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THE AFRICAN VALUE OF LIFE:
A Case of the Igbo and Inculturation

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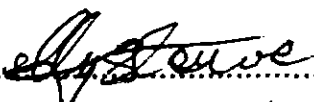
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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

THE AFRICAN VALUE OF LIFE: *A Case of the Igbo and Inculturation*

BY
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*I, the undersigned, declare that this essay is my own original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflections. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit.
All sources have been properly cited.*

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This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

Signed.....

Name of Supervisor.....

Date.....

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late father, Mr. Jacob Ugwu Nnamene, to my beloved mother, Mrs. Maria N. Ugwu, to all the members of Ugwu Nnamene's family, and to all, who long for the fullness of life. May their longing for the fullness of life never cease. May their understanding of the value of human life lead them to realise that the fullness of human life is founded in the divine life, God's own life. And, may they, through their inseparable relationship with Jesus Christ, the Archetypal, Original and Unoriginated transmitter of life, the Son of the God of life, life in himself, Our life and Prototype of ancestors, attain it fully.

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First and foremost, I thank the God of life, the Trinitarian God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for giving all human beings life and having a loving plan that all should attain the fullness of that life in Himself. I also thank Him for enlightening my mind to do this work.

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Stephen Anichukwu Ugwu, OCD

EXCERPTS

"Ndu bu isi"—"Life is a fundamental and paramount gift of existence from God". (Igbo).

"Ndu ka aku"— "Life is superior to wealth". (Igbo).

"Chi na-enye ndu"— "God is the absolute Giver of life". (Igbo).

"Chi nwe ndu"— "God is the owner of life". (Igbo).

"Ndu di omimi"— "Life is deep, a mystery". (Igbo).

"Ndu enweghi ogugu"— "Life has no end". (Igbo).

Jesus Christ is the Word of life who pre-existed before the creation of the world. He was the same as God. Through Him God made all things. He is the source of life and this life brought light to men -all human beings (Jn 1:1- 4).

"The Word became human being and lived among us" (Jn1: 14).

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3:17).

Then, God's Son, Jesus, says, "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly (Jn 10: 10).

Jesus further says, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn 14: 6).

"Life is sacred". (John Paul II).

"Christian life comes from God the Father, through the Son and reaches us in the Holy Spirit"— It reaches its fullness when it goes back to God the Father, through the Son in unity of the Holy Spirit. (Christian teaching)

"Without God, Life is without meaning". (Cardinal Basil Hume).

CONTENT

General introduction.....	i
Statement of Problem.....	iii
Research Methodology.....	v
Area of Study.....	v
Chapter 1	
1. A Point of Departure.....	1
1.1. Clarification of terms.....	1
1.1.1. Igbo.....	1
1.1.2. Value.....	2
1.1.3. Life as a Value.....	2
1.1.4. Death.....	2
1.1.5. Evangelisation.....	3
1.1.6. Theology.....	3
1.1.7. Inculturation.....	4
Chapter 2	
2. Inculturation.....	5
2.1. Inculturation: its meaning.....	5
2.2. The principles of Inculturation.....	6
2.3. Why Inculturation is importance for the Church in general.....	9
2.4. The ways in which Inculturation is important for Africa.....	10
2.5. Inculturation of the Gospel values into the Igbo society.....	13
Chapter 3	
3. Life as a value in Igbo society.....	14
3.1. The Igbo understanding of life.....	14
3.1.1. The meaning of life.....	15
3.1.2. The origin of life.....	15

- 3.1.3. The basic characteristics of life.....17
- 3.1.4 Death and finality of life.....19
- 3.2. The means for the reception of life.....21
- 3.3. The signs and symbols of human life.....23
- 3.4. The Igbo attitude towards life.....27
- 3.4.1. The Igbo recognised negative human attitude towards life.....27
- 3.4.2. The explanation of some of the Igbo negative attitude towards life.....27
- 3.4.3. The Igbo positive social attitude towards life.....29
- 3.4.4. The Igbo positive moral attitude towards life.....30
- 3.4.5. The Igbo religious attitude towards life.....32
- 3.5. The theological elements in the Igbo conception of life.....33

Chapter 4

- 4. THE IGBO VALUE OF LIFE AND INCULTURATION.....39
- 4.1. The Christian teaching on the value of life.....39
- 4.1.1. The value and meaning of human life.....39
- 4.1.2. The origin of human life.....39
- 4.1.3. The basic characteristics of human life.....40
- 4.1.4. The end and goal of human life.....41
- 4.1.5. The means of receiving human life.....41
- 4.1.6. The human basic attitude towards the value of life.....42
- 4.2. The Divine life.....43
- 4.2.1. The meaning of Divine life.....43
- 4.2.2. The basic characteristics of Divine life.....43
- 4.2.3. The means of receiving Divine life.....44
- 4.3. The possibility of inculturating the Christian teaching on life into the
Igbo value of life.....46
- 4.3.1. Pastoral Dimension.....50

4.3.1.1.	Igbo way of praying.....	50
4.3.1.2.	Naming.....	50
4.3.1.3.	Catechetical Instruction.....	51
4.4.	Dialogue.....	51
4.5.	Education.....	51
Chapter 5		
5	General conclusion.....	52
5.1	Recommendations.....	52
5.2.	Conclusion.....	53
	Bibliography.....	55-58

AFRICAN VALUE OF LIFE: A Case of the Igbo and Inculturation.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

The central concern in contemporary African Christian theological reflections on evangelization is how to help Africans respond positively to and accept the message of salvation. The core message of salvation is that God the Father, in His mercy and love, wills that all human beings be saved from their sinful human condition and then come to the dignity of sharing fully in His divine life. The divine life is a life shared by the Trinity: The Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That life is often called “eternal life,” “a life of love”, “the essence of God’s existence” and it tells us how God the Father, His Son and the Holy Spirit existed together before creation. It is the life brought to all people by Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. This is the noblest value to which every human being is called for the purpose of attaining fullness of life. Sharing in that life means entering into a loving relationship with God the Father, uniting one’s life with that of His Son and relying on the Holy Spirit for a transformation in love as Jesus rightly puts it, “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10: 10).

As a student of theology and someone who will be involved in the work of evangelization, I have been asking myself these questions: “After my studies, how am I going to present what I have studied, especially the above mentioned value, to my fellow Africans in general and my people the Igbo of Nigeria in West Africa in particular? Since people easily understand an idea related to their cultural values, what value would help the Africans to deepen their relationship with God? What value would help them to appreciate more the person of Jesus and his role in salvation?” While I was reflecting on all these questions, the word “life” struck me.

Life is an important Igbo (African) value, an intrinsic good held in high esteem. It is what gives meaning to all the good things obtainable in Igbo society. Life as a value

determines how all human beings are related to God, themselves, to each other and the world in which they find themselves. In fact, life¹ is a value that determines how moral, social, spiritual or religious an Igbo person is, and how he or she understands and seeks the realisation of his or her destiny.

Believing that life is an important value in Igbo society, I sought to understand this value better. I became more interested in ascertaining the depth of this value when I read from the Synod of African Bishops held in 1994 that we must develop a deep theological concern and reflection on African values if the effort to help Africans welcome Jesus Christ, as the one who fully reveals God and through whom they can deepen their relationship with God, is to bear much fruit. In their conference, the Bishops identified three African cultural values as good tools for theological reflection and inculturation: a religious sense, a sense of community and a sense of life.¹ These values are evident among the Igbo. They are inseparable from each other. But for the sake of the scope of this study, we shall focus on life as an important value in Igbo society. Because the Igbo society sees life as its most important value strongly connected with God, it seems suitable as a basis on which inculturation could start and evangelization bear much fruit not only in Igbo society, but also in all African societies.

This essay attempts to highlight the Igbo understanding of life as a value. The study recommends that this value be preserved, protected and promoted, lest it loses its meaning and significance. It also attempts to unveil the incompatibilities and the compatibilities of the Igbo value of life with the Christian's for the purpose of a proper inculturation. From this background, we could learn to see life as a strategic value for evangelization, not only in Igbo society, but also in any other African society. For that reason, this essay will further attempt to disclose the Christian view of the value of life. However, because the issues here are so

¹cf. Browne, Maura, (ed.) The African Synod Documents, Reflections, Perspectives, New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1996, P. 243.

complex, this essay is somewhat longer than originally anticipated. Reducing the number of pages, I felt, would have required eliminating material essential to the argument. And so I beg the reader's patience at the length.

This essay has five chapters. Chapter one gives the clarification of some terms used in this work. Chapter two deals with the meaning of inculturation, its principles, its importance for the Church and for Africa, and the inculturation of the Gospel values into the Igbo society. Chapter three highlights the Igbo understanding of life as a value. Chapter four deals with the Christian teaching on the value of life and the possibility of inculturating that value into the Igbo value of life. And, chapter five gives us the general conclusion of this essay with some recommendations.

1b. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM:

During my pastoral services to patients in Nairobi Hospital and Kenyatta National Hospital, in Nairobi, Kenya, I came in contact with those at the point of death who thought that their lives were no longer going to have continuity. They expressed their dissatisfaction with life. In grief and despair some of them said that life is meaningless since people are happily born but sorrowfully die without any hope for further living. These people actually experienced some unavoidable difficulties in their physical human existence, which led them to a sense of the meaninglessness of life and its discontinuity. But the question is: Is life really meaningless? Is there no continuity of life after death? The sense that life is meaningless is not African. The African position is that although life is threatened by pain and evil in the society, it is precious and endless for those who lived a good life- moral, social and spiritual. But for the wicked ones, the continuity of life is questionable. That is why life is seen as the foundation on which the other values like religion, community, hospitality and respect for elders are established. But how can we speak better about life as a value if we do not study it to know what it is and how the other values have it as their foundation? It is really a

challenge for us, Africans, to deeply study our values, maintain our positions and let them lead us to the truth of our destiny, which is found in God and therefore said to be Theocentric, i.e., God-centred (Chukwu-centred in Igbo).

In Africa, life is held as an important value because it links the Africans to God, the ancestors, those yet to be born, their neighbours and the world in which they live. But the current wave in the "culture of death"² seems to contradict the sense that life is a value. By culture of death I mean all that constitutes anti-life, such as abortion, contraception, murder or killing of a human person and witchcraft. Why such an anti-life situation? It is simply because those who engage in all forms of anti-life seem neither to understand what life really means nor to know the goal and stages of life. There is great need to explain the meaning of life, its stages of existence and its goal if we hope to fight against any form of anti-life.

Furthermore, the Church in Africa has been faced with the challenge of presenting the gospel values in Africa through inculturation. But the values of the African traditional religion and the values of Christianity or Gospel values seem to be in conflict with each other to the extent that the inculturation of the Christian values into the African cultures seems impossible. The resistance to inculturation is largely due to ignorance of what the cultural values are. It is necessary to examine critically any value in any culture to see if such a value could provide the ground for possible inculturation.

I am challenged by all the above cases to reflect on life as a value in African societies, with a particular reference to the Igbo society and to show that life is not only a gift from God but also a value that will be a vantage point for inculturation, the planting of the seed-values of the Gospel in Africa. It is therefore hoped that appreciating and acknowledging life as a value will help the Africans not only to see the necessity of going back to their roots to rediscover the theophanic values in their culture but also allow those values to be nourished

²John Pall II, The Gospel of Life (Encyclical Letter), No. 12 Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1995, P. 20.

by the gospel message that calls for a new life in Christ. And that as the Africans sincerely open themselves to the challenges of the Gospel, their values will provide them with the basic soil on which the seed of the Gospel (the message of God's saving love through His Son, the call to eternal life in the Kingdom of God) will be allowed to take a deeper root in their lives. In that way, when the message of the Gospel has taken a root in the heart and lives of Africans, there will not be the least doubt of their attaining a full identity after death in God alone.

1c. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This paper is based on life experience and library research work, which included consulting any books that could enunciate what and how the Igbo understand life as a value. The research also included some interviews and questionnaires, as needed. The Igbo attitude towards life and the information given about the Igbo are carefully and critically examined and analysed theologically.

1d. AREA OF STUDY:

The area of study for this essay is the Igbo society of Nigeria in West Africa. We are very much interested in knowing how life is understood as a value, why life has persisted among the Igbo as a value and how life can become a starting point for seeing Jesus not only as Life but also as the Archetype, Prototype, of the ancestors who are believed to be the transmitters of life. This essay also studies the value of life according to the Christian teaching and seeks for the possible way of seeing Jesus as "a measure" for overcoming negative or anti-life attitudes, at least among the Igbo.

CHAPTER 1.

1.1 A POINT OF DEPARTURE:

We begin by clarifying some of the terminologies used in this essay to enable the readers have a good understanding of what is being presented.

1.2 CLARIFICATION OF TERMS:

Some of the terms used in this essay are complex and difficult to define. Here, we will try to provide a clarification of some key expressions, without pretending to be exhaustive.

