti-life forces which includes ecological issues that impinge on life. Rituals are mostly life-affirming. They show the greater attention given to life\(^ {478}\) As it shall be detailed further, rituals renew life, sanctify life,


\(^ {478}\) Simeon O. Eboh, *African Communalism: The way to social harmony and peaceful coexistence* (Frankfurt am Main: IKO-Verlag, 2004), 104.
revive life both for humans, animals, and plants. It touches all aspect of life, to renew their vitality to maintain cosmic balance and ontological equilibrium.

Among the Igbo, rituals are rife and are communicated in people’s life from birth to death. The rites of passage are therefore some ways of celebrating life throughout the various times and ages in life. In significant ways, rituals reveal the core of a society. Omenala, as noted above, is at the very core of Igbo society. Thus, rituals are an integral part of the Igbo Omenala, which determines the rightness and wrongness of action. Usually, rituals occur in time and space. For all actions within the Igbo society begin with time and are carried out in spaces. Therefore, times and spaces are of critical importance in every rite taking place in Igbo life.

For the Igbo, time is sacred. It is marked with “cosmogonic time, mythical time, historical time, agricultural time, seasonal time, solar time, lunar time and so on.” Igbo time is thus cyclic and is fundamentally religious, with varied rituals associated with them. Though there is an aspect of time on the individual level which relates to transitional periods of a person’s life span from birth to death, Ekwunife, however, argues that all various aspects of time have ecological values.

Times, ecologically, relate to different seasons and celebrations by which the community is periodically recreated, and unified and religious, socio-cultural activities fostered. In each of these times, which are for various celebrations, space and objects and including time, itself, are consecrated. Nothing, then, stands as mundane or mere matter. Time, space, and objects are suffused with spirit, hence the necessity of rituals to maintain the double dimension of existence and loyalty to God for the health of the earth.

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479 Anthony N.O. Ekwunife, *Consecration in Igbo Traditional Society*, 94.

480 Ibid.
While the Igbo days and week are linked with four personified spiritual beings—Eke, Orie, Afor and Nkwo—who are said to be sent by God to establish the Igbo days, marking the Igbo weeks, months, and eventually, the Igbo year, each month is dedicated to one or more of the Igbo spiritual beings.\(^{481}\) To be clear, the traditional Igbo Calendar, Ọgụ́ọ̀, has 13 months in a year, 7 weeks in a month, 4 days in a week, plus an extra day at the end of the year. A month has 28 days. In serial order, the Igbo days are named Eke, Orie, Afo and Nkwo. The Igbo believe that Chukwu, God, created these four days. The days, also known as market days, correspond to the four cardinal points: north, south, east, and west. Hence, the number four is sacred to the Igbo, and it is easy to hear an average Igbo person referencing oba ano nke uwa, four corners of the earth, when praying or calling for a witness to an issue. Apparently, this relays the feeling of unity, togetherness with all earth entities, beckoning on their cosmic blessing or witness. This would mean that the beckoner is in good standing with the earth, has not offended or committed any crime for which the earth will shudder. While scholars are of the view that the numbers 4 and 7 are especially symbolic because of their calendrical relations,\(^{482}\) particularizing on number(s) is not an issue for discussion here. However, it is important to note that each day, for the Igbo, is special because the calendar is steeped in rituals and symbols making each day worth it, in keeping with the sacredness perceived in the society.

Symbolically, each day in Igbo land stands for a reality of ecological significance. Eke, the first day stands for the Morning of creation. Thus, the Igbo say Chi na Eke, which among other things, means God at the dawn of creation. As a result, Eke is the most sacred day for the Igbo.

\(^{481}\) Ibid.

\(^{482}\) Ekwunife, 92.
comparatively similar to the Christian Sunday. Its symbol is fire. Among other meanings, it signifies creativity, determination, regeneration. It is not surprising that major activities are forbidden on this day except village meetings with some ritual significance to honor the creative potency of Chukwu, God, and to re-enact the communal peace. Such a day of rest, as it shall be later seen in this work, enables creation to rejuvenate. Oríe, the second day, usually associated with extreme beauty and fairness, has a universal undertone of fertility and purity. Its symbol is water, apparently, the most significant substance on earth necessary for the life of all earth entities. Hence, water pollution, as seen earlier, is an abomination. For it is anti-life. This is premised on the fact that water is life, and the universe is alive with water. Whatever affects the purity of water affects the life of creation. Afo, the third day, is associated with benignity, motherhood, and mothering hospitality. Its symbol is Ala, the Earth, which is home to and nurtures all life forms. Most rituals revolve around her for sustenance and preservation of the integrity of the earth. And Nkwo, the fourth day, is linked with the breath of life and is credited with cleansing power. Hence, its symbol is the air. It is believed to be responsible for relationship, communication, harmony in creation.

Equally, as noted earlier, the Igbo world is a symbolic universe where emptiness does not apply necessarily. Nature is full of life and not empty. Days, likewise, are not empty. Not only are the days immortalized with the four spiritual beings- Eke, Oríe, Afo, and Nkwo, newborn babies are, at times, named after the days they were born to memorialize them. For instance, names like Mgbéke or Okeke (maiden or male born on Eke day), Mgbéorie or Okorie (maiden or male born on Oríe day), Mgbafo or Okafor (maiden or male born of Afo day), etc., are common among the

Igbo people. These names also mark important events, ecological or otherwise, that took place in time and space. They are great reminders of historical realities in Igbo life; what punctuated their calendar and the accompanying rituals used to address them, and the need to strengthen ties with the environment where the newbies or babies are to thrive purposefully. Customarily, those who bear these names, and everyone become, ipso facto, environmental activists. Within the Igbo psyche, humans inextricably share relationship with nature. Under normal circumstances, one cannot or is not expected to destroy or abuse the very thing by which they are identified and whose bounty they share and enjoy. Engaging in ecological disaster of any form is, indirectly or not, a form of self and cultural deracination.

A cursory look at these symbolisms reveals not only the sacramental validity of the Igbo universe, but it also points to the ecological life of the Igbo. They are not mere names for a tag, they instill in the collective psyches of the Igbo a sense of interconnectedness with and respect for every creature to thrive purposefully, and responsible use and stewardship of the earth. They are deep expressions of Igbo spirituality. They are attributes of God that equally are woven in universe. Respect to them not only aids to worship God but also to keep the environment safe from predation, despoilation or exploitation. They are divine conduits that keep the Igbo world alive. Nwaonishe Ezenwanyi, as noted by Omenka E. Nwa-Ikenga, gives one of such examples involving the four spiritual beings or days and their basic symbolisms during rituals thus:

*We honor and greet Our Chi* (God within us). *We honor and greet Chineke* (Creative aspect of God). *We honor and greet Ani* (Earth Mother). *We honor and greet Igwe* (Sky Father). *We honor all the Alusi who stand around to guide and guard us.* *We honor the Alusi of the four points, Eke, Orie, Afo, Nkwo.* *We pray they remain with us for the healing of our homes, communities, and the planet...* *We greet the elemental life in the four elements of fire, air, water, and earth.* *We offer thanks for their efforts in healing the planet.* *We pray we can learn*

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Ibid.
to work with them in healing our planet. In conclusion, we pray for all humanity, all plant life, all animal life and in fact all matter to awaken. We pray for heaven and earth to meet and dance in perfect harmony. Now and forever more, Ise.485

The Igbo recognize in these elements some vital force, hence their ability to commune with them intimately and cooperate with them in enriching and preserving the sanctity of the world. They are not to be exploited. They are to be used and enjoyed responsibly. Importantly, they are to be preserved, enhanced, and kept in a better condition than they were received for posterity. It is irresponsibility, greed, exhaustion, and injustice to pollute or abuse the very elemental gifts that are meant to be respected, enjoyed, and passed intact on to next generations. Water pollution is harmful to life same as its scarcity is. Fire is needed for various purposes but when abused, it can have devastating effects on life forms. Air is a gift of nature, very necessary for life. The release of harmful chemicals into the air can asphyxiate life. Air pollution is harmful as water pollution is to life. The earth is needed for sustainability of life forms. Abuse, exploitation, or degradation of the earth impinges drastically on life. It is a gross disrespect to the benignity of Chukwu, God, who nurtures humanity through mother earth. It smirks of ingratitude and arrogance in the use of God’s gifts of creation. Humans who walk on the face of the earth are not to be exploited, as well. Both the human and nonhuman ecology are gifts and signs of God’s presence on earth.

In essence, rituals are not necessarily to fix broken relationships with nature. They are part of the way of life. It suffices to say that Igbo society is suffused with rituals. Ekwunife offers details of this. For example, the day starts with morning ritual, Igo oji ututu, i.e., the breaking of morning kola nut, being a ritual for the consecration of the day. The same applies to the beginning

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of the week. In some communities, there is what is called ize or igo Mmuo, i.e., consecration to the spirit every Eke day, which is the beginning of Igbo traditional week. Equally, there is a ritual consecration of seasons, i.e., ritual for the beginning of planting season; rituals for bush clearing; for harvesting; celebration of new yam; activation of the land force, etc., There are rituals for spaces, consecration of places of settlement; for blessing of the land, animals, plants; for environmental sanitation, etc.486 Virtually, these rituals are ecologically friendly. They help in retaining the ecological consciousness, the sanctity and preservation of creation among the Igbo. As a result, the earth and all the resources in it are not tampered with anyhow without some ritual actions to ascertain a judicious use of them, not motivated by greed or exploitative tendencies.

In various Igbo societies, the year’s calendar, i.e., months, as Ekunife notes above, is dedicated to certain deities or spirits believed to have obliged the Igbo with the knowledge of time. Hence, rituals are celebrated to mark the times, days, or months particular to communities. These days and times regulate religious life, liturgy, and events that forbid farm work or any unnecessary labor, fighting or quarrels, any type of conflicts. Remarkably, nature rejuvenates and heals itself from human activities. Peace reigns everywhere and in every entity. It is sacred that not even creditors are allowed to collect debts and anyone who dies at such periods is said to have died at the wrong time.487 Analogously, this sacred aura and piety of ritual excellence and observance is akin to the Christian understanding and practice of the Paschal Mystery, the solemn observance of Sundays and sacred days of obligation of the church, advent, lent and Christmas festivals. The typical Igbo Christian does not need to be reminded to keep such days and time, and even space holy and attend to the rituals marking them. This is because they, in observing and worshipping

486 See Anthony N. O. Ekunife, Consecration in Igbo Traditional Religion, 31-93.
on such days, not only respect God, also they make peace with everything, and nature heals itself. Essentially, they pray for blessings on their health, recommit the day and week into God’s hands, ask for success in the works of their hands, good weather for favorable farming and other events. Understandably, community squares, homes, market squares, farms are shut down and deserted on Sundays and holy days of obligations. These days and times, apparently, have replaced the solemnity of the traditional Igbo market days and sacred days of rest. This is easy to understand because, it is not alien to the Igbo ritual times and space in that the Igbo realized the sacredness of such days and times from their traditional religious life. Arguably, within this cultural mindset, time or day does not necessarily belong to humans. It is a gift, a loan that must be accounted for. Therefore, using time or day to destroy nature would have been a waste of time, an inappropriate use of time. It is offensive to the spiritual being dedicated to such a day in which the time runs.

Given the all-embracing character of rituals, arguably, they are of immense ecological importance. Virtually, most rituals require the natural environment in a community. They are related to the environment from the start of life to the grave. For the Igbo, essentially, all rituals consist of flora and fauna species that are sacredly safeguarded “for future purposes since the rituals recur after a given period and specific sacred sites.”\(^{488}\) Posterity is important for the Igbo. It is, therefore, not surprising that the traditional Igbo could go to any length to ensure brighter and secure future for their progeny. This includes healthy and sustainable environment. Igbo environmental ethics or knowledge is preserved and transmitted through rituals. Thus, rituals are

a part of the ways of ensuring that posterity does not inherit a dilapidated environment uninhabitable for both human and nonhuman lives.

Rituals of ecological significance, therefore, refer to those actions that are geared towards the health, the care and integrity of the earth, the promotion, preservation, and conservation of the earth community of life. As noted earlier, these rituals start from the moment of birth when loose earth is smeared on the baby and the burying of the umbilical cord in the earth beside a tree. They constitute a covenant binding on the Igbo all through life to reverence and protect the earth that feeds and cares for them. Considering this, Sussy Gumo et al, quoting G. Omare, assert that “Environment-related rituals in African ethnic groups are communicated at childbirth, during initiation, during marriage, at burial, after death, once someone has offended the ancestors or God, giving thanks, worship, making judgement, before wars, before journeys and before planting.”

As stated above, the Igbo society is replete with ritual that it is safer to it is a way of life much same as arguing that environmental ethics is an integral way of life for the Igbo.

More ecologically, ritual speaks and activates in the Igbo the ethics of preservation, of relationship with nature dedicated as a life-agent, not a lifeless material to be treated with disdain, exploited, and discarded. This is because at the core of rituals is the well-being of nature. Since the Igbo consider themselves as earthly, the health of the earth is of paramount importance. The greenness of the earth is necessary for the thriving of every life form in the society. Rituals are, therefore, necessary to maintain this balance, uniting people and directing everything to their primary source of being. Uzukwu rightly notes that “Africans who like to ritualize activities in the everyday life aim at effectively lifting this life beyond the everyday; they place the everyday on

489 Ibid.
the altar of the transcendent. It is in the ritual context and ritual time that the group is most intensely in touch with its spiritual originators.\(^{490}\) For Uzukwu, this ritual experience creates and re-creates the community. By extension, the whole of life in the Igbo community is re-created at every ritual action. Hence, Igbo prayer centers on the cosmic health, the well-being of every life form.

Essentially, the nature of the Igbo world makes every ritual to have ecological reference since almost every action in this world is accompanied with some form of rites that are earth friendly.\(^{491}\) Various rites of initiation have taboos that prohibit the initiates from doing what is abominable to the earth and what the community frowns at. Be it masquerade cults, *okonko* society,\(^{492}\) business associates, esoteric groups, age grade, etc., a call to serve and preserve the integrity of the community is of utmost importance which integrally includes protecting the sacredness of all that the community traditionally holds dear. Pointedly, Metuh opines that these rites awaken community responsibility in people. They learn the implication of community life which includes obedience to the traditions of the elders, public spiritedness, communion with the ancestors, the titular spirits of the clan and commitment in marriage and the preservation of the sacred duties of strengthening the vital force of the clan.\(^{493}\) By this effort, environmental

\(^{490}\) Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *Worship as Body Language*, 44.

\(^{491}\) This has been pointed out in the previous sections- rites from birth to death which are colored with various earth’s rites. Rites in Igbo society therefore are from womb to tomb. This makes it more fitting for the Igbo to embrace ecological friendliness and spirituality that can contribute adequately to the fight against ecological crisis. For the various rites in Igbo/African society, see Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 185-202.


\(^{493}\) Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 194.
preservation becomes a way of life to any average Igbo person who makes great sacrifice to ensure that integrity of the earth is sanctimoniously kept. The essence of this is to ensure that harmony and interaction are sustained in the society. This is critically important to guard against chaos that can be environmentally delirious. Therefore, certain measures are put in place to realize this harmony. This line of thought is the major preoccupation of the next section.

2.6 Social Control Measure for Ecological Protection in Igbo Land

The previous section dealt with the roles that rituals play towards ecological conservation in the traditional Igbo society. It was established that ritual is like a way of life for the Igbo whose worldview and practices are permeated with rituals from dawn to the dusk of life. As a holistic worldview, rituals are integrally tied to environmental life and health. This is reflected in the spirituality and ethics of the Igbo. One of the sole aims of rituals is to maintain cosmic harmony and sustainability, the totality of earth life. Importantly, there would be no harmony in Igbo ecological domain without measures to checkmate human unruly or arbitrary behaviors. The social control measures adopted here are predicated upon the goals of the society, which, chiefly, are to preserve and nurture life. As a result, this section aims at elucidating and spelling out some of the control measures the Igbo society put in place to shape their minds, spirituality, ethics, and their relationship with the natural environment.

Amidst others, the social measures considered here are traditionally reserved and revered places known as sacred groves; the belief in divine manifestation in natural objects; authority of religious functionaries; reverence for the ancestors; proverbs/language in teaching, preserving environmental health and sustainability. A section in chapter three, under theological values for constructing Igbo Christian ecological ethics will continue with these values in other ways. The choice of these measures is premised on the fact that they are values that are common and central
to the Igbo. They are earth-friendly and can help to safeguard the environment and hand same on to future generations. Also, in their nature, these values have the capability to conscientize the Igbo morally and spiritually to be environmental activists, at least for the benefits of the unborn who are entitled to inherit a healthy earth. They regulate and curb excessive self-interest that tends to delegitimize, denigrate, and decimate the divine aura perceivable in creation.

2.6.1 Sacred Groves

Among the Igbo, certain areas in the community are set apart and designated as groves. Jonathan C. Onyekwelu notes that “Sacred groves were primarily constituted for spiritual purposes, thus they are often believed to house deity(ies). This explains why they are almost always named after or dedicated to deity(ies).” Generally, it is believed that the spirits who reside within the sacred groves are charged with the responsibility of overseeing and protecting them and the communities. As a result, they play active roles in the management and protection of the groves and the community. Normally, no activities take place in the sacred groves without proper consultation and due rituals by way of seeking the permission of the spiritual forces inhabiting in the groves. Onyekwelu remarks that “the gods must be consulted, and consent sought before major decisions about the groves can be taken.” In other words, as in other things in the society, sacred groves have rules and taboos on the uses of the resources within them. These rules are expected to be observed. Failure, which amounts to violations, could be punishable in line with Omenala, the traditions of a community.


495 Ibid.
By their very nature, sacred groves have a way of relaying some calmness, great and sacred silence against the tyranny of noise and violence, and reverence on the psyches of the community. As such, groves invite people to a kind of spiritual communion with nature, with God and the entire cosmos. They are “channels of communication between the human and the spiritual world.”\textsuperscript{496} The essential quality of sacred groves is that they create a sacred space which joins together the human and sacred realities and serve as “a reminder of the covenant between the villagers and their god.”\textsuperscript{497} In this way, interaction and harmony between the physical and the spiritual realities are further strengthened. Arguably, this adds more value to the dignity of the environment in that it is not seen and approached as mere matter to be exploited.

However, subject to areas, some communities have a way of fashioning some fear-instilling objects in people to command respect and adherence to sanctity of the groves. Onyekwelu argues that “in many sacred groves, an aura of fear is usually created,” using decorations, sculptures, tickets, paintings, inscriptions, buildings, etc., placed at strategic places.\textsuperscript{498} Pointedly, “People are made to believe that the gods are invincible, powerful, present everywhere and see everything happening in the sacred groves. The acts and fears of the gods and notable punishments inflicted on violators by the gods are passed from generation to generation and to foreigners.”\textsuperscript{499} Some of these beliefs could be exaggerated and sometimes unfounded when viewed with the scientific lens.

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\textsuperscript{497} Ray, 31.
\textsuperscript{498} Jonathan C. Onyekwelu, “Can the fear of the gods sustain biodiversity conservation in sacred groves?” 3.
\textsuperscript{499} Onyekwelu, 4.
However, the point is that they are an integral part of the Igbo religious universe that is not so much subjected to a purely speculative or philosophical investigations. The aim is to instill and maintain the holistic, organic, moral universe for the thriving of all life forms and to maintain balance in the universe. This is an integral aspect of the Igbo Omenala. To be fair, Omenala does not necessarily aim at instilling fear in people, but a right living rooted in the values that promote harmony, the sanctity of creation and sustainability. For instance, the preservation of some sacred forest, groves and even trees not only sustain and inhabit wild lives, aside from economic protection to humans, they check both wind and flood erosion as well as providing freshness to the environment, hence the importance of green life. It behooves on reason and respect for the laws of the land in place to adhere to such regulations necessary for the protection, harmony and integrity of life and relationship in the society.

Groves are purposeful, just like creation in the Igbo perspective. Scholars like Onyekwelu, Michael Sheridan and Celia Nyamweru critically note the religious significance of sacred groves even as they, in no small measures, serve ecological purposes. Michael Sheridan and Celia Nyamweru, in observing that religious beliefs inform social construction of power and shape ecological relationships, opine that “traditional beliefs governing access to groves work to maintain orderly ecological, social and moral relationships.”\(^\text{500}\) Similarly, Onyekwelu, remarks that “the importance of sacred groves in community life is usually felt through religious-cultural practices… Sacred groves rely on socio-religious fencing for their continued conversation, which is rejuvenated by regular rituals which are required to maintain the practices of social fencing.”\(^\text{501}\)

In other words, the primacy of sacred groves and community beliefs are mutually dependent. Because sacred forests are considered places of memory. It is, therefore, a taboo to harvest natural goods from such groves irrationally. Doing so, as noted earlier, is considered an assault on the ancestors who cherished and preserved the place for posterity and the other spirits inhabiting therein. Given this, people are likely to conserve nature primarily for the benefits of posterity and secondly out of reverence for the spiritual forces that are resident in nature, and thirdly, in appreciation of the dignity and gift of nature. Considerably, moral obligation that champions a sense of commitment to the future of the environment is advocated through this belief and practice. This helps to checkmate undue instrumental values of the environment. For this reason, “most sacred groves or areas designated as such are sparingly used as compared to the less sacred places.”

Logically, given that sacred groves are rife in most traditional communities, the environment, no doubts, was much more conserved and preserved.

In a religiously charged universe such as the Igbo, there is no gainsaying that it is the religious values that serve the primary reason and motivation for the preservation of sacred groves. In the words of Onyekwelu, “Deep religious reverence for nature, rather than resource scarcity, is the basis for commitment of indigenous people to preserve sacred groves. This informs why most groves are dedicated to deity(ies), seen as residence of deity(ies) and sites for religious/cultural rituals.” However it is viewed, the ethics of ecological conservation and preservation in Igbo land is informed by a religious view of the universe. As a result, people refrained from any action

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that would be considered a desecration of the sacred aura of the environment. Out of reverence and fear for negative consequences, as well, from the spiritual forces, illegal activities of tree fellers for exploitation purposes, pollution of land and rivers, and all forms of environmental degradation were almost non-existent in many places with sacred groves. Sacred groves are thus sanctuaries for biodiversity conservation and help in erosions and floods controls. In some villages, they serve as watersheds, *i* yi *ala*, or ponds for catchment areas where they protect sources of water for some domestic uses.504

Beside the conservation of biodiversity, sacred groves also provide the sacred space for personal and group recollections, recreations, solemn places for personal and communal reconciliation, meditation, research, and musical compositions. Relatedly, the Igbo show great consideration toward sacred groves for the traditional pharmacopoeia is largely dependent on them. Therefore, the protection of the sacred groves becomes critically important in the life of the Igbo. It could be said that the integral health of the Igbo is largely depended on the greenness and preservation of the sacred forests. Hence the proverbial saying, “the cat that cares about tomorrow does not eat the pregnant rat,”505 serves to caution people to apply restraint in dealing with the environment for what it is primarily and secondly for the sustenance of the human family as well as other lives that depend on its health and sanctity.

However, due to the ever-increasing population, land scarcity, unplanned settlements, commercial interests, and modernization likewise some ill-informed Christian beliefs and


505 This proverb is common to most African societies. It underscores sustainability, preservation, and conservation.
practices, the sacred groves are threatened. This raises some concerns as to the strength of the traditional religious beliefs in enhancing motivation for conservation. Should it be based on fear or on pure ethical concerns and the sense of interdependence of entities in nature? In some places where there are virtually no alternative sources of livelihood other than overdependence on land, people convert the groves to farmlands. Others sell them to meet up some community needs. In the face of these, what enduring ethics or spirituality of the environment are there to help people to resist the temptation of exploiting the remaining forests in the land? Any alternative sanctions enforceable enough, in the face of current existential realities, against harvesting of trees from the sacred groves and other attacks on the sacramental universe? Regardless of how varied and pressing the human needs are that could justify warring against the sacred groves indiscriminately for survival, the idea that humans cannot live without healthy environment blessed with biodiversity should not be neglected nor can the sense of the sacredness in nature be undermined. Therefore, the Igbo belief in sacredness of the Earth, the common home on which every entity on is rooted should be recovered and deepened to inform ecological action and sensibility. This is because it leads to the wider appreciation of nature as a gift. Therefore, nature needs to be respected and protected since it is through it that God reveals God’s care, love, and abiding presence in various ways. This idea is furthered in the next section of the social control measure the traditional Igbo adopted in keeping their environment safe.

2.6.2 Belief in divine manifestation in natural objects

Another measure in enforcing ecological protection, conservation, environmental sanitation, and sustainability in the traditional Igbo society is the belief in divine manifestation in
natural phenomena. This belief resonates with many African cultures. In the traditional religion, spirits are omnipresent, “they are ubiquitous such that there is no area of the earth, no object or creature, which has not a spirit of its own or which cannot be inhabited by a spirit.” Bolaji Idowu notes that the nature of the spirits can be conceived in terms of human physical characteristics “but they are more often than not thought of as powers which are almost abstract, as shades or vapors which take on human shape; they are immaterial and incorporeal beings.” As a result, some scholars are of the view the African world can be best described as forest of spirits for every length and breadth of life among Africans is wielded together by a thread that could simply be called spirit(s). In this regard, bushes and forests, trees and plants, mountains and hills, valleys and alleys, rivers and streams, animals and humans are abodes of spirits. The spirits do not just inhabit them, they use them to manifest their presence and actions in the world.

Also, being dynamic forces, Laurenti Magesa notes that the spirits can change their appearances and forms at will and “they do so whenever they wish to manifest themselves to human beings: ‘they can be either abnormally small, fat or thin. It is believed that especially when they appear beside natural objects which is their residence, they may appear in the form or shape or dimensions of the object.’” However, when or how they manifest and who discern(s) their


508 Idowu, 173-174.


modus operandi, is not the concern of this work. The emphasis is on the belief that the divine manifests in various ways in nature. Human and nonhuman creatures are susceptible to be used or enspirited, therefore, and this belief and practice serve as control measures for protecting the environment from violation and exploitation, simply because nature is sacred.

In this understanding, creation is looked upon not as mere matter. It is full of life and charged with spirit. Magesa argues that “Inanimate beings, far from being insignificant in the order of creation as African Religion understands it, incarnate within themselves ‘vital energies’… These energies, ‘alive’ in their spirits, require linkage with the entire system of the universe. They are not mere symbols of the Divine.”511 Similarly, Magesa avers that “Because of the power of the Creator within them and since they are the manifestations of the Creator and the abode of other spirits, they consist of the Divine within them.”512 This dynamic manifestation and relationship of the Creator in nature informs the Igbo reverence of creation and interaction almost in personal terms. No wonder, the call to treat all beings with respect, and utmost care because they are part of what brings orderliness and harmony to the environment. Hence, every creature is significantly important and contributes immensely to the wellbeing of all.

Belief in divine manifestation on natural phenomena strengthens mutual interaction of beings. It deters people from engaging in any actions that are deleterious to this chain of life. Thus, the notion of interconnectedness of beings permeates the entire Igbo belief system. In some instances, the Igbo believe that the Earth Spirit can manifest in nature such as the python or other animals. Ifi Amadiume remarks that the Mother Goddess Idemili manifested herself in a python.

511 Magesa, 73.
512 Ibid.
She notes that “it was their all-embracing goddess Idemili who reigns above all deities and the ancestors; she provided an overall administrative system, embracing the organization of periodic markets, the days of the week and the seasonal festivals.”\(^{513}\) Attention here is not in the worship of the goddess, which was proscribed in the 1940s, but on the sacredness ascribed to pythons in most communities in Igbo land. While most communities forbid the deliberate killing of pythons, in other areas, it is monkey, snail or rabbit or some trees like the Iroko, Cola nut, etc., without due procedures or rituals followed. The deliberate killing of these sacred totems is abomination. It is sacrilegious to kill, to eat of the animals of one’s clan or cut totemic trees. Perpetrators are required to accord fitting burial rites to the sacred symbols. Also, necessary sacrifices to restore peace are carried out.\(^{514}\) Due to much adherence to the Christian faith and modernism in most Igbo societies, the severity of these sanctions are not too strong as they were in the past. However, Bons O. Nwabueze seems to disagree with the above view. For Nwabueze, the belief is still strong as before. Apart from the core belief that the python is the defender of the land, as held in some communities, or the mother goddess, Nwabueze relates how he was counseled to not kill python in the interest of his life and family. Conclusively, “Having lived in America for almost twelve years at the time,” Nwabueze writes, “I thought that our ancestors have all died and so was their idol worshipping. Unfortunately, not.”\(^{515}\) Clearly, the recent controversy in Owerri, Imo State, over the killing of a giant python locally knows as *Eke Nworie* by some students of Alvan Ikoku College


\(^{514}\) Amadiume, 130.

of Education, Owerri, Imo State, validates Nwabueze’s thesis on the enduring vestiges of traditional practices about the reverence accorded to some totemic entities in Igbo land. The Vanguard Nigerian Newspaper reports that the management of the College is counselled to talk to the traditional chief priest of Owerri land over the killing of the python to make a cleansing sacrifice to forestall mysterious happenings in the land as it was the case in 1979-1980.\footnote{Vanguard Nigerian Newspaper, “Killing of Python: Alvan Ikoku College asked to consult chief priest for cleansing,” https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/07/killing-of-python-alvan-ikoku-college-asked-to-consult-chief-priest-for-cleansing/ (accessed July 17th, 2021).} This means that regardless of the spate of modernism and influence of Christianity in the land, the traditional religious beliefs and practices have not completely become extinct.\footnote{Contrary to popular opinion that the traditional Igbo religious beliefs and practices have become extinct, there seems to be a growing awareness and revival of the Igbo traditional spirituality among many groups of people across all ages in Igbo land today. Facebook and other social media have become avenues for educating and reaching out to many people and it is apparently catching their fancies. See Odimegwu Onwumere, “Igbo Spirituality Revivalists (ISR),” Facebook https://www.facebook.com/groups/295148837199757 (accessed July 18th, 2021). This validates the view that in the moments of great difficulty, the average Igbo person resorts to their ancestral religion for help. See Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, 	extit{Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions}, 271.} This claim may be inflated, and fear heightened, making it much more irrational than of a spiritual and genuine ecological reality. Notwithstanding whatever interpretation that any critical mind can make of it, the stress here lies on the value of respect and preservation of biodiversity through such a means. As a social control mechanism, this helps to protect nature. For all things in nature have every right to live, thrive and bloom. The values in nature, therefore, impose on humans the imperative to care for the earth and all that it is home to. In other words, the belief in the manifestation of the divine in nature carries with it some ecological implications that are relevant in the ecological integrity and preservation of biodiversity. Psychologically, this belief sacralizes God’s creation in the understanding of the people. Integrally, it connects everyone together with every entity in nature,
especially the earth that houses every entity. Invariably, people seem charged with the sacred responsibility to be earth’s moral overseers.

Furthermore, the belief in the manifestation of divine in natural phenomena and thus the attribution of the sacredness to them, arguably, instills in and maintains ecological sensitivity of the Igbo. It helps in the checks and balances of life in the universe. However, this belief, is not exclusive to the Igbo or Africans. It has parallels with the biblical view. The biblical God has, in various times, manifested in natural phenomena like water, winds, snakes, bushes, stones, donkey, doves, etc., (Genesis 1:2; Exodus 3:1-4; 7:10; Numbers 21:6-9; 22:21-39). The level of divine association and involvement of the divine in natural objects may differ in understanding. Nevertheless, the association of the sacred with nature shows both the divine origin and power over nature, the dependence of nature on God, and the interconnectedness of creation. Also, it points to the Igbo phenomenology of life, which is a complex network of relationships that “is very difficult to differentiate clearly between man [sic] and the world, and man [sic] and God and God and the world.” The world is not limited to humans. It is an interconnectedness of various realities, spiritual and physical, to which humans are a part of. In that sense, humans are to see themselves as one of the many entities that share the sacredness and bounty of the world with other entities. Therefore, any harm inflicted on one affects another. It simply boomerangs and can have spiral effects on every life form. Environmental crisis does not only affect the natural environment, but humans also suffer from it. This is one of the areas that the religious authorities in Igbo land play key roles in conscientizing their subjects on the need to have a healthy and salutary relationship with nature in the awareness that nature is charged with life and is infused with the

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divine spirit. Everything therefore stands open for and is at the disposal of the divine reality. Thus, everything in the sacred groves is considered an object of divine-social awakening and networking. This argument is the concern of the succeeding segment.

2.6.3 The authority of religious functionaries

Being a religiously charged society, there are many religious specialists and authorities in Igbo land who minister in various aspects life. They are priests, kings and queens, medicine persons, prophets, and diviners, soothsayers, rainmakers, worship officiants and or initiators. Metuh calls them mediators and mediums, who mediate between God and humans. These functionaries are humans who, by their special calling, gifts, skills, and training, are endowed with divine powers. They act as go-between in people’s relationships with the spiritual world. In no small ways, these religious functionaries help to promote ecological conservation, the sacredness of the environment and peaceful relationships. Arguably, this is achieved by their orders for the conservation of natural resources. By the virtue of their calling, functions, and covenant with Chukwu, God, and the Earth Spirit, Ala, they are to promote and maintain the integrity of the earth, which includes ensuring that the sacred laws of the land, the taboos and totems are maintained.

Notably, Metuh reasserts the belief that the Earth-Deity is the greatest deity among the Igbo. As a result, her priest (Eze-Ala) is deemed the high priest in each town. Citing Nnewi, as example, Metuh argues that the Eze-Ala is the custodian of traditional laws and customs and the president of the priests’ council known as ‘Ndì Agba Alo,’ which literally are the members of ritual council. This group has a very important say in the daily affairs of the Igbo politically and socially, which includes ecological integrity. “This council,” writes Metuh, “fixes the annual

519 Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 204.

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calendar especially festivals to mark the beginning of the planting and harvest seasons… So, even individually, priests play very important roles in the maintenance of law and order in traditional Igbo societies.”

This was extensively treated above. For the sake of emphasis, rituals are very integral to ecological preservation. As often as they are performed, the society is re-created, life is renewed, relationship and sense of stewardship to creation is re-enacted.

Again, by the virtue of their calling, the religious specialists command respect in the Igbo society. This is because they are believed to have acquired their powers from the creator who specially chose them for the integral health of the community. As mediators between the humans, God, and the ancestors, they are, therefore, the mouthpieces of the deities, their healing authority and leadership services. They are the eyes that perceive the deities who bring blessings from them to and cautions the communities of any offensive, sacrilegious acts that can destabilize the integrity and sanctity of the land. The vegetation, fruitfulness of the environment, constant provision of rains, which are regarded as one of the greatest blessings of God, when due, are crucially important for the Igbo for things to run in their normal courses. When these are lacking for no reason, it falls on some of these religious specialists to consult the deities for remedies. For example, “When there was drought, the people come with gifts and dances to ask her to change the weather, because she was ‘transformer of the clouds,’ the changer of seasons, and guarantor of their cyclic regularity.”

Thus, the religious specialists’ instructions for the conversation of environmental resources are adhered to. In this process, certain aspects of the flora and fauna of the community are conserved.

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520 Metuh, 206-207.

521 Metuh, 212.
Relatedly, most of the religious functionaries have their specific sacred sites. Conscientiously, they make sure that these sacred sites and whatever they harbor are properly taken care of to expedite the effectiveness of their work. Arguably, this is primarily one of the fulfillments of their oaths, which is both a duty and ethical responsibility they have towards their community. Likewise, they ensure that liturgy is well carried out during functions as regular as need arises to uphold the religiosity of rituals. The kings enact orders for the integrity of the society. The diviners are consulted to ascertain the approval or disapproval of the deities for any action in the community. Also, the medicine specialists, enact some rules, taboos, and beliefs to control the consumption of some herbs from certain trees. In Igbo land, as in most African societies, “medicine primarily conveys the idea that forces contained and can be extracted from the properties of some plants and herbs and applied to the solution of a variety of human problems.”

Given this, the herbalists made certain prohibitions to ward off the local population from accessing certain areas of the forests or sacred sites. In some instances, they are either claimed to be infested with evil spirits or are sites for some deities who would not tolerate the intrusion of non-initiates into their hallowed abodes except those who know and understand the language of the living and the spirits. Invariably, these helped in conserving certain plants, trees, reptiles, and animals through the ideas of mystic powers.

While it could be argued that the beliefs and practices behind these rules and observations are not expressly environmental considering the modern environmental conservation movements, this thesis may not be easily defended. Within religious or theological contexts, belief systems vary. What makes sense and holds a people’s value system in one context may be judged

522 Ibid.
unreasonable in another context. However, for the religiously minded Igbo, whose world is religiously tailored, every entity is considered sacred and alive. They are not to be tampered with any how without due processes. Therefore, certain rules are devised to forbid people from accessing some places or entities to keep them being violated, degraded, or falling into extinction. In this way, the religious authorities, through their connections with the deities, the ancestors, and the respect they command in the Igbo society help in protecting the environment from depredation and loss of biodiversity. Their position and ministry help in maintaining and restoring harmony which is a necessary condition for the thriving of life, flourishing of the environment and peaceful interaction of beings in the world. This attracts ancestral blessings seen more in the abundance of harvest, health of nature for humans and nonhumans. The next section details the influence of the ancestors in protecting the integrity of the earth.

2.6.4 Reverence for the ancestors

Ancestors occupy a prominent position in the life and belief system of the Igbo. Theirs is said to be an ancestral universe. As a matter of fact, this belief is very common to all African communities. Arguably, this all-important belief and practice among the Igbo obviously play prominent roles in ecological protection. However, before considering their roles toward environmental protection, it is worth noting who the Igbo ancestors are.

Ancestors are the pristine women and men who originated families, lineages, clans, and ethnic groups, and who provided the people, communities, plants and animals, rivers, mountains, weather conditions, etc., with their names. And by the right of their primogeniture and nearness to God by death, it is believed that “God granted the ancestors a qualitatively more powerful life
force over their descendants.\textsuperscript{523} However, B. Abanuka argues that “Ancestors mean more than just being dead.”\textsuperscript{524} In his words, ancestors “are those who have achieved to a remarkable degree the aspirations and values of their communities,”\textsuperscript{525} and those who committed no evil that cries to the deities or ancestors for redress. Morally, they are believed to have lived ethically and observed the sacred traditions that kept the fauna and flora in intact by their conscious moral behavior and faithfully handed same on to their progenies.

Besides, in some obvious ways, they achieved great feats for their communities, most of whom sacrificed their lives for the comfort and progress of their clans and communities. Achievement does not only mean financial affluence or some other feats of prowess. Living a decent and unstained life amidst the obvious, appetizing and alluring corrupt practices in the society is itself a great achievement. For such a person is a beacon of light shining in darkness, an example that the community, especially the young can always follow to shape and sharpen their thoughts and actions. Not necessarily by ripe old age and good death, and befitting burials, all which are part of the criteria for attaining ancestorhood, ancestors are also trailblazers who passed through “the seven rivers and seven seas” to ensure the harmony of their communities.\textsuperscript{526} In a certain sense, ancestorhood is linked to the responsibilities of helping humans to be accountable to cosmic laws and mindful of the integrity of their community. It helps humans to traverse through the cosmos as they live out their ethical life. Since it is the Igbo belief that God’s presence

\textsuperscript{523} Laurenti Magesa, \textit{African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life}, 47.

\textsuperscript{524} B Abanuka, \textit{Philosophy and the Igbo World}, 44.

\textsuperscript{525} Ibid.

manifests variously in the cosmos, therefore, humans and ancestors have the responsibility of venerating this divine presence. On the part of humans, reverence for the ancestors who lay buried in the earth, promotes care of the earth in the anticipation that they, themselves, will, one day, be interred and, perhaps, become ancestors. And since nobody would like to be thrown away to the vultures or animals to feast on, efforts are made to preserve the integrity of the earth. Ancestors, hence, act as invisible police and signposts in the ways of directing their descendants to walk on the paths of probity. The ancestors are not passive, therefore, in the affairs of their families and communities. It is their duties to ensure that things are in harmony in the community since they are believed to detest any form of crack on the moral universe. Thus, environmental crises in the community would have been considered a crack and dint in the ancestral universe for they signal dereliction of duties of care towards the society. As invisible police, the ancestors, believably, manifest their desire or dissatisfaction in several ways such as using certain other entities of creation as channels to ‘visit’ the living. Hence, the sight of a particular snake, mostly python, caterpillar or hyena at certain odd times might indicate an ancestral visit. The appropriate consequences would be drawn from it. They can also manifest directly in their descendants and possess them. In some cases, it is said that they can appear in dreams and or through divinations with massages for the living, which could be visiting calamities on the living, drawing their attention or making certain demands on them to correct anomalies in the society for the restoration of human and cosmic solidarity.  

Crucially, as noted above, ancestors occupy prominent position in the life and affairs of the Igbo and in their relationship with their environment. In this regard, Geoffrey Parrinder observes that it is not possible to understand the meaning of African religious foundations without going

through the “thought-area” the ancestors occupy. 

In Igbo land, the ancestors are believed to be close to the living members of their communities and participate in all the crucial family matters. They are believed to enjoy a continuous interaction with God and the other beings in the universe notwithstanding the spheres to which each belong and operates. T. U Nwala argues that they ancestors can inhabit the natural phenomena and are involved in people’s daily activities. Thus, it is difficult to talk of a clear-cut dichotomy between the natural and the spiritual worlds for they are in constant communion and communication. Similarly, Benezet Bujo integrally notes that “the African knows no distinction between individual, social and political life; but life can only be enjoyed in its fullness when the ancestors are remembered and honoured.”

Through rituals, right conducts, maintenance of law and order, Omenala, which entail environmental or ecological protection and the integrity of the earth, the Igbo foster communion with the ancestors and thus, keep them honored and happy.

Additionally, on ancestral fellowship, Bujo notes that this communion has a sacramental character in ensuring symbiotic relationships in the society. “Since the living cannot hope even to survive unless they render due honour to their dead and continue faithfully along the track laid down by them,” argues Bujo, the living keep the reverence of the ancestors to enjoy the good fortunes and blessings of the earth for “the dead can only be happy when they live in the affectionate remembrance of the living.”

As noted earlier, the Igbo, as other Africans, are


interested in the earthly life, earthly prosperity – good health, longevity, abundant crops, healthy livestock, and healthy vegetation and peaceful, sacred spaces, ecological integrity in all spheres of relationships. All these are seen as signs of ancestral blessings.

Therefore, a part of showing gratitude to the free gifts of the fruits of the earth is ensuring the integrity of the ancestral universe. This means to not indulge in any desecrating actions that constitute pollution and violation to the sanctity of the earth. However, the Igbo do not lose sight of the “eternal or eschatological, dimension, for it involves a participation in that other world where the dead live and where is to be found the key to the fate of the living.”

This belief inspires in the Igbo a sense of moral consciousness. Since it is the action in the material realm that qualifies ancestorhood, and since it is the desire of every Igbo person to reach ancestral land, people strive to keep the laws that promote the health of the earth. Ancestral home is, therefore, the perfect prototype of a good life on earth. Living a good life, ezi ndu, in the Igbo ethics means to carefully observe the taboos, the customs, and the traditions as the ancestors did while on earth. Consequently, the greatest reward for good life, which is the longing of every Igbo person, is to be reincarnated back to their family. Therefore, the traditional Igbo are ethically obliged to be ecologically responsible. For the destruction of the physical sphere implies a destruction of the locale for ancestral reincarnation and veneration, which is a concrete sign of God’s benevolence and love for them, their families, their communities. To aspire to ancestral life is to not destroy the created order. Instead, it is to affirm God’s presence in creation. Arguably, to live in any society without ancestors or ancestral consciousness is comparable to a dearth or eclipse of God’s kindness

531 Bujo, 24.
532 Bujo, 24-25.
533 T U Nwala, Igbo Philosophy, 34.
and love in such a society. Therefore, ancestral reverence compels the society to adequately and willingly respond to the precepts that enhance cosmic harmony. It strengthens the life-force of the earth for the teeming and maintenance of its sacramentality, and for the nourishment of humanity and nonhuman creatures.

2.6.5 The centrality of proverbs/language in conserving the environment

The preceding section brought out the ecological implications of ancestral reverence and how effective it is in promoting ecological health in the consciousness of the Igbo. As it has been variously established in this work, the Igbo world is a world of continuous interaction of being. Language is therefore necessary for such communion. Proverb is a gift of God to the ancestors who formulated their wisdom in pithy sayings from their experiences in life, their environment, and religious values. Arguably, the wisdom in Igbo proverbs is ecologically friendly. It serves as a medium for teaching ecological integrity since language is relevant to any community of life.

The centrality of language/proverbs in in Igbo life cannot be overemphasized. As noted earlier, the Igbo world is not dumb, not dead nor a mere matter. It is sacred and full of life. This life is not a monad. It is in relationships, a mutual and constant dealings and communication. Language or Proverbs are, therefore, essential tools for a better understanding and communion between beings in the Igbo world. No wonder most valuables aspects of Igbo life, spirituality and worldviews are couched in proverbs.

Culturally, the Igbo, true to their names, do not speak in plain words. Citing Francis Arinze, Anozie Onyema averts that “The Ibo love to use proverbs. For them to speak always in plain and simple language is to talk like inexperienced, little children. Inu bu mmanu eji esuli okwu (proverbs are the oil for eating speech), say the Igbo. Hence the uninitiated could be present when the hoary
headed discuss important matters, and yet understand absolutely nothing.”

The wisdoms of the ancients are revealed in proverbs. Hence, everyone makes effort to acquaint themselves

Straightforwardly, the Igbo do not simply love proverbs. It is an integral part of their life. Therefore, that which the Igbo love and is tied to their way of life, spirituality, and theology, arguably, has ecological weight. It preserves and safeguards nature. Equally, it serves as a tool for passing on the sacredness and integrity of the earth, ecological biodiversity to generations. Conversely, the ecological crisis in Igbo land today could partly be blamed on the progressive loss of Igbo language, idioms, riddles, wise sayings, and jokes, all which seem to come from proverbs. Language, which is a handmaid of culture, is vital for ecological sustainability. A declining language has far-reaching consequences on the preservation of a people’s knowledge and worldview. “Hence situations arise,” as Robert Schreiter rightly notes, “where leaders,” including the local community members, “from within the culture… become so alienated from the roots of their own culture, and so socialized into the invading culture, that the situation is often much worse than it was under expatriate leadership.” Aptly, this was the case of the Igbo in virtually all aspects of life. Most people have internalized oppression today to the extent that they do not value anything local. They place premium on anything foreign to the detriment of their way of life, leading to consumerism of all types. In the area of language, the contemporary Igbo find it difficult to express themselves fluently in Igbo. This affects culture, and crucially, the environment, as well. The ability to identify various entities in nature linguistically carries with it some psychological

534 Anozie Onyema, *The Igbo Culture and the Formation of Conscience*, 285. Proverb in its oil analogy goes beyond mere oil. It is like the grease in an engine which lubricates and makes the flow of parts very smooth. Put differently, without proverbs, speeches will be dry, uninteresting, and boring.

attachment to safeguard them. Perry Bellegarde, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, cautions against the loss of indigenous languages. Bellegarde advises native speakers to always speak in their mother tongues because indigenous “languages express the wisdom, worldview and laws of ancestors and teach how people can live in balance with Earth, which will be vital in facing future ecological challenges.”

This comes as a continued response to the 2006 grim and worrisome predictions by the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, (UNESCO), that “half of the 7000 plus languages spoken today will disappear by the end of the century.” Painfully, Igbo language is among the languages predicted to fall into extinction and be subsumed by other stronger Nigerian languages in 2025 if nothing serious is done to reclaim it by the speakers. However people contest this prediction for the sake of argument, the reality on the ground validates UNESCO’s prediction for “hardly can any Igbo man [sic] make a statement without code switching.” Traditionally, this is disturbing to any right thinking Igbo person who is well socialized into the Igbo worldview and way of life. It raises a lot


of concerns as to the future of the values that sustained life in the Igbo community. It is not surprising the spate of attacks on most traditional institutions, food, etc., leading to a dearth of cultural values that are protective of the environment.

Nevertheless, the traditional Igbo ensure the youths are skilled and become proficient in the use of idioms, proverbs, folklores of their community. This is because proverbs are treasure pots. To know them and be educated in and by them means to be inserted into the cherished values because they are drawn from and refer to the environment, social or cosmic order and behavior, ethics. From many indications, a lot of Igbo proverbs make references to nature, notably to the aspects of weather and climate. A few examples of such proverbs are, “Ide buru ogwe, keduzi maka akwukwo? (If the flood can carry a tree trunk, how much more of the leaf?), Mmiri na-ama ohu, o na-ama onye kpo ya (the rain that beats the slave equally beats their master/mistress), Osisi ka mma n’ala o toro (a tree is better or flourishes well in the land where it grows). This shows how weather wise the traditional Igbo are. To retain the depth of such knowledge, they are rendered in proverbs. Using them and speaking proverbially has a lot of lessons to unravel about relationship with things of the earth. Ingrained in such an exercise is a mental or psychological attachment that awakens earth-consciousness, to safeguard the environment. It aids in preserving nature while refraining from harming or abusing it.

Relatedly, the Igbo have folklores on climate. One of such folklores is that of a dispute between the earth and the sky. Accordingly, the sky suspended rains for seven years which resulted in serious drought. The sky was only moved to pity to release rains when udele, vulture, (earth’s

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emissary), sang for mercy. Arguably, it is not by mere coincidence that most Igbo myths echo a physical environment where heroes, great ancestors, cross seven rivers and seven seas in their efforts to serve and save their communities or to triumph over some issues in life. Such cases reveal human interaction and communion with their physical environment. Also, there are abundance of lullabies and songs that are related to weather and climate. Children and even adults sing them when it is raining, during harmattan or hot, dry, and dusty weather. Rain makers use similar incantations and songs to carry out their jobs. Hidden in these exercises are great environmental values, a sense of mutual interaction that relays earth-friendly ways of life expressed and preserved in proverbs, folklore, songs, etc., across all ages. Kids growing up with such earth-friendly mentality, consciously or not, are made to become environmental activists. They seek to promote harmony in creation and moral consciousness that refrains from destroying the created order.

Furthermore, to denote conservation and preservation of nature, the Igbo proverbially say, “Ori otu mgbe amaghi eri,” (one who eats everything at once does not know how to eat). In other words, the person does not think about the future. Sustainability is a very strong value among the Igbo. Consumerism is therefore not emphasized nor encouraged. Hence, the saying, “Ufo ji fo, ufo ala afo” (the reservation of yam seedlings translates into land conservation), and “agburu n’ere ala, anaghi agwo onye oria” (the people that outlandishly sell off their lands do not care for their sick relatives). These proverbs warn people to be wary of ecologically destructive lifestyle, consumerism, exploitation, and commodification of land or the gifts of nature. This is because the Igbo are aware that their survival is largely dependent on the health and life of the environment. Thus, indiscriminate selling off of land and abuse of nature does not only denote greed and avarice,
but it is also a dereliction of the culture of care, which imperils the environment for the future generations. This draws people’s attention to environmental sustainability. Hence the proverb above “Ori otu mgbe amaghi eri” (people who consume all that they acquired at once do not know how to eat or it is bad to eat all that one has in a day). This advises people to apply discipline in the ways they consume things, to avoid waste and thus conserve and preserve nature not necessarily for oneself but for the respect of the dignity of nature and for posterity. In general terms, proverbs are meant to teach lessons or draw people’s attention to something. In other words, all proverbs that speak of natural objects and human relationships with them and God create awareness of their existence, and dignity thus impels humans to respect and care for them. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are so many proverbs in Igbo traditional society. They provide recommendations on how humans are to relate with the natural environment, to care for the earth which feeds and harbors them today and which will entomb them tomorrow.

The table below provides few examples of some proverbs that relate to the human-nature-God relationships. It was sourced out from texts and social media platforms, especially, Facebook, on Igbo Spirituality and other Igbo related groups on Facebook whose aims are to promote Igbo language, culture and the environment from extinction and further degradation.

Table 2. samples of some traditional Igbo human-nature/God proverbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proverb</th>
<th>Literal translation</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Relevance/meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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[^542]: Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, 20-21; Oliver A. Onwubiko, 29-31, Udobata R. Onunwa, 48-49

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Igbo Proverb</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
<th>Semantic Categories</th>
<th>Cultural Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ehi/efi na-enweghi odudu, Chi ya na-achuru ya ijiji</em></td>
<td>It is God who drives away flies for a cow that does not have a tail.</td>
<td>God-animal</td>
<td>Lordship and providence of God over creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Osisi choro ika nka na-eto n’ihu agbara</em></td>
<td>The tree that wants to live long grows in the sacred grove or in front of the deities</td>
<td>Plant-God</td>
<td>Dependence on God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Onye nzuzu amaghi na nwanne ya bu obia</em></td>
<td>It is only a foolish person who does not know that their relative/kin is a guest</td>
<td>Human-human-God</td>
<td>Hospitality, good neighborliness, is kindness to God and <em>Ndìichie</em> (ancestors)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Aka nri kwoo aka-ekpa, aka-ekpa akwoo aka nri</em></td>
<td>The right hand washes the left hand and vice versa</td>
<td>Wholistic</td>
<td>Reciprocity - service to nature is service to oneself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ngwere ghara ugwu osisi, aka akpara ya</em></td>
<td>The lizard gets caught when he neglects the tree</td>
<td>Animal-plant</td>
<td>Dependence. When the environment is neglected, humans bear the brunt of it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ebe onye bi ka O na-awachi</em></td>
<td>One does not neglect to fix/safeguard where one lives</td>
<td>Human-environment</td>
<td>Responsibility. Humans have a sacred duty to protect the earth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Okuko nyuo ahu, Ala achuo ya oso.</em></td>
<td>When the fowl breaks the wind, the Earth Spirit comes after him</td>
<td>Animal-earth</td>
<td>Morality. When humans pollute the environment, the Earth Spirit visits them with terror</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ozi eziri anwuruoku eruola eligwe</em></td>
<td>Any message given to the smoke will eventually get Heaven</td>
<td>Human-weather/climate</td>
<td>Cosmic liturgy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igbo Proverb</td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Ethical Implication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
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<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ala mmadu metoro agaghi ichekwaba ya</td>
<td>The land that one pollutes will be hot for them, never protect them</td>
<td>Human-earth</td>
<td>Carefulness to not desecrate or pollute the sacred earth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Okuko anaghi echefunyeye foro ya odudu n’udumiri</td>
<td>A fowl does not forget the person who trimmed his tail during the rainy season</td>
<td>Animal-human-weather</td>
<td>Gratitude, appreciation for favors received.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nwanza rijuo afo, O si Chi ya ka-anwaa</td>
<td>When the weaver bird eats to her satisfaction, she begins to challenge her God for a contest</td>
<td>Animal-God</td>
<td>Ingratitude- hence ecological crises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta suya, beta suya wu’ahu nama</td>
<td>It is the cow that suffers that brunt of meat production that humans eat</td>
<td>Human-animal</td>
<td>Cautions against consumerism and culture of death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mmekorita ahu bu uto ndu</td>
<td>Interaction makes life sweet and livable</td>
<td>Wholistic</td>
<td>Cosmic harmony, interconnectedness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows that many Igbo proverbs are derived from relationships, mutual dependence of human-nonhuman creatures and with God and the deities. They are both sacramental as well as ethical. This dynamic, cosmic, and gregarious relationship reveals God’s loving, creative, and compassionate care for creation. This makes a demand on the human community to appreciate creation as gift, treat and respect it for the divine energy it reveals, arguably to ritualize creation to sustain its viability, sacrality and instill shame and guilt on any defaulting individual thwarting the sacrality and the somberness in creation. Thus, this sustains the harmony in nature. It informs an ethics of intimate relationship that allows every creature the freedom to be and achieve their divine purpose. Failure to observe this divine-human-nature relationship gives room for crisis. The table also reveals the interconnectedness in the Igbo life.
Any crack somewhere affects the other. The poisoning of one leads to the breakdown of others while the care for others leads to the promotion and sustenance of all, the balance of the universe.

By implication, proverbs create awareness and emphasize strongly that the survival of humans is solely dependent on the health of the environment, a channel through which God shows compassionate love and care and reveals God’s presence to humans. Care for the environment translates into a show of gratitude to earth that sustains humans. Humans are to live in kinship and partnership with nonhuman creatures. Thus, proverbs in the traditional Igbo society show how much the Igbo value nature. It is not so much for the instrumental value, environmental anthropocentrism or promoting self-interest but because nature is alive and inspirted. Inasmuch as people use the proceeds from nature, arguably, the Igbo have a holistic understanding of nature as a gift. Hence, they value it for what it is, i.e., God’s creation in the understanding that everything God created is good, beautiful and reflects God. Using proverb not only helps the young generation know the names or classes of nonhuman creatures, also, it imparts a sense of gratitude in them. Since the proverbs are like treasures and harbingers of the Igbo natural wisdom ecologically, they foster communion among creation and serve as preventives, as means to maintain bond between the spiritual and physical world. Morally, it advises and cautions against predation, pollution, and desecration of the phenomena on which one’s life depends. The world is alive, as it has been noted. As a result, there is constant communication in nature. And any Igbo person, true to their identity, interacts more in proverbs either in ritual actions or ethical practices, in speaking to natural phenomena and among themselves. Arguably, in light of the contemporary environmental protection agency, for the traditional Igbo, proverbs parallel environmental protection agency. Thus, recognizing the ecological significance of proverbs and language in general, M. A. Wienecke argues that proverbs have values that inculcate conservation of natural resources in
people.\textsuperscript{544} This is a great advantage to the Igbo. It is safer to argue that the Igbo, like the rest of Africans, are very rich in proverbs, folklores, songs, idioms, etc., that are drawn from the environment about interactions of beings in nature with lots of environmental lessons to teach. As an invaluable gift from the ancestors who fashioned them, in them is preserved the harmony of the earth, human relationships with nature and with God in ways that cannot be easily eroded. Therefore, as often as they are expressed, people are invariably reminded of their oneness with and dependence on nature, the need to show appreciation to God for the gifts of nature and how critically important to make judicious use of nature, project and protect same for the unborn.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has been able to establish the core tenet of the Igbo cosmovision which is that the universe was created and that the Creator, \textit{Chineke}, is God who equally works through all, manifests in all entities in creation for good. In effect, every creature, irrespective of their stature, is endowed by God. With its own force or energy of life, every creature is to sustain life because of the divine blessing or energy in it. The universe is, therefore, open to God and moves according to God’s design, each according to their time without interfering in the time, space, and rhythm of another. Each creature is free to attain their God given goals and to be fully who and what they are meant to be. By this very divine design, the Igbo view the universe as primordially free to bloom, blossom, and is ordered. The chapter asserts that harmony is essential for the continued existence, sustainability, and fruitfulness of creation. In this lies the beauty of the universe. It opens itself freely for the benefit of all. Humans get to know the blessings of God through the bounty and beauty of the earth, said to be the feminine aspect of God. She gestates, births, cossets, nurtures,

and entombs life. She is home to all entities where they live, move, thrive creatively in line with their divine blessedness. As a result, creation is purposeful. The earth is sacred. She deserves to be treated with respect and dignity accruing from her divine connection and assignment.

And because of the common divine origin, every creature is connected to each other, mutually influencing one another. Like a spider’s web, the Igbo world is holistic. Nothing stands on its own. All creatures, by far, are rooted in each other as they are all rooted in God. God is the upholder, Osebuluwa, the pillar of the world who enlivens the world with God’s dynamic and gregarious spirit. God is, therefore, the explanation for the origin and support of the universe, which comprises both the visible and invisible realities. Thus, God is not aloof to creation, yet creation is not exhaustive of God. Creation is a medium for divine manifestation and provides the sacred space for interaction between creatures and God.

Dynamically, there is a constant interaction between the visible and invisible world with the invisible world pressing hard upon the visible such that the idea of one connotes and invokes the other. In other words, there is no clear-cut separation between the profane and the sacred. The universe is full of constant interaction. It is alive, charged with spirits, not a mere matter to be used and discarded anyhow. The Igbo, therefore, see the invisible world when they interact, feel, and look at the visible, physical world. As a result, the Igbo world is densely populated with spiritual beings: Chukwu, (the Supreme Being), Mmuo, (the Deities), Arusi, (Spirit-forces), Ndiichie, (Ancestors) and Ogwu (Medicine) who work for the good of the world, the good of humans and ensure that everything moves in order. This grounds the model of organization of the ubiquity of spirits on cosmic order.

This compenetrating worldview makes it difficult to alter or destroy one thing without affecting the other. Such undue alteration would have amounted to abuse of the created order,
which, in the ecological parlance, would be degradation, depredation or pollution and crisis. It is a crack in the moral, religious order, a desecration of the sacramental universe. Rituals, thus, are needed to restore balance or harmony. The essence of rituals, aside from the fact that they are an integral part of Igbo life, is to repair wrongs, the restoration of the bond of communion between God, the deities and to maintain harmony in the universe. Rituals, therefore, have ecological importance in the Igbo world. Given the cycles of events, the Igbo calendar is punctuated with various rituals for various occasions from the beginning of life to the end. They re-create the community who are renewed and challenged to the commitment of environmental protection.

The Earth Spirit, which, as noted, is believed to be the feminine aspect of the Supreme Being, presides over the affairs of the earth. Through her, the Supreme Being births, nurtures and nourishes every life on earth. She births and entombs. It is upon her that the Igbo walk and are rooted together with other creatures that she is home to. Therefore, that which gives life, grows, and nurtures life and eventually receives it back at last, deserves to be respected with every moral and spiritual fiber. Communion with her factors in communion with all that she is home to, a covenant between humans and nature that compels mutual respect. Hence, environmental communion instils the duty care, the ethics of carefulness and thoughtfulness in relating to all creatures and the earth as gifts. Through rituals, prayers, offerings, and sacrifices, humans maintain and sustain, as well as activate the sacredness in nature, with rules, taboos, totems, regulating the use of and care for creation to maintain balance. This chapter reveals that these prohibitions and others like respect for the ancestors, notable religious functionaries, initiation rites, belief in mystic powers, the power of language/proverbs, etc., served as various and veritable ways of regulating environmental uses in the traditional Igbo society. Thus, the world is not to be abandoned to rot in pursuit of the overtly or other worldly affairs which preaches that this world is not our home nor
devoid of life and sacredness. The Igbo believe that “Ebe onye bi ka O na awachi, (one takes care of one’s abode or the place where a person is resident demands stewardship from the person to sustain, repair and tidy it). In other words, one cannot allow one’s abode to rot because it is a gift. Since the earth is home to the Igbo, they are bound to care for it, shun consumerism and dereliction. It is a sheer sign of irresponsibility, ingratitude to God, and greed to allow the earth to rot. It is an offense against the unborn from whom the Igbo loan the earth. And since, the Igbo are futuristic, i.e., they live more in their offspring, environmental stewardship and activism is naturally a way of life to bequeath a healthy earth to posterity. This is in line with the created order of the universe which is inherited from one generation to the other.

Harmony of the earth, of everything in the earth, needs to be maintained. It is a crucial aspect of Omenala. For the survival and welfare of the community depends on upholding omenala or ime di ka omenala siri cho, i.e., acting in accordance with the laws or traditions of the land, which is to keep religiously the order in the universe, not destroying, not exploiting, polluting, or abusing it. Omenala is for the integrity of the earth and harmony between creatures from human excesses. In this way, the Igbo traditional society maintained ecological balance in their dealings. They had a moral consciousness of their sacred obligation to and care for the earth. They were able to consume the fruits of the earth with an abundance of caution in the beliefs that a cat with a future does not eat a pregnant rat and that one who indulges in binge eating or consumerism does not know how to eat, does not think of the future. This ethics puts some brakes on the human voracity to abuse, dominate, exploit, or pollute and consume anything without considering the fate of the earth and future generations. The vision of the sacramental nature of the universe calls to mind the reality that the universe is full of life, has lot of meanings and messages to relay to the human minds that the world is rooted in God. It is a gift. It has dignity and deserves to be respected and
related in that way. It calls for a judicious use of the earth for abuse of the earth can be deleterious. Arguably, this sacred vision and ethics has a lot to benefit the world in the fight against ecological crisis.

However, the challenges now facing the contemporary Igbo, Christians or not, are how best to respond to ecological crises that have been caused by enormous inroads of secularization, materialism, consumerism and even some Christian beliefs that seem to oppose the Igbo traditional sacramental view of the universe. This is where dialogue between the traditional environmental conservation and the Catholic church’s theological view of the environment should focus attention. This is the concern of the succeeding chapter.
CHAPTER THREE

Theological Basis for Igbo Christian Ecological Ethics

3.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on the theological grounds for Igbo Christian ecological engagements. At the core of ecological theology is the systematic reflection that relates Christ to creation. It reveals Jesus as the love of God and the agent of creation, the one through whom the world is created. In essence, it is a re-interpretation of the Christian faith as a profound engagement with the world as a sacrament of God’s love, a gift and co-creature to be respected, preserved and not to be exploited.

As a thread running through this work, care for and communality with the natural environment is nothing new to the traditional Igbo. They have had an intimate relationship with nature, passing along interdependence, respect, and equilibrium and thus, developed some cultural models that respected nature without destroying it in the belief that nature is sacred.

The Christian ecological teaching is essentially theocentric as it is anthropocentric. As a result, Judeo-Christianity has been blamed for espousing anthropocentric notion of the relationship

\[545\] Scholars like John Hart calls for a rediscovery and reappropriation of the intrinsic values of creation, a profound sense of the sacramental universe and sacramental commons, as motifs for groundbreaking Christian ethics to challenge and put a brake on anthropocentricism and its irks like androcentrism, ethnocentrism, racism, etc. This requires a deepened awareness of the universe as infused with the visionary and active power of the Spirit’s transcendent-immanent and creating presence to stimulate a sacramental community consciousness. This helps to check the human voracity to exploit and destroy nature. Therefore, Hart argues for a creatiocentric consciousness that awakens a sense of kinship or biokind as antidote to ennui and dereliction and instills a sense of commitment to look after everything more closely. Creatiocentric awareness, thus, actuates and accentuates relational consciousness, which, for Hart, is the basis for relational ethics on the basis that God is the reason for every existent entity. For details, see John Hart, Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 117-124.
to the earth and is, therefore, challenged to develop a biocentric relationship. While the traditional Igbo ecological ethics is “basically biocentric and ecocentric,” affirming the imprint of God on creation yet it is not entirely immune from anthropocentrism. Inasmuch as it upholds the sacredness of the earth, cosmic life, and mutual dependence, i.e., like the Judeo-Christian view, it places humanity at the center, although it has a weak form of anthropocentrism. Understandably, the wrong relationship to the earth results in the wrong use of the resources of the earth. Arguably, without any theological, moral, and spiritual basis and interpretations, humans, regardless of their religious affinity, are likely to abuse the earth with impunity.

The Igbo cosmovision and Christianity profess belief in God, the creator of the universe who charged humans with the obligation to care for the earth. In their unique ways, apparently, both re-echo a common theme that God appointed humans as caretaker of the earth. Humans are to responsibly use it to the glory of God, the enhancement of humanity and health of the earth. Arguably, the power to exercise control over the earth does not delete the respect for moral obligations not just to the present but to the future generations. Hence, this chapter explores the theological basis for Igbo Christian ecological ethics. It argues that the essential values for ecological integrity, cosmic balance, right living or environmental consciousness can be deduced from both traditions. However, it asks what ways the practices anchored on the Igbo traditional cosmovision can be integrated into the Christian vision of the world given the misunderstanding


and misinterpretation of the traditional approach to the earth which is one of the reasons that led to a spate of ecological crisis in the land.

This section begins with the person and mission of Jesus, what possible implications his teachings have ecologically. Is it possible to claim to have a personal relationship with Jesus while ignoring the social implications of Jesus’ life, teaching and mission for the daily lives in the community? This is necessary to understand for an informed and well-grounded theological basis for the Catholic faith in general and, Igbo Christians, particularly, in their ecological vocation and engagement towards restoring and maintaining harmony in creation.

3.2 Ecological Jesus

This section is divided into two. Firstly, it examines Jesus’ relationship with nature against the argument that the New Testament offers no guidance on ecological issues. However, evidence from the ministry of Jesus shows a loving and caring attitude to nature. Arguably, it serves as an example for stewardship of creation. The second section, by way of emphasis, dwells on the cosmic Christ. It examines the ecological implication of the deep incarnation of Christ. It gives a more profound theological basis for ecological commitment for the Igbo Catholic church.

3.2.1 Jesus’ Attitude towards Nature: hints from the New Testament

In his article, Biblical Views of Nature, John A. Baker, considerably contests that “in contrast with the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament has relatively little to say about nature and the environment” or the laws regulating attitude to nature.548 Also, like Baker, Raymond Van Leeuwen argues that the “New Testament is a small book with an infinitely important but very

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limited agenda,” which has no “texts directly offering guidance and commentary on nuclear war and waste management, genetic engineering, cloning, wetlands, ozone depletion, deforestation and rain forest burning, garbage disposal, etc.”

Pointedly, Van Leeuwen avers that “It is no longer the first century A.D. Without much thought, one can see that the world has changed since the days Jesus walked in sandals and a robe.” In other words, for Baker and Van Leeuwen, searching the Bible to know what concerns the ancients expressed of ecological issues is not vital since the problem is not theirs but the present day’s problem, because the Scriptures did not ask the questions about environmental issues as they are asked today.

But is Jesus precisely silent on issues of the environment? Is there no relationship between Jesus and ecology? Is Jesus’ life and ministry completely devoid of any examples for today’s church on how best to relate with and integrate the environment into a holistic mission of Jesus in the church? What would Jesus do if he were to be around to witness the present ecological crises ravaging Igbo land and today’s world? Most likely, he would not be silent and indolent since his model of ministry and life underlines service borne out of love, which aims at the restoration of wholeness and order, integral salvation to creation. This is clear from the fact that Jesus comes to fix, heal, and renew and not to hurt, to save and never to destroy or exploit, to gather and never to sever. Considered in this way, it follows that the Gospel Texts that detail the life and ministry of Jesus are a powerful tool for engaging in environmental ethics to bring about environmental changes through the Christian involvement and witness in today’s world. In this regard, Gordon Zerbe argues that “the New Testament projects a vision of the kingdom of God that is full of

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550 Ibid.
implications for a Christian environmental ethic.” Since the kingdom of God is the central mission of Jesus, it follows that the gospel of the kingdom is tied integrally to environmental issues as the whole is to the parts. The New Testament is a fundamental Christian Text. Logically, it provides a guideline for any Christian action or involvement in the world, one of which is ecological crisis.

While it could be argued that the Gospels present in no stronger terms any relationship between Jesus and the natural world, the fact is that the God whose sovereign rule Jesus proclaims and whom Jesus relates to and calls his Father is “the Lord of heaven and earth” and the Creator God who is identified with “the creation which (He) created.” Sallie McFague calls this “the scandal of uniqueness of the Christian faith” which envisions “the universe as God’s body,” with strong emphasis on the most profound Christian tenet, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us.” For McFague, this has wider implication in the concrete, physical availability of God’s presence in the world in all ramifications. In and through Jesus is revealed God’s radical, inclusive love for the world. So, what is the range of this inclusive love of God like? Rightly, McFague asserts that it is inclusive of all creatures. For “Within the Christic framework, the body of God encompasses all of creation in a particular salvific direction, toward the liberation, healing, and fulfillment of all bodies… For the shape and scope of God’s body… is revealed in the Christic


552 See Matthew 11:25.

553 See Mark 13:19.

paradigm to be love.” Furthering the argument on this all-encompassing love of God, which is totally beyond the human mind, McFague insists that “Neither the radical interrelatedness and interdependence of the world as God’s body can tell us that liberating, healing, and inclusive love is the meaning of it all. But that is how Christians read the story of Jesus.” This argument will be continued later in this work. However, insights from McFague indicate that within God’s radar, every being on earth counts and is loved and cared for. It is not limited to the human life. The tiniest of creatures counts. This is seen in Jesus’ conscious words about the sparrows and the lilies of earth, the example made of the mustard seed, the tiniest of the seeds on earth, in his teachings.