1.2.1. Igbo: The term Igbo means “Upland”¹ and is used in many ways. It is used as a name to identify a group of people living at the Southern part of Nigeria called the “**Igbo people**”. It is also used to describe their language and land

The place of origin of the Igbo people is not clear. Some scholars like Dr. Ezeala, J.S.OBIOHA, K.K.Uma, and Dr. Emmanuel Ononuju argue that the Igbo people are a missing tribe in Israel.² While some contend that the Igbo people migrated from East of the Niger- following River Niger, to occupy the Southern part of Nigeria. Whatever be the case, the Igbo is a major ethnic group in Nigeria.

The Igbo are profoundly religious and about 60% are Christians, while 40% are non-Christians. The Igbo belief in, worship of, sacrifice to and prayer to the Supreme Being- God, “**Chukwu**”, who is believed to be the “**Absolute Giver of life**”, attests how profoundly religious they are. In fact, it is not surprising that most Igbo call themselves the children of God.³ The Igbo people are also social and moralistic. Their morality is centred on the protection of life from being profaned or harmed, because life is believed to be sacred and a paramount gift from God.

Occupationally, the Igbo are agriculturists; fishermen, hunters of wild animals and farmers, with yam as their chief crop. They are also porters, blacksmiths, musicians and traders. They are very industrious in any field of work. In general, the Igbo people are very enterprising.

¹ Isichei, Elizabeth, A History of the Igbo People, London: The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1977, P. 19.

² Ononuju, Emmanuel, Igbos: A Missing Tribe in Israel? (Discovering the Origin of the Igbos in connection with the Bible Prophecies of the last days:), Aba: Uju Gospel Publications Nigeria, 1996, P. 23.

³ Isichei, *ibid.*, P. 19.

1.2.2. Value: Value is defined as that reasoned and firm conviction or belief that something is good or bad; and that these convictions or beliefs are organized in our psyche to form scales of preference or scales of values.⁴ Values reflect the personality of individuals and they are the expression of the cultural tone, moral, affective, social and spiritual, marked by family, the school, the institution and the society.⁵ Value is what people believe to be good for them that should deserve a priority over anything else. People also decide what is bad for them that should be despised. A writer on “value”, Ladislav Orsy, says that a value is a good thing, not in itself alone, but in its relationship to human persons.⁶ It is a concept that signifies a thing and has the capacity to contribute to the perfection of human beings.⁷ A value is something good in as much as it can help the human persons attain a certain height of growth. Something is seen as a value when it can help the human person reach a reasonable height in their effort to attain their destiny. And the human destiny is attained only in God, the Creator.

1.2.3. LIFE AS A VALUE: Life from the Igbo, African, perspective reflects not only the personality of individuals, the cultural tone, moral, affective, social and spiritual, marked by the family, school, institution or society, in its present stage as Orsy remarked, but also points to another stage of life. That other stage of life, from the Igbo world-view, is none other than life in the spirit world- the ancestral world. By implication, therefore, life as a value, has a transcendental connotation. That is, this present stage of life points to the destiny of the human person, which is not yet realized but is hoped to be realized in the future stage of life.

1.2.4. DEATH: The antithesis of life is death. Death is regarded as the end of one’s earthly existence. It marks a transitional stage of life from its earthly existence to its spiritual existence in the ancestral domain. In other words, death refers to a situation whereby a person who has died is believed to have moved to join the company of those who had gone before

⁴Tierno, Bernabé, “¿Qué son los valores?”, Suplemento Seminal de Ya, 7/01/1990, P.46. - “¿Que son los valores?” means “What are the values?”. While Suplemento Seminal de Ya is the place of publication.

⁵ibid., P. 46.

⁶Orsy, Ladislav, Theology and Canon Law: New Horizons for Legislation and Interpretation, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992, P. 90.

⁷ibid., P. 90.

him and the only major change in this departure is the fact that the physical body decays.⁸ This means that death does not necessarily imply discontinuity of life but rather marks another stage of the continuity of life.

1.2.5. EVANGELISATION: It includes the conversion of human culture and the permeation of culture by Gospel.⁹ And Gospel here means the life and teaching of Jesus Christ as they are truly and reliably recorded in the first four books of the New Testament.¹⁰ Jesus taught about the fulfilment of the time, the presence of the kingdom of God, the need to repent and believe- have faith, in the Gospel- the Good News Jesus brought by what he says and does(cf. Mk 1:15). The conversion and permeation of human culture by the Gospel imply that the human culture does not contain as much goodness as the Gospel does. Human culture can only contain sufficient goodness when it openly comes into deeper contact and relation with the Gospel. That is why Jesus' teaching calls for repentance, conversion of heart and growth in faith, because the kingdom of God, which is present, has not yet grown in the heart of all people. If Jesus calls for repentance and belief in the Gospel- surrendering to the rule of God, for His kingdom already present, it is because the kingdom contains the fullness of all the goodness human beings are aiming at, namely, the realization of human destiny, abundant life.

1.2.6. THEOLOGY: St Anselm defines theology as "fides quaerens intellectum" meaning faith seeking understanding (clarification). He stresses two important points, namely, (1) faith-belief and trust in the absolute¹¹ and (2) seeking to understand that absolute through clarification, asking questions where necessary. To sum it up, faith and the ability to ask for clarification where necessary for the purpose of a deeper understanding of the truth of who God is to us and who we are to Him (the relationship between human beings and God) are absolutely indispensable in the field of theology. So we can specifically say that theology is that process by which we bring our knowledge and understanding of God to the level of

⁸Mbiti, John S., Introduction to African Religion, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1992, P. 119.

⁹Shorter, Aylward, The African Synod: A Personal Response to the Outline Document, Nairobi: St Paul Publications, 1991, P. 52.

¹⁰Crowther, Jonathan, (Ed.), et al, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, P. 514.

¹¹The absolute: The absolute refers to the Truth, Supra-human, God Himself.

expression. It is the articulation, in a more or less systematic manner, of the encounter with God within human experience ¹²

1.2.7. INCULTURATION: It is the insertion of the Gospel message into cultures. The insertion of the Gospel message into cultures is synonymous with the incarnation of the Son of God precisely because it was complete, concrete and was an incarnation in a particular culture.¹³ The incarnation of the Gospel in a particular culture is for the purpose of giving the people of that culture the opportunity of either accepting, receiving, the message of salvation brought by Jesus Christ or rejecting it. Wherever the Gospel is allowed to incarnate and take roots, it transforms, changes any form of bad ways of thinking or behaviour, which is not only unjust, oppressive, exploitative, but also detrimental to life itself. It also challenges such people to seek for an abundant, fullness of life in God alone as the perfection of human destiny.

With the clarification of these few terminologies, we hope that the readers of this essay may be able to follow the trend of its presentation.

¹²McBrien, Richard P., Catholicism, Vol 1, Minneapolis: Winston Press, Inc., 1980, P.26

¹³John, Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa: Post-Synodial Apostolic Exhortation, Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1995, PP. 45-46.

CHAPTER 2

2 INCULTURATION:

In this chapter we want to look at the meaning of inculturation, the principles of inculturation, the importance of inculturation for the church in general and Africa in particular and the inculturation of the Gospel value of life into the Igbo society.

2.1. The meaning of inculturation: Inculturation means the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his Gospel message of salvation understood by people of every culture, locality and time.¹⁴ Culture here refers to a pattern of values and meanings expressed through images and symbols, which is transmitted by a human society, and which enables human beings to communicate and develop their understanding of life.¹⁵ The honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his Gospel message ever more understood by people of every culture is in line with Jesus' last instruction to his apostles in which he says, "...you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The ends of the earth include every culture, and there is no better way of carrying out this instruction like through inculturation. Inculturation, therefore, has to do with honest, serious and a committed witness to Jesus and his Gospel and letting him and his Gospel permeate the culture.

Inculturation does not mean acculturation. Acculturation is a procedure by which the representatives of one culture influence those of another,¹⁶ asking the other to get rid of his own culture (the goodness of that culture not considered) and live in accordance with his (the representative's) culture instead. Unlike inculturation, which respects the good values of a given culture, acculturation is the contrary. Acculturation is characterised by ethnocentric prejudice, imposing one's culture on another, disrespect of the rights of other cultures, alienating people from their culture and a rejection of their values with little or no dialogue.

¹⁴Waliggo, J. M., Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency, Kampala: St. Paul Publications, 1986, P.12.

¹⁵Shorter, Aylward, et al., Towards African Christian Maturity, Nairobi: St. Paul Publications, 1987, P. 20.

¹⁶Shorter, Aylward, The African Synod: A Personal Response to the Outline Document, Nairobi: St Paul Publications, 1991, P. 59.

Reflecting on inculturation, Shorter spells out some of its theological meanings. He starts by seeing inculturation as an ongoing dialogue between Gospel and culture. A dialogue is a two-way process, namely, (a) the conversion of a culture by the Gospel, the unending task of transforming and redeeming culture and (b) the re-expression of the Gospel by the evangelised culture, the Gospel taking new cultural form.¹⁷ These two points are indispensable for the understanding of the theology of inculturation.

2.2. The principles of Inculturation: There are some principles one must consider if the process of inculturation is to be carried out. They include the following:-

(i) The incarnation of the Son of God: It was stressed in the African Synod Document that the incarnation of the Son of God is the principle and model of inculturation.¹⁸ Incarnation refers to the taking on of human flesh by God Himself in the person of His Son, Jesus (Lk 1: 26-35, Jn 1:14) and living among the people of a particular culture, namely, the Jews. The incarnation of the Son of God took place in the womb of Virgin Mary, but through the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk 1:31-35). This is a mystery made concrete. The Divine became human while retaining his Divinity and in this way proving God's love of identifying Himself particularly with people of a given culture and universally with people of all cultures. The incarnation of the Son of God unfolds the Trinitarian action of God; God the Father (the first person of the Most Holy Trinity), sending His own Son, Jesus, (the second person of the Holy Trinity), to a human being in the power of the Holy Spirit (the third person of the Holy Trinity). His Divine Son becomes human in order to touch the human heart and make it divine. In this way, God's desire to identify Himself with the people of a particular culture and transform that culture and its values into the highest degree of perfection became the unfolding of His plan of converting to Himself all people of different cultures. This is the core of the theology of inculturation and remains always a vital principle of inculturation.

(ii) The Gospel: The Gospel is about the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' life starts with the incarnation in which he became human while remaining divine, then, followed by his birth, childhood, adulthood, ministries of healing, preaching, teaching

¹⁷Ibid. P. 54.

¹⁸Browne, Maura, (ed.), The African Synod Documents, Reflections, Perspectives, (Proposition 28), New York. Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1996, P. 96.

(by words and deeds), suffering and death (in order to reconcile humanity with God his Father and lead us to the fullness of life), and the continuity of his life after resurrection. Jesus' teaching distinctively draws attention to the presence of the kingdom of God, the reign of God and the need for all his listeners to repent (be converted in heart and mind) and believe in the Gospel (Mk 1:15). The call for a change of heart and belief in the Gospel is simply because there is something special that the Gospel can offer humanity. The Gospel carries the message of how we are saved from an eternal death by Jesus Christ, God's own Son. Jesus' Gospel purifies, guides, animates and elevates the culture, which it permeates. The values of his Gospel transform the culture, where it (Gospel) enters, into a new creation,¹⁹ because the Gospel is so powerful that it can make the rule of God felt in such a culture. This is good news for everyone in every culture. Since inculturation consists of letting the Gospel engage in a dialogue of love with people's culture for the purpose of transforming it into a new creation, and the culture cannot be transformed except by the Gospel, it then clearly stands that the Gospel is a fundamental principle of inculturation.

(iii) The Holy Spirit and His specific role: The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Most Holy Trinity. His role in inculturation includes leading those who desire to know the truth to understand the truth. He leads the church to understand, interpret and proclaim the Good News. When the Gospel enters into a culture, the Spirit engages in a dialogue of love with that culture in question. The Holy Spirit also leads the individual members of the church to bear witness to Christ, to his death and resurrection,²⁰ and in this way makes inculturation bear fruit. By implication, inculturation can never be possible if the Holy Spirit is not involved. If that is the case, then, it could be strongly affirmed that the Holy Spirit is an absolute principle of inculturation.

(iv) The Church: The Church here refers to the family of God, God's people, the members of Christ's Mystical Body, who have faith in the Risen Lord and serve as a visible sign of his presence. The Church is a sign and an instrument of salvation, always in relationship with Christ, and has a mission to bring all people with cultural bonds to full unity with one another

¹⁹African Synod Document, Proposition 28.

²⁰Browne, *ibid.*, P. 73

and a full union with Christ.²¹ The Church understands its mission as an urgent one and seeks to carry it out in order to help all people participate and share fully in Christ's own divine life.²² With the help of the Holy Spirit, the Church comes in contact with the whole truth (Jn16:13), studies it and being empowered by the Spirit expresses in all cultures the wonderful deeds of God.²³ Since inculturation is part of the urgent mission of the Church and the Holy Spirit who is the principal agent of inculturation leads the Church, it could be affirmed, therefore, that the Church is a principal factor in the process of inculturation.