Similarly, as the Gospels reveal, Jesus proclaims an inclusive good news based on love, justice, sharing, solidarity, service, care and living in harmony with all of God’s creation. Samson K. Gitau puts it that “Jesus is said to have preached the values of God’s kingdom as resting on harmony and integrity of the entire creation.” Arguably, in his ministry and life, Jesus affirms God’s care for creatures. This presents a strong tool for theological, pastoral engagement with the environment, for initiating and engaging squarely in environmental change through the Christian witness in today’s Igbo world. For in Jesus is found a true portrayal of creation as God intended it. This is seen in the relentless witness to God’s acts of sustaining creation. In him, God is shown as the one who causes the sun to rise and sends rains on the earth; clothes the grass on the fields, grows and waters the things that are planted, making them to yield bountifully; cares for the birds of the air; ensures that no sparrow falls off to the ground unnoticed; supplies seeds to the Sower

555 Ibid., 160.

556 Ibid., 160-161.

and bread for food; supplied manna for the Jewish ancestors and ancestresses to eat in the wilderness and takes count of the number of hairs on the heads of human creatures.\footnote{See Matt. 5:45; 6:28-30; 10:29; John 6:31} In all these instances, God is revealed as the chief caretaker of the earth such that it can be rightly argued that the ministry of Jesus is a continuity of God’s original act of creation; the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep and a hen who gathers her brood under her wings.\footnote{Cf. John 10:11-15; Matt 23:37.} Although he could do all these and multiply food miraculously, Jesus abhors any form of wastes in everything and thus cautions against consumerism and throwaway culture that exerts undue pressure on the environment.\footnote{Cf. Matt. 14:13-21} It is hard to imagine that Jesus could have indulged in binge eating, excessive drinking, wanton destruction and pollution of the sacred earth that he walked on and cared so much about. His mode of life is more of frugality. It is not because of want but because of care, conservation and preservation, sustainability, and respect for the gifts of the earth in all its sacramentality.\footnote{Cf. John 6:10-12} This shows a higher level of discipline and ethics of care for the earth’s goods, which include the commitment to the well-being of everyone, the integral salvation of humanity and its sustaining milieu, the earth. Thus, Jesus demonstrates the divine therapeutic economy and carefulness to avoid wastes. This challenges the present-day life of consumerism and throwaway culture, and careless and exploitative attitudes towards the environment.
3.2.2 The Cosmic Christ

There is the notion of the world-Christ, the Universal Christ, or the Cosmic-Christ, which presents a Christological view of creation as expressed by St. Paul for whom Christ “is the image of the unseen God, and the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible: thrones, rulers, authorities, powers- all was made through him and for him. He is before all, and all things hold together in him.” Also, the writer to the book of Hebrews reaffirms and validates the reality that Christ is the one “through whom God also created the world.” In essence, if Christ is the agent through whom God has created all things, it follows then that Christ was present and active “in the beginning” when God was at the work of creation for the “Word,” from the beginning, “is with God.” This understanding leads to the knowledge that the same divine rationality that is embedded in creation is embodied in Christ, as God’s incarnate divine Word coming into the world in human body.

Hence, in the mystery of incarnation, Christ takes upon himself the totality of the human as well as the totality of the cosmos, which embraces the beauty and goodness of the cosmos and the truth of the reality of the cosmos and thus becomes the force behind, propelling the sacramentality of the universe. For Elizabeth Johnson, this is “deep incarnation” by which she means that “the sarx that the Word of God became not only weds Jesus Christ to other human

562 Colossians 1:15-17.
563 Hebrews 1:2
564 Cf. John 1:1-4
beings in the human species; it also reaches beyond us to join the incarnate one to the whole evolving biological world of living creatures and the cosmic dust of which they are composed.”

This Kairos event makes God near in a different and tangible ways to the entirety of earthly reality in its bodily and material aspects, “all of earth’s ecosystems, plants and animals, and the cosmos in which plantet Earth dynamically exists.”

Rightly, this has a wider implication. It means that creation entirely, i.e., things, “places and people can be sacraments… for Jesus is the Word of God ‘in the beginning’ as mediation of the Creative Spirit’s creative imagination emanating into the concrete material forms and energy flows of the universe.”

This presents a profoundly new way of relating to creation as infused and graced by God, revelatory of God, and is related to God.

Johnson agrees with McFague, as earlier noted, in so many ways to illustrate God’s deep and total involvement in the world in a very profound and unimaginable way. It can be said that God is not only the creator. God works through and walks along with God’s creation. God is amid creation. God cares and sustains creation. The harmony of creation is God’s concern. This is possible because of the Incarnate Word. Interestingly, God is not the exclusive reserve for human beings, nor is God’s operations only limited to the heavens without involving in the affairs of the world that God created and has definitively inhabited through the Incarnation of Jesus.

Reasonably, God will not advise the pollution, exploitation of creation, the marginalization of any aspect of creation by another, nor dereliction towards creation. This would make ways for “ecological deterioration,” which, “like addiction… is insidious… that we become so used to

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567 Johnson, 187.

diminishment, so used to environmental decay, that many even deny that it is occurring.\(^\text{569}\)

Apparently, this is like alexithymia, being apathetic or callous to the feelings or discomforts of others. It is a form of ecological alexithymia or apathy to what goes on with the habitats and lives of creatures other than humans, to water pollution, the deterioration of the environment, a house, a place, lives, church. It is inconsiderate attitudes to the excruciating pains that the less privileged in the world undergo. For Johnson and McFague, this parallels the marginalization of the weak, the poor by the strong and the rich who often deny the reality of their actions. Evidently, this is what most humans do to creation and deny that it is happening.

Thus, McFague, too, of Johnson, narrows this anthropocentrism down to the experiences of most women, i.e., gender disparity, racism, etc., as part and parcel of “ecological blight … that is neither democratic nor egalitarian,” even as the perpetrators profess the Incarnate Word.\(^\text{570}\)

Definitely, McFague and Johnson are not alone on this view. John Hart allies with them, asserting that anthropocentrism grounds “androcentric…and ethnocentric ideas and practices,”\(^\text{571}\) for the modus of oppression is similar. Invariably they work against the agenda of the “God of all flesh,” “the solidarity in spades,” “the deep relationality that runs through the whole cosmos” and for Johnson, “Thanks to the evolution of life, human beings are genetically related in kinship to all other species on our planet.”\(^\text{572}\)

Furthermore, Hart extends the analysis that anthropocentrism with its related irks, (androcentrism, ethnocentrism, racism, classism, etc.), are an aberration and

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\(^{570}\) Ibid., 4. See also Elizabeth Johnson, *Creation and the Cross*, 165-168.


\(^{572}\) Elizabeth Johnson, *Creation and the Cross*, 158-159.
embarrassment to the connectedness of all creatures (biokind) in Christ that allows sharing in a relational community that advocates nature’s natural rights. For Hart, therefore, they undermine the significance of the incarnation, “the sacramental universe and sacramental commons;” the intrinsic value in creation and perpetuate the instrumental value that weaken “relational consciousness,” which is “a foundation for relational ethics,” such a way of life which the Incarnate Word proclaimed, lived, and exemplified.

In essence, Johnson, McFague and Hart offer a deconstruction of not only anthropocentricism, but also androcentrism, racism, ethnocentrism, even “unhealthy dualisms,” the dichotomy between matter and spirit, which, as Pope Francis notes, “left a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history and disfigured the Gospel." These are oppressive to some members of creation while upholding various supremacies. They are not in sync with deep incarnation. Maltreating women, the poor, people of color, etc., is a part of ecological degradation, same as upholding spirit against matter. Arguably, agreeing with McFague, ecological devastation is not only a flora and fauna issue, though humans cannot live without the plants and animals and the ecosystem that supports them. True! Yet, ecological issue is equally “a people issue, most especially, a justice issue, for the ecology, the environment, the home that we share is a finite one.” The violation of human rights- women, children, people of color, etc., is a violation of the Incarnate Word in whose body these poor of the earth find refuge. Precisely, for Hart, “the poor, which is inclusive of all earth’s entities are sacraments of Christ, for they concretize theologically

573 Hart, 121.

574 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home* (Maryknoll, New York, 2016), #98. Henceforth cited as LS.

the teaching that Jesus as the divine judge- the Son of Man- dwells among the poor. Thus, the incarnation ripples outwards, beyond convention, with the saving ramifications for all beings. Hence, Johnson avers that “In Christ, God enters into the biological existence…. In the incarnate One, God shares the life conditions of foxes and sparrows, grass and trees, soil and moisture.” The saving God becomes a human being who is part of the larger human community that shares the membranes of life with other creatures, all created from cosmic material, and susceptible to death and disintegration. In Christ, therefore, God reconciles and elevates the dignity of all creation. The affirmation of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, as Lord and Savior of creation, therefore, abhors any form of oppression or abuse of a set of creation by another under whatever pretext.

The incarnation, therefore, points to the central paradox of the Gospel namely, that God the Creator and the Lord of the universe became flesh and entered the human condition, submitting to the limits of place and time and dwells among humans and the rest of creation. Within his space and time, he interacted and impacted on the environment and vice versa, and crucially important, Christ reveals God to humanity through the earthly, material things of life. Consequently, the extraordinary act of divine solidarity and downward nobility to the earth, God, in a much profound way, has come to live among creation as a sustainer and redeemer. Creation plays host to its Creator through the incarnation of Jesus who comes as both a guest and the owner of creation and part of creation, working through and perfecting it. By the virtue of this singular divine solidarity with creation, it ceases to be mere matter. It is full of life. It is a gift and is sacred. The material

576 Hart, xv.
577 Elizabeth Johnson, Creation and the Cross, 185.
reality is, therefore, capable of bearing the divine image. Hence, Anselm T. Sanon calls “Jesus, the Master of Initiation” who comes from God to initiate creation into God and vice versa.\footnote{Anselme T. Sanon, “Jesus, Master of Initiation,” in \textit{Faces of Jesus in Africa}, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 85.}

Evidently, the signs that Jesus performs speak more about this divine-nature relationship.\footnote{Reflecting on the signs that Jesus portrayed which bear imprint of the cultural milieu in which he was socialized and what he made of them ritually, Diarmuid O’Murchu asserts that Jesus is a “ritual maker” in chief for whom ordinary bread and wine become the Body and Blood that gives life. See Diarmuid O’Murchu, \textit{Ancestral Grace: Meeting God in Our Human Story} (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 150-156.} At Jesus’s initiatives, ordinary earthly realities take on extraordinary qualities. For example, water is transformed into wine, mud from the ground becomes healing ointments for the blind; bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ for the life of the world; vines become a perfect example to talk about human attachment to God without whom they are dead. In some instances, following St. John’s Gospel, sheer matter and phenomena, i.e., the tangible things of taste, touch, sound, smell and sight become the occasions of epiphany, the ways through which Jesus reveals the intangible divine reality to humans who have never seen God. In this way, material realities, the daily events of life, become windows through which the viewers catch the glimpse of God’s glory.\footnote{Cf. John 1:18; 6: 16-25} In other words, through the humanity of Christ, “the rest of material creation also becomes transparent to God, thus realizing the potential for which it was created.”\footnote{Anthony Asoanya, \textit{The Ecological Crisis in Africa}, 194.}

Therefore, the incarnation of Jesus has profound as well as simple implications to the environment. Within the scheme of God, everything counts. Material creation, in fact, the daily
and ordinary things of life are of utmost importance in the divine plans of things. Nothing is to be discarded as useless, nothing is to be abused. Everything has a purpose and dignity. Everything points beyond itself and is united in Christ who left footprints on the sands of time. This is not so primarily because Christ is the agency through whom God brought into being all that exists but crucially because God enters the abode of created matter, to take on a mortal flesh, to inspirate it and become a part of it through Jesus. Degradation of creation thus is a gross disrespect for Christ. Hence, Elizabeth Briere, as noted by Asoanya, avers that “Because God Himself [sic] has become matter, I will not cease to honor the matter which brought about my salvation.”

The incarnation, by far, bears witness to God’s immanence to the created order, God’s solidarity not only with humanity but with the rest of creation. At the same time, it elevates the human mind to the transcendency of God, which does not imply absence. Reiterating Uzukwu, it is “a distance that does not reduce God’s providential presence or nearness, nor God’s tenderness and sweetness, nor God’s continued involvement in imbuing terrestrial existence with vitality.” Thus, the incarnation links God to creation and vice versa so that there is a constant interaction between God and the cosmos through Christ. Unity of creation in Christ, arguably and understandably, brings healing to the disruption between creation and God mostly generated by secularism, science, and the growing theories of some ideologies whose so aim is to divorce creation from God for easy exploitation of the earth.

In the incarnation, the finite has been given an infinite depth, an infinite stamp. Therefore, it can no longer be regarded simply as mere matter or something without dignity, respect or value,

582 Ibid.

583 Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness, 74.
or reverence. It is as Dermot A. Lane argues that the whole of created reality has received an infinite extension by the fact that it has become in Jesus Christ, as its cosmic center, the vehicle of God’s incarnate presence in the world. In other words, all things are united in Christ as the incarnate Word of God in whom they exist. Therefore, all things possess an unfathomable depth which the Christian faith alone can echo to the world. Lane’s insight presents a compelling theological tool for a sacramental way of seeing and relating with the world undeterred by the separation between the sacred and the secular. It calls for a radical engagement of the church in Igbo land with ecological rescue mission as an integral mission of Christ who embraced creation without reservation. Faith or trust in Christ does not and should not denigrate creation, allowing it to rot. Instead, it inspires reverence and salutary relationship with the environment such that was paramount in the traditional Igbo society. In essence, cosmic Christ makes faith in creation available and wholesome. As Ferdinand Nwaigbo argues,

> When the eternal Word of God took flesh in time and place, the gulf between heaven and earth... the division between the sacred and the secular, the destiny of the human person and the destiny of the cosmos has once and for all been cemented, so that in the mystery of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the human family is able to have the taste of heaven on earth, to encounter God that they are serving in their fellow human beings, to unveil the sacredness of the earth in secular realm, and to find the unity between the human person and the universe.

Nwaigbo’s view, in a way, agrees with those of Johnson, McFague and Hart in viewing creation as holistically related in Christ without any form of dichotomization that sees the earth as mundane, devoid of divine presence, which is the basis for the exploitation of the earth in some people. Arguably, Christ who took unto himself this material world, without disdaining it, is intimately

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present to it. He surrounds it with his love, illuminates and directs it to fullness in God. Therefore, this world which his human eyes beheld and admired is now imbued with his glowing presence.\textsuperscript{586}

In a way, the glory of God pervades over creation. Every place is a sacred space for encounter and relationship with God, fellow human and with nonhuman creatures. This makes interrelation and harmony between the physical and the spiritual realities possible. This intrinsic relationship creates a feeling of love, reciprocity, awe, reverence, and respect for creation. Seen this way, for anyone professing Christ, then, creation is not to be exploited, polluted, or desecrated because of its intrinsic relationship to Christ. It has dignity and respect thereof. This understanding leads to the salutary inter-relationship between humans and the physical world, a feeling of interdependence that is bound by the ordinances of creation. This being the case, a call to action, active engagement in the mainstream of environmental issues becomes a vocation that is integrally linked to the mission of Christ and the demand of the Gospel message. This is the task facing the church as the Body of Christ hence, the preoccupation of the next section.

3.3 \textbf{Selected Catholic Magisterium on Ecological Concerns}

In this section, the focus is limited mostly to Catholic texts. Attention is more on Vatican II, Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis, and the episcopal conferences of the African Bishops concerning environmental issues. The aim is to provide more theological grounds for ecological engagements to save the earth from further degradation and exploitation.

3.3.1 Traces of Ecological Discussions in Vatican II and post Conciliar Documents

Vatican II is a watershed for the Catholic Church’s foundation and engagements with most social issues like environmental concerns affecting the world. It opens the church more to the

\textsuperscript{586} See Elizabeth Johnson, \textit{Creation and the Cross}, 192. See also LS., \#s96-100.
outside world to appreciate and reflect on the issues that pillage the world and humanity to see how best the Gospel can address them. The pastoral constitution on the church in the modern world, *Gaudium Et Spes*, unequivocally asserts that “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [sic] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men [sic].”587

One of the major anxieties of this century is the threat to the natural environment from human activities. This threat touches both faith and social life since believers are not to live a compartmentalized life. As Asoanya argues, “Whether as stewards of God’s creation or champions of environmental justice, many church members today have increasingly found that a strong pro-ecology and stand in environmental issues is an integral component of their faith.”588 With this, there is no shying away from engaging in ecological issue or stewardship of creation.

The emphatic formulation of Vatican II expresses what is generally expected of Christians regarding their civic duty towards the world:

Individual and collective activity, that monumental effort of [humanity] through the centuries to improve the circumstances of the world, presents no problem to believers: considered in itself, it corresponds to the plan of God. Human beings [were] created in God's image and commanded to conquer the earth with all it contains and to rule the world in justice and holiness; to acknowledge God as maker of all things and relate [themselves] and the totality of creation to God, so that through the dominion of all things by [humanity] the name of God would be majestic in all the earth.589

587 *Gaudium Et Spes*, #1. Henceforth as G.S.


589 GS., #34.
Apparently, this closes the gap between what is traditionally considered mundane and sacred. It stimulates ecological witness in people to try to live in an ecologically responsible manner as well as committing themselves to ecological projects in the name of God. These are indices for harmony that recognizes and respects the freedom of creatures without violating their dignity.

Also, ecology, resources, and environmental sustainability feature prominently in the Second African Synod of Bishops for Africa, between October 4th and 25th, 2009. Like the Council Fathers in carefully noting ‘the griefs and anxieties’ of the contemporary times, especially of those of the poor, the synod bishops note the ecological crisis and exploitation of African human and natural resources by foreign powers. They call attention to how industrialized countries seek access to Africa’s mineral wealth at all costs, the result of which the peace and communal living of most African countries have been threatened leading to series of ecological crisis.\textsuperscript{590} Besides, the bishops link ecology to an integral Christian vocation, a call to duty care for God’s creation entrusted to humans. Of the fifty-seven propositions, three propositions entirely deal with environmental issues in which the synod fathers made a theological statement that reaffirms creation as God’s gratuitous bounty and that everything God has made is good (Gn. 1). They assert that humans are charged with the vocation of the stewardship of the earth (Gn. 2:15). While decrying the human destruction and abuse of nature which is supposed to be “our mother;” they proposed that churches from grassroots to the higher levels should promote environmental education and awareness as a part of Christian faith and vocation. To arrest the ugly spate of deforestation and desertification, the synod participants strongly encourage tree planting, respect for the integrity of nature and call attention to the fact that the earth is a common home, a common

good, a sacred space in which humans encounter God and interact with other earth entities. As the World Council of Churches correctly observes, the society for which the church must strive and proclaim the gospel of Jesus should be “just, participatory and sustainable.” Sequel to this, the synod bishops call on national governments and corporations to ensure that citizens have security of land tenures, access to safe water and environment, the education of the people of God on their rights and responsibilities to the environment. According to the synod council, this will enable God’s people who are also citizens and stewards of the earth to challenge any unjust decisions and practices against the environment which affect their health and faith. This firmly locates ecological issues in the church’s tradition. And as a part of the church’s mission, it shows how deeply ecological issues are inextricably intertwined. This can only come through environmental education, which is key to safeguarding the environment and promoting harmony. The Church, as a teaching authority, knows how best to adopt environmental education into her schemes both in the pastoral and academic life.

Remarkably, Peter Knox, quoting Steve Murray, notes that the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in the 2002 historical overview of the concerns of the Holy See for the environment, clearly calls the environment an “all-embracing concern,” and avers that “The teachings [of the Catholic Church concerning the environment] call for a radical change: for a conversion of the heart and mind so that all may have life, life in abundance. This implies living in harmony with all of creation. When this is so, the world will truly be at peace and all of creation

591 Orobator, 165.


593 Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, ed., Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace, 166.
will reflect the beauty of the Creator. “*594 In other words, the first place of harmony in the world is the heart. It can only come when humans rid their hearts of violence. For the violent responses and attacks on fellow humans and the entire creation has its place in the heart. When this happens, the poor creatures bear the brunt of it. This tends to smear the beauty of creation. In its original sense, creation exists for the glory and reflects the beauty of God. It is incumbent on humans to sustain the dignity of creation, the harmony that accounts for mutual interaction.

Interestingly, the council fathers observe that humans are not beings in isolation of other entities in the sacred earth. By their innermost nature, humans are social beings who share the social space with other earth’s entities. “Made in God’s image,” they are called to the stewardship of “all earthly creatures with a right to ‘subdue them and use them to God’s glory.” 595 To ‘subdue’ is not a right to exploit, pollute nor desecrate the earth. It is a vocation for duty care, a privilege bestowed on humans to tend the earth, rule over the mineral, animal, and vegetable resources of the universe. In other words, it has moral obligations attached to it. This responsibility extends to the generations to come. The earth is a gift not meant to be abused nor greedily consumed with reckless abandon while neglecting future generations nor the integral health of the earth. Justice demands that the earth be taken care of. It is the right of the future generations to inherit a harmonious and healthy earth for it is in this that the glory of God lies.


595 GS., #12.
However, the council notes a disconnect of this synergy with the fall in which humanity fell “out of harmony with himself [sic], with others, and with all created things.”\textsuperscript{596} Regardless of their fallen nature, humans are called and charged with the duty to care for and further “the universal common good,”\textsuperscript{597} such that humans bear the continuous reminding that the care for and “cultivation of the Earth is a human obligation”\textsuperscript{598} which they are to carry with great attention in the understanding that the earth is a sacred gift that needs respect and care. The World Commission on Environment and Development puts it that, “… the case of the conservation of nature should not rest only with development goals. It is part of our moral obligation to other living beings and future generations.”\textsuperscript{599} In the words of the council fathers, integral development worthy of the name is in line with “the designs of God.”\textsuperscript{600} As a result, the council criticizes and frowns at any exploitative use of the earth and its entities or quest for technological or chemical advancements “aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their population” which includes nonhuman habitats and pollution of rivers and lands as a “crime” and “abomination” against God and the sacred earth.\textsuperscript{601} This includes, as well, any actions either from a corporate body, community and individual persons which smack of deliberate earth-devastation

\textsuperscript{596} GS., #13
\textsuperscript{597} GS., #84.
\textsuperscript{598} GS., #39.
\textsuperscript{600} GS., #57.
\textsuperscript{601} G.S., #80.
in any way, either for selfish interests or advancement in business. They are not only anti-human, anti-environment, they are also ungodly and offensive to the sacredness of the earth.

Therefore, there is no more justification for any exploitation of the environment under the pretext of subduing and conquering the earth nor dereliction towards the earth by “the heaven-bound Christians,” which is part of the reason some Christian fundamentalists care less for the earth subject to their understanding that this world is not our home.\textsuperscript{602} Bede U. Ukwuije argues that the aspiration to go to heaven, sometimes, leads Christians to disregard the earth because they lay claim to Jesus’ expression ‘What then will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life?’ (Matt 16:26).’ For such people, this is a call to disregard the things of this earth in pursuit of those of heaven. Grossly, they fail to realize that heaven and earth are inextricably tied to the Creator, whose glory fills heaven and earth, for “the earth itself is supposed to be mirror of heaven.”\textsuperscript{603} Ukwuije is right. It makes no sense to treat the earth with disdain while laying claims to heaven above. It is as if God’s influence does not permeate the earth. Faith teaches that heaven and earth are all God’s creation. Therefore, God cannot be in one place to the detriment of the other. Such a dichotomization is dangerous and exploitative of the earth.

The earth, by the virtue of its divine origin, is sacred and needs to be treated with dignity. It is a sacred trust bestowed on humans to exercise stewardship over the earth, to make judicious use of it, preserve its sanctity and the harmony among earth’s entities, not to abuse it. Arguably, the church, by her divine origin, is charged with the sacred obligation to be custodian of the earth. It is through the gifts of the earth the church draws her material nourishments most of which are

\textsuperscript{602} Bede U. Ukwuije, “Befriending the Earth,” 21.

\textsuperscript{603} Ibid.
used in her divine liturgy. The church, true to her vocation and mission, cannot distance herself from environmental issues nor partake in the exploitation of the sacred earth. Therefore, the diplomatic or interdisciplinary views of some politicians and multinationals, and perhaps, some uninformed Christians, that the church is not qualified to engage in ecological issues do not have basis for their claims. The Christian faith is not abhorrent to ecological issues for they are issues of faith as well as justice. Integrity of creation is part and parcel of the church’s faith and mission. As Lukas Vischer observes, “when examining the history of the environmental movement, one is struck by two major phenomena. First, the environment is relatively new as a major political and economic force, however, a second ideological revolution has also taken place- namely, the rising influence of religious concerns in environment.” Environmental crisis is both social and religious concerns. In fact, it is an interdisciplinary crisis. Most fundamentally, it reveals the crisis lurking in the human heart. Al Gore makes ecological issues more of a religious matter. In his word, Gore notes that “the more deeply (we) search for the roots of the global environment crisis, the more (we are) convinced that it is an outer manifestation of an inner crisis that is, for lack of a better word, spiritual.” This resonates with Pope Francis as shall be seen later in this work. However, this places ecological issues at the very mission of the church in the world. The church is involved in ecological discussions the same way as other faith traditions, movements, political stakeholders, multinationals, etc., for “the crisis that threatens the destruction of the earth is not


only social, political, economic, and technological, but it is at root spiritual.” Salvation which the church proclaims is integral. Therefore, it cannot neglect the crisis devastating the environment. It affects the very humans that the church ministers to as it affects creatures other than humans. What concerns the human person is of much concern and importance to the church. The church’s integral message of salvation is not addressed in a vacuum but in the world peopled by humans and other creatures. And since most of the crises are caused by human predatory behavior towards both human and nonhuman creatures, the church is well placed, through her teachings and sacraments, to bring transformation to the human hearts to rethink their views on and use of the earth’s goods and their relationship with all the earth’s entities without which harmony is not attainable. Therefore, it is crucial that ecological conversations are reflected in the official teaching of the church. In response to this, Pope John Paul II, with great momentum, created much awareness of ecological responsibility as integral to the church’s life and mission. The succeeding section focuses on this.

3.3.2 John Paul II on Ecological Issues: Solidarity, Peace with God, peace with all creation

Solidarity is a beloved concept of Pope John Paul II. For him, it is “not as a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and preserving determination to commit oneself to the common good…, because we are all really responsible for all.” This goes beyond making resources available to

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poorer nations to tackle changes from severe weather, lack of water and other issues. It is solidarity with the earth community. In the context of the worsening ecological crisis, solidarity recognizes that every life form is increasingly tied together as members of the earth community. Sister Marjorie Keenan, in her synopsis of the report from the Holy See on ecology, notes that “solidarity extends to nature.”608 This recalls deep incarnation, which offers solidarity and care to all existent beings. Solidarity with all creation tasks humans with the responsibility of the welfare of the poor and of all creatures. Their destinies are entwined. We will either confer onto future generations of all creatures a beautiful, fruitful, green, and vibrant planet or a planet shrank in beauty and biodiversity, ridden with crisis and chaos. John Paul II sees this as a major concern facing humanity hence, the need to reawaken in people deep ecological consciousness, especially to church members to embrace this mission as the duty care for creation.

With John Paul II, the development of the Catholic theology of stewardship [of God’s creation] came to the limelight. All through his pontificate, John Paul II issued great statements regarding respect for nature and environmental protection. His theology of creation focuses on a vision of the natural environment that is both theocentric and anthropocentric yet in some ways, incipiently ecocentric out of the reverence for all creations’ expression of the divine presence in their unique ways. The divine aura in creation is not limited to humans though they are the “crown of the entire processes of creation.”609 John Paul II, like the council fathers as well as the Igbo traditional society, is convinced that the position of humans at the center of creation imposes on


them moral obligations to be good stewards of creation. Humans are not to be predators. They are to be in solidarity with the earth community, not to exploit it.

Besides, for the Pontiff, the decree of dominion of the earth must be understood from the theology of human beings as the Image of the Creator and as co-operators with God in the work of creation charged with the duty care for creation. They are not to go about “destroying nature in the name of ‘develop and dominate the earth,’ subjecting it without restraint to their will, as though the earth did not have its own purpose, which we humans can indeed only develop but must not betray.”610 So, the abuse of dominion and its modern misconception arose from sin, the greed and quest for materialism associated with the lifestyle of the modern person, not from the consequences of Christians responding to their vocation.611 Thus, development worthy of the name is that which promotes the well-being of creation. In essence, ecological conservation is not opposed to development. Rather, it charts a path to the right use of God’s creation with utmost care to not exploit the gifts of nature for selfish reasons. “Development cannot consist only in the use, dominion over and indiscriminate possession of created things and the products of human industry, but rather in subordinating the possession, dominion and use to man's [sic] divine likeness and to his vocation to immortality.”612 Development must conform to the will of God in respect for the dignity of creation, the rights of the poor and to ensure that while transforming the earth, care is taken to not destroy the dynamic balance existing among beings that depend, for instance, on land, water and air for their very existence.


611 SRS, #s. 29-31. See also John Paul, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1990, #3.

612 Ibid.
Furthermore, John Paul II’s theology of the environment envisions the sense that nonhumans possess intrinsic value even as they properly have instrumental value to human beings. However, he submits that humans must respect creatures of the earth because they possess an inherent right in them to be respected, not necessarily because the failure to do so would amount to adverse effects. Arguably, John Paul II emphasizes strongly on respect for all life forms, the dignity of creation which is enjoined together with humans to praise God. Here, he draws a link between the moral agent in relation to creation which is tied to the old covenant to the land which speaks of “peaceful harmony with the Creator and with all creatures.” Similarly, John Paul II firmly contends that there is a connection between peace, justice and ecology, observing that one of the threats to peace is “lack of due respect for nature by the plundering of natural resources and by a progressive decline in the quality of life,” due to “unjust land distribution” and worsened by the need of most indebted countries to expand their ports in order to service their debts. Peace thrives more where there is justice the absence of which leads to disharmony. This caveat is to all humans, more especially to the rich, in their dealings with nature or poor creatures.

Seeking the biblical and theological basis for ecological concerns, the Pope argues that in God’s schema, there is a fixed relationship between humans and the rest of creation such that a reliable theology of the environment needs the involvement of God, the human person and nature

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613 John Paul, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1990, #s 3-6. Elizabeth Johnson challenges humans who claim to praise God while their actions stifle God’s breath and voices in other creatures. Every creature has the right to praise God in their own way, to be heard and to bloom as God has intended them. See Elizabeth Johnson, *Creation and the Cross*, 178-180.


616 Ibid., #11.
since environmental problems cannot be fixed purely in socio-political terms. Doing this amounts to abandoning the social and cosmic reign of Christ as King of the universe; it is edging God out of creation as the Creator. As Anthony Asoanya says, it is replacing mother earth as purely “matter earth as if the earth does not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose to be developed and not to be betrayed.” For this reason, John Paul II asserts that “ecological crisis is a moral problem.” Therefore, it is not enough to use ecology as a slogan or a movement to seek personal credibility nor use it to promote some sort of materialistic philosophies that have no roots in God or that are anti-life like those who hold the extreme view that solution to environmental crisis lies in depopulation of the world. Such a view only promotes the pleasure and comforts of the wealthy to the detriment of the poorer nations or poor creatures. Depopulation is against human ecology, against the sanctity of life. It makes humans the author and finisher of life. It stifles the human dignity and diminishes the manpower needed to integrally develop and care for the environment. As noted above, John Paul II markedly insists that efforts should be on respect for life and for the dignity of the human person which extends to the rest of creation called to join humans in praising God, which is the condition for peace.

Significantly, respect for creation comes from respect for the life and dignity of humans. In other words, violence against life automatically has repercussion on the rest of creation. Therefore, environmental pollution and exploitation of the natural resources must be seen as a total disrespect for life which boomerangs more on humans. The health and flourishing of humanity depend largely on the health of the environment. Therefore, humans need to rid themselves of greed, the murderous violence which severely changes and leaves no chances to future generations.


618 Ibid., #s1, 6, 7 and 15.
John Paul II calls for an ethics of peaceful harmony with the Creator and with all creation. Also, all positive efforts towards the preservation of life, commitment to non-violence, pro-life activists, and groups deeply involved in creating awareness of the quality of life and ecology must be supported and encouraged. This requires a change of heart, humility, and renewed efforts to see ourselves and the world as an integral part of God’s plan for creation.

Reasonably, the recognition of this fundamental truth that the world is created and dignified by God provides insights for any objective moral order to articulate the code of ecological ethics. Thus, “in this perspective, Christians and all other believers have a specific role to play in proclaiming moral values and in educating people in ecological awareness, which is none other than responsibility towards self, towards others, towards creation.” No doubts, such ethics promotes and enhances mutual dependence and upholds the principle of universal solidarity, responsibility and social justice which are conditions necessary for a true culture of life that essentially includes the environment. Basically, John Paul II is an advocate of an ethics of environmental responsibility and solidarity with all creatures. As well, he is an advocate of restraint and reverence which is appealing to all works of life and faith.

Like John Paul II so are the traditional Igbo society who hold that the earth should not be subjected to arbitrary use. Such destructive actions are abominations. They can be deleterious since, for the Igbo, mother earth can be capricious even as she is benign. Similarly, John Paul II avers that any exercise of dominion that eventually destroys nature’s creative potentials is an

619 Ibid., #9.

offense against God’s original plan for creation. Therefore, humans who indulge in such actions are guilty of “‘provoking a rebellion on the part of nature,’ and they leave the natural world ‘more tyrannized than governed.’”

John Paull II agrees much with the Igbo traditional ecological consciousness and ethics. This calls for a renewed approach and culture towards creation stemming from a triple relationship to God, to self and to creation. In other words, creation should be viewed as a family in which every entity shares ties and are bonded together. Humanity is to ensure that this family, the common home, is well maintained and not abused. This informs Pope Francis’s summons on care for the common home metaphor.

3.3.3 Pope Francis’ ecological engagement: Care for the Common Home

Firstly, like his immediate predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, Pope Francis devotes great attention to the ecological problems facing the world and the need for the church to embrace ecological vocation and responsibility as part of her integral mission. Secondly, like other Papal encyclicals, Francis’ care for the common home leans on the magisterial teachings of his predecessors. However, much unlike them, uniquely and phenomenally, Francis includes the Catholic Social Teachings emerging from the global church and precisely the Latin American context, and arguably, capturing all indigenous and traditional peoples across the globe. By extension, the Igbo traditional heritage is envisioned and included in Pope Francis’ view.

Integrally, he parses out this rich tapestry of ecological virtues and vices through his unique spirituality and charisma as inspired by the life and teachings of St. Francis of Assisi who had a kinship vision of all creatures, communed with the Creator as well as with all creatures, beckoning

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621 CA. #37.
them to praise God with him like they were humans gifted with reasons. Hence, Francis’ choice topic “Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home,” in which he argues that the universe is a common good that belongs to all and is meant for all entities of the earth. “God,” Francis writes, “created the world for everyone,” the earth is a shared inheritance, and every entity ought to benefit from its proceeds. With this, Francis calls for a new way of thinking about the earth, a new of thinking about humanity which he argues is in dire need of ecological conversion. In other words, his message is about a renewed theological anthropology that centers on cultural movements away from obsessive habits of consumerism of all sorts which defile the common home with exploitation, pollution, and wastes. Remarkably, this pollution is not just environmental. It extends to “mental pollution” arising from excessive consumption of information in the digital age which often “has more to do with devices and displays than with other people and with nature.” This affects relationships, commodifies nature and creates apathy to the pains and groans of others, of the earth, the common home, and stifles harmony. Consumerism bears heavy and deleterious footprints on the common home. In essence, the core of Pope Francis’ message is that our common home is gradually, if not rapidly, becoming unfit to play host not just to human dwelling, most particularly the poorest nations of the earth, but also for many nonhuman creatures. This is a serious, earth threatening crisis that requires a new

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623 Pope Francis, Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015).

624 L.S., #23.

625 L.S., #47.
thought pattern about humanity and their actions towards God’s earth, our home. Clearly, for
Francis, ecological crisis is a “sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity,” as
well as a “summons to profound interior conversion.” However, Francis advises on the necessity
for a deeper search into the root causes, a move into “the ethical and spiritual roots of
environmental problems, which requires that we look for solutions not only in technology but in a
change of humanity, otherwise we would be dealing merely with symptoms.” As a result,
Francis calls for a renewed humanity, an ecological conversion. This is built on John Paul II’s
2003 pastoral letter to bishops and church leaders in which he argues that “There is a need for
ecological conversion, to which Bishops themselves can contribute by their teaching about the
correct relationship of human beings with nature.” It is only “a genuine conversion in Christ,”
says John Paull II in collaboration with Patriarch Bartholomew I, that “will enable us to change
the way we think and act” economically, technologically and in all ways that relate to the
environment. On the strength of this, therefore, Francis avers that it is basic in healing the earth
because “we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without
healing all fundamental human relationship.”

626 L.S., #119.
627 L.S., #217.
628 L.S., #9.
630 John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, *Common Declaration on
631 L.S., #119.
interfaith and interdisciplinary since ecological crisis is a reality that cuts across all disciplines and religious traditions, cultures, and the earth is a common home to all entities. Therefore, each in their own way is expected to contribute meaningfully for a tapestry of healing by making small and significant changes in lifestyle however difficult it is.

Change is not easy to come by because of the psychological attachments to the things of life that make us to want to crave more of and cling to them and the fear of giving up on them, perhaps for no just consequences other than inordinate attachment. For example, we consider the problem of chlorofluorocarbons (CFC) used in many spray cans in propellants, perfumes, repellants, insecticides, pesticides, lubricants, plastics, refrigeration, etc., It contributes to climate change and loss of biodiversity. Alluring as it is, to seek solution to this one specific problem that is almost common, “we are faced with a double challenge: one of personal conversion and change of lifestyle and one of social change. As difficult as it may be, we are called to precisely that.”

We must do it for the good of the common home, for posterity, for right relationships, to ‘bring God’ back to creation. Creation is not ours. So, we have no rights to destroy cosmic balance. This conviction requires sacrifice on everyone, which is important for effective healing. For healing is necessary for there to be balance, for restoration of the cosmic praise.

For Francis, the universe is grounded in God. It is therefore a gift hence, the theological thread of praise; “LAUDATO SI’, mi’ Signore” – “Praise be to you, my Lord.” In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.”

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632 Sister Margorie Keenan, Care for Creation: Human activity and the Environment, 20

633 LS., $1.
other words, the ability to praise God is not the exclusive reserve for humans. All creatures praise God in their unique ways. This right of cosmic praise should not be denied of any creature. It is the right to live, flourish and achieve full growth. It enables creatures to contribute to the beauty and sanctity of the universe or the cosmic harmony. As Francis notes, this is “the common point of arrival, which is God” and united together in Christ through whom all things in heaven and earth came to be and held together. Therefore, every creature, even the tiniest one is an incessant revelation of God. Like Francis so is Pope John Paul II who shares the view that “alongside revelation properly so-called, contained in Sacred Scripture, there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of the sun and the fall of night.” In a much compelling way, this is akin to the first eruption of a volcano, which indicates that in the interior of the world, in the remotest and most rural of the earth, in the deepest sea or even in the poorest of all, in all creatures, women and men, black, brown or white, with disability or not, etc., God’s fire is already burning bright, God is present and is aware of all the tiniest of creatures.

Indeed, all of creation reveal God in various ways. “The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God. … God has written a precious book, ‘whose letters are the multitude of created things present in the universe.’” Understanding this reality brings a sense of kinship, universal communion, a rainbow of colors made so by God without discrimination, supremacy nor inferiority, and a solidarity that lessens ecological stress, i.e., a moral obligation to work for the common good, which has a practical consequence regarding the promotion of sound and healthy

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634 LS., #83.
635 LS., #85.
636 LS., #84-85.
environment. This gives a clear picture of the harmony in nature, a constant source of wonder, of awe, a continuing revelation of God, a certain kind of art, namely God’s art designed and set forth in motion for the glory of God. This is the beauty that humans are called to contemplate and to harmonize with the rest of creation to sing the hymn of their own existence joyfully and to live in God’s love and hope, a democratic and sacred space.

Thus, humans are called to a generous obligation to care for the planet with the similar love, tenderness of God in the belief that all creatures share in the unending plenitude, fullness of God in our common home. This is the basis of ecological ethics, drawing the human mind and eyes to ecological realities that adopt the language of “fraternity and beauty” to intimately relate with all earth entities with reverence, care and restrain exploitation, consumerism, and supremacy in those who are “unable to set limits on their immediate needs.” This is in understanding that the strong ought to bear with the weak, not to abuse them. For we are not only tied to each other as members of the earth community but also, we have divine presence in us all.

In some many ways, Pope Francis ideas resonate with Igbo conception of the universe and the interconnectedness of all creatures that reflect the intimate union of the sacred and the secular. In the Igbo context, this finds expression in their sacramental nature of the universe, the faith that nature is alive; that God is present in the universe; that everything has a purpose and dynamically

637 Sister Margorie Keenan, Care for Creation, 20.

638 Elizabeth Johnson, Creation and the Cross, 193.

leaning towards God; “that everything is a revelation of God; and that although human beings are irreducible to a status of objects, they are not meant to dominate and abuse other creatures tyrannically lead [sic] to the acknowledgement of nature as a locus of God’s presence.” Understandably, the traditional Igbo did not allow irresponsible and unlimited exploitation of resources and human beings on the basis that nothing in the universe stands for itself. This instilled respect for the earth, a sense of commitment to care for the earth through which God feeds and sustains humans and in which every entity is rooted. Therefore, for the religious people, faith traditions, Christians or not, as Francis argues, it is a vocation which is in keeping with the tenets of their belief to respect the earth, to care for our common home. As with John Paul II and the Igbo traditional society, Pope Francis reiterates the triple interwoven relationship with God, the neighbor and with the Earth itself. This form of intimate relationship is very strong in the Igbo traditional ethics of life and relationship. It is part of the Igbo Omenala on which everything in Igbo land, religious and ethical, is based. It is part of the Igbo spirituality to show solidarity, concern for the welfare of others, to strive to maintain harmony and be in cosmic prayer or worship and relationship to God with all earth’s entities. In all these values and more are found the basis of Igbo ecological ethics which are well validated by Pope Francis. As a result, there is no justification for the Igbo Christians or anyone to abscond from, abdicate or shy away from stewardship of the earth. This shall be well discussed in sections 3.5 and 3.6 of this chapter. However, it might be interesting to know what the African Catholic Bishops conferences have said or taught about ecological issues in the continent.

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641 LS., #66.
3.3.4 African Catholic Bishops’ Conferences: Together with creation, Mother earth

African Catholic Bishops Conference, unlike most Catholic Bishops Conferences from other parts of the world,642 apparently, have not unitedly confronted ecological issues to come up with a theme as a guide. However, the absence of this on the continental level does not deny the regional and national discussions or efforts by some regional, national, or individual bishops.

On the continental level, some scholars have sharply criticized the African churches for paying little attention to environmental issues in comparison to other Bishops conferences of the world.643 Ken S. Gitau observes that “Some [high ranking] church leaders are already famous for their active participation in politics. However, participation in the struggle against environmental degradation seems either to have been ignored or accorded insignificant attention.”644 In Nigeria, particularly, Asoanya, like other scholars, observes that “concentration is rather limited to the basic duty of preaching and converting and saving human souls than caring about this passing world but very little is devoted to highlighting biblical insights on humanity and environment.”645 From his

642 For instance, in the United States of America, the USCBC have advanced so much ecological teachings. Comprehensive ecological teachings of this conference can be read in their social teachings published under the title, “Renewing the Earth,” which a typical example of their in-depth concern about the environment. This conference presented the earth as a sacramental universe, God’s tangible sign of love. As a result, it deserves human accountability before God. See United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on the Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching,” https://www.usccb.org/resources/renewing-earth (accessed September 28th, 2021).


field work experiences and questionnaires to the ordained and nonordained from African countries, Asoanya gathered that most African bishops pay more attention on spiritual, construction of gigantic church edifices or cathedrals, acquisition of land, etc., that environmental issues are mostly grouped among worldly things. He reasons that for them, “Since Christians are mere pilgrims on earth, emphasis therefore should be placed not on things of the world or natural but otherworldly, that is life beyond.”\textsuperscript{646} But is environmental ethics ought not to be an integral part of the church’s mission? This work has shown that stewardship of creation is an important activity of the church. As right as these scholars may be in their respective opinions about the slow pace of the churches in Africa towards ecological issues, it is worth mentioning the efforts of some Bishops of Africa in this regard.

Very recently, in February 2020, the Catholic bishops of West Africa who constitute membership of the Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa (RECOWA-CERAO) gathered in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, to deliberate on the ecological issues affecting the region. They came up with a theme “Together, let us work for the rights of communities and the environment.” With this, they called for a binding instrument to regulate the activities of the transnational corporations and individuals. They recognize that the contemporary Africans are fast losing sight of the sanctity of the earth contrary to the traditionally held belief. This is because humans have divorced themselves from the sense of oneness with the rest of creation for exploitative reasons and greed. Togetherness with the rest of creation, perhaps, will help to re-instill a sense of duty towards the environment in the contemporary Africans. Among other things, they denounced the issues of land grabbing and forced expropriation of lands belonging to individuals, communities, or farmers by herders for grazing purpose which has exposed the lands to all sorts of abuse. As a result, there has

\textsuperscript{646} Asonaya, 277.
been series of clashes, all sort of ecological degradation, leading to loss of cultural and ancestral heritage, famine, displacement, exodus, migration, unemployment, loss of human lives and biodiversity, etc. In line with Pope Francis’ Laudato Si’, and drawing from the traditional worldviews, the regional conference of West African Catholic bishops reaffirms their belief in sanctity of the earth. It is a gift from God and as a result, humans must be responsible in dealing with the earth. Accordingly,

In the spirit of *Laudato Si’* and, alongside the peoples of Africa, we reaffirm our commitment to protect the rights of these peoples, to respect their values, their traditions, their customs and cultures. We want to work for the preservation of the earth, forests, rivers and all that lives and flourishes in these spaces considered in Africa, not only as resources to be exploited in the single direction of profit, but rather as sacred spaces, source of life, wisdom, balance.  

The conference validates and affirms the fact that nature is not mere matter. It is sacred. It gives a working theology of the environment as God’s creation and gift, “our common house” and it requires “a change of lifestyle” to appreciate this beautiful gift of God with various life forms. Perhaps, the bishops will need to fall back more to the traditional compenetrating worldview that abhors any clear-cut dichotomy between the profane and the sacred, the sacramental nature of the African universe, the sense of rootedness of everyone, everything, in the earth to drive home their environmental teachings to the contemporary minds. However, this broad teaching on the regional level is expected to be implemented in the national and local levels of the church.

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648 Ibid. The bishops joined hands with Pope Francis in calling for interdisciplinary collaboration in protecting our common home.
However, prior to the West African regional Catholic Bishops conference, the Ghanaian Episcopal conference have championed the course of environmental protection in their nation. Drawing from the African experience of the earth, the episcopal conference came up with an image of “Mother” as the best concept that suits the environment. Emphasizing her sustaining role, they assert that “She needs to be protected from abusers to enable her continually play this role effectively,” and as a matter of urgency, “The church ... has a responsibility towards the environment in Africa.”

These bishops are of the view that the African mythology, the Bible, and other sources are very clear on the issue of creation. For these bishops, and rightly, creation is not a random act or the result of an accident. Rather, it is a well thought and carefully executed plan from a divine being. Creation is not the initiative of humans. Humans are part of creation like other nonhumans. Being at the center of creation is a privilege, not a right to abuse it. This conference sends strong message with the theme, Mother, as a hallowed reality that is so profound and touching. Therefore, humans and nonhumans are all children of mother earth and as a result, creatures are kins. This means that the filial love and concern for family members is expected to be the same towards nonhuman creatures. Abuse of the earth is invariably an abuse of a family member, a disrespect to motherhood. If one cannot help the earth, at least let them not hurt her. Creation is, thus, purposeful and needs to be accorded the peace it deserves. Land grabbing and other environmentally unfriendly actions, by this fact, are condemned as against nature, against the traditional ethics of relationship that seeks the good of others and harmony.

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649 Instrumentum Laboris, The First Synod of the Diocese of Wa (Upper West of Ghana); Let Evangelization Shine Forth in a Renewed Life of Faith, 1998, 74.

650 Ibid.
Closer to Nigeria, while it can be argued that the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, CBCN, is a member of the RECOWA-CERAO noted above, apparently, there has not been a unique conference specifically devoted to fashioning out a theological theme for environmental engagement. However, in different communiques of the CBCN, mentions have been made of the deplorable state of the environment in Nigeria. Terse as the references are in the various communiques, the CBCN acknowledges with gratitude that Nigeria is blessed with a lot of mineral resources, rich vegetation, mild climate, abundance of water, etc. In a way, they acknowledge the divine presence in the environment and as such it is a gift. They note with dismay the fact that “Our fertile land and environment are being severely wounded. Rivers and streams are polluted, fish die, forests are despoiled, desertification spreads south. Refuse litters our streets because waste disposal services are practically non-existent. Oil spills and gas flares pollute and poison the environment in the Delta Region.” In the documents, there is no solution proposed to address the wounds on the environment. Ordinarily, one expects to see a sense of ownership, admission of guilt on various areas that have collectively and individually wounded the sacred earth, and critically a profoundly theological framework as model to drive home the deplorable nature of the environment to people across the nation. It was more like identifying a problem without proposing an ethical, spiritual, etc., solution but only pushed it to the government that seems derelict to handle the environmental issues affecting the nation.

However, on an individual basis, recently, Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, who doubles as the metropolitan see of Abuja and the president of the CBCN, allies with Pope Francis’ Laudato


652 Ibid., 432.
SI’ in the call for creation care. Kaigama comes up with a theme “Care for our common home” to challenge everyone to embrace an environmental vocation and mission to save the environment from further deteriorations. For him, “nature has been wounded and the church must be part of its healing.”653 As a part of the solution, Kaigama calls for a change in lifestyle, adoption of renewable energy, avoidance of wastes, embracing ecological education in churches, schools, homes, etc., and ecological spirituality, etc., to improve the environmental life. To this effect, dioceses, parishes, families, schools, universities, hospitals, religious institutions, farmers, etc., have a vision of the earth as a delicate common home that needs everyone’s care albeit small ways as both a civic and sacred duty to protect.

As much as credit should be given to Kaigama for his bold step, there is an apparent lack of reference to the traditional African values as a springboard of a local solution to local problems. As it has been noted, environmental protection is a way of life to the traditional African people. This is informed by their religious universe. To maintain harmony was important hence the traditional people devised measures to arrest excesses and to keep the environment clean and healthy. The vision of God was very active and present in nature. This value helped to instill a sense of mutual relationship and communion between humans and nonhumans in the understanding that everything is alive, inspirted, and purposeful. People, therefore, tried to maintain harmonious relationship with God and the deities, among themselves and with nonhumans. Without a recourse to some of these traditional values that are ecologically friendly and salutary, the ground for ecological mission seemingly remains shaky and can easily be discarded tomorrow with another stronger ideology thought to be fashionable. The idea of creation

as a sacrament needs to be constantly and profoundly touted. This will make the Christian ecological engagement stronger, more intentional, purposeful and raise up committed environmental activists among the celebrants and recipients of the church’s sacraments to appreciate nature as sacrament, a gift that requires informed stewardship. Arguably, this creates a deeper and intimate bond between humans and their environment, especially as Catholics whose sacramental sources come from nature’s gifts. This thought is continued in the next section.

3.4 The Sacramental Earth: Igbo and Christian commonality

The Igbo traditional and Christian perspectives share some commonality in the belief that the earth is a sheer gift of God. It is a common view that the earth is an expression and extension of God’s benevolence, a sacred place of encounter and mutual interactions of beings and with God. Vitally, it is the window of, as well as the door to God’s presence.⁶⁵⁴ The earth is profoundly sacramental. It helps us “to discover God in all things,” and it is so since “the universe unfolds God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face.”⁶⁵⁵ This means that the earth’s natural goods are not mere instruments for the well-being of humans. Essentially, they are in some ways carriers of divine presence. They are purposeful and reveal the goodness of the Creator. By virtue of this, the dignity of the earth is asserted. Properly, humans are to relate with and make responsible use of the earth’s fruits constructively in the understanding that they are signs of God’s grace and presence, fellow creatures who share and enjoy divine care and protection. Any destruction,

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⁶⁵⁴ Cf. Rev. 5:6; Zech. 3:9; 4:7-9. The stone with seven eyes is Christ, the living stone, the first born of creation. He takes away the sins of the world and unites all things in himself.

⁶⁵⁵ L.S., #233.
exploitation, or undue commodification of the earth amounts to a violation and desecration of it. It is an abuse of the sacred trust reposed on humans by God as stewards of the earth. For the Igbo, it is abomination, and sacrilege, or sin in the Christian parlance.

Thus, John Paul II and Pope Francis argue that the ecological crisis is, at its core, a deeply moral issue. The popes note that the widespread exploitation and destruction of the environment is raising awareness and is forcing people across the globe to come to terms with the fact that we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past. Hence, a new ecological awareness is beginning to emerge that the ecological crisis is a moral issue. While this constitutes a new awakening in the Church, i.e., ecological crisis as a moral issue, for the Igbo, it has been an integral part of Omenala (tradition) as aru (abomination) to destroy the created order, to exploit or pollute the environment in any way. For “any action that contravenes what the land forbids is seen as a desecration of the land.” Whichever way, there is a need for cleaning or reconciliation.

Similarly, the Scriptures attest to the beautiful themes on ecological ethics in connection with the sanctity of the earth. Crucially, it presents God as the owner of the whole cosmos- the heaven, land, and seas, all peoples. Again, it shows that God cares for the earth and that the earth was created for God’s pleasure. This belief in God’s ownership of the earth informs a deep


659 See Deuteronomy 11:12.

660 Revelations 4:11. See also Psalm 69:34.
care and reverence of the earth among the Igbo. Since, the earth is a gift to humans, they are to show great responsibility towards its integrity, never to subject it to futility and abuse. For the Igbo, the earth is delicate and needs to be handled with utmost care and attention to not violate its delicacy and sanctity for it is not ours but God’s gifts.

The identification of God’s interest on the earth is essential for it enables a strong Biblical concern for the environment and thus compels humans to respect and care for the earth, the beauty of God’s creation. In the Igbo traditional life, similar concern for the environment is found. Greatly, sacred view of the earth, as has been seen in this work among the Igbo, gives it authority over the land. As the feminine aspect of God, the earth is reposed with the authority of land ethics and all the necessary rituals that are for the health and protection of it and all that dwells in it.

The rituals mediate grace, which is seen in the bounty of the earth, and in turn, they are offered to God in thanksgiving to and appreciation of God’s benevolence. In essence, this mindset is reflected in the Christian liturgy thus, “Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life....” These rituals of thanksgiving for the gifts of the earth’s fruits are one of the ways of maintaining and communicating with God and the invisible forces that are believed to play great roles in life and health of the earth and human existence. This ritual organization, so much common among the Igbo cultural life, shows the great attention given to life, i.e., the renewal of life, sanctifying life, reviving life for both human beings,

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animals, plants, and other entities in the universe. They are rituals of tranquility and peace which are necessary for cosmic balance and the ontological equilibrium.663

Thus, the experience of God in and through the earth does not only produce moral passion to protect and love the earth, also it is a reminder that humans are integral part of the web of life and kin to all creatures.664 As a result, the assumption by some Igbo Christians that the earth is a reservoir of raw materials is countered. Instead, the world is to be seen as a sacred place of divine mystery and connections and source of wonder. Elizabeth Johnson puts it that, “The life-giving Spirit of God, Dominus et Vivificantis, encircles, pervades, and energizes the world, gifting it with its own intrinsic, self-organizing powers that have led to magnificence beyond our imaginations, including our own human race.”665 This understanding, akin to the Igbo cosmovision and relationship with the world, calls to mind the complexity of the universe and the cosmic process that shape it. It is a cause to appreciate all that the earth is home to however infinitesimal, as purposeful and gifts, hence the sense of the interconnectedness of all life forms. For Johnson, all this reality gives rise to the sense that the world is a wonder that should compel humans to take off their shoes as they stand on sacred ground. It “provides a new entry into an ancient form of contemplation along with a fresh ethical consequence, namely, acts of prophetic witness and repair of the world.”666 In other words, amidst the alarming ecological crisis, the sense of the wonder of

663 Simeon O. Eboh, African Communalism, 104.

664 The sacraments create a bond that obliges the recipients to care for each other and the world. This parallels the Igbo ethics of Onye aghala nwanne ya, (kinship/interconnectedness) to make sacrifice to secure the common good. We shall come to this in the next section.


666 Johnson, 85.
the natural world demands prophetic witness from the Christian community since it is an integral part of their vocation to embrace the world as a sacrament of God’s grace and presence.\textsuperscript{667} The Igbo traditional cosmovision agrees with Johnson. The experience of the world as a wonder is ancient and customary to the Igbo spiritual heritage. They reverenced natural phenomena as agents of divine mysteries. It is an experience that cuts across African societies who live in a religious universe for whom the universe is not just only an imprint but also the reflection of God which commands wonder and awe.\textsuperscript{668} This experience helps to protect the environment from human abuse and invasion. The enactment of taboos protects the land directly while some do so indirectly by preserving the things that contribute to the beauty of the earth such as plants, seas, mountains, and animals. These creatures bring to the limelight the beauty and glory of the earth and as result, people establish close social and spiritual connections with nature and thereby define the physical world in social terms without losing sight of the spiritual energy at work in it.\textsuperscript{669} Given this, all species of life, land areas, waterbodies, the regimes of air are approached with the anticipation that God is self-revealing and communicating through them. Nothing about them is tasted or perceived without reference to God whose bounty is shown in the plethora of biodiversity. As the United States Catholic Bishops put it, “The diversity of life manifests God’s glory. Every creature shares a bit of the divine beauty.”\textsuperscript{670} Additionally, the bishops argue that every creature has intrinsic or

\textsuperscript{667} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{668} See John S. Mbiti, \textit{African Religions and Philosophy}, 48.

\textsuperscript{669} Apollos O. Nwauwa and Ogechi E. Anyanwu, eds., \textit{Culture, Precepts, and Social Change in Southeastern Nigeria}, 69.

independent value that must be respected and protected. Though the worship of God is often expressed in terms of following established dogma and rituals, the bishops argue that ecological responsibility is another way of reverencing the Creator.  

Elizabeth Johnson expresses the bishops words clearly, arguing that when we declare ‘‘Heaven and Earth are filled with the glory of God,’ we sacralize nature, for the phrase, ‘glory of God’ signifies that the incomprehensible holy mystery of God indwells the natural and human world as source, sustaining power, and the goal of the universe, enlivening and loving it into liberating communion.” While this is agreeable to the Igbo, however, they acknowledge the sacredness already in nature. And through rituals, they uphold, memorialize and further it to generations. Like the United States bishops, the Igbo believe that maintaining the cosmic and ontological equilibrium, via ecologically friendly rituals and ethics, is a great way of reverencing the Creator whose presence pervades the earth.

Therefore, the sacramental earth needs to be liberated from human desecration. This should be the goal of the church in Igbo land to restore the holistic view of the world as both a justice issue and duty care. It implies a reinvention and or a modification of their traditional cosmology of interconnectedness and sense of the sacred universe as a tool to address the spate of desecration of the environment in the contemporary Igbo communities. The glorification of God is not to be done in abstract. It has much to do with the health and flourishing of the earth, the natural environment. This is in understanding that the earth is both a revelation and sacrament of God. “Revelation, because the invisible grandeur of God can be glimpsed and known experientially in the splendor of the universe, its balance, complexity, creativity, diversity, fruitfulness; and

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671 Ibid.

672 Elizabeth Johnson, “Heaven and Earth are Filled with Your Glory,” 91.
sacrament, because the mystery of the divine, self-giving presence is really mediated through the richness of the heavens and earth. Participating in the glory of God, our whole planet is a beautiful showing forth of divine goodness and generosity.” Arguably, the view of creation as sacramental reveals more of God’s invisible presence and grace to the natural world through which humans receive God’s bounty. This sacred contemplation of God’s creative Spirit in nature ought to lead humans into appreciating God’s presence in the cosmos. Invariably, it alerts and conscientizes them of the sins of ecocide, biocide, and genocide, the dangers of pollution and desertification that are threatening the earth community in Igbo land. This consciousness leads to a wider recognition of both individual and collective responsibilities not only to the Creator and Upholder of the earth, but to each other and to all life forms and the earth. Therefore, the human community can take note of the inherent goodness, value, elegance, the dignity of creation and respect and relate with it for what it is and represents. In this prism, it is easy for people to recognize that the earth is a sacred reality, a common good, a shared space as well as the source of life, providing goods and sustenance to all creatures. It is not solely for human satisfaction to the detriment of other entities which the earth is home to. All earth’s entities have the right to live and bloom and achieve their God-given potentials without undue interference and violation from human activities.

3.5 Theological Values for Constructing an Igbo Christian Ecological Ethics

The preceding section explored the Church’s teachings on ecological ethics. They espoused the dignity of creation and call for informed stewardship of creation, respectful relationship with every life form because of the divine presence in creation. “Their leitmotif is that care for the environment is not only one of the most urgent social questions of today but also one which has

673 Johnson, 93.
deep moral and religious roots.” In essence, this integrates the social together with the moral and religious as against any form of dichotomy that pitch the spiritual against the physical.

The succeeding section, drawing from chapter two, especially 2.6, concentrates mainly on some Igbo traditional, theological, values that serve as models for constructing ecological ethics fitting for the Igbo Christians. The Igbo traditional society, like other African societies, is a value ridden and oriented culture. Apparently, everything is a value in its own way and has a purpose and is meant to contribute to the growth of another. Given the wholistic nature of the Igbo world, everything is linked to another so that it is hard to talk about one thing without reference to another. In the process, it sounds a bit repetitive. Virtually, everything said in chapter two are values and have an integral connection to the preservation and conservation of the earth. However, for precision, this section has chosen to itemize some values as building blocks for constructing an ecological ethics that can speak tellingly to the Igbo Christians. In some ways, they resonate with Christianity. It amounts to a double heritage for the Igbo, making them well equipped to contribute meaningfully to ecological preservation without folding their arms, depending mostly on external help. Therefore, there is a need for the Igbo to be integrally home, to toe the home narrative, to think creatively homeward for proper consolidation in all aspects of life.

3.5.1 Gleaning from Traditional Ethos: Thinking homeward, recalling the past with nostalgia

Musically, one of the current soulful lyrics among the Igbo today is, “Ndilgbo, lotabanu ulo. Ukwu no anyi na mba adighi anyi mma, loruonu ulo,” i.e., come back home, the Igbo. Our

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The psychology of this lyric is deep. It is very wistful of the traditional Igbo values that have been bastardized due to misinformed narratives and quest for anything foreign to the detriment of traditional, cultural values. There is a need to do some in-ward looking for a holistic survival of the modern Igbo degenerating into series of crises. The lyric, as soulful and wistful it is, has both social, moral, and religious connotations, calling for a mutual collaboration of Igbo leaders of thoughts, theologians, clerics, politicians, businesspersons, the academics, etc., to summon courage for round table discussions on inward looking for a stable future for the Igbo. More ecologically, it calls for the review of what has happened in the Igbo land and asks for a journey into the traditionally cherished values that can solve the local problems.

Traditionally, the Igbo have a saying that “Nku di na Mba na-eghere Mba nri” i.e., the firewood of a place cooks the people’s meal. This adage offers insights on how local solutions to ecological issues should be sourced given that every community has its unique ways of living meaningfully in their local environment. However, this does not mean that local communities are to shun external supports needed to tackle their problems. Rather, it is an incentive aimed at rousing up and boosting people’s creativity, self-reliance and to value what is positively local to them without copiously depending solely on foreign aid for every solution to their problems.

Often, foreign aid becomes dead aid that accentuates dependency syndrome, consumerism, vicious circle of poverty and corruption, stifling creativity, and local empowerment to problem resolutions. As John M. Waliggo rightly notes, “One of the root causes of the many anti-life

forces, systems, and problems in Black Africa has been our failure to embark on the movement of re-awakening our own moral and religious values and to construct the future on them. No sane society chooses to build its future on foreign cultures, values, or systems.”677 In other words, “Every society is obliged to search deep in its own history, culture, religion, and morality in order to discover the values upon which its development and liberation, its civilization, and its identity should be based.”678 This even comes in the wake of the recognition of the values embedded in the traditional cultures as veritable tools for arresting ecological crisis. Asoanya observes that “…very recently, …, western cultural anthropologists, environmentalist, ecologists, social scientists, missionaries, spiritual philosophers, legal experts, educators and politicians have begun to consider the meaning of nature from the perspective of the indigenous peoples, rather than from their own exclusivists’ understanding.”679 This sounds like the dawn of a new reality for some people but it is actually an affirmation of what has been there in the Igbo society from the dawn of creation. It justifies the Igbo deeply religious perspective of nature, seen as a sacred reality.

The traditional Igbo person feels the nearness of God in their environment, that nature is not mere matter. This was so much talked about in chapter two of this work. The reality of the God-indwelt universe was so pervasive. It factors into the way the Igbo view and relate with the


678 Ibid.

679 Anthony Asoanya, The Ecological Crisis in Africa, 50. Also, Pope Francis calls for respect of indigenous cultures. They do not commodify nature. They relate to and treat land as sacred. In them is found values to combat the crisis facing the word ecologically. See LS., #146.
universe. It can be said that it was a strong ethos as well as liturgy, a lifestyle, protecting the fauna and flora and helping to keep harmony. Arguably, environmental preservation is a way of life to an average traditional Igbo. Through informal education rooted in the quotidian life and melioristic practices, the basic traditional skills and knowledge to cope with the environment are handed to generations. Age grade systems and various agnatic groups, masquerade cults, all helped in maintaining environmental sanitation and integrity of the earth, “opening up natural water channels as well as removing obstructions along water ways. The organ through which major projects are executed in Igbo land is through the age grade.”

This traditional ethos checked environmental degradation. Embarking on them was considered a civic as well as sacred duty to care for the earth.

In chapter one of this work, it was noted how this traditional ethos were mischaracterized and demonized. The effects continue to linger in all aspects of Igbo life, especially when a people’s culture was tagged “an empty vessel, requiring education in the spheres of religion and civilization in order to be rendered truly human.” Some Igbo, or African scholars as well as most Christians accepted this mischaracterization of African values as animistic, primitive, and championed it. This superior culture led to a spate of ecological misery likewise economic crises. The result of


this exercise was internalized oppression, the collapse of most traditional values that kept the
society in peace and balance, the fauna and flora flourishing without undue human interference.

Thus, this presents a task of how to unlearn what was learnt and to relearn the reality that
seem misinterpreted, and even championed by the locals as demonic, especially as international
bodies of various disciplines, including theologians, as noted above, are reconsidering the meaning
of nature from the view of the indigenous peoples, rather than from their own exclusivists’
perspective. This is one of the criticisms Christians have continued to face in Africa, not just in
Igbo land. Denigrating and demonizing the sacred grooves and cultural practices that helped to
protect the environment and conserve biodiversity remain an ugly past that haunts the Christian
missionaries which the present-day church wrestles to correct. It is something, which, as some
critics argue, “Christians should be embarrassed for and at the same time should be considered as
absurd.”683 How do the contemporary Igbo who seem deracinated traditionally come home to
rebuild? And where will they begin? To what extent can the singing of the local lyric, “*ukwu no
anyi na mba adighi anyi mma …*” (our penchant for anything foreign has not done us any good),
go to changing the mind frame of all who sing it? And can the vestiges of the firewood of a place
still cook the food in the place given the overt quest for anything foreign and consumerism in most
contemporary Igbo? Arguably, the lyric calls for detoxification. For many people, it is part of the
ongoing summon for decolonization for a proper repositioning to chart ways forwards. Hence, the
need for decolonization of the Igbo minds, a healing of memory for the conscious Igbo self and
mind that will be proud of their cultural and religious heritage to emerge without which
environmental issues like other crises facing the contemporary Igbo life will continue unabated.

683 Ibid.
3.5.2 Decolonization Task

Decolonization is not an easy task. It is a herculean task to learn to unlearn and relearn their true reality for people with a known and experienced reality of colonization, which affected almost every fabric of their life and thus are made to see whatever is cultural to them as inferior, or, sometimes, demonic. The tendency for such people to ignorantly resist any decolonizing agenda is there. They are likely to prefer living with the status quo to reclaiming some vestiges of their past however rich they are, especially, given that they have been psychologically and culturally deracinated. It needs a lot of inputs, time, courage, and in-depth self-knowledge, i.e., a people’s historical identity, their humanity and worldviews, their traditional moral consciousness that shaped humane living in their environment. This is necessary to avoid repeating “the violence which accompanied colonization and evangelization” of Africa. Regardless of the difficulty, decolonization is a task worth doing to rebuild a people’s identity and patriotism.

To deconstruct or decolonize this imposed worldview, Josiah U. Young, quoting Amilcar Cabral, calls for “a re-Africanization procedure” that means a process by which the alienated African elites should undergo to divest themselves of the bourgeois cultures of the colonizers since the application of such a culture proved to be counterproductive regarding the economic and ecological situations of Africa. This entails a spiritual rebirth or reconversion to the grassroots where the African culture is real and dynamic, as well as academic, political, social and or economic, and linguistic rebirth or emancipation. It is about cultural renaissance, resistance, self-determination, survival, healing, empowerment, and reclamation of Indigenous voice. This finds

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684 Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church*, 32.

expression in what Pope Francis calls “cultural ecology,” which calls for “greater attention to local cultures when studying environmental problems, favouring a dialogue between scientific-technical language and the language of the people.”686 In other words, local ideas, manpower, values, moral or religious consciousness, etc., of the indigenous people should not be supplanted.

Therefore, there is a need for critical thinking and research that entail “reinterpreting the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, that is, seeing it differently by questioning its knowledge/power constructions”687 and subverting the hegemonizing strongholds of the imperialist colonizers. It addresses the educational methods that privileges Western worldview and epistemological approach over the Africa/Igbo belief and knowledge systems. For instance, Cabral rightly observes that the African culture is nourished by the organic, living reality of the notion of bondedness against the sharp demarcation between the sacred and the secular of the West. Similarly, George J. S. Dei notes that there is a strong conception in Africa that all entities of the universe, both humans and fate that shapes every life on earth, are spiritual while the Western Scientism is indifferent and dismissive of this source of knowledge.688 Decolonizing education must seek ways of readjusting and re-orienting Africans/Igbo scholars, clergy, etc., to recognize that intuitions and emotions are some culturally effective means of gaining knowledge. The temptation here is the belief that Cabral’s views on re-Africanization process would redirect attention to the Igbo cultural-religious roots and help in unearthing the Igbo ecological ethics which are anchored on Igbo traditional environmental knowledge. No doubts, some Igbo

686 LS., #143.


traditional lifestyle and attitude to the environment can offer valuable lessons to the contemporary Igbo society in managing the natural resources of the earth.

However, this is not to pretend that everything the traditional Igbo society espoused is ecologically friendly and salutary without any need for some modifications. What is advocated for is not, therefore, cultural romanticism. Such might sound anachronistic and unrealistic. There is a need for a courageous truth telling to sharpen and reshape a people’s cultural life. It is not taking everything hook, line, and sinker without critical scrutiny. It entails a careful conversation on our enduring historical realities that make community building and consciousness possible, the pillars on which ecological values rested in the traditional Igbo society. Therefore, the emphasis here is on the Igbo community and communality with nature and their respect for the divine presence in nature. This is a strong value. Arguably, it could form a strong theological platform for ecological vocation and engagement with the Catholic church and, perhaps, other stakeholders in Igbo land to fight against ecological pollution and dereliction that is fast sweeping across the Igbo contemporary society without folding arms, awaiting foreign aid or intervention or incentives from the government. The attitude of waiting for the government for the execution of every project in the land is foreign to the Igbo society. However, this is not a counsel to the government to be derelict towards the needs of its citizenry. The traditional Igbo society takes pride in protecting and building what is theirs even to national excellence and envy. Such had been the case with environmental issues. There had been melioristic practices that helped to solve any environmental issues for the safety of the community. Environmental protection and cleanup are not a favor to the government or the society. The Igbo proverbially say, “a slippery ground does not know a king.” The ecological heat is on everyone without exemption. A decolonized mind can think straight and inwardly into the cultural values that helped to put things in check in their contexts.
and reconnect with them wholistically. One of such values, as noted, is the notion of bondedness and harmony in nature. This local ethics, which is informed by the sacramental view of nature, is a strong tool for boosting local knowledge and protection of the environment.

Ecological crisis is first and foremost a local crisis before being global. Its solution must be sourced locally first before engaging foreign hands for help. However, before proffering solutions, there is a need to educate and re-educate people on what ecological crisis means and its devastating implications to both the present and future contexts. In this case, the traditional environment knowledge is an advantage for the Igbo whose traditional worldview emphasizes on organic relational ethics, the sanctity of creation, a commodious, democratic space for all creatures to thrive to achieve their purposes in life. This knowledge is essential to revamp in the contemporary Igbo, most of whom tend to fare without any form of ecological, environmental consciousness for various reasons, on the need to value and live harmoniously with nature, engage in environmental activities that will boost local agronomy, consumption of locally made goods, etc., that promote a sense of cultural identity, pride, and commitment to protect the local environment from degradation. Decolonization brings out a sense of identity, pride, ownership, and commitment in people to stand up to what is truly identifiable with them and creatively manage their crisis with their local resources before scouting for external resources. One of such values that characterizes the Igbo traditional society is the care ethics. Arguably, it can turn things around for good ecologically in the society. It is one of the common beliefs and practices to the traditional Igbo society and the Christian faith. It is, therefore, the subject of the next section.

3.5.3 Culture Care, a part of Faith expression

Traditionally, care ethics is deeply ingrained in any average Igbo person. This starts early in life where, as kids, children are introduced to tending of flocks or animal tenancy, husbanding,
gardening, hard work and sustenance, and some domestic chores that are environmentally salutary.\(^{689}\) This has a deep spiritual, social, psychological as well as economic implications in the life of the Igbo. The ability or tendency to tend to one’s assignment carefully leads to commitment to care for another aspect of life, the society, even church affairs, locally called “Oru mission,” i.e., mission work, which is strictly environmental sanitation on the church premises, interior décor and hygiene of the church edifices, planting, trimming, and pruning of trees and flowers, etc., to maintain some groves and floriate the church surroundings. This gives an incredible aesthetics, an outward manifestation of the inner beauty in a people’s culture, shining magnificently on the greens in the place.