(v) Evangelisation: It has been noted that inculturation cannot take place in absence of evangelisation. Why? It is because, inculturation presupposes evangelisation, and inculturation remains a mark of full evangelisation.²⁴ One of the main tasks of evangelisation is the proclamation of the Gospel and only after that does inculturation becomes effective. To evangelise is to proclaim by word the Good News of Jesus Christ, the crucified, dead and risen Lord, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Evangelisation aims at touching every society and human being in every aspect of their existence.²⁵ It is only when the Gospel is proclaimed that people of a certain culture can hear the message and become challenged to listen attentively in order to understand what the message is all about. And consequent to the positive response to the proclaimed Gospel comes inculturation. Inculturation here does not imply a situation whereby some missionary "evangelisers" of the past promoted acculturation more than inculturation as they "preached the Gospel". Inculturation is rather the fruit of listening, welcoming, or reflecting on and assimilating the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mk 1:1), proclaimed. If that is true, then, it can be said that just as we cannot adequately talk about inculturation without implying the Gospel being in a dialogue of love with a culture after the Gospel has been proclaimed, so also can we not truly talk about inculturation without implying evangelisation. In that regard, therefore, it can be asserted that evangelisation is a necessary principle for inculturation.

²¹Lumen Gentium- A Constitution of the Church, No. 1.

²²Ibid., No. 2.

²³African Synod Document, Proposition 30.

²⁴Ibid., Proposition 32.

²⁵Ibid., Proposition 3.

(vi) **Prayer:** True inculturation is supported by prayer. Prayer is dialogue with God, Our Father. It is an act of intra-personal and inter-personal communication with God, whereby one speaks from the depth of the heart, listens to God and allowing oneself to be led by His Spirit. Prayer can also mean entering into a friendly relationship with Jesus. Prayer is a necessary ingredient for growth in the virtues of prudence and the discernment²⁶ of the will of God. It is difficult to discern God's will without prayer. In the life of Jesus, prayer is a key element in the discernment of the will of God, his Father and our Father (cf. Mk 1: 35-39, Lk 11: 1-13) and being prompted by the Holy Spirit puts His Father's will into action (Lk 4: 18-19, Is 61:1-2) in the midst of the people of a particular culture. For that reason, it can be firmly asserted that in order to discern the will of God, the action of the Holy Spirit, through prayer is a vital principle for inculturation.

In summary, the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God, the Gospel itself, the Holy Spirit, the Church, evangelisation and prayer are all vital principles for inculturation. They are all interconnected, for the Spirit of the Incarnate Son summons the Church together through the preaching of the Word of God to all people of different cultural backgrounds for the sake of their salvation. With all this in mind let us consider the importance of inculturation.

2.3. Why Inculturation is important for the Church in general: Inculturation is important for the Church in many ways. We shall mention a few here.

(i) *Inculturation helps the Church to discern what is essential to the Gospel as she sets out to evangelise every culture.* Inculturation involves reaching people with the Gospel through their own cultural values that are similar to those of the Gospel. It is not easy to discern what is essential to the Gospel and remain faithful to it when reaching out to the people with many cultural values. To do this, prudence and constancy in prayer are necessary. Since the Gospel, prayer for discernment and evangelisation are the principles for inculturation, following these principles will lead the Church to fidelity to the essentials of the Gospel while reaching out to all people of various cultures.

²⁶Browne, *ibid.*, P. 75.

(ii) *Inculturation offers the Church the opportunity to study a particular culture and discover that culture's authentic values, which would serve as good signs for the understanding of the perfect values of the kingdom of God.* As inculturation offers the Church that opportunity, she comes to understand the similarities and the dissimilarities between the Gospel values and those of any particular culture under consideration and consequently know better what to borrow from that culture and what she can offer to that culture.

(iii) *Inculturation offers the Church the opportunity to be enriched by the distinctive contributions of different cultures.* As the Church is challenged by the signs of the time, to meet the needs of the people, she also discovers something new in such a group of people. This offers the Church the opportunity to grow, especially when she sees how God is already present in the culture of the people offering them the opportunity to receive the call to live in accordance with His kingdom values, such as mercy, love, peace, justice, etc.

(iv) *It provides the Church with a suitable atmosphere to deepen her role as a listening Church.* This becomes evident whenever the Church shows that she is not only a teacher but also a listener to those she teaches. Therefore the Church discovers more that she is both a listener and a teacher.

(v) *Inculturation helps the Church to discover the ways in which the Gospel can be firmly rooted in the lives of the people of a particular culture she evangelises.* Since inculturation tries to discover and recognize the valuable elements in a culture that define a people's identity and destiny, the Church, whose task is that of inculturation, understands them as a fertile ground on which the Gospel can be firmly rooted in the people's lives. Thus, by using those valuable elements in helping the people who hear the Gospel proclaimed to them, those people come to understand why the Gospel should be truly rooted in their lives and why the Gospel values should be seen as a way of perfecting their own cultural values.

Having briefly given the importance of inculturation for the Church, let us also enumerate the importance of inculturation for Africa in particular.

2.4. The ways in which inculturation is important for Africa: There are many ways in which inculturation is important for Africa. However, we shall enumerate some of them here.

(i) Inculturation allows Africans the opportunity to hear the Gospel more clearly in terms of the values they recognize. It provides the Africans with the opportunity of assimilating the Gospel message in their lives while building on their authentic cultural values.

(ii) Inculturation offers the Africans the opportunity to live a genuine faith.

(iii) It involves the Africans more in their own unique way of contributing to the up-building of God's kingdom.

(iv) It helps to foster the transformation of the African cultural values by the Gospel and bring them to perfection as the Africans aspire to respond to the call to conversion by the Gospel.

(v) Inculturation would help the Africans to see the need for discovering the depth of their good values if they are to bear true witness to the presence of God in their own culture.

Having enumerated the importance of inculturation for Africa, let us briefly highlight a few of the points. Inculturation is important for Africa because of the following reasons.

First, the Africans need a new opportunity of assimilating the Gospel message in their lives while building on their authentic cultural values. When the early missionaries came to Africa, they saw Africans as people with some values that seemed conflicting with the Gospel values. Without any dialogue, they misinterpreted those values as evil and the Africans found it difficult to believe in the message of the Gospel. Consequently, the Africans lost the opportunity of assimilating the Gospel message. But since inculturation involves bringing the Gospel into a culture, it is hoped that the effort to make the Gospel permeate African cultures will foster a good relationship between the African cultures and the Gospel, a relationship that will grow into a loving and fruitful dialogue, in such a way that the Gospel values may enrich the African authentic values. It is clear that unless they deepen their relationship with each other, they can neither understand each other nor see their similarities and dissimilarities and the need for each other.

Second, some theological concepts seem too abstract and are difficult to understand when they are not interpreted into concrete terms and ordinary language of the people. For example, the concept, Trinity: three persons in one God. Although Africans believe in the Supreme Being, one God, the Africans may not easily relate to such a concept, unless it is

explained at the cultural level, in the language people can understand. This is the thrust of inculturation that it will enter the African culture and look for the terminologies people use, which may help them deepen their belief in God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Third, the Gospel needs to be deeply rooted in the lives of Africans, just as there is a need to go beyond the proclamation of the word. To allow the Gospel deeply rooted in the lives of Africans, deep thought and reflections on how the Gospel could be presented to Africans are necessary. I think that inculturation can be very important in this area, by presenting the Gospel in such a way that it can take a deeper root in the lives of Africans. It is really important because the Gospel has been proclaimed to many Africans without really touching their lives. Many “missionary evangelisers” who came to evangelise Africa could not go deeper than the proclamation of the word. The word is powerful but there is also a saying that “actions speak louder than words”. If that is true, then, there is a great need to go beyond the ordinary proclamation of the word and find something concrete that addresses people’s identity. It is also the thrust of inculturation that it will go beyond the proclamation of the word and show the people the practical meaning of faith through their own cultural values.

Fourth, we need to know our good cultural values, because unless we know them we may not understand how God is already at work in our own cultures and how to embrace God’s kingdom, the reign of God in our midst, as Christ inaugurated it. All this can be possible through a thorough examination of the African cultural values. Without such an examination, we may not know the values that constitute an obstacle to embracing the kingdom values. We may not realise the necessity of examining our cultural values except when challenged. It is the work of inculturation to challenge the people of a given culture to look at what they have if they are to embrace the values of God’s kingdom.

Finally, we need to understand those ways in which our cultural values are different from the Gospel values. This may help us know how to contribute to the up-building of the kingdom of God in our midst. We seem to think that every cultural value is perfect. But the present moral, social, religious and spiritual crisis, around such issues as abortion, contraception, murder at any level, social stratification, oppression, exploitation, offering of

humans in the name of religion, all that contributed to the “culture of death”²⁷ in our contemporary societies poses a contradiction. We know already that there are some positive values in African cultures. They show that God is already working in a hidden way. But the major problem with some positive values is that they are sometimes neither seen as the work of grace (gift from God) nor is “the One through whom” (the mediator, Jesus) they were already given as grace to be recognized. All this hinders a better vision of life. This is why Jesus came to help us go beyond those cultural approaches to life by repenting and embracing the values of his Father’s kingdom, so that we can have a better meaning of life. Hence he says, “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10). Without condemning our cultures, Jesus wants us to start living the Gospel values in our own cultures, and it is possible today but through inculturation.

With the knowledge of the meaning of inculturation, its principles, its importance to the Church in general and to Africa in particular, we still have to bear in mind that Africa is a vast continent with numerous cultures and values. Going into a particular culture to see its good values and how they relate to the Gospel values would be helpful for discovering how the Gospel message of salvation can be meaningfully rooted in the life of the Africans through inculturation. For this reason, therefore, we would like to turn to Igbo society.

2.5. Inculturation of the Gospel values into the Igbo society: Following the remark made by Pope John Paul II about the constituents of inculturation in Africa, that is, ensuring that followers of Christ will evermore fully assimilate the Gospel message, while remaining faithful to all authentic African values,²⁸ I would think that if there is any authentic African value all Africans should remain faithful to, it is “Life”. Life has further been included as one of the three identified positive values in Africa by the African Synod in 1994. Life is believed to have a theological meaning and can always help the Africans to deeply and fully assimilate the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. Based on this point, I wish to understand, to clarify the contents of this value, life, from the Igbo perspective, to see how it can help us assimilate the Gospel message and fully realize our identity in God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

²⁷ John Paul II, The Gospel of Life: Encyclical Letter, (No. 12), Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1995, P. 20.

²⁸ John Paul II, (The Church in Africa: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation), *ibid.*, No. 78, P. 62.

CHAPTER 3.

3. Life as a value in Igbo society.

In African societies, there are many values that are held in high esteem because they link the Africans to God, to the ancestors, to the unborn, to each other and the world around them. Some of those values are religious belief, community, life, hospitality and respect for elders. However, among all these values, life holds a very significant position. Life is believed to be a fundamental vital force of existence and a gift from God to human beings through the ancestors. Because of this gift, the Africans venerate the ancestors for being the channel through which life passes before reaching them. They acknowledge, praise and worship God. They ask God to give them long life. The Africans give God names that portray Him as the Giver of life. For example, among the **Banyarwanda** and **Barundi** societies, the name “**Imana**” is given to God. “**Imana**” means that God is the source and giver of life- the power to live and grow. In Yoruba society of Nigeria, the name “**Ori-se**” is given to God just as the Igbo call God “**Chi-ukwu**” to portray the same idea as “**Imana**”.²⁹ All African societies have different names for God as the giver of life. And so, just as a great river gets names in all the places it flows, so also God gets names in all the societies of Africa where He is acknowledged as the God of life. Because the scope of this essay is so limited that it cannot explain what life really means for all the African societies and the attitude they show towards it, it would be plausible to focus on one African society. Our choice here is the Igbo.

In Igbo society, life is a unique value, the central value from which all the other values have their real meanings and foundations. But what makes life a value on which the other values have their meanings and foundations? What does life mean for Igbo society? To attempt all these questions, it is necessary to know the Igbo understanding of life.

3.1. The Igbo understanding of life

The Igbo understanding of life can be explained under the following points: - The meaning of life, the origin of life, its basic characteristics, death and the finality of life.

²⁹cf. Bujo, Benezet, African Christian Morality at the Age of Inculturation, Nairobi: St Paul’s Publications, 1990. P. 75.