In a religious universe like the Igbo, it is a form of faith expression too since everything is interconnected. In this way, environmental duties are conscientiously done because they are pleasing and noble both to God, the deities and to humans in fulfillment of one’s stewardship of creation to keep the kinship in nature healthy. As often as they are done, faith is expressed however silently, in the understanding that nature is sacred, graced and owned by and revelatory of God. In a Christian parlance, this is akin to the Pauline instruction, admonishing that every action be done in the name of the Lord Jesus for the glory of God.\(^{690}\) Arguably, this is an integral part of the reason the Igbo engage in environmental care. It is faith put in action. For Pope Francis, it is singing the “Gospel of Creation,” which, inspired by “faith convictions can offer Christians, and some other believers as well, ample motivation to care for nature.”\(^{691}\) Agreeably, Francis advises that “If the simple fact of being human move people to care for the environment of which they are part,

\(^{689}\) For details, see Victor C. Uchendu, *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*, 22- 30.

\(^{690}\) Cf. Colossians 3:17, 23.

\(^{691}\) LS., #64.
Christians in their turn ‘realize that nature and the Creator, are essential part of their faith.’”

This is already the traditional practice in the Igbo culture. It is, thus, be a compelling model for constructing an Igbo Christian ecological ethics to arrest ecological crisis and keep harmony intact.

This goes to show not only that creation is linked to and upheld by God. Also, it sets a tone for a theology of Igbo Christian stewardship of the earth, a gratitude to God for the gift of nature. Care ethics, for the Igbo, is an expression of gratitude. Hence, the proverbial saying, “Eme ma a onye akidi, ya agwota ozo, i.e., appreciation of favors received is a condition for more and more favors. In other words, care culture attracts more blessings from God, mother earth and the ancestors who are the custodians of the community. That God cares for creation is the truth well proclaimed, accepted, and believed by the Igbo. Also, it makes a demand on the Igbo, especially to the young people, to counteract the seeming dereliction creeping in among them, which is drastically affecting the environment and faith. If God cares for the lilies in the field and the birds of the earth same as God cares for humans with the provision of rains and food, etc., why would humans not follow in the same way to care for their environment from which they are nourished and relate to God and others? When, therefore, the Igbo exercise such duties, it is a form of appreciation to Chukwu, (God), Ala (Mother Earth), ndiichie, (ancestors). Such an ethics of care is both Biblical and traditional as rooted in the Igbo religious worldview. It is both a command to obey God’s will to care for earth for it is a channel of God’s grace, benevolence to humanity and a revelation of God’s beauty and glory.

692 Ibid.

693 LS., #66 See also Genesis 2:15.
Consistent in this work is the view that the stewardship of the earth is one of God’s commands to humans. For the Igbo, it is an act of worship and communion to care for the earth. Hence, Ken S. Gitau observes that “African Christians need also to worship Christ in cosmic terms. If this is done, God’s plan of incarnating himself in Christ so that humanity may have life and have it more abundantly will become a reality.” Arguably, insofar as the incarnation is exclusively a Christian belief and unique in its way, the Igbo compenetrating worldviews could provide a platform for the Igbo Christians in appreciating Christ in whom everything in heaven and earth are united and redeemed. The environment is an integral part of the incarnation and redemptive work of Christ. It is included in God’s plan so that the environment cannot be exploited or treated with dereliction. It is as important as the humans who depend on it for survival and integral worship. Ethics of care therefore needs to be continuously resounded in both pastoral and theological parlances. Since theology does not operate in a vacuum nor does it only center on humans exclusively, it becomes imperative to assert that it must embrace ecological issues, which need care culture to address. However, it is not a theology that centers on dominion with its aggressive attitude towards nonhuman creatures but a communion theology that empowers people and communities to relate in familial ways with creation, just as children are taught to relate and tend their pets or some animals or trees to fruition in their care in most Igbo families. Such will conserve a balanced utilization of natural resources and enhance the quality of life for all. Essentially, it must be a theology that will serve as a tool to analyze the religious, socio-political, and economic state of the society’s problems and help create both religious and political conditions that will make ecological responsibility possible. Care culture, which is already a tradition in

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695 Ibid., 325.
the Igbo society serves as value to fall to for such integral solution to the crisis of the environment. This is necessary for the continuous unity of life in the society- church and the environment. This argument is continued in the succeeding section.

3.5.4 Unity of Life

Basic to the Igbo traditional life is the unity of all things, a harmonious universe of persons, communities, the natural phenomena, and the spiritual world. Christianity is not opposed to this value. It finds expression in Christ who is the head of all things and in whom all things are united. Affirmation of Christ in this way is an assertion of life, abundance of life to all things without discrimination. Pope Francis reaffirms this cosmic unity of life in which every entity shares. For him, “There must be harmony between people, men and women, and the environment. We are not enemies; we are not indifferent. We are part of this cosmic harmony” of life.

Harmony is necessary for the well-being of life. Every entity of the earth has the right to live and harmoniously thrive in life-affirming environments. Hence, integral health of the earth is vitally important. As Pope Francis puts it, “Everything is connected, and as a family of nations, we must have a common concern: to see that the environment is cleaner, purer and preserved. And to take care of nature so that it takes care of us.” This principle of reciprocity or hospitality is rooted in strong love for the earth that plays host to humanity. The health of nature translates into

696 Cf. Colossians 1:16-17.


698 Ibid.
the health of all earthlings. It is a shing examples of lively faith in Christ in whom all creatures are united as a family and are nurtured and nourished integrally. This awareness promotes life.

Essentially, for the Igbo, life is the highest value, a special gift of the Creator, the Supreme Being who gives life because God is full of life.699 Knitted to the fullness of life, the Igbo see life as green, ndu, and as a result, life is meant to continually endure. George Ehusani puts it that “life is an eternal stream,” which is meant to be enjoyed and passed on so that anything, anyone incapable of passing, sustaining, and maintaining this precious gift is a curse on the community of life.700 In other words, for the Igbo, life flows. It is a motion, a curative energy manifested in “the continuity of our own becoming, our time, our duration. This curative energy, this vital impetus is organized and protected against the forces of chaos and destruction.”701 In their traditional prayers, the Igbo pray for abundance of life for animate and inanimate things, human and nonhumans. Unapologetically, the Igbo are pro-life which is translated in their relationship with natural phenomena. Nwala puts it better that relationship and unity among the Igbo is best described as “life confronting life” such that “to the traditional Igbo man, objects in nature confront him… as ‘Thou’ as a live presence that reveal itself and are expressed emotionally in a dynamic reciprocal relationship.”702 Thus, this personal attitude to things, feelings of empathy, personification of abstract qualities and natural phenomena instills in the Igbo deep reverence for all life forms, not to harm life arbitrarily. Any action that opposes life is abominable. Equally, the Catholic church

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is pro-life, which, for Pope Francis is not limited to the human life but also to the environment necessary for the thriving of the human life. Thus, both human and natural lives are of utmost importance. The crisis in one affects the other. It has been established in this work that ecological crisis is not only a flora and fauna issue, but also a people crisis. This unity of life sets a strong platform for both fashioning out model for Igbo Christian ecological ethics. The Gospel and ethics of life trump over any degradation of life. This makes much sense to the Igbo Christian, sharing double traditions that uphold the fullness, dignity, and sanctity of life, in understanding that Christ comes to give life in abundance. It is the life of the world which includes humans and nonhumans. This belief and ethics build a hedge around all life forms for protection from degradation or abuse.

So, for the Igbo Christian, talking about the authorship of Christ as life-giver and sustainer, it fits into their traditional values and elevates their ecological mindsets in thinking synergistically that Christ is the lamb of God, the tree and river of life, who never even uproots darnels growing in the same fields with wheats to avoid harming life. And given that the Igbo world is a sacramental universe, the Igbo Christian will rethink their attitudes to trees, animals, the earth they work and walk on. This vision promotes ecological balance. It, therefore, stands as a veritable model for an Igbo Christian ecological ethics that can help to arrest any form of lifestyle that is hostile to the environment. In line with this, preservation of creation, maintenance, and promotion of life, rather than any life diminishing venture, must be theologially reiterated and included into the Gospel of life, the earth’s life, as an essential component of the Christian faith and ecological mission in Igbo land. Apparently, it will help to curb consumerism, pollution, and any life-threatening lifestyles among most contemporary Igbo. This sacred view of the universe can contribute remarkably and positively in the ways the Igbo Christians relate with both humans and the whole of nature.
The sanctity of life and the collective community good serve as an ethical foundation for respect for the environment. Both are integrally connected and mutually affecting each other in a form of universal communion. Pope Francis confirms this while noting the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the organic unity of life in their manifold relationships. Accordingly, “God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.”\textsuperscript{703} As delicate as this union is, tenderness and harmony are needed to sustain it, not excessive anthropocentrism. For “A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power.”\textsuperscript{704} As such, this calls for a re-evaluation of the dominion motif and its attendant individualism and materialism that is manifest in most Igbo Christian life today which, in no small ways, threaten the environment. That humans are at the center of creation in both the Biblical and traditional Cosmovision is not an express permission to exploit and destroy the earth. As the Igbo proverbially say, “Agadi ekunyere nwa o si na ya enweghi eze, ekunyere ya nwa ka o tagbuo?” i.e., an adult entrusted with the responsibility of caring for a baby who says they have no teeth, is the baby given to them to masticate and devour? In other words, the privilege to be keepers of the earth is not a right for humans to violate and destroy the earth. Rather, it is for a responsible stewardship which entails both husbandry and husbanding of all earth’s resources and the preservation of the same for future generations. The Igbo and Christian views of creation affirm the belief in the goodness of creation. Agreeing with S K. Gitau, God did not encourage the

\textsuperscript{703} LS., 86.

\textsuperscript{704} LS., 78.
destruction of the very same creation declared good by God from the beginning. So, the dominion
cmand is a delegated power for a responsible and communal co-operative, which is “intended
to express the same sustaining care of the communal environment as its creator.”
Thus, unity of life needs care to sustain and further it. Human life and nature’s life cannot be treated in isolation.
The promotion of this unity is a task for everyone. Since it is a value both for the traditional Igbo and Christianity, it becomes a genuine platform for constructing ecological ethics that speaks to the values of the Igbo Christian to reconsider their thinking about the environment. Therefore, to safeguard the environment from exploitation, abuse and pollution, collective efforts that cut across all faiths and works of life are needed. It is expected of the Church in Igbo land to engage the traditional culture that is so much at home with the sense of solidarity, Igwebuike, in ecological conversions. Popes John Paul II and Francis already set examples in this regard. This is a boost for eco-theological ethics, at least it is locally ingrained in traditional belief and life of the Igbo as well as enjoying interdisciplinary recognition. This leads into another value, the family, as a model for constructing an Igbo Christian ecological ethics.

3.5.5 Broader concept of family in Igbo worldview

One of the values vital in constructing an Igbo Christian ecological ethics is the concept of family. The Igbo interaction with nature bears a semblance of a family where there is constant communion and communication despite the friction that families often witness. The Igbo compenetrating worldview that sees everything in their organic whole validates this reality.

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Arguably, if God is the creator of all things, then creation, in its wholeness, is a family of God who nurtures and sustains even the tiniest of all creatures. Hence, everything has a name in this family which bears a mark of identity and belonging to a family. Regardless of their stature, domestic or wild, they are to be treated with respect, valued for who they are first, i.e., their inherent dignity, before their instrumental value.

The family is a strong and sacred institution in Igbo land. The family ties are so much revered for in them lies the bedrock of every life form. The Church shares a similar view. She teaches that the family is a domestic church where the seed of life, faith and ethical, moral behavior is sewn and perpetuated. Children get this fundamental education through interaction with others in the family. This helps the child in learning and developing health habits, environmental ethics, and protection to care for creature as kinfolks. The Scriptures lend a voice to this, thus, “Train up a child in the way he [sic] should go, and when he [sic] grows, he will never depart from it.”

In its mystical sense, family in Igbo land, as in other African societies, goes beyond the nuclear and extended concept. It is all-embracing and dynamic and not a mechanical reality. In a broad sense, it is a mutual interaction of beings where no member is “completely static not even a stone or a piece of metal,” so that every “being is alive” and “is seen as a ‘He [sic] rather than an ‘it’.” In essence, it could be argued that animals, plants, animate and inanimate objects are an integral part of the Igbo family. Ekwealo, noting Evans-Pritchard, confirms this of the Azenda

707 Lumen Gentium, #11.


709 Emefie Ikenga-Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 68.

people’s initiatory ceremonies wherein the young initiates are reminded thus; “Your relatives are animals, your father is an elephant, your father’s elder brother is the red pig, your wives are cane-rats, your mother is a bush-buck, your maternal uncles are duickers, [sic] your grandfather is a rhinoceros.” While this practice is not necessarily Igbo, they have affinity with the Igbo relationship with their totemic animals or trees. Most animals are esteemed for their ‘personal’ qualities which the Igbo might aspire to achieve. Most animals, also, constitute the names of most villages or families as their totemic animals and are related with cordially as humans, members of the village or family. Some plants are also compared with human qualities, relationships, etc. Likewise, inanimate objects and elements are said to be the abodes of deities and spirits which are part of the family since the Igbo interact with them dearly and they are reprimanded or praised accordingly” as humans. They occupy important places in Igbo life and are accorded respect and so are held in awe and sacredness. Pope Francis shares the same view. He talks of communion of creation in an intimate way as a family. “Everything is related,” Francis says, “and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his [sic] creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.” Thus, this broader view of family is validated.

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712 Nwala, 35.

713 Ibid., 49.

714 LS., #92.
Similarly, Charles Nyamiti gives a detailed observation that family in Africa comprises all these groups above and more. It involves all living members, besides being mystically connected to the ancestors and, through social pacts, to outsiders such as friends and others.\textsuperscript{715} Nyamiti talks also about a form of membership within the African family (clan or tribe) that is usually brought about by special initiation showing thereby the sacredness of the family.\textsuperscript{716} Thus, in Africa, family “evokes not only blood communal membership of few living members, but also the themes of clan, tribe, affinity, maternity, patria potestas, priesthood, ancestors (thereby including themes of mystical time, archetypes, heroes, founder), initiation and hence fecundity, life, power, sacrality and so on.”\textsuperscript{717} As a result, “Every act of cruelty to any creature” as Pope Francis notes, “is ‘contrary to human dignity’”\textsuperscript{718} because of the communion of creatures.

This broader concept of family is a value common to both the Igbo people and Christianity. A cursory look at the implication of deep incarnation, noted earlier, reveals that God in Christ is with all flesh, all creation, and that Christ is the first fruit of all creation. Therefore, creation is a family of God intimately linked to God, through Christ, for its life, just as a fetus is connected to its mother through the cord. As a family, creation is under God from whom all families in heaven and earth have their name, origin and sustenance.\textsuperscript{719} In this line of thought, Nyamiti avers that


\textsuperscript{716} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{717} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{718} LS., #92.

\textsuperscript{719} Colossians 1:15-17. See also Ephesians 3:15 For Elizabeth Johnson it is divine solidarity with all life forms, a community of life with Jesus as the firstborn. Elizabeth Johnson, \textit{Creation and the Cross}, 188-193.
“Creatures are united with each other not only because they have the same creator, in whose life and power they share, but because they have God as their goal. … all creatures are meant to work and co-operate together to reach this final goal.” Traditionally, for the Igbo, family is strength. As a team, members help each other to achieve their purposes in life. Despite their differences, family establishes a strong bond between kins. The success and failure, health and sickness, etc., of everyone is everyone’s concern. No one stands to the detriment of their family members nor abuse the others including what belongs to them. Everyone is everyone’s responsibility. This understanding and relationship, and duty extends to creatures other than humans as a family where everyone has dignity and name, respected as such, and helped to bloom and blossom.

Given this understanding of family and its hallowed place in Igbo life, the fight against environmental crises must not only start from the root, which is the family, it must embrace the narrative that creation is a family with various interrelated branches. Any harm against the environment is a violation of a family member. As the Igbo say, “Onye gburu nwanne ya amaghi egbu,” i.e., whoever kills a family member does not know how to kill. This is because the person has also killed oneself, cut off oneself from the cosmic family and severed the relationship, the interdependence and synergy of life within the family. Ecologically, any harm to the environment boomerangs to the community for everything is interconnected. The human species are related in the same way they are related to all beings in the universe as a family in an organic whole. This image of creation as a family presents a powerful symbol for social responsibility. Therefore, any theology of the environment in Igbo land should appropriate the sense of family to hit home the message and be relevant to the people who are all rooted in the family.

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3.6 Greening the Church, Greening the Earth: Insights from Martinus L. Daneel (Ubuntu/Ukama) and Wangari Maathai (Harambe) vis-a-viz Igbo ethos

This section focuses on some brave and creative works from selected places in Africa, precisely, Zimbabwe and Kenya, in their fight against ecological degradation. The Earth keeping group of Martinus L. Daneel from Zimbabwe and the Green Belt Movement of Mathai Wangari of Kenya are very compelling initiatives to boost and empower the locals to embrace squarely the ownership of their environment against its exploitation under whatever pretext or pressure from individuals, groups, or governments. The concepts of Ubuntu/Ukama (togetherness/relationship) and Harambe (togetherness) are employed respectively by Daneel and Wangari to prove the power in a local culture to transform the environment in the positive direction, training people to be environmental activists, to embrace social responsibilities in the name of the Gospel.

The Igbo have similar values employed by the groups under study here. They are Onye aghala nwanne ya (let no one abandon their kinfolks) and Ndu miri, ndu azu (life for the river, life for fish) or Egbe bere, ugo bere (let eagle perch, let the kite perch), which translates into live and let live. Its emphasis is on the natural right of nature. Regardless of the local names, in principle and practice, these Igbo values are the same with Ubuntu/Ukama of the Earth keepers of Zimbabwe and the Harambe of Green Belt Movement of Kenya ecologically. Arguably, these can get the Igbo stimulated and dared, and with insights from Daneel and Wangari groups, to green up the church, their surroundings and life. The aim is to inspire and challenge the Igbo Christian to toe the same route, using the values available to them to arrest the ugly trend in the society environmentally. Green faith reflects on the green environment! This is especially vital given that the Igbo name for life is Ndu which is also the name for the green color. To be green is to be alive.
3.6.1 Greening the Church, Greening the Earth: Insights from Zimbabwean faith traditions

The churches in Zimbabwe continue to advance in their efforts to maintain a healthy environment under the auspices of Earthkeeping. This is an initiative credited to Martinus L. Daneel who made intriguing efforts to integrate cultural and socio-political approaches in theology. Daneel developed an applied ethics of Earthkeeping based on the spirit of the Zimbabwean liberation struggle of Chimurenga, Freedom war, which resulted in the Zimbabwean independence. Much unlike the liberation war with armed militia, the soldiers of the new Chimurenga, liberation of nature, are traditionalists and Christians who are committed to healing and restoring the integrity of the earth through tree planting ministry. Earth keeping movement is composed of interfaith and interdisciplinary folks whose ecological struggle is drawn from the traditional Shona world, best described as where human activities are elicited by the sacrality of the earthly reality. The aim is to reawaken the green life, green faith, green consciousness in people against the lifestyle and ideology destructive to the environment that are perceived as alien to their traditions.\textsuperscript{721} Pope Francis, as earlier noted, under cultural ecology, denounces such lifestyles and ideologies, as more of the consumerist vision, encouraged by the mechanisms of today’s globalized economy with drastic levelling effects on local cultures.\textsuperscript{722} It undermines the enormous ways that a people had solved their local problems. It tends to solve all problems out of uniform policies or technical interventions that tend to ignore the intricacies of local problems which demand active participation of community members. This was the Zimbabwean reality under the colonial regime

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that dispossessed people of their ancestral lands, destroyed their cultural values. They had to fight vigorously to regain their freedom and to protect their biodiversity from further extinction.

Like the liberation movements that relied so much on the African worldview and Christianity for their liberation struggles, Daneel asserts that the ecological movement or Earthkeepers should not be different. Reliance on God as the liberator of the oppressed and the Creator of all that is existent, i.e., faith and tradition, informs and motivates Earthkeepers to ensure that God’s creation is not defaced or suffer injustice. The sanctity and life of the earth is a top priority. Daneel adopted the concept of *Ubuntu* (togetherness, relatedness, etc.,) as a compelling metaphor that speaks to the values of Zimbabweans irrespective of faith or political affiliation, with the aim to reconfirm the interconnectedness of humanity with the natural environment to boost the morale of people to work together in greening the society. *Ubuntu*, among other things, ecologically implies that humans are not just connected with nonhumans, they have intrinsic value to be defended and protected. With *Ubuntu*, Daneel develops an ethic of earth-healing ministry which has planted millions of trees to afforest places that have suffered human-made and natural disasters. In the spirit of *Ubuntu*, there are kinship and filial ties between the Earthkeepers and natural environment who address trees as “‘brothers,’ ‘sisters,’ and ‘friends:’ ‘You are my brother...my sister. Today I plant you in this soil. I will give you water for your growth.’”

Arguably, the legitimacy of this tree planting ministry centers on the ecological understanding that the earth is the Lord’s which makes the crisis of the earth as well as the human crisis of critical importance to *Mwari Musiki*, God the Creator. Invariably, if the health of the earth is a priority to

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723 Daneel, 171.
God, reasonably, humans should not be aloof nor be derelict in salvaging the environment from further deterioration.

Besides, Daneel studied the active role the ancestral spirits or spirit mediums played in the spiritual heads of Zimbabwean struggle for freedom. Core to the Zimbabwean value is the centrality of the ancestors who are respected generally as guardians of the land. So, to allow ecological degradation of any sort on the land is seen as an affront to the ancestors who lay buried in the land. And for the fact that *Ubuntu* connects the living and the dead and strengthened with the belief in the ubiquity of spirits, it is salutary to afforest the environment since they are believed to be the abodes of the spirits and part of *Ubuntu* to which every entity is joined. Hence, based on this value, there emerged an Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists, AZTREC, with main objectives to protect the trees and vegetation on the holy mountains in honor of the tribal ancestors, and tree planting; to promote and protect wildlife and to protect water resources (marshland, mountains, dams, and rivers). In this same spirit, independent churches, convinced of the necessity to environmental protection as an essential Christian imperative, established an Association of African Earthkeeping Churches in which bishops, religious leaders and pastors feature in various church teachings and gatherings, sermons, etc., the need to befriend and love the environment, keep it green and sacred through planting trees. This is drawn from the strength of the traditional value of ancestral veneration that is central to the Zimbabwean culture. This is what happens when a people do not deracinate themselves from their cultural ties and root. Their local sources become the reservoir of knowledge to “decolonize” themselves and form a strong future for themselves. Hence, Daneel’s conviction that the Traditional Religion must be seen as “an ecological force with very specific implications for the development of a theology of the
environment.” This shows how respect for the ancestors leads to an increasing sense of environmental responsibility, which for the Earthkeepers, is a battle that needs consolidated community efforts to arrest. In a place where religion covers all aspect of life and “Ukama,” which translates to relatedness, is paramount, referring trees as sisters and brothers points to the centrality of the great kinship of creation as well as to the human understanding of Ubuntu. Arguably, Ukama and Ubuntu which stand for togetherness or relatedness provides an ethical and spiritual “outlook that human well-being is indispensible from our dependence on and interdependence with all that exits, and particularly with the immediate environment on which all humanity depends.” This local theology which sees all things as united in and related to Christ, the first born of all creation and who returns all things to the Father, and as an ancestor of all the ancestors, resonates with the Zimbabwean church. It is like the fuel that fires up their green faith initiatives in greening the environment through the tree planting ministry towards healing the earth.

Furthermore, and remarkably, the Christian Earthkeeping movement sees a parallel link of the sufferings of the environment to the suffering of Christ. For the Earthkeepers, African Christology, which has been subjected to and dominated by anthropocentric interpretations, needs some liberation from this single narrative. Therefore, the Earthkeepers argue for an inclusive or cosmic Christological interpretation that includes ecological liberation as part of the Christological framework, not only the socio-political dilemmas of colonial and post-colonial Africa that has

724 Daneel, 208.


726 In a unique way yet similar, this resonates with the Pauline teaching on the groaning of the entire creation, awaiting redemption. See Romans 8:18-22.
neglected ecological crises, making them invisibly irrelevant for years.\textsuperscript{727} In other words, the suffering Christ, as the first born of creation, also identifies with the earth community.\textsuperscript{728} Basically, the human liberation and earth liberation are critically important to God, the source of all creation. Symbolically, the Earthkeepers ritualize the holy communion while carrying seedlings in their hands as a sign of new life. For “the seedlings in Earthkeeper's hands at the communion table and the seedling addressed as brother or sister are a clear recognition of the entire earth community as partakers or recipients of Holy Communion, a way of extending the hope of reconciliation and new life, emanating from the cross, to all creation.”\textsuperscript{729} This is wholistic of God’s shalom in a boundless and all-encompassing effect on the whole of existence, from the domain of the human heart to the cosmos and everything in between. Christologically, this is total restoration of all things in Christ, “To the extent that God reigns over existence, reconciliation between God and people, between people and people, and between God, people, and creation happens.”\textsuperscript{730}

The Christological dimension to the earth-keeping ministry is compelling. Like \textit{Ukama} and \textit{Ubuntu}, it harmonizes and pulls together the fractured Western view that seemed to demarcate the sacred and the secular and makes a case for the interconnectedness of all things. Thus, when one thing suffers, the entire body is affected. Hence, the need to fix what is lacking for integral life and function. Tree planting ministry, in this way, becomes the cure for the suffering environment. It is a sacred duty in honor of the ancestors and integrity of creation, as well as a ministry of love which

\textsuperscript{728} Marthinus L. Daneel, \textit{African Earthkeepers}, 213.
\textsuperscript{729} Daneel, 215.
\textsuperscript{730} Al Tizon, \textit{Whole & Reconciled: Gospel, Church, and Mission in a Fractured World} (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2018), 78.
is motivated by the communion with Christ and the rest of creation. Union with Christ translates into union with everyone that Christ is in union with. Thus, loving Christ, loving God, is loving others, embracing the world in its healthy, green way. Through this sense of communion with creation, Earthkeepers appreciate "trees and plants not only as an exploitative resource but as brothers and sisters whose sanctity requires respect." This earth healing spirituality is a reminder that in the Lord's presence, humans and trees acquire the same status as brothers and sisters. The theological conviction here lies in the fact that what is truly human cannot be understood and become meaningful without reference to the kinship of all creation. This insight is rooted in Christ through whose incarnation God announces not only kinship with humans but the rest of creation as well. This is a great lesson to the Igbo church who shares almost the same world view with the Zimbabwean people, to draw strength from the values inherent in their traditional and cultural cum religious heritage to fight the menace of ecological degradation that is fast becoming a way of life. Be that as it may, this next section of this work will examine the other green initiative from Kenya to see how interrelatedly veritable the movements are in fighting ecological disaster in Africa.

3.6.2 Green Belt Movement: Insights from Kenyan Wangari Maathai

Like the Zimbabwean Earthkeeping movement, so it is with the Kenyan Green Belt Movement. Realizing that peace on earth depends on the human ability to secure their living environment and, witnessing the apparent dereliction of humans towards the environment, leading to its serious exploitation, desertification and pollution, and the consequent culture of consumerism

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732 Daneel, 168.
and death, Wangari Maathai took up action to wake humanity up from their ecological slumber. She combines science, social commitment, active politics, and faith together with cultural and religious heritages and trainings to simply not protecting the existing environment, but to broadly and futuristically secure and strengthen the very basis for ecologically sustainable development starting from the grassroots levels to regional, national, and international levels.

The Green Belt Movement is an indigenously led movement founded by Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan women right and environmental right activist. The focus of this movement is environmental conservation and development through tree-planting ministry. Like the Zimbabwean Earthkeeping movement, the Green Belt Movement relies on the traditional values, the local capacity, wisdom, knowledge, and expertise to combat environmental crisis and its enablers. Membership of this movement is all-embracing- women, men, faith traditions, academics, environmentally interested groups both in the urban and rural areas, although with strong base in the rural areas, especially women whose maternity is likened to the benignity of Mother-Earth, and whose labor pangs are equally parallel to the earth’s crisis. Arguably, the bleeding of the earth from ecological injustices mirrors the plights of widows, young girls, women, ethnic minorities and various communities or groups at the margins of the society, the poor of the

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733 Maathai describes as hell the various wounds inflicted on the environment comparable to none that human mind can ever to think of. For details, see Wangari Maathai, Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 42.


735 Wangari has other copious works on the right of women, especially the rural women who bear the brunt of ecological crisis. For brevity, this work is restricted to Wangari’s reflection as found in the Green Belt Movement document.

earth. For Wangari, their sufferings show a crack in the cosmic family, a severance from the community of life, an apparent indication of a dying relationship that needs to be greened up.

Like the locally fashioned theological motif of *Ubuntu* rooted in the values of Zimbabwean cultural life, Wangari’s Green Belt Movement also reclines on the belief and practice of *Harambee* (Let us pull together) to reawaken the green life, green faith, green consciousness in people against the lifestyle and ideology destructive to the environment that are perceived as alien to their traditions.\(^{737}\) *Harambee* is wholistic. It is a psycho-ethical morale booster meant to evoke a sense of solidarity, commitment to protect one’s land, the common good and promote the cosmic relatedness among creatures. Ecologically, *Harambee*, like *Ubuntu*, implies that humans are not just connected with nonhumans, they have intrinsic value to be defended and protected.\(^{738}\)

Significantly, the Wangari Maathai led campaign named “Save the Land Harambee” massively leads to the re-education of people on the need to love and save their community from desertification and erosion through their active participation in forestation and reforestation. It creates and promotes, among other things, organic farming, indigenous food crops, community education on food production and nutrition, right eating for right living and right faith, and right relationships at various levels. Equally, it promotes local culture and spirituality to restore positive values that contribute immensely to boosting self-confidence, empowerment, and identity by way of decolonizing and healing the minds ravaged by colonization, civilization, and Christianity.\(^{739}\)

\(^{737}\) Maathai, 89-110.

\(^{738}\) Maathai, 49.

\(^{739}\) Maathai, 47-48.
Tree-planting, as a way of bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel and fidelity to ancestral traditions, arguably, has become a way of life among most Kenyans. Like an anthem and a mantra, Harambee ignites and sustains the sense of togetherness and relatedness of all earth’s entities under the watch of Providence. Hence, the deep commitment to afforest and protect the environment, which exudes God’s inexhaustible presence, provision, and sustenance to humans. As a ritual, at each planting ceremony, people renew and reaffirm their dedication to defend God’s beautiful creation and its integrity, the greenness of their faith in God and in each other, and a cleaner Kenya:

Being aware that Kenya is being threatened by the expansion of desert-like conditions; that desertification comes as a result of misuse of the land and by consequent soil erosion by the elements; and that these actions result in drought, malnutrition, famine and death, we resolve to save our land by averting this same desertification through the planting of tree wherever possible. In pronouncing these words, we each make a personal commitment to save our country from actions and elements which would deprive present and future generations from reaping the bounty [resources] which is the birthright and property of all.740

The striking and interesting values in Earthkeeping and Green Belt Movement initiatives is the fact that they embrace both the young and the old, people across faith traditions, political and cooperate bodies who have undergone through ecological conversion. Humans cannot sever relationship with their kins and expect to be green. Collective and individual efforts are necessary to defend the environment. Since ecological crisis affects everyone and everywhere, it is the environmental values that are based on many aspects of human endeavor that will greatly change the environmental map of any society. Tree planting consciousness becomes a sacred, holistic duty that people across faith traditions see as an integral part of their faith and traditions to save the environment from further deterioration.

740 Maathai, 21.
In essence, green thinking is revolutionary. It aims to elicit positive changes in people’s attitude to the environment, to God and their duties towards each other. For Daneel and Maathai, the force behind green thinking, green relationships, green faith, and green environment “deals more with the radical version of Christian beliefs and attitude gained from the Bible particularly from the understanding of the ecological Jesus Christ.”

For J. Rogerson, noted by Asoanya, “It means that since the former lifestyle has so far proved ‘unsustainable,’ a radical change is needed in everything from worship to economy to transport,” to shopping and eating habits. In this regard, Maathai, reflecting on the outcome of their initiatives in a rhyme, excitedly writes,

… Now we know, green is something. Now we know, seeds are valuable. Now we know, seeds are trees. Now we know, we are green, our touch is green. … Now we know, we are all brothers. Now we know, we are all sisters. Now we know, we share the earth. Now we know, our touch is green. … We didn’t know Kenya, Tanzania are ours. We didn’t know Ghana, Uganda are ours. We didn’t know Zimbabwe, Ethiopia are ours. Now we know our touch, our faith is green. …

This experience results from an awakened awareness of the sense of interconnectedness of life, people, countries. It sings of the beauty of such a cultural value, ubuntu, ukama or harambe, which means togetherness, interconnectedness, solidarity. It cuts across Africa. Together as one, united by the common good they share, they can offer each other the necessary help to green up the continent and make it viable for the teaming of biodiversity.

Like the Zimbabwean metaphor, Ubuntu/Ukama and the Kenyan Harambee, arguably, the Igbo concept and practice of “Onye aghala nwanne ya,” (no kin or kith should be left behind or abandoned); stands as a veritable value to explore and lean on for ecological thrust that can renew

741 Anthony Asoanya, Ecological Crisis in Africa, 282.

742 Asoanya, 283.

the green life of the church and the environment in Igbo land. Hence, the task of the succeeding section is to show how the Igbo value, like those employed by the initiatives of Earth Keeping and Green Belt Movement groups, stands as a strong basis to awaken the sense of environmental commitment in the land.

3.6.3 Igbo ethos of Onye Aghala Nwanne Ya (No Kith/Kin Should Be Abandoned): Principle of Interconnectedness and Ethics of Care

_Onye aghala nwanne ya_ has a correlate _onye aghala nwanna ya_. While the former relates with maternal intimacy, the latter encapsulates paternal affiliation. Literally, _Onye aghala nwanna ya_ is translated as ‘let no one abandon their maternal kinship’ and on the other hand _Onye aghala nwanna ya_ means ‘let no one abandon their paternal kinship.’ Though both emphasize on kinship, naturally, in Igbo land for instance, motherhood rather than fatherhood connection apparently fosters stronger affiliation among family members. _Nwanna_, translates as brother or sister. Literally, it means the child of my mother, which is the same as sibling. There is much of familial sentiments attached to it. Siblings tend to fend for each other and think about one another’s welfare.

A Strong bond with one’s siblings is equivalent to deeply knowing and honoring one’s mother. It has a mental weight that panegyrizes motherhood. Hence, Alice Walker declares: “How simple a thing it seems to me that to know ourselves as we are, we must know our mother’s name.” Walker’s claim is relevant to the Igbo traditional culture regarding mother-child bond. It recalls and unearths a certain practice in some Igbo cultural areas, before the advent of Westernization, whereby children were known in reference to their mother’s names. It shows

how powerful the concept of motherhood was in the traditional Igbo society. A child could be identified by reference to its mother’s name same way as it could be of the father’s. Caroline N. Mbonu notes that “To know one’s mother’s name represents a metaphor of existence, an existence that is secured in a mother-child relationship. This relationship emerges from the mgbala, the hearth.”746 Further, Mbonu, employs a powerful and solemn Igbo nomenclature to demonstrate the heavyweight of motherhood in Igbo land. Accordingly, “the nomenclature Nneka, mother is supreme, derives from a self-understanding that the knowledge of mother’s name evokes. Similarly, the designation ‘mother tongue’ reveals much about the web of relationships that exists between the mother-child-culture and society.”747 This goes to show the inextricable bond of relationship motherhood establishes among siblings. It becomes easier to understand the motherhood of the earth and the affinity the Igbo have with all earth’s entities because they are rooted in the earth together. Therefore, nobody should abandon their kin to rot or left uncared for.

Chapter two of this work showed that the bond between the earth and the Igbo is strong. The Igbo do not abandon their mothers the same way that they do not abandon their siblings. Abandonment was not inbuilt in the traditional system of the Igbo. Everything is taken care of because they are part of the whole just as the same way that everything is valued and is purposeful within the system. The old, the young, the sick, all have greater roles to play, lessons to teach in


747 Mbonu, 72.
the society however incapacitated they may be. Unlike the Western culture that makes provisions for sanatoria or old people’s home where most elderly people are kept for nursing till death, the Igbo keep theirs at home. Psychologically and spiritually, the Igbo treat the earth this same way. It is a sacred responsibility on the Igbo, as children of the Mother Earth, to care for her.

The concept of ‘*Nwanne,* ’kin can fittingly apply to the Igbo understanding and relationship with the Earth’s creatures. Arguably, if the earth is called mother, it follows that all entities are kins. And if we are kins, we are duty bound to care, act justly, and extend hands of life, regeneration to each other. Violence against any kin is self-violence. Any form of violence, be it human or nonhuman, smacks irresponsibility and abdication of one’s fiduciary duty and is condemnable.

Crucially, *Onye aghala nwanne ya* has a correlate term, “*O nuru ube nwanne agbala oso,*” which literally means “One who hears the cry of a brother/sister should not ignore it (i.e., walk away or show apathy).” Obviously, the earth is crying in many ways in Igbo land today. The cry of the earth is analogously the cry of a mother over the death of her children, the cry of the poor because of marginalization. It is the cry of the natural environment due to human exploitation, pollution, and desecration. The fast encroachment of desertification in Igbo land reflects the cry of the earth. Likewise, the current spate of killing, bloodletting, kidnapping for ransom, trafficking, scamming, violence, insecurity, etc., in greater numbers virtually on daily basis in Igbo society


is an embarrassment to this beautiful and life-sustaining value and bond. It tends to question the power of onye aghala nwanne ya. In all these atrocities, humanity bleeds profusely. Likewise, mother earth cries and agonizes. It is an affront to the sanctity of life, human and nonhuman. It parallels the Biblical experience where the prophet echoes the cosmic dirge that “… the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing.”

This yearning for attention, for justice, for green initiatives cannot be abandoned. The solution to this cannot come from outside. It must be from values within the Igbo community. Ogbu U. Kalu is right that the “Igbos resort to indigenous solutions at points of crisis- an indication of where the heart is.” Thus, Igbo do not need to search for solutions to the environmental crisis from the Western categories. Onye aghala nwanne practice serves as a tool to conscientize people to retrace their steps to act as required of kins.

As kins, the human community, with their moral senses and reasonability, exercise the fiduciary duty, as responsible adults, or loosely speaking, as elder brothers and sisters, to the vulnerable members of their family which includes plants and animals, rivers, springs, lakes, all the waterbodies. Harmful chemicals used in farming or leached out into the rivers, toxins released in the environment, deforestation, indiscriminate killing of animals, littering of refuse dumps anywhere, and all sorts of pollution will be regarded as affliction and violence to the members of one’s family, a violation of one’s mother and a rupture of kinship. Viewed as such, it is logical to assert that this value, Onye aghala nwanne ya, can serve as a microscopic structure that can be

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751 Hosea 4:3.

adopted by the church in Igbo land in fashioning out ecological ethics relevant to the Igbo community. This domestic structure will be well appreciated as a point of departure at the services of known and unknown brethren even beyond one’s geographical boundaries.

In the context of greening the Igbo church, *Onye aghala nwanne ya* motif evokes a sense of communion with creation, through which the Igbo learn to view trees and plants not as an exploitative resource but as kins whose sanctity requires respect. With *Onye aghala nwanne ya* motif, the greening of the Igbo church would mean that the faithful should be concerned about the state of the environment and seek ways of advancing the care for God’s creation. This is because, green thinking invariably will bring about some dramatic change in the business-as-usual attitude about the environment and thus brings about an ecological spirituality, an inner conviction the transformation that recognizes the values of creation and thus fosters responsible actions to secure the integrity of the earth which includes among other things, tree planting, restrained and frugal consumption, other-oriented virtues. It has to do with a change of mindset, change of character on how we view the environment. Unlike the corona virus and perhaps other diseases that have vaccines to arrest it, the only vaccine to the environmental crisis is a change of lifestyle, a realization that humans are rooted in the earth same way as other entities which the earth is home to. However, the Igbo concept of *onye aghala nwanne ya*, must be courageously redefined to be inclusive of every life form since the Igbo considered themselves rooted in the earth alongside of other creatures. This leads to the next section that seeks to establish nature’s natural right under the Igbo concept of live and let live and pro-life vision and wishes for all life forms.
3.6.4  *Ndu miri, ndu azu/Biri ka m biri-* live and let live: Natural Right to Life

The right to live and thrive is one of the fundamental rights. Though most often applied to humans, it is equally applicable to all creatures. This work has established that creation has an intrinsic dignity due to its divine origin and source. Therefore, the right to live is an inalienable right of all creatures as members of the society. According to Nicholas Wolterstorff, a “society is just insofar as its members, both individual members and its institutional and communal members, enjoy those goods to which they have a right. To fail to enjoy one's right is to be wronged.”

Implied in this assertion is the reality that justice is inherent in natural rights. As a result, to be denied these rights is to be wronged. It is the right of the environment to be kept cleaner, free from pollution and healthy as it is the human right to live and make responsible use of the earth. Exploitation of the earth is an infringement on the right of the earth. Inasmuch as humans have the right to live, the environment has the same right.

One of the nuances of the Igbo sense of justice is “*Ndu miri, ndu azu*” (life for the river, life for the fish). Its correlate term is *biri ka m biri*, i.e., live and let live. It is the basis for Igbo sense of natural right and right of nature, an acknowledgement that humans do not have the right to abuse creation for creation is not the product of their volition. *Ndu miri, ndu azu* is a prayer as well as a way of life that upholds commodiousness and harmony. Implicit in this prayer or belief is the realization of the inalienable right of everything to space, opportunities, and life. For the traditional Igbo society, it was unthinkable for any entity to try to dislodge another from the necessary space or to deny another an ontological space. Wolterstorff is thus validated.

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Following Wolterstorff, arguably, the traditional Igbo society had a right sense and practice of ecological justice that led to the thriving of life as a right to all earth’s entities. Hence, the prayer and the philosophy of life, *ndu miri, ndu azu* demand that each entity lives and lets another live. To deny another of this fundamental right is a gross violation of their right, and justice belongs to all beings. Simeon O. Eboh describes the Igbo sense of natural right and right of nature as “*theospheric* in orientation and application” by which he means that Igbo ethos of live and let live is in line with the natural or divine law that ethically obliges the Igbo to promote and care for the common good.\(^{755}\) For Ekwealo, “Live-and-Let-Live is a theory of responsibility, equity, justice, and balance with a moral charge that whoever does not respect it would not experience happiness and wellbeing.”\(^{756}\) Rather than a theory, arguably, it is more of a practice or best, applied ethics.

Underlining *Ndu miri, ndu azu and biri ka m* biri is the belief that every entity has equal right to live, of existence, actualization, and realization. Primarily, it is affirmation of life and the right to life for every entity in the Igbo cosmology. The understanding is that the life of water is compatible and of equal status with the right of fish. It is the same with all entities irrespective of their statues and sizes. This is because, for the Igbo, creation is purposeful, and life is a mutual participation in each other for mutual enhancement. By nature, every entity has the right to interact and be interacted with. It is natural right to be enhanced and live freely without interference. Ecologically, humans have the right to life just the same as nonhuman creatures have.

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The Christian and the Igbo view of creation makes it clear that every creature is the reflection of God, that God is intimately present to each being and thus each has its intrinsic value and significance independent of their usefulness. This is because God loves them, and they have values in God’s eyes. Therefore, all life counts and has the right to live. This makes harmony among beings possible. As a matter of fact, the current ecological crisis is a result of sinful actions that wrong the earth. The earth cries for justice. Siltation, desertification, and species extinction are harms to biota whose wronged voices the present Igbo can hardly ignore. Thus, justice as an attempt to speak up for the wronged entities beckons now than before. To not engage in the fight for environmental justice betrays the very belief and practice of *ndu miri, ndu azu* and *biri ka m biri*. It is to deny the core ecological consciousness embedded in the Igbo life and culture. It is as well a belief and practice in Christianity in followership of Christ whose life and ministry embrace all life forms.

The ecological consciousness of live and let live is best explained in the idea of existential gratitude, which is “an acknowledgement of the worth and sometimes consequent expression of gratitude to an existent for its central and active roles in one’s life or the community.” To constitute a threat to the life of another being falls short of *ndu miri, ndu azu* or *biri ka m biri* -let and let live, and the sense of gratitude to God for the gift of creation. This value, therefore, can stimulate any Igbo person, Christian or not, to embark on greening up their environment, sanitation, conservation of all forms especially most totemic animals and trees that seriously face attacks from some misinformed, Christian fundamentalists and other people. *Biri ka m biri* abhors

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757 Cf. L.S., #s 42, 69, 76, 80 and 140.

758 Ekwealo, 53.
such dastardly actions. If I must live, then I should equally recognize that other beings have the same right to enjoy the sacred and democratic space.

Vitally, *ndu miri, ndu azu*, challenges everyone to take health, ecological issues seriously. It involves personal, family, group, and communal hygiene, including church hygiene, especially with the very things used liturgically. The pollution of any of the items like altar wine and bread, water, etc., amounts to communal disaster just as water, river or ocean pollution with harmful chemicals are dangerous to all aquatic lives. This is applicable to all works of life to farmers, food vendors, doctors, nurses, the chemists, industrialists, the media, the academia, etc., Any form of poison in any field of life has drastic effects on others and the entire society. It equally cautions manufacturers of weapons of mass destruction in various degrees and stokers of wars in various ways albeit under the pretext of noble claims etc., For war, anywhere and anytime, always does severe harm to the environment. It disrupts the flow of life, “harms the cultural riches of people, risks which are magnified when one considers nuclear arms and biological weapons.”

Everyone, everything, depends on the other for survival. Humans should be responsible in dealing with creation to ensure a continued survival of life entities hence, *ndu miri, ndu azu*, prayer and ethics of the Igbo. For the health and life of the river is important to the life and health of fish. One of the beauties of the river is the fish it produces. Both are essential. They have rights to live and help each other to thrive. Anyone, anything on the planet earth is important and purposeful and depends on each other in some ways. It is in such a harmony that God’s glory and love is seen. However, it takes a renewed mind and heart to attain and appreciate such a commodious lifestyle. This is a

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759 LS., 57.
form of spirituality, a daily conversion from greed to a simple way of life that is ecologically friendly. This line of thought is the preoccupation of the next section.

3.7 Ecological Spirituality

Ecological spirituality calls for a change of lifestyle in the right direction especially as ecological crisis has become a growing concern among many people and nations of the world and faith traditions. However, there are groups of persons who are in denial about the reality of climate change. Pope Francis observes that some rich individuals, powerful institutions directly associated to the fossil-fuel and transport industries fund the climate skeptic campaigns. These people sow the seed of doubts that makes it hard for some politicians to take decisive decisions to curb carbon emissions. Francis asserts that “many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with making efforts to reduce some of the negative impacts of climate change.” Activities like these are irresponsible and immoral. On another side, some people are ignorant of the drastic effects of their daily lifestyles on the environment. Denials and ignorance are part of the major problems frustrating efforts to right living for the health of the environment that need urgent attention. For Pope Francis, these actions must be acknowledged, condemned, redressed, and it must begin with righting the wrongs in human relationships. Arguably, “If the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural, and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships.” Truly, the crisis reveals a lot of greed or evil in the human heart and mind, which affects relationships. Rightly, Pope Francis notes that “the

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760 L.S., #26.

761 L.S., #119.
external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast.\textsuperscript{762}

Thus, it is not surprising to notice the spate of ecological damages, human and natural alike, in the modern times.

For human beings … to destroy the biological diversity of God’s creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth’s waters and its land, its air, and its life- these are sins.\textsuperscript{763} For ‘to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God.’

In various ways, albeit small and under whatever pretexts, everyone virtually is guilty of ecological sins and in some ways, ecological conversion is expected of everyone. It entails some ecological journey homewards, interiorly searching one’s or group’s thoughts, actions, or inactions to hit the nail at the head to fix the leaking roof of the house.

Therefore, Pope Francis draws the attention of everyone to replace extreme “consumption with sacrifice, greed with generosity, wastefulness with a spirit of sharing, an asceticism which ‘entails learning to give, and not simply to give up. It is a way of loving, of moving gradually away from what I want to what God’s world needs. It is liberation from fear, greed and compulsion.’”\textsuperscript{764} And for Christians, Francis notes that it is a call “‘to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbours on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet.’”\textsuperscript{765} In this way, Pope Francis articulates

\textsuperscript{762} LS., #217.

\textsuperscript{763} LS., #8.

\textsuperscript{764} LS., #9.

\textsuperscript{765} Ibid.
what ecological spirituality entails. In other words, it is a form of ecological conversion, a change of attitude from domineering and mechanical way of seeing and relating with the world to perceiving God busily at work in all creatures so that we experience the universe as gifts, charged with divine presence. It is a change in lifestyle of compulsive consumerism, impulsive buying, and needless spending, wastes, unnecessary travels involving the airspace and automobiles, obsession with acquisition of things for oneself while depriving others their right to such goods.\textsuperscript{766} It involves the “ecology of daily life,” which brings about wholistic improvement in the quality of life starting “in our rooms, our homes, our workplaces and neighbourhoods,” for “we use our environment to express our identity.”\textsuperscript{767} Our self-carriage speak loudly about our attitude to nature. Simple style of life that enables an antiseptic environment is therefore advocated.

For Christians, whose ecological spirituality is based on the convictions of their faith, a call to follow Christ entails learning, living and loving Christ who has passionate concern for creation, to save and not to destroy, to gather and never to scatter, to care for the gift which creation is. A commitment like this, as Pope Francis recalls, “cannot be sustained by doctrine alone without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without an ‘interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity.’”\textsuperscript{768} Compartmentalization of faith does not do justice to this integral way of life modelled after Christ that does not dissociate the spirit from the body or from nature or worldly realities. For such only falls into the temptation of looking down on nature or fellow humans with disabilities, with different skin colors, accent or

\textsuperscript{766} L.S., #s 204, 206 - 207.

\textsuperscript{767} L.S., #147.

\textsuperscript{768} L.S., #216.
language, culture or social and religious statuses, and gender inequality, etc., all of which bear their imprints on our relationship with the environment. All these and their irks fall short of the way of life of Christ and so, they cannot inspire greater activity and enthusiasm to resolve ecological problems. As a result, ecological conversion, which is an ongoing transformation, is needed to create a balance or harmony in relationships, in nature.

Furthermore, in the understanding and belief that creation is a gift of God who, in various ways, is present in creation and works through creation to sustain creation, humans who are specially charged with the stewardship of creation ought to do so with greater care to not betray confidence, and to show gratitude. As a part of the stewardship or care, firstly, ecological spirituality, apparently, not only seeks to reconstruct the consumerist attitude, lifestyle, and binge eating, but also challenges the gross ignorance of the source of what we eat and use, how and where foods are grown and made, and how integrated are all these realities to their very source. Secondly, it touches on how we engage in grateful eating and consumption in an empathetic recognition of the have-nots most of whom are driven away from what rightfully belongs to them.

Besides, ecological spirituality, arguably, begins with the grateful, loving, and joyful acknowledgement of the fact that all creatures owe their existence to God. This humility to acknowledge the ownership of creation goes with an understanding that humans are not separated from the rest of creation and that the suffering of one is the suffering of many, that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”\textsuperscript{769} In the awareness that we are inextricably tied to a network of mutuality as a cosmic family, therefore, “We share it intimately with other creatures”

\textsuperscript{769} This quote is attributed to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. See National Civil Rights Museum, “Dr. King’s Legacy,” Justice Platform, https://mlk50.civilrightsmuseum.org/dr-kings-legacy (accessed November 4, 2021).
and importantly “We acknowledge God as Creator of us all.”\textsuperscript{770} In this spirit of gratitude, relationship between humans and nonhumans and with God is constantly renewed. Humans recall that all beings reflect God and participate in God’s altar, the earth. This entails a continuous renewal of relationship with God in the spirit of gratitude for the gift of the earth and all that the earth is home to. For Pope Francis, it “calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness. First, it entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God’s loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works.”\textsuperscript{771} Consequently, we come to absorb the reality of ongoing creation, we learn to perceive God the immanent One, as the giver of all gifts, all that we are and have; that we owe eternal gratitude to God for everything.\textsuperscript{772} We care, preserve out of tender compassion to show gratitude. We do not kill or destroy to show gratitude.

Contrary to critics who espouse a fanatical view that ecological spirituality is creationism, i.e., the worship of creation,\textsuperscript{773} it is rather the recognition of God at work in creation, that the universe is God’s work and thus a revelation of God who works through, upholds, and sustains it, and the courage to be revolutionary in living out the faith in Christ. St Francis of Assisi shows this form of radical intimacy with God’s creation. He emotively personalizes them: “O brother wind,


\textsuperscript{771} L.S., #220

\textsuperscript{772} L.S., #220.

air, clouds, rain and sun as well as O sister moon with silver glean.”

With them he exalts God thus, “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs.” Essentially, ecological spirituality instills not only a cosmic form of worship, but also an earth-caring vision and lifestyle that encourages green spiritualities or eco-theology, a view of nature as a lens through which we see God’s hand as the author of creation, not substituting God with nature itself. It touts the belief and ethics that God the creator has neither abandoned nor encouraged the destruction and pollution of the work of God’s hands which is declared good and wholesome. Dominion, therefore, is not for exploitation and destruction of the environment. Rather it is for a responsible stewardship born out of love for all that God has made. Ken S. Gitau notes that it is a delegated, responsible, and communal co-operative, which was intended to express the same sustaining care of the communal environment as its creator.

Curiously, how does this spirituality relate to the Igbo? Is there any convergence of the Christian ecological spirituality with the traditional Igbo spirituality and ethics of the environment and relationship? The answer is in the affirmative. Ecological spirituality resonates much with the traditional Igbo relationship with the earth and indeed of all earth’s entities. It has been established in chapter two of this work that the world is a God-indwelt universe, a compenetrating universe where the spiritual dovetail into the physical hence, there is no dichotomy between the sacred and


775 LS., #1.


the secular, and it is ubiquitous, full of life with constant communion or interaction. It affirms the world as a spiritual reality, a gift and should be treated with respect. Through the rituals, from the cradle to the end of life, the Igbo are covenanted with the earth, and thus are charged with the duty care of the earth. Through rituals, also, they constantly renew earth’s vitality, their relationship with it and try much to keep off any counter harmonious attitude and relationship with nature. For the Igbo, rituals are not mere routines. It is life. The Igbo traditional spirituality is wholistic. Succinctly, environmental ethics is a way of life for the Igbo.

Blessedly, the Igbo Christians have a doubly rich heritage to improve upon ecological life and protection. Christ, through his deep incarnation, speaks to all cultures, all beings and identifies with every life form and thus lives an example to follow in care for creation. The Igbo are not excluded from Christ’s plan for integral salvation of the world and the demand to care for creation. Therefore, the Igbo Christians should not be scared nor hold their rich cultural heritage in disdain in fighting ecological degradation. It is an advantage to have something local to fall back to. However, this does not mean that everything espoused by the traditional Igbo spirituality is wholesome. It is easy to perceive some air of superstition or exaggerations of the ubiquity of spirit that can lead to some crippling fear. Also, some practices exclude women for some reasons, ranging from their monthly biological cycles to some cultural beliefs. They tend to denigrate women. Some practices, as well, denigrate and exclusive some villages or families or persons tagged osu, caste system, restricting communion with them in some ways. This is a form of degradation as far as human ecology is concerned. As noted, this attitude reflects on the way humans relate to the environment consciously or not. Thus, in light of Christ, these unwholesome beliefs and practices need to be evangelized so the Igbo Christian can see Christ as Lord and Savior of the universe in whom everything is united together to God, and thus have a sound ecological
spirituality that does not segregate between beings since everyone is considered rooted in the earth and mutually relate. It makes no sense to segregate anyone, anything, occupying the same sacred space, affecting, and being affected by the realities of life in the sacred, democratic space.

Ecological spirituality, therefore, calls to every listening ear and welcoming heart to realize that the earth, as created by God, is good, but now, it is marred due to unrestrained human activities. Thus, there is a need for radical change in lifestyle individually and collectively for a greener and cleaner relationship with the earth as with God. This ecological way of life challenges humans to behave holistically and be salutary. It is such that empowers and arms individuals, groups, faith-based associations, etc., to develop interest in conserving a balanced utilization of natural resources and enhances the quality of life for all earth entities.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has been able to establish the theological grounds for ecological engagement in the Church in Igbo land. Echoes from the Magisterial teachings of the church as well as the Scriptures reveal that care for the environment is wholesome. Jesus, as the study reveals, shows great care for the earth, and uses the fruits of the earth variously to illustrate God’s care and love for God’s creation. His mission is wholistic as seen in his ardent proclamation of the reign of God in relationships, in rebuilding what was broken and restoring all things in himself as the firstborn of creation. With Jesus, creation assumes a much-elevated status as a sacramental reality that plays host to its Creator and Redeemer. Jesus’ attitude to the fruits of the earth challenges the Igbo Christian to shun dereliction, consumerism, pollution, and all that violates the rights of the earth.

It is a justice issue much as it is an act of faith and charity to exercise care and caution in dealing with the environment. Integrity of the earth must be upheld. Care for environment is an
integral part of the church’s vocation and mission, same way it is with the Igbo traditional life, as the traditional values showed in this works. What is needed much is to deconstruct the overtly westernized Igbo mentality through education to think creatively and locally on how best to source locally the solutions to their local problems rather than leaning so much on foreign contributions. No doubt, the traditional values are a great source for engagement in this regard and can benefit the church in enriching her ecological teachings. Ecological engagement or spirituality is not creationism. We care for the environment because of faith in God who is the author of all life forms and who has entrusted the duty-care to humans from the beginning of times. Thus, care for the environment is not entirely new, not exclusively limited to the Church. It is human to be both stewards of and partners with the environment. Such is the intention of God for reposing the sacred trust to humans to care and not to desecrate or exploit the earth. Creation is good and beautiful. It mirrors God but not exhaustive of God and cannot replace God. The awareness of this value needs a continuous resounding against the incursions of deep fanaticism in most Igbo Christians today who have been falsely indoctrinated into believing that the environment is mere matter to be exploited at will.

The traditional Igbo was “green” given that green stands for Ndu, i.e., life in Igbo language. The dearth and collapse of this green life in so many ways among the Igbo raises a serious concern. The church can no longer be aloof to this reality nor “be silent witnesses to terrible injustices if we think that we can obtain significant benefits by making the rest of humanity, present and future, pay the extremely high cost of environmental destruction.”778 It is part of the life-movement and mission of the church to ensure that the life of the environment within which precinct it is

778 LS., #36.
domiciled, is furthered and kept green. Inasmuch as we have the responsibility for every living thing on this planet, which includes fellow humans, crucially, we are to care for the less fortunate, and the environment is also part of this poor of the earth who are the sacrament of Christ. As stated above, it is both a charity and justice issue. This means that talks and teachings on the greening of the church should be held with the aim of training environmental activists and church leaders effectively to integrate the environment into religious beliefs and practices of the church to “resacralize our relationship’ to the planet.” The chapter following will continue this argument, precisely, in the recommendation section succeeding evaluation, which will eventually lead to the conclusion of this study.

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Chapter Four

EVALUATION, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the research on the Igbo sacramental nature of the universe, a model for constructing a Christian ecological ethics for the Church in Igbo land. The chapter attempts an overview and appraisal of the work. It offers recommendations for (creating) and reawakening ecological awareness among the faith community as well as every Igbo person for ecological crisis is nondiscriminatory. The earth is a common home. Hence, everyone and everything is rooted in it. It therefore requires that all hands must be on deck to ensure its steady health and life for the continued existence and nourishment of all life forms. The evaluation made of this work, likewise, the recommendations, are done with an eye to its implementation feasibility by the Church in Igbo land as an aid to boosting local creativity in fighting environmental issues. It holds that the church in Igbo land, leaning on the traditional religious ethical values, has relatively what it takes, locally, to mitigate environmental crisis in the place. This reality needs to be harnessed, of course with some modifications in light of the Gospel, and implemented to equip the faithful, both the ordained and nonordained, to defend the earth and all realities that the earth is home to. The conclusion brings the work to the end.

4.2 Overview of work

One of the values chiefly important to the Igbo spirituality is harmony. In other words, for the Igbo, life is appreciated and better understood when humans and nature are in love with each other. Peaceful, harmonious, environment is a ground for the thriving of life. It is a universal variable for it is incumbent on human action and response to the environment. The traditional Igbo
is aware that there are anti-life forces in the world. Therefore, they try to abide by the rules of engagement to ensure balance. In this regard, people respect others, not living at the expense of others. For the Igbo, this is the principle of egbe bere, ugo bere, (let the eagle perch, let the kite perch), ndu miri, ndu azu, (life for the river, life for the fish) or biri ka m biri, i.e., live and let live. These values are rooted in the religious, ethical life of the Igbo who live in a sacred universe with the ubiquity of spirits that permeate everything. It is the basis for interaction of all beings. It recognizes a sacred and democratic space for the thriving of all life forms. This grounds the ecological life of the traditional Igbo hence the interest of this work, rooted in the earth: an Igbo sacramental nature of the universe, a model for constructing an Igbo Christian ecological ethics.

In the course of this work, beginning with chapter one, we found out the identity and socio-historical context of the Igbo, as one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria located in the Southeastern part of the country. The Igbo society is home to millions of people as well as thousands of endemic species of animals and plants. Its forests, mountains, wetlands, rivers, savannah, provide unique biomes to species of life. The traditional hospitality of the Igbo distinguishes the community as home for all. This is strongly rooted in their deeply religious life, their faith in God and the deities as chapter two reveals. However, still on chapter one, the work details the characteristic features of the Igbo life and culture and the rich environment. Like most communities in Africa, the Igbo encountered colonization, civilization, and Christianization. As a result, there are changes from the traditional religious way of life leading to a cross-cultural lifestyle, to a much more modern life that is fast sweeping across the society today. This comes with a high prize, i.e., the erosion of most traditional, religious, values that regulated life and harmonious relationship in the Igbo society. Thus, there is a form of internalized oppression that the average Igbo quests, values, or prefers anything foreign to what is local to them. This affects
even the language and other cultural items. The work reveals that this modern way of life, with all
that it encapsulates – be it political, religious, economical, or psychological-, exacts enormous
impacts on the environment. It is one of the major causes of ecological crisis in the land aside from
other realities. Sadly, as the Igbo proverbially say, “Aru ghaa afo, o buru Omenala,” i.e., when an
abominable behavior is unchecked, it becomes a norm. In other words, the spate of environmental
crisis in the land and the apparent sense of dereliction in most contemporary Igbo is fast becoming
a norm. This new normal is contrary to the traditional ecological consciousness, the quest to
maintain harmony in the community. It, therefore, serves as a challenge to the Catholic faith in
Igbo land; how sensible is it to believe, to worship God happily in a fast-degrading environment
without acting? Faith in God translates into stewardship of creation to keep cosmic balance.

Correspondingly, chapter two of this work shows that the Igbo, like the rest of Africans,
have a religious world, a sacramental universe, a God-indwelt cosmos, a compenetrating world
where the spiritual dovetails into the physical. This traditional religious expression is spirit-
centered and earth-affirming. The universe is the creation of God who is the pillar that upholds it,
Osebuluwa, and therefore the deities could inhabit it. It is a gift and is purposeful. It is full of life,
not a mere matter. As a result, no part of the universe is empty or dumb.

The earth, for the Igbo, has a feminine and divine attribute. By this reason, she is the vehicle
of divine benevolence to all creatures and is home to all creatures from the beginning of life to its
end. Under her womb, the ancestors lay peacefully entombed and continue to share communion
with the living members of the community. This unbroken communion maintains cosmic balance.

The Igbo understanding of the earth goes beyond material, physical, ground, or land reality.
Crucially, the earth has a profound and all-embracing metaphysical reality. If nothing else connects
the Igbo people and everything in their world together, it is not the earth, hence rooted in the earth.
Everything in the Igbo world revolves around the earth. As the saying holds true for the Igbo, *Ala nwe mmadu niile*, i.e., the earth is the owner all human beings and by extension, the owner of all earthlings. The Igbo see themselves as inextricably tied to the earth for sustenance and final rest and as a result, they are duty bound to care for the earth, abide by the moral laws of the earth as enshrined in the heart of the community for the maintenance of harmony.

The moral laws contain ecological ethics under the aegis of *Omenala*, which literally translates as that which is obtainable in the land. It is the tradition of the ancestors formulated under the guidance of the earth spirit, *Ala*. Hence the earth is the chief custodian of Igbo morality together with the ancestors who preserved and passed it on to the community members. *Omenala* is the backbone of Igbo religious and ethical life. Whatever is not in consonance with *Omenala* becomes *Omenelu*, (that which is unrealistically obtainable in the vault of the air), i.e., against *Omenala*, thus an offense. In this regard, pollution of the environment, destroying the created order, exploitation of the earth, killing of totemic animals or trees, etc., are against *Omenala*. To enforce these laws, the Igbo devised measures of social control, taboos, to command people’s allegiance to them to keep nature, life, in harmony. The work argues that the Christian faith in Igbo can learn a lot from this spiritual traditional value that is earth friendly, that emphasizes on harmony, the interconnectedness of things, a universe that is pro-life, *ndu miri ndu azu*, that sees the world as a divine ambassador to guard against ecological amnesia. The Church proclaims the Gospel of life. It does not add up to the proclamation of life in an environment within which precinct the Gospel of life is proclaimed is fast experiencing death, degradation, pollution, extinction, and huge exploitation. It questions the sense of our understanding of the mystery we celebrate and its implications to the society. It calls for new theological understanding of nature to address the wrong narrative about nature in most people.
Consequently, chapter three presents the theological ground for ecological engagements. It shows that ecological life and mission is integral to the universal church’s life and mission. The world is God’s creation, the breath of God. As well, it is a gift. It is purposeful, alive, and sacred because it has its dignity, intrinsic value inhered in God. Creation exists for the glory of God. Theologically, it points to the incarnation of Jesus, which is extensive, i.e., deep incarnation that unites all things in Christ. Jesus is the first born of creation. As a result, creation is a family of God with Jesus as the firstborn. This has wider ecological implications. It challenges both the human and nonhuman ecological disasters due to human arrogance, greed, and supremacy. In a way, the incarnation of Jesus bridges the traditionally held gab between the sacred and the secular, which is mostly responsible for imbalance, exploitation of nature, compartmentalization of faith.

The magisterial teachings, papal encyclicals and episcopal conferences lend credence to the authenticity of eco-theological engagement in the understanding that God has not abandoned this world. Humans are therefore to take care of God’s creation. While not sounding pessimistic, the papal teachings show that the earth is abused, is wounded which is symptomatic of the crisis in the human heart and the earth bears the painful burden. The air, water, soil, and all forms of life bear this evidence, because human beings “see no other meaning in their natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption.” The solution to this crisis is the transformation of heart or what Popes Paul II and Francis call ecological conversion. This is necessary for universal communion.

Within the Igbo context, the chapter reveals some traditional values that can help to realize the summons to ecological conversion, thus serving as tools to construct Igbo Christian ecological

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781 LS., #s 2 and 5.
ethics. The broader concept of creation as a family, as the family is critically important to the Igbo as it is to the church; the unity of life, which is also common to the Christian faith, as everything is united in Christ, amongst other values that the Igbo traditional society espouses. These values can help bring positive changes in the ways the contemporary Igbo look and relate to their environment. For example, evidence from the Earth keeping (based on the traditional value of *ubuntu/ukama*) of Marthinus L. Daneel led group of Zimbabweans and the Green Belt Movement (based on the traditional value of *Harambe*) of the Wangari Mathai led group from Kenya shows how the traditional values can animate the locals to rise to the challenges of environmental crisis. The Igbo have similar values as this work reveals. Revamping them can bring changes in the right directions. However, this can only come about primarily by engaging the Igbo on a journey homeward, to detoxify the consumerist and derelict attitude in them, to decolonize their minds of any penchant to anything foreign to value what is richly local to them. It is only as this is done that ecological spirituality can thrive. The church, as a mother with teaching authority and as an expert in humanity with her moral voice, has a task to engage with the Igbo traditional values for a lasting ecological mission. This is necessary to attain green faith, which systematically reflects on the green environment. It is not surprising that the Igbo word for life is *ndu*. It is same as green color. It is based on these values that the work will make recommendations after evaluation.

### 4.3 Evaluation of work

The sequence of this work has been harmony. It is critical to the Igbo society as elsewhere. Consistently, the work has argued that the traditional spirituality and commodious relationship with nature present a great tool for relating with nature in the present Igbo society that seems to fare without much respect to nature.
However, this work is not oblivious of the complexity of the Igbo traditional worldview. It is also aware that the Igbo traditional ecological practice is susceptible to misinterpretation due to perceived ambiguities. Its strengths seem to be its weakness as well. The sense of ubiquity of spirit presents some problems. The belief that spirits can inhabit trees or animals, etc., perhaps, foregrounds the fanatical Christians’ interpretation of scapegoating the environment. Logically, if good spirits can inhabit the natural environment, it follows that evil spirits can equally inhabit them. This tends to give credibility to the claims of the fanatical set of Christians, justifying their various wars on some natural objects they earmark demonic. But again, it tends to be a lopsided belief, probably a product of ignorance amongst other things that needs to be critically studied.

Nevertheless, extending the argument further, Igbo traditional religion, like Christianity, believes in good and evil spirits and their respective operations in the spheres of life. For instance, it is not uncommon to see such belief resonating clearly in Judeo-Christian texts. Genesis records instance of God’s spirit hovering on the waters.782 This same Spirit creates the world, very active in the world, breathes and renews the face of the earth783 and is everywhere that nothing can be hidden from the Spirit.784 Yet evil spirit can still inhabit some creatures; “And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.”785 Jesus also sends evil spirits to a herd of pigs that eventually


783 Cf. Psalm 104:30.

784 See Psalm 139:7-8.

785 Revelations 16:13.
drowned in the river. Yet these rivers and mountains clap their hands and sing joyous praises for God. This ambiguity is rife and can present a hydra-headed ambiguities in Christianity as they are in traditional Igbo religion regarding ubiquity of spirit. When these ambiguities are not well handled, nature pays the brutal prize. Since this work is not on Biblical exegesis, it leaves it to the Scripture scholars to clear the clogs. However, the point here is that there are ambiguities in Christianity as they are in traditional Igbo religion regarding ubiquity of spirit. When these ambiguities are not well handled, nature pays the brutal prize.

Every religion has its weakness as well as strength. Terrence W. Tilley rightly observes that “Practices, especially religious practices, are fragile; communities of practitioners are also fragile.” Discernment, therefore, is needed to act rightly. Tilley states,

We want to understand the ‘right’ way to engage in practices and the ‘right’ way to believe, not only because we want to be authentic and faithful participants in the tradition, but also because we want to be able to pass on a vibrant tradition to those who succeed us in the tradition. We would like to find a rule that could guarantee that the tradition we have been blessed to inherit can bless those to whom we bequeath it.

Enduring tradition is very important. This comes from discerning the values that build and sustain humanity and the environment within which context humanity thrives and help them to relate healthily to each other and to God. What good the values promote and how they can be furthered sustainably considering the Gospel of creation? These are critically important issues to consider.

786 Matthew 8: 28-33.
787 Psalm 98:8.
789 Tilley, 103.
In other words, there is a need for conscientious study of Igbo traditional religious claims objectively to see what values they promote, how they can enrich faith and help in mitigating environmental degradation. This is where the Catholic church in Igbo land needs to critically engage in conservations with the traditional religious expressions to distil facts from illusion. Certainly, everything is not evil. Also, everything should not be accepted in the name of culture.

Again, as noted in the previous chapters, evil for traditional Igbo society is the disruption or disintegration of the ontological harmony. Whatever weakens or destroys the life or “vital force” of any being in the web of life is a breach on the harmonious interaction among beings. It is, therefore, considered evil. Stan Chukwube notes that “one’s action is considered moral or immoral depending on how that very action enhances or impedes the welfare of others and the smooth functioning of the community.”\textsuperscript{790} Though Chukwube may not have this on mind while writing, it is crucial to note that the word, ‘others,’ includes the human and nonhuman relatives since the Igbo believe there is kinship in nature as this work has demonstrated. Insight from Innocent C. Onyewuuenyi makes this point clearer. “In his conduct the African takes into consideration the fact that he [sic]is not alone,” says Onyewuuenyi, “that he [sic] is a clog in a wheel of interacting forces. He [sic] knows that the important thing in his [sic] action is not how it affects him [sic] personally, but how it affects the world order, the spiritual republic outside of which he [sic] does not exist as a muntu, outside of which he [sic] is a planet off its orbit, meaningless and nonexisting.”\textsuperscript{791} This

\textsuperscript{790} Stan O. Chukwube, \textit{Renewing the Community and Fashioning the Individual: A Study of Traditional Communal Reconciliation among the Igbo.} (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2008), 48.

validates the point already made in this work that humans, for the Igbo, are beings among beings who mutually interact. Harmony, therefore, is crucial to the Igbo hence they try to ward off any disruptive agent threatening harmony. If evil, for the traditional Igbo, is the disruption of the harmonious interaction among beings as noted above, and as a result, they put up environmental ethical behaviors rooted in their religion to forestall the breaking of this harmony or to restore it when broken, then the spirit behind this ethics is a good one. It is a value. It promotes life contrary to the idea and practice of destroying the environment in the name of liberating people from evil manipulation said to inhabit in the groves or natural environment. Supposedly, no sane mind would object to any means to maintain a balanced relationship with their relatives even when their relatives include beings other than humans. It is duty-care, a culture of love and justice towards one’s neighbor or kin to which the environment is an integral part of. Education is part of the solution to this problem. The Catholic church has an obligation to continue to enlighten the faithful on how to approach issues like this for proper insight and relationship with the environment. Arguably, there is a need to intensify pastoral care to ensure proper relationship with the nature.