3.1.1. The meaning of life

The Igbo term for life is “**ndu**”. “**Ndu**” is derived from the root word “**di**”. “**Di**” means “Being”. “**Ndu**” means “existence”, “the vital force of being”, “the vital force of an existence”. For the Igbo, “**Ndu**” is defined as the fullness of being- long life, health, renown and bright future, not just bare survival”.³⁰ “**Ndu**” is neither a concrete object nor any object of movement. This perhaps poses a problem in its understanding. “**Ndu**” is often personified as something whose being is constant, dynamic, sustained, prolonged and revealing in order to make it understood. Analogically, “**Ndu**” is like the air we breathe but do not see. It is like the spirits that are believed to exist but remain hidden from people’s sight. Hence the Igbo belief that life is as mysterious as the spirit itself. Life is simply a mystery. The mysterious aspect of life is deeply portrayed by an Igbo man, Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe, when he affirmed , “My life is a pilgrimage from the unknown to unknown. I do not know whence I emanated or whither I am bound”.³¹ Thus the Igbo saying that “*ndu di omimi*”, that is, life is very deep and therefore a mystery is here justified.

3.1. 2. The origin of life: The origin of life is always traced back to “*Chukwu*”, the great God, or “*Chineke*”, God the Creator, or the “Unknown” as Azikiwe puts it. Life is a pilgrimage that begins from the Unknown to Unknown.³² Azikiwe implicitly says that life originates from God who is the Unknown.³³ God is the Unknown because no one has ever seen him, known when he started to exist. No one knows the length or depth of God; whether he is tall or short, thin or fat. That God is the Unknown does not imply a total ignorance of who God is. God is partially known through his words and actions in the life of the people in the world. For example, the Igbo people call God “*Chinwendu*”, God the owner of life, not because we have ever seen God with our eyes, but because our ancestors have it as a belief.³⁴ God is called “All-loving”, “All-merciful” and none of these names prevents people from

³⁰ Metuh, Emezie Ikenga, African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation (Studies in Igbo Religion), Jos: IMICO Press, 1991, P. 162.

³¹ Igwe, Agbafor, Zik: The Philosopher of Our Time, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 1992, P. 1.

³² *Ibid.*, P. 1.

³³ Mbiti, John S., Introduction to African Religion, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Ltd., 1992, P. 59.

³⁴ An answer given by an interviewed Igbo to the question: “How is God the Originator of life and yet He is the Unknown?”.

calling Him “Omini-present”. This is because “All-loving” and “All-merciful” do not include “Omini-present”, and all this points to the impossibility of giving a full account of who God is. In other words, an attempt to explain how God is known has even shown that the more one says who God is, the more one discovers that He is more than what that person thought of Him. And this implies that nothing one says about God is absolute and adequate to tell all about Him, because God is infinite. So we can say that while God is said to be partially known, He is not completely known. To know God better, therefore, demands belief, openness and receptivity.

It is an Igbo traditional belief that life originates from the Supreme Being, “*Chukwu*”. Life does not originate from the laboratory,³⁵ as some people think, but rather from God Himself.³⁶ The Igbo people believe that “*Chukwu*” gives life to every creature, but very special is the type He has given to human beings. The speciality of the life human beings received from God rises from the Igbo belief that “*ndu mmadu*”, human life, is God’s breath and therefore a part of God’s beingness. Subsequently, that life is believed to be received from God through the ancestors and it does not attain its fullness until it reaches the ancestral domain in the spirit world. The ancestors play many roles in the process of receiving life from God. The ancestors are believed to share in two important domains, namely, the spirit world and human world. They serve God and human beings. In the spirit world they serve God. They are very close to God and they relate to Him. They are God’s friends and are believed to have attained a supernatural excellence. They mediate between God and human beings, and intercede for human beings before God. In the human world, the ancestors are believed to live very close to human beings and are members of the community. They are naturally related with their earthly relatives in blood. They are mediums of life and serve as transmitters of life. The ancestors are believed to be endowed with supernatural forces and can protect the human beings from sickness and all dangers. In fact, the ancestors are not only

³⁵Kass, Leon R., Toward a more Natural Science: Biology and Human Affairs, New York: The Free Press; A Division of MacMillan, Inc., 1985, P. 99.

³⁶Magesa, Laurenti, African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life, New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1997, P. 47.

channels of life, but also active role players in the natural and supernatural worlds³⁷ While they are in deep natural blood relationship with their earthly kin, they exist spiritually, in an invisible manner, in a different but more powerful way. They have sacred communion with their kindred. So when we talk about the human life as having a speciality, we mean that human life passed through the ancestors who play the above roles to God and human beings. By contrast, the type of life given by Chukwu to the other creatures like animals, insects and plants, sometimes called “*ndu umanu*”, has no ancestral connection and is believed to end its existence in the human world. The life human beings received from God through the ancestors enables them to long for a complete life and permanent identification with the ancestors whom God has blessed with an imperishable life. For the Igbo, **Chukwu**, God, remains the absolute giver of life,³⁸ the author, spring, fountain of life, and therefore its origin.

3.1.3 The basic characteristics of life:

In Igbo thought and understanding, life has some basic characteristics. One of them is that life is sacred. The Igbo people have a great sense of the sacredness of life.³⁹ For them, life is sacred because it is a gift from God who is sacred. Sacredness demands care, protection from defilement or destruction. The Igbo society reverences life, cares for it and articulates its importance in her morality as a responsibility of its members to give life and protect it from destruction.

In addition to the above basic characteristic, life is good. Life is good because it comes from God who is good, merciful, generous and loving. Because life is good, it is believed to be precious and desirable by all. This is why the Igbo people ask: “*Onwere onye ogologo ndu anaghi agu?*”, that is, “Is there anyone who does not like a long life?” Hence, life is a fundamental good God has given every human being.

³⁷Nyamiti, Charles, Christ As Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1984.

³⁸ Chidili, Barth, Discovering Christianity in African Culture, Nairobi: Pann Printer Ltd., 1993, P.22.

³⁹Onwubiko, Oliver A., African Thought, Religion & Culture: Christian Mission and Culture in Africa, Vol. 1, Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd., 1991, P. 22.

Another characteristic of life is that it is transmittable. The Igbo people believe that when God gives life, that life passes through some designated agents. A recognised agent for the transmission of life from God to human beings in Igbo society is the ancestor.⁴⁰ For the Igbo, the ancestors are good channels to life, because they intercede for the living, especially, the married couples, asking God to give them children so that their lineage will continue to exist.

Another characteristic of life is that, as a gift, it is relational. It flows from God and passes through the ancestors down to the lineage of a great grand father, a grand father to a grand son. This implies a web of relationship and a symbol of God's invitation of human being to a permanent relationship and identification with Him. This is why the Igbo people in particular and Africans in general see themselves as people in blood relationship with each other and as people whose life is to be lived in relationship with the others. Hence, goes the saying, "I am because we are."

Life is also experiential. It is an invisible spark of God's presence in each human being. And, just as God exists, always present and cannot be seen with the human sensory organ, except with the eyes of faith, so also human beings have life as God's invisible spark of presence that cannot be seen. In other words, every human being knows that he or she has life by experience. For the Igbo, therefore, the presence of life can only be known by experience. The Igbo people experience life in the family settings, especially in giving birth to a child, the child's growth, survival from sickness and suffering. They also experience life in the community settings, such as in solidarity with each other, and some activities like festival celebrations.

Finally, in Igbo thought and reflection, life has a continuity. The continuity of life is echoed by the Igbo saying that "*ndu enwero ogugu*", which means that life can never have an end. Life is a reality that must continue⁴¹ even when one stops experiencing its presence. This present life would naturally flow into the future.⁴² The future is not yet at hand and does

⁴⁰Chidili, op cit., P22.

⁴¹Ibid., P. 23.

⁴²Opata, Damian U., Essay On Igbo World View, Nsukka: AP Express Publishers, 1998, P. 115.

not lie in this present life. It tells us about a life after the present life, a life after death. But how does life continue to exist after one's death? Does death not mark the finality of life?

3.1.4 Death and finality of life:

Death is regarded as the utmost affliction and ultimate negation of life.⁴³ However, it is not the end of life, because life has continuity and it is believed to be indestructible even by death.⁴⁴ The finality of life as such does not even arise in Igbo world view. When someone in Igbo society died and got buried, that person's life is believed to have started a never-ending journey. In this case, one's physical existence can become extinct but its extinction does not determine the end of life, because life transcends one's physical existence, space and time.⁴⁵ The Igbo people believe that life continues after one's death in the spirit world, but only in the ancestral abode. The ancestral abode is not the same as God's abode, because God's abode is inapproachable and deserves total reverence. The structure of Igbo cosmology makes this clear, whereby two distinct abodes in the spirit world are identified, namely, "**Obi Chukwu**", God's abode and "**Obi Ndichie**" the ancestral abode.

⁴³Magesa, *ibid.*, P. 187.

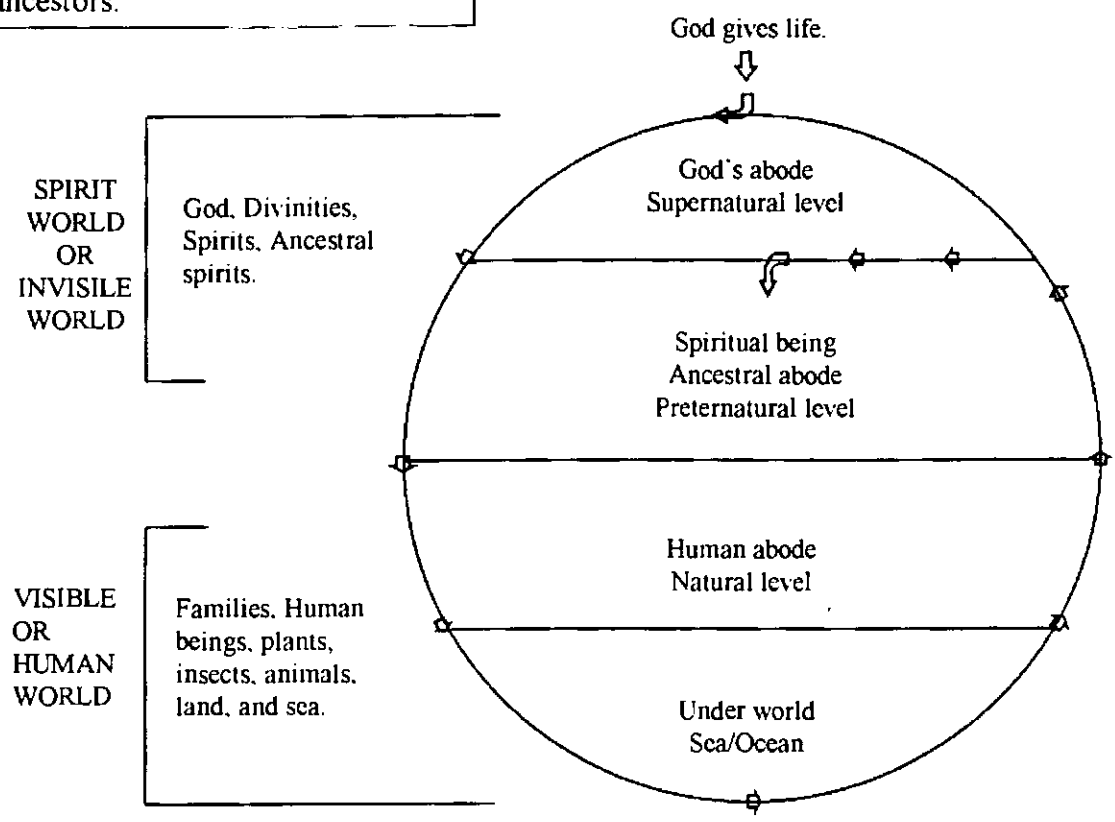
⁴⁴Mbiti, *ibid.*, PP. 121-2.

⁴⁵*ibid.*, P. 44.

The structure of Igbo cosmology and the flow of life from God through the ancestors to human beings and then back to the ancestors.

**LIFE GIVEN BY "CHINEKE,"
GOD, THE CREATOR**

THE FLOW OF LIFE



In Igbo cosmology, there are two words, namely, "ala mmuo", the spirit or invisible world and "ala mmadu", the human or visible world. The spirit world has two levels, namely, "ala mmuo ukwu", the supernatural level, and "odudu ala mmuo", the preternatural level. The supernatural level is the abode of "Chukwu", God, while the preternatural level is the abode of the ancestors. After the spirit world, the human world follows next. The human world is the abode of human beings, animals, plants, etc. The Igbo people believe that both the spirit world and the human world are interconnected, united and inseparable from each other.

In the structure of Igbo cosmology, as we can see, an arrow represents the flow of life. The arrow indicates that God gives life to human beings. But human beings do not receive that life directly, until, it is transmitted by the ancestors. So life passes through the medium of ancestors in an invisible manner to human beings, becomes present and assumes a physical state. The physical state of life is terminated by death and life flows across the underworld after the burial of its bearer and flows up to the ancestral abode in the preternatural level. The last arrow in the ancestral abode shows the final destination of life as it unites with the ancestral spirits. In other words, the fullness of life, from the Igbo perspective, as it could be the same in any African society, is attained only when that life unites with the ancestors in their abode.