Besides, another area of concern with the traditional Igbo ethical, religious, life is fear. What is the driving force behind most earth-friendly practices of the traditional Igbo society? Is it fear or love and respect? To what extent can the fear of the deities go in sustaining biodiversity and maintaining the sacredness of the earth? Some scholars hold that the traditional practices are not intentionally geared towards maintaining a healthy ecological relationship. For instance, Bonaventure Ugwu talks about fear as the propelling factor behind the Igbo traditional ecological practices and observance. Ugwu argues that “Respect for nature should not be out of fear but love.” Also, Nisbert Taringa argues that “the ecological attitude of traditional African religion

\footnote{Bonaventure I. Ugwu, “A Spirit-Based Theology of the Environment,” 77.}
is more based on fear or respect of ancestral spirits than on respect for nature itself.”

Further, Taringa holds that the designation of some species as totems leaves other species that are not regarded as totems vulnerable, just as the designation of some places as sacred exposes others that are not to exploitation and degradation. Understandably, these can be genuine concerns that may be held in creative tension. Nevertheless, Ugwu and Taringa do not seem to understand the wisdom of the traditional Igbo in designating certain species as totems and certain places as sacred. Certainly, every phenomenon in Igbo world is not treated as totemic yet it does not limit or reduce the sacred view the Igbo hold of each species since by their origin, they are all created by God who declared them good and blessed. Fear can be reasonable or irrational. Again, this is not particular to the Igbo traditional approach to religious matters. In Christianity, Christ advises believers to not be afraid, yet some Christians get scared at the slightest events. Humans naturally exhibit some fears over certain phenomena in life. This is one of the natural tendencies in life. Apparently, Igbo traditional religion might not be advocating irrational fear although there might be claims that sound too superstitious or exaggerated. What is discernable here is respect for all life forms. Thus, it is a reasonable fear devised to protect nature from human abuse. Taringa and, perhaps, Ugwu failed to realize this and distinguish between reasonable and irrational fear. Again, they failed to realize that environmental conservation, commodious life, is a way of life to the traditional Igbo.

Disagreeing respectfully with Taringa, firstly, the fact that the “ecological attitude of traditional African religion is more based on fear or respect of ancestral spirits than on respect for nature itself,” does not mean that these taboos are not principally made to promote healthy


794 Taringa, Ibid. 191-213.
environmental relationships. It is crucially remarkable to note that religion and culture of the Traditional Africans are inseparable as it could be seen from their worldview. Therefore, the Igbo elders, in their wisdom, enacted these taboos, as part of *omenala*, tradition, handed by *Ala*, the Earth Spirit, under the tutelage of the ancestral spirit to elicit fear and respect to maintain a healthy environmental relationship in the cosmos. They are to curtail excessive human behavior towards life in general. There is nothing wrong with this except Taringa is, for instance, opposed to the law prohibiting murder in many countries of the world under the penalty of life imprisonment or capital punishments in some places which are not meant primarily to control the ethical behaviors of human beings towards their fellow human beings though it is observed more based on fear of being punished than respect for fellow human beings themselves.

Secondly, it is not true that designating some species of animals and plants as totems or some places as sacred the way the ancients made it would lead to the extinction of other species. As noted above, not every species is totemic in Igbo society. However, every natural phenomenon is held as sacred which helped in their protection and enhancement. The fact is that the elders in their wisdom knew that human beings need certain beings other than humans as food to protect and strengthen their own lives. Obviously, they knew they must not endanger these other beings in a way that could lead to their extinction thereby disrupting the ontological harmony. Therefore, they designed these means to realize this goal. That explains why each clan in Igbo land has a different species of animals and plants as their totems. So, there is no way a particular species could be extinct from the universe except by natural death since what is eaten in one clan is protected in another as totems. Taringa and Ugwu need to be reminded that the ancients who enacted these taboos were, perhaps, not oblivious of the fact that some people kept them out of fear of being punished by the ancestral spirits who are the custodians of these laws.
On the contrary, that is not what they intended to do, to create irrational fears in people. Apparently, many people kept laws out of love and respect. However, this is subject to varied interpretations which possibly may differ from the minds of the ancestors for enacting laws they deemed fit for the protection of their environments. Again, as earlier noted, what counts most is the value that these beliefs and practices promoted. They serve as healthy environmental ethical behaviors through which the traditional Igbo society controlled human excesses and thus tried to maintain a balanced relationship with other beings in the universe. Belief in God whose spirit permeates the universe, on the natural phenomena, and whose benignity is seen and received from the bounty of the earth inspires environmental protection and harmony in the Igbo traditional society. It is a way of life within the Igbo to ensure that the surroundings are adequately taken care of. It is pleasing to God, the deities, and the community. It is both ritual and ethics for the Igbo.

Summarily, as noted above, this does not mean that some of these traditional beliefs are exhaustive for them to be lifted as they are into the Christian ecological practices. This study does not equally advocate a complete return to the past. It is neither against urbanization nor advancement. Firstly, a call to what completely was in the past is not realizable. It amounts to an effort in futility and sounds anachronistic. Secondly, lifting all that were in the past and inserting them into the Christian ecological teaching, to be locally authentic or inculturated, sounds parochial and more or less of cultural romanticism. The Igbo worldview is a complex reality. Issues of relationship with the earth can be overly exaggerated, leading to some superstitious beliefs and thinking. Distilling the wheat from the chaff is important for proper integration into Christian ecological ethics. Therefore, effort should be made to critically assess the environmentally ethical behaviors of the elders, their wisdom in devising certain ecologically friendly practices or social
control mechanisms that helped to preserve the earth bequeathed to their progenies. In this regard, the work makes certain proposals. This will be the focus of the next section.

4.4 Recommendations and Pathways Forward

This work has exposed most of the Igbo traditional ecological practices in the worldview held as sacred and alive wherein everything is interconnected. This sacred view and kinship relationship served to keep the fauna and flora together and maintained a cosmic balance. It has argued that these practices can be well integrated into the Christian ecological ethics to arrest the current ecological dereliction, consumerism and exploitation affecting the society. In this regard, it makes some recommendations as pathways forward for the re-education of people on the ecological values of the traditional Igbo life, which when adopted, can expand the range of information and approaches needed to tackle environmental issues in the land.

4.4.1 Continuing Catechism of Creation and Christian witness

The significance of Catechism on creation cannot be overemphasized. It is worth reiterating the views espoused by the Catholic Catechism on creation. Clearly, the catechism recognizes and emphasizes much on the dignity of creation. Every organism as a creature of God has values of their own in God’s eyes and “by their mere existence they bless him [sic] and give [him] glory.”

In a similar fashion, “Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection … Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man [sic] must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature,

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795 Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2416. Hereafter cited as CCC.
to avoid any disordered use of things.” By virtue of this deep pronouncement, the sacramental nature of the universe is thus validated. Creation is not ordinary, not without a purpose. Creation is a work of a benevolent, caring, and compassionate as well as a just God whose goodness is seen in the extension of Godself as the sacred Altar known as the earth. This is a reminder of the fundamental truth of the Christian faith, as well as the Igbo traditional belief, that the earth and all in it is God’s creation and good news worth upholding and witnessing for.

This theology of creation lays out the fact that creation - the natural environment, animals, mountains, waters, forests, etc., are intimately an extension of God’s goodness and they, in some ways, participate in the mystery of salvation. In Christ is the whole of creation made anew and everything is taken in and by Christ. Since Christ died for the salvation of all, it is therefore the human responsibility to respect and care for nature for the intrinsic value it has. Nature is primarily for the glory of God, and it is the window through which humans perceive and receive God’s goodness. If God created the world, then the world and all things in it must have values that should be respected. Integrally, this means that the earth and all that it is home to are created in a system like a household (as Oikos), a family. To be pro-life and pro-family is therefore to be pro-earth, pro-creation, pro-environment, pro-faith in the understanding that things are interconnected and, leading to God, the source of all creation. Therefore, people need to exercise responsible use of creation to avoid any abuse of it. While the human needs for shelter, food, development, medicine, etc., are valid and necessary, efforts are to be made to ensure that there is reasonable limit to not exert undue pressure, wounds, or pains to the environment. This truth must be repeatedly told using whatever means available in Igbo church to drive home the message.

796 CCC, #. 339
The image of creation as a family with various species of life, one of which is the human life, as a caretaker of God’s family, needs to be much integrated in the catechetical instructions as a vocation and ministry placed on humans in the Igbo Christian catechism. Crucially, incorporating the Igbo traditional conception of the sacredness of the earth and the mutual interaction of life into the catechism of the church stands as a great way of reviving and “Futuring our past”797 in the minds of the young to ecologically care for the earth and relate properly with it. The traditional Igbo have a strong sense of responsibility for the dignity and harmony of creation. This factors in the way they tend to the earth conceived as a benign mother in whom everything is rooted from birth to death. As a result, strong sense of kinship is initiated. Relatedly, there are rites of smearing a newborn baby with loose earth as a sign of welcome and communion with the earth community and the rite of burying the umbilical cord in the earth beside a tree. This is like a covenant to be earth friendly, to protect her and thread responsibly. The ecological significances of these pro-environmental rites need to be highlighted in the catechism. They are examples to drive home the sense of kinship and responsibility towards the earth in the young minds as well as adults for ongoing catechetical instructions. It is expected that this will bring positive changes in the ways we look at and relate with the earth. This is one of the ways of repairing the damages done to the Igbo world culturally and spiritually. The future of any society lies in her young ones who are well socialized and integrally initiated into the deep values, the soul of the society. Such actions produce lasting legacies, a sense of commitment, stewardship, and partnership with all life-forms and

properties of the place. In this way, the belief that ecological preservation is a way of life among the Igbo is perpetuated.\footnote{798} 

Religiously, the Igbo society has rich double heritages, traditional and Christian. In essence, both religious heritages are more like a way of life which the Igbo society can be so much at home with. A careful integration of the ecological or creation values of both teachings in the catechism of the church in Igbo land is a boost to their ecological integrity to maintain cosmic balance. This will empower the young minds to take charge of their future, integrate environmental justices into their life and works and eventually transmit same to their progenies. As put clearly in their pastoral statement by the United States Bishops Conference, Christians need to be reminded that they are called to be faithful stewards of God’s creation at all costs. “As faithful stewards, fullness of life comes from living responsibly within God’s creation,”\footnote{799} otherwise God’s family.

Family is crucial to the Igbo life, the same way it is to the Christian teaching. The phrase, “Creation as family” will drive home to the values that the Igbo hold so dear to relate with and use the earth’s fruits within reasonable limits, bearing in mind the welfare of their future generations. Therefore, inflicting pains on the earth in whatever ways, through pollution, binge, profligacy, exploitation, dereliction, etc., is an affront to God’s family, to human dignity, which translates into meting cruelty to fellow humans as well. Although the human life and right are not at par with those of nonhuman creatures, they are by no means to be abused, exploited, or suffer dereliction


from humans. It bears repeating that humans are called to care for creation, not to exploit it nor declare profane whatever God has proclaimed good ab initio. To achieve this, renewed interest in catechetical instructions from the grassroots levels to parish and regional levels is important.

4.4.2. Engaging Women in Environmental Discussions

One of the African proverbs says, “If you train a man, you train an individual. But if you train a woman, you train a nation.” The corollary of this wisdom is seen in the indispensable roles Igbo women play both in their maiden and matrimonial homes to maintain balance, to achieve development and sustain life from its beginning to the end. Any cultural, social, political, economic, and religious development strategy in Igbo land that denigrates the importance of women is doomed to fail from the onset.

The position of women in environmental conservation therefore cannot be overemphasized. No doubt, the success and health of any family, society, church, etc., rests heavily on the active shoulders and creative heads of women. The moral and spiritual tones of both Christian and traditional life are mostly maintained and perpetuated by women who teach these values convincingly to their children and relatives. Therese J Agbasiere and Rose N. Uchem respectively note with excellence the political, economic, social, and religious statues and roles women have gallantly played in Igbo however much of patriarchal slant the Igbo society has had or witnessed. Instances abound like Aba women’s riot, healthcare sector, education, leadership

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801 To protest marginalization, women, in 1929, organized themselves through their various indigenous groups and networks to successfully deal with British colonial regime that imposed tax on them without consulting them. These women demanded, among other things, for a return to the past, social reforms, and the recognition of women’s rights and dignity within the cultural context. Their solidarity and organization were quite remarkable in an age and situation of nonexistent of telecommunications. The ability of women to massively mobilize themselves, in the face of danger
and politics, development projects, peace and harmony in the society, agriculture, and finance, etc. Women have remained outstanding agents of change and influence in all areas of life.

Agbasiere observes that, “Most of the church apostolate societies are composed of women. Church dignitaries, foreign and indigenous, have paid tributes to the ‘weight’ of female Christians in church life and affairs… Christian women are indispensable in the ministry of the church. Without them the Church in Igbo land would collapse…” There is no gainsaying the fact that women are the livewires and the backbones of the society and the church. They are “gift pragmatized,” ethical beings who confer status to men and upholders of morality. Similarly, Agbasiere avers that Igbo women are “the promoters of creative awareness of the implications of religious exigence and interactions within the society” as well as having the capability of “creating, maintaining and re-creating the proper milieu for moral and effective bonds between the visible and invisible beings within the universe.” In this same capacity, they are leaders with great


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804 Agbasiere, 7

805 Ibid.
ingenuity, industry and exceptional ability which may involve resistance to externally imposed change as seen above.

In a society like the Igbo that recognizes and celebrates the maternity of *Ala*, and the sacredness of the earth and cosmic spirituality, the intrinsic connection between women and nature is not new. Hence, the Igbo are rooted in the earth in all spheres of life. This reality which ties integrally to the motherhood and mothering nature of the earth is physically seen in the role of women as outstanding humans first, and secondly, as sisters, daughters, aunts, wives, mothers, and friends who gestate, cosset, educate, lead, preserve, love, and responsibily give and tend to life both human and nonhuman life-forms. Agbasiere articulates the comprehensive roles of women in Igbo society economically, socially, and religiously. For her, the Igbo world is more of a female-oriented world. This makes sense considering the feminine aspect of the Igbo worldview, *Ala*, Mother Earth and her role and recognition and respect accorded to her. Women and nature are linked together in creative and life-sustaining ways just as sustainability and environment are linked. For Agbasiere, women are known to be closer with and much concerned about nature than men. Far from sounding sexist, it is one of the natural tendencies and blessed gifts women have that trumps men’s proclivities and prowess. Women have heavy weight in both the blessing and cursing of any generation and the land. For instance, when things are getting out of control in Igbo land, the help of *Umuada* - (the Igbo brand of feminism) is sought to restore peace. Their decisions are binding. Failure to adhere to the decisions of the group attracts punishments. Their blessings are believed to be enduring.

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806 Ibid.

In Igbo land, especially in the rural areas, women interact with and shape the environment often more than men. They bear more of the survival burden in crop and food production, household management, leadership organization, education, religious education, sustainability, preservation, conservation, etc., that it can be rightly said that women are the mainstays of economic life in the families and society. For example, growing up as a kid, it was from my mother and grandmother that I learnt about the *isi ji na odu ji* (the head and end parts of a yam) metaphor. The traditional Igbo use this metaphor to teach sustainability, preservation, and conservation and guard against the culture of waste. The *isi ji na odu ji* metaphor teaches that if the head and the end parts of the yam are not safely preserved or conserved for the next planting season, then there will be famine, the future is not sustainable. Therefore, *isi ji na odu ji* metaphor teaches against consumerism or binge eating and imparts a sense of responsibility, commitment to protecting the environment, and extension, faith, and other values necessary to keep life ‘green’ to the young minds. While teaching sustainability and conservation of nature or faith is not the exclusive reserve for women, mothers, or a particular gender, the point being illustrated here is the powerful influence women naturally have to shape the face of the future, to protect and conserve nature and teach same values to the young minds whether their children, wards, relatives or anyone within their limits. This is a gift. The church and the society must acknowledge, appreciate, and harness it for proper education on conservation and sustainability of the environment and transformation of the society. Responsible conservation is much more of a natural gift that women possess and this may account for their assiduous relationship with the physical environment.

Painfully, women are more aware of the threats that any onslaught on the environment poses to their lives and those of their children and families. As a result of this closeness with nature, the role women play in childbearing and rearing, healthcare, sanitation, food production and
processing, responsibility for water, fuel, and all sorts of basic needs in life must not go without proper acknowledgement. The sustainability of the environment cannot be successful without women’s active involvement in decision making and implementation processes. Wangari Maathai’s initiatives in Kenya is one example, among many, involving women’s active roles in safeguarding the environment. Igbo women are familiar with such shining examples in being actively involved in decisions, organization, leadership, diplomatic engagements, and actions that change the society in the right direction. Thus, any environmental ethics or sustainable developments that feigns ignorance to gender discrimination either in the church or the society and silently or actively allow it is not only inadequate, but also anti-human, anti-life, anti-ecological ethics, anti-society, and anti-faith. An enduring ecological integrity in Igbo land must not neglect the dignity, humanity, and role of women. Healing and consoling Mother Earth analogously means treating women fairly and justly in the understanding that they relay earthly blessings and on other hand, when provoked, they can pronounce deleterious curses capable of sweeping away all benedictions, resulting in earth’s crises and human penury.\textsuperscript{808} To fight against ecological crises, the church, therefore, must engage women actively from the start to finish without which nothing can be reasonably achieved.

4.4.3 Engaging the Youth in Ecological Conversations

As it has been noted in this work, no right-thinking Igbo likes to bequeath leaky roofs to their young ones nor prays to be greater than their youth. This holds true of the church as well. The youthfulness and liveness of the society and the church is a great concern almost as it is with the youthfulness and liveness of the environment that provides an enabling atmosphere to human

\textsuperscript{808} Cf. Sirach 3:8-10.
lives. Therefore, “the community has the obligation to ensure the continuity of life in the community.”

Equally, the posterity of the environment lies in having committed and vibrant youth who would promote the culture of life and integrity of creation against the virulent culture that is hostile to the environment as well as anti-faith in several ways.

Hence, Benedict XVI calls for a serious review of the contemporary lifestyle in which many societies, including the church, are prone to hedonism and consumerism irrespective of their harmful outcomes. For the Pontiff, what is needed is an effective shift in mentality that can lead to the adoption of a new lifestyle in which the quest for truth, goodness, beauty, and communion with others for the sake of the common growth are the factors that determine consumer choices, investments, and savings. Benedict XVI’s proposal seems helpful in sustaining the environment. However, the concern is the relevance of this new lifestyle to the average unemployed Igbo youths, most of whom are desperately hungry for the satisfaction of their immediate needs regardless of the means. How ecologically sensitive will they be when they are left with no options for a meaningful lifestyle that are environmentally friendly? No doubts, poverty continues to berate a lot of values. This makes environmental sanctity harder, abetting exploitation and pollution of the environment. However genuine these concerns are, they do not justify any exploitation and pollution of the environment nor dereliction towards it. Inasmuch as the church may not create ideal jobs or satisfy the hunger of the teeming unemployed youth, she has the obligation to encourage the youth to make courageous choices toward more environmentally friendly livelihoods that help to heal the wounds of God's creation, fight to ensure respect for the dignity

\[\text{Simeon O. Eboh, } African \text{ Communalism, 85}\]

\[\text{Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, Caritas in Veritate (On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth), June 2009, #51.}\]
of the vulnerable and spread the spirit of solidarity and sharing and preserve their bright future. Proverbially, the Igbo say, “the cat who cares about his future does not eat a pregnant rat.” Following this, Pope Francis advises the church to be consistent in encouraging the youth to be “the critical conscience of the society in the world that ‘thinks only present gain, that tends to stifle grand ideals…” Ecologically, these values can greatly help to fight against what Chinua Achebe calls “cargo-cult mentality,” or what Chukwudum Okolo calls “squandermania mentality” at work in most of today’s youth. Engaging the youth on critical issues about genuine hard work, commitment to protecting God’s creation and passion for environmental justice, and the appreciation of the common home, the interrelatedness of the human and the natural environments are ways to counter exploitative tendencies that rip the environment apart.

It is imperative, therefore, that the church should critically engage the youths in ecological discussions, stimulating debates to weigh the pros and cons in the use of the environment vis-à-vis the brighter and greener environment for tomorrow. Some Igbo ethical principles like cosmic balance, sacramental nature of the universe, communion, kinship, interconnectedness of life, onye aghala nwanne ya (let no one abandon their kin), egbe bere ugo bere or biri ka m biri, (live and let live), ndu miri ndu azu (life for the rivers, life for fish), etc, are various values for ecological debates or discussions for the youth. This could be organized on local or parish and regional levels, diocesan, and inter-diocesan levels from time to time. These environmentally based discussions,


812 Ibid.


debates and colloquia are breeding grounds for young environmental activists for the church and the society. By learning facts, not fears, about the environmental crisis, and by commitment to environmental life and guided by the people they respect as role models in life, the young people can learn and participate excitedly in an experience of integral aspect of genuine ecological education that will help save the earth from further pollution and exploitation. In this way, they become active and happy agents of the Gospel of creation, the culture of life, the vanguards of green faith, green life.

4.4.4 Establishment of Ecological Sunday

It is critically advisable that the Catholic church in Igbo land starts to celebrate ecological Sundays or Earth Day Sundays or Creation Sundays, or Green Masses whatever name each locality chooses. The aim of such a Sunday is to formally introduce and familiarize environmental theology into the Christian worship and life. Readings, songs, psalms, and prayers, including the homily or sermon on such a day will reflect the dignity and integrity of creation and the need to maintain cosmic balance for the thriving of all life forms. Unequivocally, the homily is meant to condemn the contemporary human rapacious attitude, consumerism, throwaway culture that impinge seriously on the environment and encourage people to value the traditional human-nature relationship that helped the Igbo traditional society to keep the fauna and flora alive and green.

In chapter two of this work, it detailed the ecological significance of most traditional Igbo rituals. There are rituals for planting and harvesting seasons, for thanksgiving to God for the fruits of the earth and grateful consumption and other rituals for various occasions. These rituals can provide great insights for teaching people how to use the fruits of creation religiously and materially to enrich the environment, to relate with each other and to worship God, connecting with creation in returning praises to God, the Creator and sustainer of creation. Inasmuch as this
work does not advocate cultural romanticism nor complete return to what were in the past
traditional Igbo life, it calls on the church to make efforts to study those earth-friendly traditional
rituals and see how best to modify, explore, and employ them to teach the faithful about “integral
ecology.” After all, rituals of blessing of seeds, animals, fields, harvesting, for rains, and
thanksgiving to God are integral part of the church’s liturgical life. Recalling and exploring the
rich values of Igbo traditional spirituality, regarding ecological theology, is an advantage to the
contemporary Igbo Christians. It helps the emerging Igbo reality to be conscious of their roots and
committed to a secured future. As Luke Mbefo rightly notes, “when the roots are not forgotten,
but positively affirmed, then the evolving, in this case, the modern African who is the product of
a two-fold heritage, the one native, the other foreign, harmonizes in himself [sic] a unity
unavailable to the traditional African taken alone, and to the foreign in him [sic] when taken in
isolation.” In other words, the integration of most traditional rituals into the Church’s life will
produce a well-seasoned, richer, and balanced Igbo Christian ecological ethics and ritual that can
help in a good formation of ecological spirituality. People will become conscious of the need to
protect creation for such means self-protection as well. Taking care of creation, then, becomes
much more like a way of life. In this way, ritual celebrations are carried out into life activities, to
the fields or farms, to the marketplaces, to workplaces, in political and economic life, in various
institutions of life, in decision making, in industrial productions, etc., without
compartmentalization. It gets down to various roots of life to what and how people consume things,

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815 LS., #137.
they become intentional, and mindful of the needs of others, including the needs of the environment. This is one of the fruits of having an ecological Sunday.

Furthermore, environmental sanitations, gardening, albeit in small scale measures, and the melioristic actions that help to keep the environment healthily sustainable need to be constantly emphasized on such a day and if possible, regularly at Masses and other ecclesial gatherings. Priests, pastors, or church leaders have the moral obligation to encourage the faithful of their moral duties to support policies laid out by some environmental activists or movements for the protection of the environment. *Laudato Si’* document is a very rich document that needs to be integrated in sermons and catechetical instructions on the Gospel of creation. According to Carmody Grey, the radicality of *Laudato Si’* does not lie only on the fact that it is a compelling social teaching very much ad rem but also as a theology of creation. In Grey’s words, as noted by Joshtrom I. Kureethadam, “With the phrase, ‘Gospel of Creation’ alone, Pope Francis, “inaugurates a new era in the Catholic Church’s approach to the natural world. The world of animals, forests, mountains and waters are inextricably part of God’s good news for us; they express and participate in the mystery of salvation.”818 This theology is worth perpetuating in the rural and urban areas for a new ethics of the environment and way of relating with the natural world and protecting it as an integral part of God’s command and Christian vocation and mission. It is incumbent on the priests, pastors, or parish evangelists to break this word meaningfully and contextually to the understanding of people for deeper appreciation of the natural environment.

4.4.5 ‘Ad Memoriam’ Tree Planting Ministry

Tree planting is a noble ministry. It is a sacred and ethical vocation to add to the beauty of God’s creation. The earlier chapters, especially chapter three, of this work, revealed a lot of this ministry in some parts of Africa, the *Ubuntu/ukama* (relatedness) of the Zimbabwean Earthkeepers and the *Harambe* (Togetherness) of Green Belt Movement of Kenya. Similar values for tree planting initiatives exist in Igbo society. They can be veritable instruments, philosophy, or spirituality to boost a people’s morale in contributing to the greening of the earth to memorialize events or people in life. Celebrations of various occasions are so common in the present Igbo society. In most of these occasions, the environment is polluted and smeared with all sorts of refuse- littering of plastics, nylons, defacing of building walls with murals, etc., that constitute nuisance to the environment. Aside from providing refuse dumps for the neatness of the environment, people could be taught to memorialize their ceremonies by planting trees. It could be in memory of their loved ones who are dead. It can as well be to immortalize their great days in life like birthdays, wedding days/anniversaries, religious consecration or priestly ordinations/anniversaries, graduations. Also, it can be on occasions of parish feasts, i.e., feast of a parish’s patron saint, feasts marking Catholic Women Organizations, CWO, Catholic Men Organization, CMO, Mothers’ and Fathers’ Days celebrations respectively, Catholic Girls Organization, CGO, Catholic Youth Organization of Nigeria, CYON, etc., Imagine if in each of these feast days, a parish decides to plant just a tree around the region or a designated village, street, family, etc., of their choice!

Scientifically, planting trees is one of the effective ways to curb carbon dioxide building up in atmosphere, aside from the fact that trees serve as wind breaks, protecting houses and warding off erosions. Traditionally, tree planting is associated with some Kairos events in life. For
example, in some part of Mbaise areas of Igbo land, young maidens visiting their suitors’ families for the first time, on or before traditional marriages normally go with seedlings of any tree to plant. This act is very symbolic. A tree is a symbol of life and strength apart from its economic and environmental values. It means life and fruitful, and lasting relationship in marriage. As the tree grows and fructifies, so is the marriage expected to grow, mature and bear fruits. This practice, which is fast dying, could be taken up by the church and inserted into marriage instructions. It is symbolic as well as a compelling way of floriating, greening up, and protecting the environment. This practice is in line with the recommendations of *Laudato Si* as part of the environmental healing processes. Accordingly, “Given the complexity of the ecological crisis and its multiple causes, we need to realize that the solutions will not emerge from just one way of interpreting and transforming reality. Respect must also be shown for the various cultural riches of different peoples, their art and poetry, their interior life and spirituality.” This is commendable.

Related to tree planting, as a rich cultural heritage, in Igbo land are the practices of animal tenancy and tree tenancy like raffia palms, pear, plantain, banana, etc., in which people exchange among themselves to establish and strengthen relationships. In Mbaise areas, it is called *iluwe aku*, literally a form of agistment between persons in which the proceeds from the animals or trees are shared equally between the giver and the recipient of the livestock or plant. This practice not only strengthens peaceful relationships among people, also it helps to create more bond between the human and nonhuman creatures. This helps in promoting and conserving biodiversity and instils the sense of commitment to environmental integrity in people howbeit unconsciously. By

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819 L.S., #63.

integrating this into her teachings, the church will be enriched in her ecological teachings and practices to educate her children properly on ecological protection.

4.4.6 Formation of Environmental Society

Pope Francis’s summons to action in Laudato Si’ has birthed an international Catholic group known as Laudato Si’ Movement, LSM, founded as Global Catholic Climate Change, GCCC, to actualize in concrete ways the vision and mission of Laudato Si’ to grassroots, regional, national, and international levels. LSM has triple dimensions. The first is the spiritual dimension which emphasizes on and encourages ecological conversion and appreciation of creation as God’s gift, Gospel of creation. The second is a lifestyle dimension. Like the first, it calls for changes in lifestyle, that humans recognize the need for positive change in production and consumption to fight climate warming. Lastly, LSM has mobilization and advocacy dimension which reminds the church of her duty towards creation and that she must extend this role actively in public spheres to save humanity from self-destruction. The aims of LSM, above all, are to raise and intensify awareness within the church in various levels about the urgency of climate action in adherence to the Catholic social and environmental teachings, to promote Catholic relationship between faith and reason, to persuade politicians, social leaders and businesspersons to commit climate actions, to keep the global temperature to 1.5 degree Celsius, relatively to pre-industrial levels. This is good news. It can serve as a template for formation of environmental society in the church in Igbo land.

The church in Igbo land is replete with pious sodalities and organizations or movements with various objectives both on the parish and diocesan levels. These societies act as leaven in

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various ways in bearing witness to the faith in Christ. They are often the social and political arms of the church. Therefore, establishing Environmental Society with the sole aim of creating and perpetuating environmental concerns is wholesome. They can help a lot in breaking down the works of the commission on Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation, JPIC, and Laudato Si’ Movement, LSM, to the understanding of people. The society is to be charged with the responsibility of articulating resources, both theological and social, like those of LSM, to address environmental needs of the church and the immediate communities where the churches are located.

As part of its duty, the society will design and engage in activities like erosion control measures, grassing, tree planting and the beautification of church compounds to improve the aesthetic outlook of the church with ornamental trees and flowers. They could help in organizing outdoor church programs or Masses to enable people feel the natural connection in worship. The idea here is that this society will link with other environmental societies in the State and in the country, like the Green Belt Movement and Earth keepers in international levels to share visions together and to join hands in the fight against environmental crisis.

Again, this society will be entrusted with the duty of organizing environmental workshops, campaigns, and seminars regularly where environmental activists, environmentalists and or ethicists, theologians and policy makers can be invited to engage in stimulating conversation with the local congregations on the need for environmental conservation, the causes and prevention of environmental crisis and other relevant environmental and poverty issues affecting the Igbo land and the globe. The formation of this society, when adopted, should be seen as one of the practical expressions of the church’s commitment to care for the local community, in that way, maintaining her relevance in the society. It is one of the ways of creating awareness and implementing Laudato
Si’ and other Papal or episcopal teachings on care for the environment and social issues affecting people’s faith.

4.4.7 Ecological Ethics in Catholic Schools, Seminaries/ Houses of Formation

One of the major lacunae this work noticed at its incubational stage was the apparent lack of environmental education or ecological ethics in most houses of formation in Igbo land. Continued discussions during this work also revealed that many ordained and nonordained people in Igbo land lack adequate information or knowledge of ecological ethics. It was hard for some to conceive the earth as a sacrament of God. It shows a great lack in the formation system. The writer, himself, was never introduced to it during his own years of initial formation. This is a lacuna with devastating consequences environmentally. Indeed, it is a huge problem to have future priests, leaders, consecrated persons who seem to be in the dark as far as the impacts of ecological crises in the land and beyond are concerned. Certainly, to have a wet ground is to water the floor. The would-be environmental activists or promoters need to be educated. The desired energy needed to impact meaningful changes in the lives of the faithful who live so much in the reality of ecological crisis on the need to make changes in their lifestyles and attitudes towards the environment may not go too far when priests, consecrated persons, well-meaning Catholic faithful are ignorant of the crisis and its immediate and future impacts on faith and health. It is imperative that people get acquainted with environmental education to respond positively to the challenges of the times, to keep the faith and the environment green as God’s mission field and sacred space.

In this regard, environmental education should be introduced and included in the course curriculum for students in the religious houses of formation (convents/Novitiates), mission schools from primary to tertiary levels. This is one of the ways of correcting the misinformation about the environment in the contemporary Igbo society, especially with the brand of fanatical Christian
liberation movements that wage war against the environment. Others view the natural environment as mere matter at the beck and call of human insatiability. This teaching gives rise to exploitative and degradable uses of the environment that are commonplace in the society. Some Catholic priests, the religious, and many of the faithful are promoters as well as consumers of such environmentally harmful teachings. This is rooted in ignorance. Hence, the need to ecologically educate people.

Theology students, most of whom are future ministers of the Gospel and Sacraments, should be well educated on the importance of appreciating nature as part of the sacraments to enhance proper environmental managements and for their personal renewal and spiritual upliftment. Insights from this exercise can help in deepening their celebration and appreciation of the sacraments whose material elements are derived from the natural environment. The sacraments are the fruits of the earth and the works of human hands, representing vineyards, crops, rain, sunshine, rivers, etc., the God-given bounty of the earth. In the Eucharist, for example, we do not only bring the whole of creation to the Altar, but praise and thank God together with all creatures. Hence, in the Eucharistic liturgy, the Church prays, “You are indeed Holy, O Lord, and all you have created rightly gives you praise…”822 Thus, the Sacraments, as a memorial of the Cross, call the celebrants and participants to solidarity with ecological crises, victims of injustices, political, social, and economic issues as well as natural disasters, the realities of those in low-lying areas whose lives and properties are threatened by climate change, indeed, all of God’s creation “groaning in labor pains until now.”823 The celebration of the Sacrament penetrates heaven and

822 United States Catholic Bishops Conference, The Roman Missal, 634.

823 Romans 8: 19-23.
earth. As Pope Francis, in agreement with Pope John Paul II, puts it, the “Eucharist was an act of cosmic love… The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation” and irrespective of where it is celebrated, it “is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world.”

The Eucharist is, therefore, a sacrament of ecology. Understood in this way, mutual relationship between humans and the rest of creation is enhanced. The celebrants and participants in the sacraments will try to live their lives in ways that protect and enhance all God’s creation. Regarding the above, environmental theology or ecological ethics should be included in the course curriculum of theological schools. This also creates innovative and practical ways of responding and engaging theologically in socio-economic, political, religious, and cultural issues of concern to the church in Igbo land. This suggestion is in recognition of the fact that the challenges and the dynamics of the 21st century society make extra demands, i.e., political, cultural, socio-economic, and psychological demands other than the normal theological demands on the priests. Integral formation needed to equip future ministers entails a systematic approach that reflects the realities of the times. This means that the church must assess, if possible, update or shift from the current traditional theological studies to a much contextual, missiological and pastoral paradigms that reflect current issues affecting the 21st century Igbo society and beyond. Thus, a re-appraisal of the paradigm for theological studies in the church in Igbo land is extremely important. The aim of this, among other things, is to ensure that people make practical connection between theology and the environment as God’s sacred and beautiful gift that is meant to be cherished, respected, celebrated and preserved; to engage informatively in socio-cultural issues with theological hindsight; and to have and form candidates who will be disposed theologically to embrace fresh challenges in a lifetime of ministry and dialogue with them wholistically without playing to the gallery.

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824 LS., #236.
Similarly, as part of ongoing formation in life, organizing workshops, seminars for the clergy, religious and all the members of the church is another good avenue of unlearning certain lessons erroneously held about the environment and thus dismiss environmental illiteracy and ignorance. Such a reality will likely precipitate the ability of environmental education facilitators to integrate other pertinent areas of development and environmental concerns including the underlying socio-economic causes of environmental degradation and poverty problems.