The Igbo cosmology discloses that life continues even after death and unites with the life of those in the ancestral world. But the question that this view raises is whether the life of every human being is qualified to unite with that of the ancestors in their world after its present existence has been terminated by death? For the Igbo people, the continuity of life in the ancestral abode depends on how unblemished life has been in its present or physical existence. If one's life has been stained with any evil act of its bearer, that life becomes incapable of leading its way into the ancestral abode. The ancestral abode is an abode of unblemished beings, whose life is pure. It is an abode of joy and intimate relationship with God. But if the purity of life and its sacredness are maintained in its present existence, then, it will always lead its possessor into the ancestral abode and make its possessor capable of identifying with the ancestors in the spirit world. For the Igbo, life and its possessor are one, the same inseparable reality, a unity. When we look at a human being, we only see someone with a lively body, but not the fullness of life in that body. One can only observe, on the one hand, the possessor of life and not the life in itself. On the other hand, one cannot observe a lively body if life has ceased to move that body.

As for the finality of human life, it could be said that life does not end by (a) the termination or discontinuity of the physical existence of life in the human body. (b) The termination of the physical existence of life by death marks the beginning of another stage of life with more spiritual dimension. (c) Life is endless if it is lived in communion with the ancestors at the preternatural level of the spirit world.

3.2 The means of receiving of life.

The means of receiving human life addresses the question as to when one's physical life or present life on earth could be said to have been received. For the Igbo, there is only one means by which human beings could receive life. Life takes a process before its reception. It is given by *Chineke*, God the Creator, transmitted by His agents, the ancestors⁴⁶ and received by human beings during a sexual union between two people of the opposite sex. Sexual union here symbolises human cooperation, acceptance, openness, consent and willingness to take on the responsibility of receiving and enhancing life, on the one hand. On

⁴⁶Chidili, *ibid.*, P. 24.

the other hand, sexual union signifies human limitations whereby no one single person can claim an absolute autonomy in the reception of life from its absolute giver, "*Chineke*", God. But how do the Igbo people know when human life is received?

For the Igbo, the knowledge of the reception of life by human beings is not in the awareness of any sexual union or relation. The knowledge of when human life is received depends on conception, that is, when a female human being has conceived a child in her womb. It is only during the growth of pregnancy that the presence of life is noticed. Life is said to be present and, then, human life is categorised as the "unborn"- the life in the process of being brought into the cosmos. Science tends to support the idea that human life begins at conception. From the scientific data, conception does not occur immediately after a sexual union has taken place between two people of the opposite sex, until the female reproductive cell called an egg is fertilized by the male cell called spermatozoa.⁴⁷ In other words, pregnancy can only result in the fertilization of the ovum, female egg by the sperm- male egg cell, and a new human life begins.⁴⁸ Science in this way seems correct, but it does not tell us whether life is given by God and received by human beings during a sexual union. As for the Igbos, however, Chukwu, God, gives life to every human being and it is perceived as something made present during conception. Without sexual union and conception, therefore, no one could account for the time when human life is received. If sexual union, which results in conception, is a means for receiving new life, can we say that conception out of wedlock, rape, etc., is also a means of receiving life? The Igbo society is aware of the fact that the means for the reception of life can be abused. For the Igbo, conception out of wedlock, rape, etc., is an abuse of this means. Generally, whenever an abuse of the means of receiving life happens, it becomes a matter of great concern. The victim, the female is given assistance, counselling (telling her that she is carrying a new life that requires her cooperation), proper care in cash and kind to ensure that the newly conceived life is protected. The rapist is fined by the elders of the town and asked to be paying some money to the elders for the assistance of the raped until she gives birth. All this is the necessary precaution taken to ensure the

⁴⁷cf. Martin, Elizabeth, (Ed.), Oxford Reference: A Concise Dictionary of Biology, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, PP. 82, 94.

⁴⁸Manscarenhas, Marie M., Natural Family Planning. Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1985. PP. 1, 4, 9.

surety of the life of the unborn. The act of sexual union out of wedlock or raping in itself is neither customarily nor traditionally acceptable. But once a new life (baby) is conceived through this means, the life itself is never turned down but rather welcomed. So for the Igbo people, while life that emerges out of sexual union is respected and welcomed as a gift from “Chineke”, God, any act of sexual union outside marriage is traditionally regarded as an abuse of life and therefore unacceptable.

3.3. The signs and symbols of life in Igbo society.

The Igbo people do not conceive life as an object of observation. This is because life, for them, is a mystery. As a reality beyond an immediate exploration, there are some symbols, which the Igbo use to identify life. They include (a) Water, (b) Food, (c) Blood, (d) Heartbeat and Respiration, (e) Kola-nut, and (f) Pregnancy.

(A) Water: The Igbo term for water is “*mmiri*”. “*Mmiri*” is believed to be a powerful symbol of life. Water is used for cooking food, for satisfying one’s thirst, for washing off dirt; cleansing. It sustains and refreshes. Water, in its general use, for the Igbo, is for survival. It has the attribute of prolonging one’s physical existence. Hence, the Igbo people regard water as “*oji ndu*”, meaning the upholder or sustainer of life or something that makes existence possible. Because of the power and strength drawn from water, the Igbo people see water as an adequate symbol that explains life and serves as an analogy for explaining how the giver of life sustains human beings by sustaining life itself.

Among the Igbo, rivers, streams, springs, which constitute a veritable amount of water are treated with care. They serve as religious centres where worship and sacrifices can be carried out. Rivers, streams, springs are all regarded as communal heritage. The Igbo community maintains them by keeping them clean so that those who use them will continue to live healthy.

(B) Food: In Igbo language, food is called “*nri*”. Like water that sustains, food is understood as something absolutely necessary for human survival. Just as the presence of life in a human person is a surety for a living person so also is food. Food is any substance that people or

animals eat or drink or plants absorb, to maintain life and growth.⁴⁹ Without food the human person cannot live or exist. For Igbo people, food indicates the presence of life, while an absence of food or the inability to eat food signifies a termination of one's physical existence (life). To maintain life, the Igbo people work very hard. They work as farmers, fishermen and traders in order to survive hunger, which threatens life. So, for the Igbo, food is always a pointer to life and the care it needs.

(C) Blood: The Igbo word for blood is "*obara*". The Igbo people perceive blood as a symbol of life. Blood, for them, is sacred and is often identified with life itself.⁵⁰ It is an important element in every human person and animal. For instance, the blood of animals is used for sacrifice to God. The usage of blood in offering sacrifice to God is an expression of one's sincerity, purity of heart and hands before God. Wherever the blood of animals is shed during a sacrifice to God, it is believed to be a sign of life and the highest gift a human being can offer to God. Shedding of blood does not imply spilling the blood of a human being. Shedding another person's blood or taking away one's life is seen as a rejection of life as a precious gift from God. This is different from the loss of blood in the case of menstrual blood, because menstrual blood is seen as a sign that someone has the capacity of receiving life. Anything that involves blood is always likened to life in Igbo thought, because the Igbo people believe that where there is blood, there also is life or existence.

(D) The Heart, Heartbeat and Respiration: The heart, heartbeat and respiration, known as "*Obi*", "*Obiotiti*" na "*Ikwume*" respectively, are just signs of the presence of life in Igbo traditional understanding of life. They are observed as a mark of the presence of life in a human person. To understand heartbeat and respiration as a sign of the presence of life in Igbo tradition is in keeping with the observation of a certain physician, Leon R. Kass, who affirmed that the traditional signs of life are heartbeat and respiration.⁵¹ Hence, the physician's traditional affirmation justifies the Igbo saying that "*Onye ekwurozi ume aburugo onye nkpuruobi ya gafere*", meaning "He or She who no longer breathes/respire is

⁴⁹Crowther, Jonathan, (ed.), et al, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, P.457.

⁵⁰Magesa, *ibid.*, P. 162.

⁵¹Kass, *ibid.*, P. 20.

one whose heart (life) has gone off". The inability to breathe, especially in the case of a patient who is supported by machine does not mean that such a patient is no longer alive. The inability to breathe in the sense the above saying portrays refers to a condition whereby there is no sign of helping a patient to live physically, which means that a person is dead. For the Igbo, therefore, there are no any other appropriate signs that can identify someone who is still in his/her physical stage of life than the signs of heartbeat and respiration.

(E) Kola nut: Kola nut, known as "*Oji*", is a nut, seed, with many robes held together by one tread, called bud. *Oji* is very central to the Igbo people because of its origin.

According to a popular Igbo legend about "*Oji*", the founding fathers of the Igbo society visited the orchard of the gods in the spirit world on the third day before their first annual yam festival celebration. They were asked by the Chief of the gods (**Chukwu**) to choose a fruit from all the fruits in the orchard. The founding fathers chose "*Oji*". And the Chief of the gods told them that the fruit they have chosen is a sign of his appreciation for their visitation, a symbol of his love and unity with them, and that as the fruit, "*Oji*", has many robes joining mutually with each other and sharing the same cream, so shall they receive life whenever they eat it. On their return, the Igbo founding fathers launched a celebration of the "*Oji*" and recalled the memory of their visit to the spirit world and the gift of "*Oji*". Since then, "*Oji*" became an important element in every Igbo celebration and a veritable means of communication with the gods.⁵² From then too, the Igbo people began to see "*Oji*" as a sacred fruit, significant fruit for welcoming visitors, showing a goodwill, bond of love, unity and solidarity with each other and the gods. One Igbo thinker says that "*Oji*", **kola-nut**, is so sacred and must therefore be specially presented, broken, shared and partaken by all parties and families in every marriage ceremony as the final consummation⁵³ and sharing of life together. "*Oji*" is also seen as something that establishes a person's identity in an encounter with other people in a strange environment.⁵⁴ "*Oji*" serves as a necessary

⁵²cf., Ubesie, Tony, Omenala Ndi Igbo, Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1978, P. 68.

⁵³Ukaegbu, Jon Ofoegbu, Igbo Identity and Personality Vis-a-Vis Igbo Cultural Symbols, Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd., 1991, P.41.

⁵⁴cf. Anigbo, Osmund A.C., Commensality and Human Relationship Among the Igbo, Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press, 1987, P. 167.

element for invoking the ancestors in the spirit world⁵⁵ and it represents the link between the human world and the spirit world.

The Igbo people use “Oji” to offer worship and sacrifice to God, especially when they want to ask God for long life. In their prayers, before the breaking of kola nut into pieces in any occasion, the Igbo saying “*Onye wetara oji wetara ndu*” meaning that “He who brings kola nut brings life”⁵⁶ is acclaimed. This is why in any important event, ceremony or feast, kola nut is the first thing that must be provided, otherwise it is assumed that life is not represented and therefore the essence of such an event, ceremony or feast is missing, relegated.

(F) Pregnancy: For the Igbo, pregnancy, known as “*ime*”, is always seen as a symbol of new life, while the birth of a child is understood as a sign of new life. A newborn child is often thought to be the reincarnation of some ancestor who is seeking to return to this life, or at least part of his spiritual influence returns.⁵⁷ A pregnant woman is highly respected in Igbo society, because she is believed to carry within herself a new life. No one is permitted to fight her. If a pregnant woman is beaten by anybody or even her husband, that person is often regarded as an enemy of life and therefore is punished by the Igbo community. That person may be fined or ostracised by the members of his clan depending on the gravity of his or her “sin”. A fight with a pregnant woman, which resulted in the miscarriage or death of the unborn, is seen as a grave sin, an abomination, and therefore is punishable by ostracisation. While a slap on the face of the pregnant woman is punishable by giving a fine of some amount of money as a sign of being very sorry and a promise of being very careful with a pregnant woman next time. All this is simply a measure taken by the Igbo in showing that life deserves a greater degree of care, respect and protection in the womb.

All these signs and symbols of life mentioned above are highly appreciated in Igbo society. The Igbo people use them as means of communicating some ideas about life. They

⁵⁵cf. Ezeugo, S. N. I. U., Research and Comments on Igbo Culture (unpublished art., Olu, 1965), P.3.

⁵⁶Achebe, Chinua, Things Fall Apart, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1992, P. 5.

⁵⁷Parrinder, Geoffery, West African Religion: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Akan, Ewe, Yoruba, Ibo, and Kindred Peoples, London: The Epworth Press, 1961, P. 95.

convey some important messages to the Igbo whenever they are employed in everyday discussion on life.

3.4. The Igbo attitude towards life:

It has been stated that life is the first among the other gifts of God to every human being. The gift of life poses some challenges. The challenge that goes with the gift of life is how to live, experience that life in its physical existence, preserve its sacredness and seek for its fullness. Unfortunately, life is mostly threatened and endangered by human factors. Because, human beings can freely decide to save life or to destroy it, life faces some negative and positive human attitudes. But how does Igbo society explain the negative and positive attitudes towards life?

3.4.1. The Igbo recognised negative human attitude towards life: The negative human attitude towards life can simply be regarded as anti-life forces or an attack against life. The Igbo people regard all anti-life forces as "*aru*". "*Aru*" refers to any ill-human acts, such as hanging oneself by a rope, killing a person with any weapon that can produce destructive effects on the physical existence of life. Some of the effects of "*Aru*" are mainly, (A) the deprivation of a harmonious relationship between the offender and his or her fellow human being or with the ancestors through whom life is transmitted. (B) The destruction of the interconnectedness of all things and the peaceful equilibrium believed to exist between the human world and the spirit world. (C) Bringing suffering that diminishes or ultimately makes human life meaningless and unbearable.

There are many things regarded as "*Aru*" in Igbo society. They include : - (a) War- "*Aghia*", (b) Witchcraft- "*Amosu*", (c) Poison- "*Nsi*", (d) Murder- "*Igbu-ochu*" or Suicide- "*Ikvwu-udo*" and Adultery or Fornication- "*Inyionyĩ*". A few of them will be explained.

3.4.2. The explanation of some of the Igbo negative attitude towards life: The main negative attitudes towards life that will be explained here are war and murder or killing.

(i) **War:** Igbo communities are almost constantly at war. Wars are mostly caused among the Igbo communities over land dispute or by the desire to avenge an injury suffered by one of the village groups. For example, Obibi in Owerri often seeks to extend her boundaries by going to war. When war begins in any of the Igbo communities it is often governed by the

principle of “an eye for an eye”,⁵⁸ and may be finalized by the loss of life. All of this arises out of evil desire, greed, unforgiving hearts, and lack of understanding of what life entails. In 1999, Umurere and Aguleri in Anambra State (all in Igboland) of Nigeria launched a war against each other and a lot of people were killed. War also brings about some disastrous effects, such as destruction of property, abject poverty, unrest, crisis, disorder, anger, fear, hatred and sorrow. If all these are true, then, it can be said that being at war with each other contradicts the fact that life is a value. In that case, to say that life is a sacred gift from God that deserves respect, preservation and promotion among some Igbo people would merely be a matter of theory without practice. How can life deserve preservation and yet no proper care is given to prevent it from being destroyed by war? War neither spares life nor enhances it. If war does not enhance life, why then should some Igbo people be warring against each other?

(ii) Murder or Suicide: Committing murder or suicide is not a new act in Igboland, just as we can think of it in any other society in the world. Some Igbo people commit murder or suicide because they seem not to understand life as a sacred gift from God. For example, Okonkwo of Umuofia consciously used his machete to kill Ikemefuna⁵⁹, who, although not a biological son, called him his “father”. Okonkwo with the other Umuofia elders killed Ikemefuna because of (a) fear of the wrath of their gods: *Ani*- earth goddess, *Amadiorah*, *Idemili* and *Ogwugwu*, and their ancestors,⁶⁰ and (b) poor understanding of what life entails. If they had a good understanding of life as a gift from God and a value that must be respected, preserved and promoted, why did they have to terminate the life of an innocent boy Ikemefuna? Another example of killing as a negative attitude towards life is a man who tied his cloth to a tree branch and hanged himself. It was because after planting his yams during a farming season, he harvested miserable and rotting yams. If someone who kills himself because of bad harvest is said to have had a good understanding of how sacred his life was, on which ground, then, can we justify his understanding of life as a gift from God that should be revered, preserved and promoted? If all these examples of murder and suicide were true in the past years and currently happen in the present stage of human

⁵⁸ Isichei, Elizabeth, *A History of the Igbo People*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977, P. 79.

⁵⁹ Achebe, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*, Ibid., P.43.

⁶⁰ Ibid., P 103.

existence, then we may ask: “what can we do to help the people like Okonkwo and his fellow elders to stop killing others and deepen their reflections on life as a value with divine origin?”

3.4.3. The Igbo recognized positive human attitude towards life: Among the Igbo, life is seen as the core, the foundation and the force of all human existence. Human life, in particular, has social, moral, religious and spiritual dimensions. A human being can grow into a social, moral and religious or spiritual being but only when that person possesses a good understanding of what human life entails. Therefore, the general human positive attitude the Igbo or any of the African societies could show towards life can be understood within the social, moral and religious or spiritual approach towards life. Now, let us examine the Igbo attitude towards life within the social, moral and religious or spiritual network or level.

3.4.4. The Igbo positive social attitude towards life:

Human beings are social and relational beings. They need the company of each other for a harmonious life in their society, because no one is an island. Consequently, every human being’s life has a force, which depends on the force of the other persons and other beings, including those of the ancestors and ultimately God.⁶¹ However, to attain that harmonious and full life, human beings need to guard against their social behaviour, which often tends to diminish life. Otherwise, human beings could become anti-life and destroyers of the sole purpose of existence. For the Igbo, the sole purpose of existence is to seek after long life, its continuous growth and fullness.

One of the areas at which the Igbo society socially shows a positive attitude towards human life is marriage. Among the Igbo, marriage is understood as a legitimate and sacred means of receiving a new life from God, the Giver of life. It ensures a continuity of life from one generation to the next by stabilising the existence of families, the units of every human society. Marriage promotes a real relationship fostered by good friendship and love among the married and their relations.⁶² It has sacred purpose- procreation. It is a good sign of maturity, calls for commitment, responsibility, a good means for the examination of a young man’s and a girl’s behaviour before customarily being married. Because marriage is not only

⁶¹Magesa, *ibid.*, P. 52.

⁶²Ogbalu, F. C., Igbo Institutions and Customs, Onitsha: University Publication Company, 1974, P.17.

a legitimate means by which life is received but also a means through which life is protected, respected and promoted, it is highly valued as an essential rite of passage for all Igbo. Again, marriage is not only believed to be in keeping with the right attitude towards life but also a sacred institution, which every male and female grown ups, are expected to observe. Why? It is because marriage has a social, moral and religious impact to play in the promotion of life. Socially, marriage commands a healthy human relationship between a male and a female, their families, clans and villages, who are to become co-receivers of human life. Morally, it examines people's behaviour and encourages them to develop good acceptable behaviour towards human sexuality, a delicate and complex part of human problems that often brings an abuse to life when misconstrued and improperly handled. And religiously, marriage is a gift from God protected by the ancestors,⁶³ so that life can be transmitted, received, protected and promoted.

In all this, because of the connection marriage has with human life, everyone in Igbo society is expected to be morally, socially and religiously sound so as to be qualified to marry and become receivers, protectors and promoters of life. Therefore, the Igbo people believe that by observing marriage as a sacred institution which encourages the young ones to strive after moral, religious and social excellence, if they are to marry, the sacredness of human life can be respected, safeguarded and promoted.

3.4.5. The Igbo moral attitude towards life: All morality is centred on preserving human life and its "power" or "force"⁶⁴ with the ultimate aim of attaining the fullness of life.⁶⁵ Morality therefore tries to avoid all human actions that are anti-life.

The Igbo moral attitude towards life is considered from the point of view of the impact human actions have on life. Do human actions destroy or safeguard life? To be moral means channelling one's actions towards safeguarding life and avoiding being immoral whereby one remains indifferent but destructive to life. Morals are always seen as the food and drink, which keep a society alive, healthy and happy⁶⁶ and ensures the security of the

⁶³Igboeze, Maduka, The Gift of Creation, Abakaliki: Zamu Publications, 1976, P. 9.

⁶⁴Magesa, *ibid.*, P. 32.

⁶⁵*Ibid.* P.77.

⁶⁶Mbiti, *ibid.*, P. 179.

human fundamental right to life. With morals life is promoted and protected at a maximum level.

One of the ways in which the moral attitude towards life is demonstrated in Igbo society is setting up a taboo on life. That is to say that anyone who kills another person commits an abomination. An abomination is a sin against another person together with the community and the ancestors. It causes a disorder between the living and the dead. So murder is not encouraged. A conscientious and deliberate killing of other people is regarded as killing of one-self and a rejection of life. Even an inadvertent killing is not lightly treated but rather attracts the punishment of being exiled or ostracised either by one's clan or community,⁶⁷ because it involves the termination of life and is therefore anti-life. Being anti-life or killing someone is a disorder in Igbo society. It is even considered absurd. It is a contradiction in Igbo society or in any African society where anyone happens to extinguish another person's life and go on preserving his or her own life as if nothing happened⁶⁸ Killing of any person is not only a disorder in Igbo society, but also a disharmony between the spirit world and the human world. And to put things right, the Igbo people believe that a ritual cleansing of blood (life) interfered with must be carried out. This is why life is given maximum security and seen as a moral issue in Igbo society.

In Igbo morality, the principle of "*onye biri ka ibe ya biri*", that is, "live- and- let-live" portrays the core of Igbo moral attitude towards life. It is a principle, which defines the rights, duties, responsibilities and obligations⁶⁹ of each person in Igbo society towards life. The Igbo morality is intimately tied with the life of each individual, community and ancestors. For the Igbo, the ancestors, in particular, are the guardians and custodians of her morality and any interference with her morality is regarded as an abomination. An abomination is any human act that upsets the peace and harmony that exist between the living and the dead and which eventually brings disaster to life.

To sum it up, the Igbo moral attitude towards life is generally on how to secure life from all that diminishes its existence.

⁶⁷ Achebe, Chinua, Things Fall Apart, Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1992, P. 87.

⁶⁸ Onwubiko, *ibid.*, P. 22.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, P. 20

3.4.6. The Igbo religious attitude towards life

Religion here refers to a belief in the Supreme Being who is the giver of life. The Igbo people are people of great religious sense. They are profoundly religious. All accounts of their life reflect this fact.⁷⁰ For the Igbo people, religion is life itself and life is religion. Religion is a way of life or life itself, where a distinction or separation is not made between religion and other areas of human existence.⁷¹ If Africans, especially the Igbo, are notoriously or incurably religious⁷² as Mbiti has noted, it is because being religious is the manifestation of their whole life, an acknowledgement of God as the giver of life and the seeking of the fullness of life. They therefore express a belief in the God of life through appropriate worship and sacrifices.⁷³

The purpose of any worship and sacrifices in Igbo religion is the asking of the continuity of life and the protection of it from any harm or threat. The asking of the continuity of life is better expressed in Igbo prayers. Everything the Igbo people think, say or pray for is based on the need, desire, for the continuity of life. In private or communal morning prayers, life is first asked for before asking for wealth.

In their traditional prayers the Igbo people acknowledge God who is present and ask Him for long life. A prayer, which excludes asking for long life, in Igbo patterns of prayer, is not yet complete. The completeness of their prayer finds itself in the prayer for long life. Virtually realizing that life comes from Chukwu, God, almost every bit of prayer said by an Igbo person, whether for the recovery of the sick, for fortune, of gratitude for a gift received from God, life is always mentioned.⁷⁴ An example of a prayer said by an Igbo person is "*Chukwu, chekwaba ndum, na ndu ndi ezina unom,*" that means, "God, protect my life and that of my family and avert all from evil."

Again, in an invocation to God, an Igbo person asks for long life and says "*Ndu anyi na-ayo abughi ndu osisi akpu. Chineke nyere aku oyibo mmiri o na-anu nye anyi ndu*

⁷⁰cf. Isichei, Elizabeth, A History of the Igbo People, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977, P. 24.

⁷¹Magesa, *ibid.*, P. 25

⁷²Mbiti, John S. African Religions and Philosophy, London, Heinemann, 1975, P. 1.

⁷³Isichei, *ibid.*, P.24.

⁷⁴Metuh, Emefie Ikenga, African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation (Studies in Igbo Religion), Jos: IMCO Press. 1991, P. 148.

n'ihe anyi eji akwado ya." This means, "The life we are asking for, is not the life of cassava tree. *Chineke*, God, you who gave the coconut the water which it drinks give us life and where-withal as to sustain it".⁷⁵ Thus all this shows how life is a value that calls for religious or spiritual attitude and links an individual to a relationship with God, with one another and one's environment.

From what has been presented above about life, it becomes vivid that the Igbo have some elements of negative and positive attitude towards life. Yet while the positive attitude towards life is commendable, the negative aspect is not. The negative attitude towards life still shows that not all the Igbo people have a good understanding of how valuable life is. It therefore remains a challenge to free life from every bit of negative attitude shown to it by some Igbo people who seem to lack a good understanding of how valuable life is.

3.5. The Theological elements in the Igbo conception of life:

Having had the study of the Igbo understanding of life as a value, the process by which life is received, the signs and symbols of life and the positive and negative attitudes that are shown towards life, the question: what theological foundation has the Igbo value of life remains an area of interest that should be addressed. So, it would be plausible to look for the theological elements in the Igbo value of life.

The Igbo conception of life as a value that has its origin from God, Chukwu, constitutes the starting point of an Igbo theology. The understanding that God is the absolute Giver of life highlights this point. By implication, if God is the absolute Giver of life, there would be no any other giver, originators of life or anyone else in whom human beings can depend on, trust, hope in for receiving life, except God. If that is the case, then, the theology behind the Igbo value of life and how it can help anyone to know the first link every individual person has with God becomes evident. In this light, therefore, the fundamental human right to relationship with God as the source of his or her force of existence is hereby underscored.