On her capacity and structure, the church enjoys the privilege and monopoly of being influential and inspirational, as well as being closer to people more than any other secular institutions. As a teaching and sanctifying institution, the church should make use of this position of proximity and influence to create avenues through which she can teach, influence, and inspire people to appreciate the need to protect and conserve the environment as God’s sacred trust to humans. Under this same strength, the church can fruitfully engage in diplomatic dialogues with governments, traditional rulers, other faith-based communities, NGOs, on the need to safeguard our common home.

4.4.8 Church, Government and NGOs on Ecological Conversation

The Igbo have a proverbial saying that, “Agbakoo aka nyuo mamiri, ya agboo ufufu” which literally translates as when people urinate together, bubbles are formed. In other words, Igwe bu ike, solidarity is strength. This means partnership for bright future. The corollary of this proverb is team spirit, the partnership of various stakeholders to tackle a perceived herculean crisis common to all. The threat to the web of life in Igbo land is a huge crisis. It demands that all hands must be on deck. Therefore, to get the desired change needed in environmental management, partnership with various stakeholders is important. Governments, political leaders, Non-Governmental Organizations, Corporate bodies, journalists, schools, faith-based groups, etc., need
to be engaged in critical, synergistic thinking and talks on ecological issues in Igbo land. The previous chapters already presented some values common to people across faith and disciplines. Likewise, the preceding section talked about the work of LSM as some incentives regarding partnership. Those values are building blocks for ecological conservation and commitment to save the environment from further degradation. Partnership based on those values, and much more, are needed in various levels of life in the society. The church has always partnered with groups across faith lines and disciplines to solve a common problem affecting life.

A clear example of such committed partnership needed to address environmental degradation is the team spirit of the various world leaders and leaders of world religions and Indigenous Peoples or Traditions of the world at the just concluded United Nations’ Climate Change Conference or Cop26 in Glasgow, Scotland, October 31st-November 13th, 2021. Pope Francis is not left out in touting for such engagements with World leaders and Faith leaders, the Science Communities, etc., on Climate Change issues to foster solutions to the crisis threatening the common home. In many ways, the Igbo church is not oblivious of such partnership with leaders of thoughts, governments, corporations, journalists, etc., for roundtable talks to proffer solutions to problems in the region. This validates Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger/Benedict XVI’s declaration that “The Church, an expert in humanity, has a perennial interest in whatever concerns men and

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825 One of such meetings was recently held in Anambra State to proffer solutions to the crisis in the State that posed violent threats to the State gubernatorial election, November 6th, 2021. The roundtable discussions of various stakeholders: Bishops, politicians, the leaders of the Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB, Traditional Rulers, etc., produced fruitful results. See Muyiwa Adeyemi and Uzoma Nzeagwu, “Traditional, Religious Leaders Urge IPOB not to Disrupt Anambra guber poll,” The Guardian Newspaper, November 1, 2021.
women." There is no doubt that the Catholic church is proficient in this area, hence the need for the church in Igbo land to ecologically educate her members in this area for proper representation.

The proposal here is that the Church needs to set up a commission comprising groups of interested and committed development experts to partner with the state actors and other groups on the state of the environment in Igbo land. The duty of this body is to formulate development policies that will also cover environmental and poverty issues. From this commission, environmental activists across faith, political or cultural lines can spring up both in rural and urban areas. They can see how best to foster, restore, or initiate some traditional melioristic practices with improved touches on them, that protect the health of the environment and thus the health of everyone.

4.4.9 Publications/social media platforms

Living in a digital age is a blessing in so many ways. Access to information is very fast and cheaper now than before. Virtually, many people have access to cell phones. Internets are available to so many people with floods of social media platforms or apps for easy communication. These apps could be veritable ways of educating people on the dignity of creation, care for the environment and the need to limit unnecessary spending and consumption that impinge on the environment. Groups or individuals, and church members could use the Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, Snapchat, Pinterest, IMO, Google chat, Signal, Band, etc., to reach out to the teeming population about the human sacred duty towards environmental preservation. Many youths, adults, are on the social media for various reasons. Exploring this

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platform for ecological ministry can have far-reaching consequences in creating awareness and action towards environmental sanitation and balance.

Similarly, books, Lenten pastorals, journals, fliers, or pamphlets with practical suggestions on how to relate to the environment could also be published. Billboards and pictorials, T-shirts, face caps, hats, hand-fans, etc., with catchy words about the inextricable bond between humans and the natural environments can speak volumes on the values of the Igbo about the reality of climate change and ecological degradation. The earlier chapters treated some Igbo values of togetherness, communion, cosmic balance, *ndu miri ndu azu, biri ka m biri, egbe bere ugo bere*, kinship with all creatures, compassion, earth sanctity, etc. They can be etched on T-shirts, caps, etc., as reminders. This can sensitize people, especially the young people on the need to stand in defense of the environment as a justice issue as well as a sacred vocation placed on them.

Again, parishes, dioceses, organizations, individual members of the church could organize environmental essay competitions for students both in the primary and secondary schools run by the missions. This could be extended to public schools for everyone needs environmental sensitization from time to time. This exercise could be made attractive with awards or trophies and other social events that can impact positively on the students about the sacredness of the earth and right relationship with the earth. These essays should be published in the diocesan News Papers or parish and diocesan websites. They could be briefly read in church gatherings as a way of creating more awareness and encouraging many young people to participate in the environmental awareness ministry of the church and society.
4.3 Conclusion

This work has got to a point where it can be concluded that the traditional Igbo deep attachment to the earth and their sacramental imagination of the universe provide invaluable insights on the ground of which an environmental theology can be constructed from bottom-up approach as opposed to the top-down approach and information needed to tackle environmental issues. Building upon ecologically sustainable local knowledge and belief system is one of the significant ways of dealing with issues pertinent to people within their context. It is crucial for community-based conservation by linking the human values to the conservation values available within a people’s worldview. This can be a source of inspiration for commitment to ecological ethics. Thus, the preservation of traditionally religious ecological knowledge and practices is an asset in today’s much needed solution and answer to the spate of ecological degradations of various kinds as this study has revealed. It provides both spiritual and intellectual sources that can enrich environmental theology or environmental studies.

It can no longer be denied that faith traditions, especially indigenous religious worldviews, as the new report from the United Nations reveals, play incredibly enormous roles in reversing climate change. Similarly, many of the religious leaders of the world believe that an integral part of the solution to ecological crisis does not only come from the wise uses of science and technology, but it also comes from new earth-centered spiritualities as well as the religious expressions and forms of practices that address alienation within the household of God. To a certain extent, the Igbo traditional environmental consciousness and practices, as other traditional

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environmental knowledge, are a locally grounded science of a kind that can augment Western science as well as enriching the Christian ecological ethics in combating environmental problems.

Ecological ethics is an integral part of the church’s vocation and mission to protect and care for God’s creation. The apparent absence of such activity in the Catholic church in Igbo land is an oversight. It is indicative of ecological amnesia which can be devastating since it leads the faithful to forsake the physical world. It goes with it a sense of dereliction which contributes to an impoverished understanding of reconciliation and deep relationship with nature. This is because it makes people to think more of themselves as solely independent from the natural environment and undermine any efforts at caring for the environment and preserving it for future generations. As ecological amnesiacs, certainly, people live more or less of an illusory life and in denial of the reality of ecological crisis, forgetting that the most fundamental and commonest things are that humans as well as other earth’s entities are rooted in the earth, and by that fact, we are bodies bound to each other in the web of life through water, air, breath, food, etc., The Igbo traditional ecological consciousness challenges the Church in Igbo land to rise up to ecological awareness to denounce the spate of consumerism, dereliction, pollution and exploitation of the environment.

Ecological amnesia is dangerous. This is even as the recent studies have shown that the next global suffering, which will be disastrous, is suffering from the effects of human-induced environmental exploitation and pollution. This is partly rooted in ecological amnesia. This is ecological sin caused by human dereliction and unfriendly attitudes towards the environment. Apparently, the church in Igbo land, is guilty of this. It may not have occurred to people to confess such sins in the sacrament of reconciliation due to ignorance. Therefore, the concept of sin needs to be updated to include Eco-sin. It needs to be preached against with the same fervency that other
sins are criticized while Eco-life or Eco-spirituality is to be extolled as other virtues in the church are praised.

The essence of ethics as well as the celebration of the sacraments or the liturgy is to direct humans to the right actions which proceed from the right intention. Such can only come when the right and informed, comprehensive teaching of Jesus, the ecological ancestor, who cared for the earth and all earth’s entities and united all things in himself, is explicitly detailed to the faithful. Part of this teaching should include the Igbo traditional ethical life, the Omenala, to help direct people on the path of true ecological life to help check abuses of the environment, both the human and natural environments. In this way, the Igbo ecological ethics and the Christian ecological ethics, when integrated, can form a comprehensive and enviable ecological ethics that will put the Igbo Christians on a strong theological background to engage fully in ecological sacramental celebration and commitment in fostering solution to environmental issues in the land and beyond. Nature is an integral part of us, a kinsfolk that deserves the respect and love we crave for. It is a mission field that needs “evangelization,” i.e., care, tenderness, justice. Arguably, nature is a missionary of God’s generosity, peace, simplicity, beauty, harmony, sacredness. It is the recovering of this sacramental dimension of nature that can fill humans with reverence and love and put some brakes on the human voracity to dominate and consume everything.

However, since this work cannot claim to have exhausted all that need to be said or done as far as ecological ethics from Igbo perspective is concerned, it recognizes that there are still more rooms for further research and improvements on the subject matter. This is necessary for an informed understanding of the traditional Igbo values or ethics for a proper articulation and application of comprehensive and lasting solutions to the ecological crisis that is fast devastating communities in Igbo land and beyond.
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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Map of Nigeria showing the major ethnicities in the country

The three major ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa in the north, the Yoruba in the west, the Igbo in the east. Other Igbo speaking people are in other regions of the south. Hence, the Igbo occupy the Southeast of Nigeria.

Figure 1: Map of Nigeria, showing the various ethnic groups
Figure 2: Map showing the various Igbo States in the Southeast of Nigeria, the concentrated area of study.
Appendix II: Sustainability in Igbo land: Palm Tree, Yam, Cassava, Cocoyam Planting, etc

Palm trees are one of the major sources of livelihoods/sustainability in Igbo land.

Figure 3: Palm trees, a major source of sustainability among the Igbo. It is almost found in most West African nations and cultures
Figure 4: harvested bunches of the palm fruits/nuts
Figure 5: Red oil extracted from the palm nuts, ready for consumption, export, or storage
Figure 6: Yam barn, another major source of sustainable economy in the traditional Igbo society mostly planted by men.
Sustainability in the traditional Igbo land is tied to the general well-being of the community. It expresses the integral feelings and relationships of the Igbo with their natural environment prior to the contemporary times. Before colonialism, the Igbo had had their unique ways of doing things. This ranges from harmonious living with their local ecologies to creating their peculiar knowledge through continuous interaction with the environment which includes local technologies; food production; medicine; subsistence farming; preservation and conservation of the environment. The environment shapes a lot of the Igbo ideas and practices. Through constant practices, sustainability
becomes a way of life etched deeply into the communal psyche. Also, through communal participation, the Igbo culture and knowledge are sustained and transmitted to future generations.

Sustainability consciousness in Igbo land is shown in the community development projects like *Igbu nkwu* (harvesting of palm fruits) mostly done every three full moons. Every able-bodied person is expected to take part in it. It strengthens ties between people and their environment, leading to environmental sanitation and protection, and culminating in liturgy and other festivals.

Firstly, as shown in the above pictures, palm tree is a major cash crop among the Igbo. It is the source of red oil used for various purposes both domestically and internationally. Everything about palm tree is arduous from pruning, harvesting and oil extraction processes. Therefore, it involves a division of labor among the old and the young, men and women. One thing terrific with palm tree lies in its capacity to pull people together at every stage of its activity in one way or the other. However, the task of pruning, climbing and harvesting the red fruits clustered in a bunch belongs exclusively to the males. This is because of the male prowess and strength.

Normally, the bunches of the harvested fruits are shared according to hamlets when it is a communal harvest done for the execution of certain community projects like rural electrification projects; pipeborne water; civic hall construction, school building projects; community health centers or clinics, etc., and in some places, they are used to support church projects in the community. In the past, they were used to support individuals to attain better education abroad or at home in the spirit of communal life. In the typical Igbo sense, community development projects are processes by which a community harnesses the resources that they are locally gifted with to attend to their needs or build infrastructure and human capacities through collective efforts in their community. This varies among communities according to their respective needs. In this sense, the community embarks on *Igbu nkwu* (palm fruit) harvesting to execute the projects. On other times,
the palm fruits can be harvested by individual families for their basic needs. Whichever way, the fruits are allowed to ferment for some days after which they are gathered together, washed and then boiled in a larger cooking pot. Once it is done, it would be pounded or crushed in a mortar with pestles by mostly young men and women. This is followed by the extraction of the oil which involves a mutual hard press either manually or by the aid of some machine specifically designed for it for consumption and exportation.

Secondly, the critical message that the palm tree relays is the sustainability consciousness it creates in every Igbo person. Its usefulness is beyond words. Nothing about it is wasted. The trees protect the environment in various ways hence the need to plant the trees more or tend to the ones that nature planted. Ritually, the umbilical cord is buried beside any palm tree. It serves as a mutual bond between the child and the environment, who strives earnestly to tend to the tree jealously. Domestically, the dried palm fronds are used as firewood for cooking and the ashes are used as manure in the farms to help the fields regain fertility, among other uses of the ashes. The leaves are processed into various brooms for sweeping, some for room cleaning and the others for compound and community, including church clean ups. The fresh palm fronts are used for staking yam and three-leave yam twigs respectively and some vegetables. Equally, the palm fronts are used in the yam and cocoyam barns to prevent them from the heat of the sun. Traditionally, the fresh palm fronts, called omu nkwu, are very symbolic. They are revered for the meanings they relay. They symbolize peace. Also, they are used to convoke serious communal meetings; used to place a notice of no entry to some portions of land under dispute or to indicate that farming processes would take place in the very portion of the land. Anywhere the palm fronts are placed, they serve as a note of warning for everybody to keep off the place. In times of death and burial, the palm
fronts are equally used to indicate mourning, sorrow, etc. Of course, for Catholics, the palm fronts are used during Palm Sunday liturgy from where the ashes for the Ash Wednesday are produced.

Besides, the red oil is used in cooking and for industrial purposes. The palm fronts are burned to produce potash in making dishes and the roughages of the extracted fruits are used in making soap. Also, the roughages are used in farm lands that have lost their fertility to help them regain fertility. The hard kernels, (aki) pictured below are crushed or broken for various uses. The seeds/nuts can be eaten. They are also processed into palm kernel oil, *ude aki*, which is used for various purposes, including industrial purposes for creams, butter, etc. The remainder of the kernel nuts, after the oil extraction, is used in feeding livestock and chickens. The broken or crushed kernels pictured below
are used as fuel for cooking. Also, they are applied to attrition ridden areas or road to prevent erosion. Again, some palm trees are reserved for wine purposes. The palm winetappers make wines out of them for drinking, and recreational, and commercial purposes. As said above, no part of the plant is wasted. It is an enduring plant with invaluable uses. As a result, some Igbo communities use it to strengthen relationship in form of agistment which is beneficial ecologically. This plant instills in the psyche of every Igbo person, consciously or not, the need to preserve and conserve the environment. For the fact that people’s umbilical cords are buried in the earth, beside palm trees, one is expected to relate with the environment in a familial way. Besides, the entire arduous processes in it serve as an informal method of education. For during the entire process, the older generation passes onto the younger generation the traditional environmental knowledge and other pieces of information relevant for community life, ethics, rituals, etc., to respect, to thread with
caution in dealing with the earth and all that the earth is home to. Through this process, the Igbo transmit and learn the value of hard work, team spirit, community-orientatedness, spirituality and all the virtues necessary for integral growth of the individual and the community.

The other aspects of sustainability among the Igbo are the yam and cassava farms, not excluding cocoyam and other produces. Yam traditionally belongs to men to cultivate. This is because of the tedious, energy demanding and protracted patience in cultivating yam from clearing and tilling the grounds to planting, staking and harvesting it. Cassava, cococam, and other crops are exclusively for women to farm although anyone could help in the growing of all crops. These crops are also cash crops. They are used domestically and are exported as well for other uses.

However, there is a common perception of among the Igbo as a religious, social, and cultural crop. Yam is believed to be a scared and very sensitive crop. As a result, it is treated with respect and purity. It is believed to have come from the Supreme God through the benevolence of mother earth to the Igbo progenitors, although the Igbo believe that everything they have is a gift from God. Every belief, custom and value attached to yam has direct impacts on its cultivation. Among the Igbo, stealing of yam is a heinous crime. It is an abomination, likewise to cultivate or consume yam before the new yam festival which is in honor of Chukwu Okike, God, and the yam deity, Njoku. This explains largely the sacred annual new yam festival common to the Igbo both home and abroad, which is conducted in the contexts of family and religious settings, for instance through church harvest and thanksgiving.

Aside from the religious significance, among the Igbo, it is said that “yam is king but cassava is the mother of all crops.” King in the sense of the social ignificance of yam. Cultivation of yam is a thing of pride and joy among the Igbo men. The large expanse of a person’s yam farm and barn is seen as a sign of virility, prowess, commitment towards sustainability, and industry.
Socially, it attracts the title of Ézeji, i.e., king of yam. Beyond these religious, cultural and social connotations, yam has a lot of nutritional values and is beneficial to human health likewise livestock and chickens. Other crops, like cassava and cocoyam, also, have the same nutritional and beneficial benefits to both humans and livestock and chickens.

Thus, as an agricultural set of people, the Igbo life and history are defined by their relationships with the land and their ecologies. Industry is very much rooted to the average Igbo person’s life. It goes with a sense of commitment and culture care to preserving and conserving the local ecologies since life depends so much on them for sustainance. The Igbo take pride in producing what they eat without depending on anyone for aid. As a result, they make sure that their environment is well taken care of for continued sustainability. Though the Igbo are into business and education yet it does not prevent them from engaging in subsistence farming to complement life. Traditionally, it is the hieght of social affront or snobbery for somebody to be branded *Ori mgbe ahia loro*, i.e., one who depends only on the market for subsistence. The aim here is to motivate people to embark on local sustainability which is best when it is gorunded in a local context to solve particular needs of the context than importing ideas foreign to the context. Through the agricultural practices with their accompanying rituals, socialization and education about environmental ethics are passed on to the younger generations. This traditonal value challenges the contemporary sense of dereliction, consumerism, dependency syndrome, etc., that has adverse footsprings on the environment. Conceptually, this traditional value can integrated into the international strategy and discourses for sustainable development. Arguably, a culturally, religiously relevant Igbo traditional environmental education can promote crucial knowledge about the environment. It is such knowledge that has sustained the Igbo society for centuries prior
to the contemporary lifestyle (capitalism, consumerism, etc.,) that undermine the traditional Igbo religious values.\textsuperscript{828}

Appendix III  \textit{Enwe Lagwa (Lagwa Monkey): historical insights surrounding the totemic Animal and Lagwa Community}

![Image of Lagwa Monkeys]

Lagwa is one of three Communities in Okwuato in Aboh Mbaise Local Government Area (County) of Imo State (and it is home to the writer). It shares boundaries with Nguru in the North; Umuhu-Okwuato and some villages of Ibeku-Okwuato in the East; Enyiogugu in the west; and in

\footnote{828 See David A. Ihenacho: \textit{African Christianity Rises: Eucharistic Inculturation in Igbo Catholicism} (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2004), 93-99.}
the south with Mbutu and then Obiangwu and Logara Communities in Ngor Okpala Local Government Area, all in Imo State. Aside from the Ngor-Okpala Communities of Logara and Obiangwu that bound her to the south, all other neighboring communities of Lagwa to the north, west and east, are presently situated in Aboh Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State. Lagwa Community lies about 3 kilometers (1.85 miles) off the Owerri-Umuahia trunk A road. Lagwa comprises eight villages: hence, the name, Lagwa ama-asato as it is commonly known and called.

Lagwa people have a common ancestry traceable to Agwa said to have migrated with his pregnant wife, Agwawumma, from Umunama in the present Ezinihite Mbaise Local Government Area (County). The eight villages named Umuabazu, Obo, Umunoke, Umuokere, Umuosi, Ezido, Okwuta and Umunokwu are said to be the eight sons of Agwa who settled in the present place called Lagwa. As sons of Agwa, Lagwa people see themselves as brothers/sisters with a common history and tradition. According to Oral history, Agwa was a famous farmer and hunter. He was attracted to the place that would be named after him by the thick vegetation of the place filled with monkeys among other wild lives. History has it that the place that would be named Lagwa was known originally as Ulo Agwa, i.e., the home of Agwa. This was prior to the colonial period. The change in the name, Ulo Agwa to Lagwa, like most names in Igbo land today, was because of the difficulty the Europeans who first visited the community, (possibly Captain H. M Douglas) had in pronouncing Ulo Agwa. To avoid the difficulty, they did away with the letter U and thus came up with Loagwa. Since the Igbo vowels, O and A, do not normally go together in most nouns, the letter O was dropped for easy pronunciation and sound hence the current name, Lagwa.

The vegetation found within and around Lagwa is typical of rainforest vegetation, characterized by a variety of luxuriant trees and herbs and giant wooden climbers. Up to about last two decades ago, there were long stretches of thick virgin forests and groves of local deities
everywhere. However, modernization, continuous farming activities and the felling down of the natural vegetation for building, domestic and commercial purposes, have seriously disturbed the ecology and ecosystem of pre-colonial Lagwa. Also, the narratives employed by some Christian fundamentalists about the rainforest vegetation as havens for evil spirits believed to be disturbing the community altered people’s view of the rainforest vegetations to the extent that the once thick rainforest vegetations native to this part of the world have gradually given way to farmlands and secondary vegetation amongst other activities. As a result, the rainforest vegetation is remaining a handful in the community. This has also led to the gradual loss of some of the wild-lives linked with the thick forests, as well as gradual drop in the humus-content of the soil.

By culture and tradition, Lagwa people “live” with monkeys. They do not kill, harm, or eat them. The monkeys are regarded as *Mghoto Lagwa*, i.e., Lagwa daughters. This is because Lagwa people regard their monkeys as pets and sacred animals, members of their larger family or community. Monkey is the totemic animal for the Lagwa community. As a result, it is an abomination for any person, or group of persons, to attempt to kill or eat monkeys. Lagwa people guarded these monkeys jealously to protect them from intruding poachers from other communities.

The species of monkeys found in Lagwa is called sclaters monkey, or the Nigerian monkey (*Cercopithecus Sclateri*). Apart from Lagwa, there are other communities in Igbo land where monkeys are found and protected from harm. However, what is not yet known, as at the time of this study, is whether these communities are related to each other in some ways before the great migration periods that led people to move to other places for settlement.

Historically, no living person in Lagwa today can accurately give the time when monkeys came to live in Lagwa specifically without living in the two other communities, Umuhu and Ibeku, that make up Okwuato to which Lagwa is one of. It cannot also be easily stated today the true
origins of Lagwa Monkeys, i.e., whether, on the day of creation, God created and put them in Lagwa, or whether they migrated from elsewhere to Lagwa where they found a suitable habitat. One Dickson Onyechekwe Ekwe, a 97-year-old Lagwa indigene, when asked, could not recall precisely how and when monkeys came to live in Lagwa. However, he holds that his father, Olekanma Nwoko Okorie, who lived more than 100 years before dying in the 1940s, had said that, before anybody lived in Lagwa, there had been monkeys in the land called Lagwa.

In the absence of any available and reliable written accounts that could have been of help in reconstructing the possible origin and dispersal of the monkeys, oral tradition, therefore, becomes the only available source to turn our spotlight to. However, it is good to note that there are multiple accounts of the oral tradition of how monkeys came to be friends or daughters of Lagwa people and as a result, their totemic animal. These accounts have slight variations. Some are of different editions of the tradition. Whichever, they are well known. For precision, we limit ourselves to two most well-known accounts gathered from the members of Lagwa community.

One of the versions is from Mr. Athanasius Iwe Eleba, an 87-year-old retired civil servant. According to this oral source, Lagwa monkeys have close links to Lagwa deity called Aro-Ukwu, known currently as Arukwu Lagwa. This source has it that the progenitor of Lagwa, Agwa, while leaving his foremost place, Umunama, was accompanied by a herd of monkeys as escorts and perhaps as kins to his new place. By the time Agwa reached his destination, the entire stretch of land that became known today as Lagwa was filled with monkeys. Tradition holds that Aro-ukwu deity of Lagwa has not always resided in Lagwa. She was a deity from Umunama Chileke (the great God who creates) cult who perhaps followed Agwa on his sojourn. Her daughters and pets were monkeys. In other words, this version of tradition asserts that the monkeys found in Lagwa today are linked to the Aro-Ukwu Lagwa deity whose origin is traced to Umunama. This, perhaps,
accounts for one of the names people popularly call the monkeys, “Enwe Arukwu Lagwa,” i.e., the monkeys of Lagwa deity and the people of Lagwa, both home and abroad, proudly associate with the monkeys, and use them as logos for any of their community items or celebrations.

Another version is from the recorded interview by Mr. Martin Ori, a 52-year-old indigene of Lagwa, a journalist and philosopher. This version has it that monkeys had existed in Lagwa before people came to inhabit in the place. Accordingly, monkeys lived in the large forests in Lagwa and ate whatever was available there as food. One day, a man called Agwa came to this land. He came along with his pregnant wife. Agwa was an established farmer and a skilled hunter. On numerous times, when Agwa would either go to farm or hunt, a specific wild animal that would be later known as enwe, monkey, kept hopping playfully around the forest. Now, on a certain day, Agwa’s wife went to a nearby farm to do some weeding. Some monkeys would come, bringing various fruits as food for her. Excitedly moved by the generosity of the monkeys, the woman went home and narrated to Agwa, her husband, of the kindness she received from the monkeys. On hearing this, Agwa was humbled by the benevolence shown to his pregnant wife by the monkeys. Subsequently, he decreed that no member of his household would ever harm, kill, or eat the animal. They were to be treated as kins. Hereafter, the children of Agwa, who today are the people of Lagwa, do not kill, harm, or eat monkeys.  

A look at these two accounts reveals some reconcilable similarities in them. However, one could argue that the similarities in them could be so because one source possibly copied from another or from other sources available. That said, both accounts clearly agreed that the ancient

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ancestor of Lagwa, Agwa, and the deity, Aro-Ukwu came from Umunama, which influence their sacred worldview- their intimate relationship with nonhuman creatures and ultimately their relationship with God. The Umunama origins of Agwa and the Aro-Ukwu Lagwa, today, are not disputed. There is close relationship between the Umunama and Lagwa people. This is regardless of subtle dialectical differences in the Mbaise dialect of Igbo Language. The people of Ununama Ezinihitte Mbaise regard the people of Okwuato which comprise Umuhu, Lagwa and Ibeiku as their relatives. As a result, during their distinguished annual Oji Ezinihite, i.e., the Ezinihite kola nut cultural festival, held every January first, each year, they recognize and reserve special seats of honor for Lagwa, indeed the Okwuato people in acknowledgement of their close ties.\footnote{See David A. Ihenacho, \textit{African Christianity Rises}, 101-103.}

However, one of the weaknesses of the first account lies in its inability to state whether monkeys are still found in the original home of Agwa and Aro-Ukwu deity which is Umunama or that the entire monkeys there migrated with Agwa to the current place called Lagwa. The absence of this fact questions the credibility of Umunama origin of Lagwa monkeys. From all indications, at least from oral sources available, Umunama community does not harbor monkeys of any species within its borders. Arguably, if Umunama Ezinihitte were the possible origins of Lagwa monkeys, then there would have existed a similar colony of monkeys within community. Again, if it were so, the Umunama community would have had some traceable recollections, by orature, of when monkeys once existed in the community. None of these exists. What is known throughout Mbaise nation is that no other community within Mbaise has monkeys except Lagwa community. This validates the second account, which sounds so plausible.
Arguably, since the progenitor of Lagwa, Agwa, was a skillful hunter as well as a farmer, it is most likely that during his hunting adventures he must have encountered the place known today as Lagwa. Similarly, he fell in love with the rich vegetation with various species of animals in the place. As a result, he decided to move and settle finally there with his wife, Agwawumma. Oral evidence asserts that of all the tropical animals and plants at the beck and call of the ancient Lagwa community, none impressed them like monkeys. They are the most beloved and singularly chosen as the totem, untouchable among Lagwa indigenes. The reasons for this are most likely because of the generosity of the monkeys to the Agwawumma, the ancestral mother of Lagwa community, as well as the phenomenal qualities of monkeys that are akin to human characteristics. Therefore, the monkeys are singled out for special protection with the laws and taboos around them to protect them from violation. And to guarantee that the laws and taboos surrounding them had force, the monkeys were dedicated to Aro-ukwu Lagwa deity. Hence, the continued thriving of monkeys in Lagwa community until the recent times that the Christian fundamentalists started flouting the taboos and violating the rights of the monkeys and other nonhuman creatures that are under attack today in the community.

However, Lagwa people regard monkeys as their kins, the mgboto Lagwa, Lagwa daughters. As clever as they are, the monkeys know the boundaries of Lagwa community and try to limit their operations within the borders. They have learnt that they are safer within the confines of Lagwa community and respect that. Perhaps, this is one of their natural survival instincts or principle of compensation from nature that they do not step into areas considered unsafe for them. And anytime, by mistake, a monkey strays to other villages, she knows how to locate the home of
any Lagwa daughters who is married to that community to seek asylum in case of danger. Wherever they live, Lagwa indigenes will protect their monkeys religiously, panegyrize, shower them with some pet names that appeal to their natural tendencies to shelter and feed them and ensure that they are brought back to Lagwa community for safety. This sounds strange but that is the practice among Lagwa people wherever they are or married to and see their sister (monkey) around them. Several Lagwa daughters married in the neighboring communities testify to this awe-inspiring experiences and stories.

The Significance of Lagwa monkeys

The importance of monkeys to Lagwa people cannot be overemphasized. For precision, five points will be highlighted in this work. Lagwa monkeys have social, cultural, spiritual, and economic importance to the people of Lagwa. Beside the natural tranquillity and eco-friendliness which the totems and their natural habits create, there are other benefits that Lagwa people derive from their kinship with monkeys over the years.

Firstly, monkeys are symbol of cultural identity and heritage. Their presence confers on the Lagwa community a cultural idenity known as Imierienwe, i.e., the people who do not eat monkeys. One of the fames of Lagwa people enjoy beyong the shores of Mbaise is as a result of the monkeys in their community. Importantly, they are part of the gifts of God to nature and specifically to the Lagwa people such that is not found in any other place throughout Mbaise nation which comprises three overwhelming Local Government Areas (counties) and home to the Mater.

Ecclesiae Catholic Diocese of Ahiara Mbaise. Monkeys are an integral part of biodiversity. They enrich Lagwa community who count themselves specially blessed with this unique gift.

Secondly, Lagwa monkeys are mystical beings that inspire in humans the attitude of wonder about the creative dynamics of God. Contemplating on their cleverness, their beauty and human-like characteristics, they elevate people’s mind to the praise and glory of God who spreads and sustains diversity in nature. This inspires the community members to strive to protect nature.

Thirdly, they are sources of discernment to the locals. According to an oral source from his Royal Highness, Eze Cosmas Onyeneke, 64 years old, a lawyer, business mogul who doubles as the traditional titleholder of Lagwa ancient kingdom, “the monkeys interpret signs of bad omen.”\textsuperscript{832} Naturally, the monkeys play and wrestle a lot. The adult males act as umpires while the female ones as well as the young ones cheer on the wrestling monkeys. For the Lagwa community, whenever the monkeys leave their treetops and start playing on the ground with a unique chirps in form of a squawk, it is a sign that death is lurking around the community. This instills some sober moments among particular village/hamlet members. As a result, people try to seek redress from their wrongs, amend broken or frosty relationships to avoid dying in such a condition. Similarly, as more of terrestrial beings with some cleverliness akin to humans, monkeys are able to sense and detect dangerous intruders, poachers, armed people, and some carnivorous animals that can harm human lives in the community. At the sight such dangers, the monkey make some weird sounds while taking to their heels with sharp speed, hopping restlessly on the trees. Everyone in the community is poised to go in search of such a phenomenon to arrest it. Oral tradition has it that during the times of intercommunal wars, the monkeys helped the Lagwa people to defeat their

\textsuperscript{832} Ibid.
intruding enemies by making such sounds that alert the community members of the presence of dangerously armed people around. However, some of these beliefs and practices are no longer very strong now as they were in the past two decades for obvious reasons.

Fourthly, the monkeys help in the afforestation of the community with various species of trees. They do this when they eat the fruits and throw away the seeds wherever they jump. Also, when they eat and swallow the seeds, they defecate the seeds anywhere. In this way, they help to regrow the environment, thus saving the environment from desertification, erosion, etc. With monkeys in place, the average Lagwa person does not border so much with planting trees because their kins (monkeys) are there to help, although this is changing now.

Fifthly, Lagwa Monkeys entertain and attract tourists who come from various parts of the country and beyond to either film them or for entertainment. In doing so, they help in improving the economy of the community. Uniquely, Lagwa monkeys are phenomenally fun to watch. They are very clever, playful, and amusing creatures. They can entertain while at same time not failing to protect their young ones jealously, at all costs. It is fun, entertaining, and gratifying to watch them play tirelessly. If a person is not conscious of their time and events for the day, they can spend most of their time watching the various styles of play displayed by the monkeys. Due to their agility, never ending playfulness and fun, the Igbo people made a proverb around the monkeys, saying, “elewe enwe aghara oru,” i.e., the playfulness and smartness of the monkey can prevent one from attending to one’s business of the day. This is because one rarely gets tired of watching the skillful displays of these beautiful and sacred creatures. The entertainments they give provide some calming, salutary, and relaxing effects on the mind of many people, guests or tourists who come from afar to watch them. It is, indeed, a gift to the eyes and joy and peace to the soul.
However, monkeys can be destructive as well. They eat virtually everything humans eat. As a result, they destroy most farm produces as well as most items kept in the homes. Most times they take advantage of any open avenues—doors, windows, or some other openings in the houses to cart away food items left in the pantries. Due to their playfulness, they can jump freely and uncontrollably on the house roofs destroying them. This is one of the major reasons that some Christian fundamentalists and other people wage war against them to ensure that they are eradicated from the community. This has always brought clashes between community members over the killing of monkeys. This is a tension that yearns for resolution. It is an ongoing deliberation between the Lagwa community members of various stakeholders: pastors, community leaders, traditionalists, politicians, academics, etc.

Besides, what monkeys are to the Lagwa community are invariably what other totemic animals or trees are to many other Igbo communities in their unique ways. Each community has a totem of their own. They respect them according to the rules or taboos guarding them. Some communities are identified with the names of their totemic animals, i.e., eponymic names of some villages like *Umunkita* (children of dogs) community in Ahiazu Mbaise, others like *Enyiogugu* (kins of elephant) in Aboh Mbaise, *Umeube* (children of pear) in Nguru, Aboh Mbaise, *Umuokazi* (children of wild spinach- gnetum Africanum) in Amuzi, Ahiazu Mbaise, etc. Traditionally, these communities would not harm or eat the animals, trees or plants that are associated with them as their totems. Like the Lagwa monkeys, they are treated like community members, protected, and preserved in those communities. As it was noted earlier, some of these practices are not as strong as they were in the past in some communities.

However, in the contemporary times, most Igbo communities now make customized wears with the images of their totemic animals. The most common and fashionable to the contemporary
Igbo society is the widely respected and revered Igbo animal, *agu*, tiger. It is fast becoming fashionable to the average Igbo youth, apart from the elders who formerly were identifiable with such brand of wears. This is a form of cultural reawakening in most contemporary Igbo people. Arguably, it can provide platforms or fertile grounds for the Church to cash in on them to spread the message of ecological ethics now that the momentum, the morale, seems high to protect the environment from further degradation and extinction. They boost local efforts to creatively fashion out ways of addressing the ecological crisis and loss of biodiversity in the land with resources available in the local contexts. Below are some of the images of *isi agu*, i.e., tiger head, brand of wears in vogue among most Igbo people in various colors and designs for various occasions including clerical wears for liturgical celebrations, wedding garments and other occasions.\(^{833}\)

Wearing such clothes or shoes with the images of various animals or trees are some ways of being environmental activists, ecological missionaries, spreaders of the gospel of creation, advocating for the existence of and respect for biodiversity as God’s gifts and fellow earth entities who are also rooted in the earth as humans are. This can help to arrest ecological amnesia in most people.