Another theological element that could be drawn from the value of life is the mysterious aspect of life. Like other mysteries, life is dynamic, incomprehensible and

⁷⁵ Ibid., P.145.

revealing. It reflects the depth of God and His incomprehensibility. The mysterious aspect of life is portrayed in the three stages life takes. The first stage of life, being life as it were in God before He gives it to human beings, is only known to God alone. Human beings are unaware of how that life was before receiving it from God. The second stage of life, the life as it is given by God, transmitted by the Igbo ancestors and received by human being, is still invisible and mysterious. How this invisible reality determines one's physical existence is still not fully known. Human beings only believe that they have that life within them. This second stage of life as the Igbo society has already pointed out is only experiential: It is neither "seen" nor "touched" like any object of observation. It is a mystery that human beings have life as a gift of existence and yet never seen that life which is in them. The second stage of life is marked by a struggle to understand what life is all about and prevent it from death, but no success has ever been made to prevent life from passing through the gate of death. This is because life has another stage it must enter for its continuity. The third stage of life, that is, life as it goes back to its source and reaches its fullness, is not even clear to human understanding. This could justify the Igbo belief in life as a reality that continues in the spirit world, in the ancestral abode after its physical existence, if its sacredness is not stained by any evil acts of its bearer. This third aspect of life portrays the eschatological, future dimension of life. But the problem that this presents to us when we follow the dynamics, journey of life in Igbo cosmology and belief in its continuity is that life has its last flow in the ancestral abode and not in the abode of Chukwu who is transcendent and inapproachable. If the eschatological dimension of life is in the ancestral abode, how far does this theology help the Igbo people to deepen their reflection on Chukwu, God, in whose abode is the fullness of life attained? While hoping to get a sound eschatological aspect of life, the mysterious aspect of the Igbo value of life reminds us about God who is also a mystery. Just as life is in a human person and cannot be seen and yet is believed to be present in that person, so also is God transcendent and yet immanent in His creatures and remains unseen. In this respect, therefore, the mysterious aspect of life becomes disclosed. And from this perspective, one can see how the Igbo value of life leads us to identify the basis of Igbo theologies as the theology

of life. Hence, the Igbo theology of life is based on the study of life as it originates from God and attains its fullness only in God as its ultimate source.

In the use of signs and symbols by the Igbo to express their understanding of the hidden reality of life in itself, the mysterious aspect of life becomes evident. For example, the use of water, blood, a kola nut, by the Igbo as symbols to explain life gives us an idea of how life is a sacred mystery that requires a deeper but inexhaustible understanding.

Furthermore, the Igbo basic positive attitude towards the value of life, such as social, moral, religious or spiritual, reveals some elements of their theology. For example, in the religious or spiritual aspect, we understood that the Igbo express in prayer their relationship with God as they experience Him. Since the Igbo pray to God and rely on Him for long life, one cannot deny them a basic theology of prayer. For every prayer addressed to God alone is theological. Any prayer to God is an expression of faith, trust and hope in God, for anyone who does not have faith, trust and hope in God's goodness can hardly ask Him for anything. Consequently, prayer is the basis and strength of religious or spiritual life. Since the Igbo people realise this and pray both in private and in public, their spirituality becomes one of prayer. In this sense, they could be said to have a basic sense of a spiritual theology, which is underscored, by a deep sense of prayer and the impact of God on human life.

Another example that reveals a sense of a theology in the Igbo attitude towards life is found in the area of morality. The Igbo principle of morality "*Onye biri ka ibeya biri*", "Live and let live", which actually depicts the call for mutual love of one another, respect, protection and promotion of life because it is a first gift from God, is a pointer to this. "Live and let live" does not refer to a situation whereby one is free to show I don't care attitude towards others. Instead, it depicts the importance of the life of every individual in a community. One could see an element of moral theology, which deals with the study of human response to the divine law. The divine law calls for a life of love: love of God and love of neighbour. It calls for good conscious acts towards one's neighbour, for the protection of the life and dignity of each person and the avoidance of any harm against him or her. Since the Igbo morality is based on the protection of life, the encouragement of the good acts and the discouragement of the evil acts that destroy human life and prevents its bearer from

Moving his or her neighbour, the Igbo value of life could be said to provide the Igbo with the basic tools for a moral theology.

All of this reflects the significant theological elements in the Igbo value of life. The significance of the value of life could be grasped because the Igbo people pray, worship and make sacrifice to God. And the need to preserve this value opens the way for the Igbo to seek after moral, religious and spiritual excellence. Nothing to the Igbo people is morally, religiously or spiritually challenging than the value of life. For this reason, it could be objectively said that every value, which disposes any group of people to relate in prayer, worship and sacrifice to God as the originator and giver of life, is highly theological. Hence, the Igbo value of life is of no exception. On the contrary, however, when we consider the negative attitude some Igbo people have towards life, one may be tempted to deny them the sense of a moral theology, since they do not seem to know the link, relationship, the authentic Igbo people have with God. This negative attitude towards life by some Igbo people remains an important reminder to the need for evangelisation. It therefore poses a big challenge to teach and evangelise such people in Igboland, if they are to know their destiny as it is founded in God and should communicate to them an idea of whom they are, where they come from and where they are to return.

Finally, in all this, the kind of theology that could be found in the Igbo value of life is the theology of life. This could be called the first theology any Igbo person would study because it recognizes, appreciates, affirms and promotes a belief in God who is the sole giver of life. Consequently it is a theology that can always lead the Igbo people back to their root, origin, sources of existence, destiny, and recapitulates how inseparable they must be from God. It is a theology that gives hope for the continuity of life even after death, the physical departure of the possessor of life. The Igbo value of life is theological because it helps the Igbo to find God in their own culture as the Absolute Giver of life. If life according to the Igbo is the first of the gifts from God to human beings, a spark of God's presence and a part of God, it could be said that wherever there is life, there, God is present. By implication, whenever there is any harm to life, it invariably means a harm to God and a sign of ingratitude to Him for the gift of life to human beings. If that is the case, then this raises the

question as to what a person can do to avoid being against life, which is synonymous with being against God? If there is something anyone can do in this situation, it is only to remind us about the need for evangelisation. Evangelisation is necessary for bringing the Gospel of life to all people and helping them to experience the liberating power of God. Liberation refers to the rescuing of life from the hands of those who seek to destroy it by any means. Liberation is required here because human beings by nature have within them some elements that make them go against life and incapable of changing themselves. Those elements include all destructive emotions of envy, greed, hatred, anger, pride, lust,⁷⁶ and when such destructive elements grow stronger in the human person, their control becomes difficult, if not impossible. Human beings, especially some Igbo people who kill themselves or kill other persons, have to be transformed, converted from within so that they can avoid showing any form of negative attitude towards life. And unless transformation, a change of heart and mind, takes place among the Igbo people the full place of God in the life of every Igbo person may be lacking. But the problem is, who can bring about the transformation and free the Igbo people from those destructive elements, which often lead to the contradiction of the positive attitude some of the Igbo show towards life?

The one who can transform people from the destructive emotions in them is Jesus Christ, the second person of the Most Holy Trinity. This is because Jesus Christ is the one in whom the climax of God's self-communication becomes evident. To attain the fullness of life, eternal life, the divine life without Christ is really impossible. It is true that God gives the Igbo people life through the ancestors, just as He spoke to our ancestors through the prophets and then to us in the past (cf. Heb 1:1). But it is more true that God has spoken to us and given the fullness of life through Jesus Christ, His Son, whom He made heir of all things and through whom He created the universe (cf. Heb 1:2). Jesus Christ is the Summit of the fullness of life, divine life. That is why it remains under the power of Jesus to transform people with destructive emotions and give them life fully (cf. Jn 10:10). If Jesus is the Summit of the fullness of life, the divine life and the giver of that life, which all human being ask God to give, can God give life through other means better than His own Son?

⁷⁶Magesa, *ibid.*, P. 187.

Another transformer of people is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Most Holy Trinity, has the power to guide, transform and purify the human heart from all destructive emotions. When a person receives the Holy Spirit and relates with him, he fills that person's heart with some fruit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23). Where the Holy Spirit has not been received, immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outburst of fury, acts of selfishness, dissension, factions and occasions of envy (Gal 5:19-21) control the human person. If the Holy Spirit has the power to transform the human person from their destructive elements when they relate to him, can he not also transform some of the Igbo who have those destructive emotions in them?

I would think that one's relationship with Jesus Christ/the Holy Spirit⁷⁷ can bring a change in one's attitude towards life. The change from the negative to positive attitude towards life depends largely on one's relationship with Jesus Christ/the Holy Spirit. If some Igbo people who have destructive emotions can turn to Jesus Christ/the Holy Spirit and relate to him, they could receive his transforming power. But how can such people receive the transforming power of Christ if they do not relate to him? How can they relate to Jesus if they do not know him? And how can they know Jesus better if he is not made known to them?

⁷⁷Jesus Christ/the Holy Spirit: They are the second person and third person of the Most Holy Trinity, respectively. Jesus is the Perfect image of God the Father. Jesus Christ is both divine and human. His humanity helps us to see him as a human being we can relate with and from him see how his Father looks like. The Holy Spirit is only divine just as Jesus but is not human. So it is difficult to see him as someone we can relate with. But once one relates with Jesus, relating with the Holy Spirit will be easy, because the Holy Spirit is the spirit of Jesus and the spirit of his Father. Again, Jesus gives his spirit to all who believe in him.

CHAPTER 4.

4. THE IGBO VALUE OF LIFE AND INCULTURATION.

In the preceding chapter we saw that life is an important value in Igbo society. Unfortunately, life is attacked by some Igbo who have within themselves some destructive elements such as envy, anger, selfishness, greed, pride and lust and are unable to change themselves. We saw that Jesus Christ is the one who can transform people from such destructive emotions. But the main problem is how to come in contact with Jesus Christ. We may not give a solution to this problem better than Christianity can do. Christianity often solves this kind of problem through inculturation. For this reason, we turn to the Christian teaching on life to see how through inculturation Jesus Christ can come in contact with those in Igbo society, who would need his transforming power.

4.1. THE CHRISTIAN TEACHING ON THE VALUE OF LIFE.

The Christian teaching on the value of life revolves around two but closely related realities- **HUMAN LIFE** and the **DIVINE LIFE**.

4.1.1. THE VALUE AND MEANING OF HUMAN LIFE.

Christianity derives its understanding of human life from God's creative activity (Priestly tradition (P), cf. Gen 1:27-28). Human life is understood as God's breath to the human being. For God formed man out of clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being (Yahwistic tradition (J), Gen 2:7). From the above texts, Christianity realises that human life is a vital force, a sacred gift of existence from God. It is precious, a primordial value, a responsibility and a fundamental right⁷⁸ of every human being.

4.1.2. THE ORIGIN OF HUMAN LIFE.

God is the origin of human life. God is the source of life (Lv 23:10-13), the fountain of life (Ps 36: 10). God gives food and breath to human beings (Ps 104:27-29) to keep them alive (Ps 104:30). The breath of God is God's own dynamic spirit (Gen 2:7). Without God human life would not exist(Ps 104:29).

⁷⁸cf. S.C.D.F., Declaration on Procured Abortion, *anaestio de abortu*, 18 November, 1974, NOS 1,2, 3 & 5.

4.1.3. THE BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMAN LIFE.

Human life has the following basic characteristics.

First- Sacredness: Human life is sacred.⁷⁹ Human life from its very beginning until its end is a basic and sacred value. It is sacred because God who gives it is Sacred. Human life, however, can lose its sacredness if it is not protected and preserved.

Second- Transmittable: Human life is transmittable. The transmission of life calls for a responsibility. According to Church's teaching, the transmission of human life is the responsibility of the married couples. The married couples are those, who according to God's plan, have the mission of collaborating with God's work of on-going creation. They are seen as those who God has joined together into one flesh (Gen 1:27, 2: 24; Mk 10:8-9). They comply with the divine command: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it"-stewardship (Priestly Tradition, Gen 1:28). For the Church, therefore, the transmission of life is reserved for the married couples.⁸⁰

Third- Good: Human life is good.⁸¹ It is good because it is God's special gift to human beings for their own good and dignity. The life, which God offers to the human person, is a gift by which God shares something of Himself with His creature. That life is quite different from the life of all other living creatures. Distinctly, the human person, although formed from dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7, Jb 34:15), is a manifestation of God Himself in the world, a sign of His presence, a trace of His glory and summit of God's creative activity.⁸²

Fourth- Fragility and Short spanned: Human life is fragile and its span short. The fragility of life is lamented over by Job when he discovered the shortness of his life in its earthly existence (cf. Jb 14:1). The Church realizing how frail human life is (cf. Ps 39:5-6)

⁷⁹Elwell, Walter A., The Marshall Pickering Encyclopaedia of the Bible, Vol 2, U.K: Marshal Morgan and Scott Publication Ltd., 1990, P. 1341.

⁸⁰John Paul II, The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan, Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1997, P. 396.

⁸¹John, Paul II, The Gospel of Life: Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995, NO. 34.

⁸² John Paul II, The Gospel of Life, *ibid*, NO. 34.

and how human beings often contribute to its destruction teaches that human life is an incomparable value that must be respected, protected and promoted at all levels.⁸³

4.1.4. THE END AND GOAL OF HUMAN LIFE

Naturally, biologically or scientifically, human life, which begins at the time the ovum is fertilized, from the moment of conception, is said to end at death. But according to the Church's understanding and teaching on human life, there is something more than being biological. Human life does not only have a biological or **natural dimension but also supernatural dimension**,⁸⁴ and therefore should be considered from both dimensions. By implication, although human life seems to end at death biologically in the human world, it continues in another form. This is why the Church asks the human persons to believe in the life after death.

Human life has a goal. Its goal is to offer the human person an opportunity to exist, know, serve and love God above all things with one's heart, soul and strength (cf. Dt 6:5, Mt 22:37). Its goal is to help the human person live, search for God and discover God as his or her source. When a person exists, knows, serves, loves God, such a person is said to be a living sign of God's glory. As St. Irenaeus puts it, "the glory of God is the fully living person and full life for human being is in the vision of God."⁸⁵ Being the glory of God means being able to reveal God as love and source of life.⁸⁶ The glory of God is the responsibility of the living person. Hence, the goal of human life is to offer the human person an opportunity to unite with God.

4.1.5. THE MEANS OF RECEIVING HUMAN LIFE.

Human life is received through a sexual intercourse between a fertile male and female persons. However, for the Church, the only fitting place, which God Himself has chosen to call a human person into existence, is the conjugal relationship, marital sex: unreserved

⁸³cf. John Paul II, The Gospel of Life, *ibid*, NOS. 2, 33, 60, 61.

⁸⁴cf. S.C.D.F, Declaration on Procured Abortion, *anaestio de abortu*, 18 November, 1974, NO 7.

⁸⁵cf. Ward, Hannah and Wild, Jannifer (eds.), The Doubleday Christian Quotation Collection, London: Doubleday, 1998, P.5.

⁸⁶cf. Minns, Denis, Irenaeus, England: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, P.41.

loving bodily union.⁸⁷ Marital sex is the only fitting place because it involves undertaking some commitment, responsibility. The responsibility includes receiving life and nurturing it intellectually, morally, socially and spiritually.⁸⁸ The fitting place for receiving human life is reserved to marital sex, because it is only in marriage that God's initial intention of joining two persons together into one flesh is manifested (cf. Gen 2:24, Mk 10:8-9). Marriage is a sacrament, which confers grace on the couples, a sign of God's covenant love for His people Israel (Hos 3:1-5, Tb 7:13, Mal 2:10-17) and the unlimited love Christ has for the Church (Eph 5:21-23; 6:4). Hence, the church holds that the transmission of human life is the responsibility of the married couples,⁸⁹ because human life is sacred and its sanctity should be maintained through a sacred institution, namely, marriage.

4.1.6. THE HUMAN BASIC ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE VALUE OF LIFE.

The Church teaches that life is a basic value of every human person, and it is inviolable. To avoid violating the value, life therefore has to be respected, protected, loved and served.⁹⁰

The Church teaches also that human life has a supernatural goal, namely, fullness of life, to share fully in the divine life. But that supernatural goal was lost through the effects of the personal and original sin of the human person (cf. Gen 3:1-19). To recover the supernatural goal of human life, God has to communicate His divine life and bring that supernatural goal closer. It therefore remains the responsibility of the human person to show a moral, social and spiritual attitude towards life if its goal is to be attained.

With the basic understanding of human life and its limitations, we can go further to see what the Divine life is all about.

⁸⁷Gormally, Luke, "Humanae Vitae and the Virtue of Chastity" In: Hume, Basil, The Gift of Human Life: Proceedings Of A Symposium To Mark The 25th Anniversary Of Humanae Vitae, Oxford: Family Publications, 1994, P.17

⁸⁸cf. Orsy, Ladislav, Marriage In Canon Law: Texts and Comments, Reflections and Questions, Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1988, P.53.

⁸⁹Gadium ei Spes, NO 50.

⁹⁰John Paul II, The Gospel of Life (Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae), Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995, NO 5.

4.2. THE DIVINE LIFE:

4.2.1. THE MEANING OF DIVINE LIFE: Divine life refers to the life of the Trinitarian God: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. It refers to God Himself, because God is Life.⁹¹ So, divine life is the life of God who is not only Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but also the Source of all life.

4.2.2. THE BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF DIVINE LIFE: There are many basic characteristics of divine life but only a few will be mentioned here.

First- Uncreated: The divine life, unlike the human life, which began at creation, is an uncreated life.⁹² By implication, divine life has neither a beginning nor an end. It is rather the “beginning” of all that has a beginning and the “end” of all that has an end.

Second- Eternal, Immortality, Continuity and Mystery: The Divine life is eternal: It is not conditioned by time: no starting, no ending. It is immortal: beyond human destruction or control. It continues to be the life of God, Trinitarian life: no discontinuity because it would mean that God is no longer the living God (Mat 16:16). The divine life is a mystery: revelatory.

Third- Sacredness, Purity, Perfection, Holiness, Love :Any attribute to God can always say something about His life. God is Sacred, Pure, Perfect, Holy, Love (Gen 9:5-6; Lv 11:45; 19:2; I Pet 1:16; 1 Jn 4:8). The Divine life is sacred, pure, perfect, holy, love itself because it is the life of God who is these attributes.

Fourth- Communicable: Divine life is communicable but only by God Himself. The communication of the divine life takes a process. It starts from the Father, flows through the Son and reaches us in the Spirit. This process, however, reaches its goal and its climax in Jesus Christ,⁹³ the Son of God, the Word-made-flesh (cf. Jn 1:1-4,14; 1 Jn 1;1-4), because Jesus is divine and human. The divine and the human are united in one person, Jesus Christ.⁹⁴ Jesus gives the reason for the communication of divine life. It is because God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but

⁹¹Swizdor, Matthew M., God In Me: A Popular Explanation of Sanctifying Grace, Massachusetts: The Franciscan Fathers, 1959, P. 123.

⁹²ibid., P. 124.

⁹³cf. McBrien, Richard P., Catholicism, Vol I, Minneapolis: Winston Press, Inc., 1980, P. 472.

⁹⁴ibid., P.545

might have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). Jesus says: “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10). He unfolds the Trinitarian plan of communicating a full life. So, divine life, eternal life is communicable and the Son testifies that the divine life is communicated through himself.

Fifth- Grace that transforms: Divine life is communicated purposefully for the manifestation of God’s love to human beings and for their salvation. God gives Himself to us through Christ, comes to dwell in us in the Spirit and grants us a share in His life when He is received into our hearts. And this giving of Himself is called grace (uncreated grace).⁹⁵ Grace transforms, permeates, purifies, strengthens, unifies, enkindles human activity as a whole, promotes an interior harmony of all powers, aspirations and impulses. So God works “from within outward.” Grace radiates outward when it is given free scope in our life. Grace owes its effects to our cooperation to the Father’s unique love in Christ.⁹⁶ Wherever grace is accepted, it transforms everything into love. If the human persons accept the divine life, it transforms them.

4.2.3. THE MEANS OF RECEIVING DIVINE LIFE: Divine life is not received as human life is biologically received, but rather as follows.

First- Faith in Jesus, in his Spirit and in his Father: Faith is believing and entrusting oneself to who Jesus is, what he does, teaches, preaches about himself, his Father who sent him and the Holy Spirit who guides him (Lk 4:1) to fulfil his mission of making the human life find meaning in the divine life. Jesus affirms the Spirit: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord” (Lk 4:18-19, cf. Is 61:1-3). Jesus is the Son of God, the messiah. He obeys and does the will of his Father. He heals the sick. He preaches the gospel of God, the presence of the kingdom of God and the need for repentance, conversion of heart and mind (Mk 1:14-15). He teaches about the values of the kingdom of God such as love, peace, mercy, purity of heart (Lk 6: 20-36; Mt 5:3-9). Faith in Jesus

⁹⁵Fransen, Peter, *The New Life of Grace*, Tournai: Desclee Company, 1969, P. 100.

⁹⁶*ibid.*, P.349.

involved sincere resolution and commitment in following Jesus daily. Jesus implies this when a man approached him and asked him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mk 10:17). Jesus recommended two things (a) observing God's commandment sincerely and (b) a total commitment (cf. Mk 10:19-22). So, faith in Jesus and what he teaches requires sincere resolution and commitment.

Second- Divine life is received through Baptism. Baptism is a sacrament, a visible sign of God's grace by which a human being is given a new birth. Through baptism a person is born into a child of God and adopted by God (Rm 18:15-17). Jesus declares the importance of divine life, eternal life through baptism. He told a man named Nicodemus that no one can enter the kingdom of God⁹⁷ without being born from above (Jn 3:3). How? Through water and Spirit (Jn 3:5). Water signifies the cleansing power of God, while the spirit is the one who cleanses the baptised from sins, forgives subsequent sins when that person repents and gives the person a new identity, interiorly. The new birth is a spiritual issue and not biological (cf. Jn 3:6). This baptism reaches its spiritual height in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19).

Third- following the initiation into the Divine life is the observance of the Lord's commandment(cf. Mt 28: 20). The lord's command is to love God with one's whole heart, soul and mind, and love others as oneself (cf Mt 22:37-39). This is because the divine life is all about love (cf. Jn 15: 9-10) and love permits no destructive emotions.

Fourth- Inseparable relationship with Jesus: Jesus gives life even to his friends who die physical dead (cf. Jn 11:25). Those who continuously relate to Jesus receive life from him and grow in the divine life he brings. Jesus uses some images to describe how he gives life. He uses (a) the image of the vine and its branches to show that eternal life, divine life is attained only through an inseparable relationship with him (Jn 15: 1-15). (B) The image of the bread to show that communion with him leads a person into the attainment of divine life (Jn 6: 53-58). Christianity understands this image as the Eucharist in which Christ is present and the bread and wine used in offering sacrifice to God become spiritual food and drink. (C) **The image of living water to show that separated from him (Jesus), his spirit would not live**

⁹⁷cf Kingdom of God is often explained in St John's Gospel as Eternal life.

within a person and as a result a failure to attain divine life (Jn 4:1-15). (D) The image of the Word of God that gives life to show that he is the Word-made-flesh (Jn 1:1-4,14) who gives life and that rejecting him is rejecting an abundant life. Those who believe and inseparably relate to Jesus in this present life are assured of abundant life before and after their death. This is because Jesus, whom they unite with, has laid down his life for their sake (cf. Jn 15:13), died, resurrected and continued to be their resurrection and their life (Jn 11:25).

In all this we see how one can receive the divine life from the Father through the Son in the Spirit. It is through faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Father, baptism, sincerely keeping God's commandment (love of God and neighbour) and inseparable relationship with Jesus Christ. These four means of receiving the divine life are connective with each other.

4.3. The Possibility of inculturating the Christian teaching on life into the Igbo value of life.

Having presented the Igbo view of life as a value and the Christian view of life as a value and now seeking for the possibility of inculturation, there remains the need to address some questions: Are the Igbo value of life and the Christian value of life the same? Can we find any link between the two values such that inculturation can be possible in our present context?

The Igbo value of life and the Christian value of life do not seem to be entirely the same. This is because, although they hold some common grounds, they have some differences.

Their common grounds are on human life with regard to its origin, characteristics, means of receiving it, the attitude that should be shown towards it, the goal of human life and its end.

Their differences are: First, on the distinction between the human life and the divine life. For the Igbo, there is no explicit distinction made between the human life and the divine life. Perhaps, there is no such distinction because, like many other African societies which do not put a dichotomy between the human and divine, natural and supernatural, the Igbo see every reality as inter-connected and holistic. If that is the case, then, they may not need to make such an explicit distinction between the human and the divine. However, this may

present us with the difficulty of knowing what is specifically divine or human. If there is no distinction between the divine and the human, how can we know what God does which human beings cannot do? Or how can we avoid superstition? For Christianity, however, there is an explicit distinction between the human and the divine. **Human life** has a beginning and it is a created life. It has a supernatural destiny. But it cannot attain it because of sins.⁹⁸ **Divine life** is the life of the Trinitarian God. It has no beginning, no end. It is an uncreated life. Divine life is communicated by the Father through His Son in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 1:26) purposefully, for making the attainment of eternal life possible. Through the Son, Jesus Christ, the divine is now within the reach of the human. And the attainment of the fullness of life depends on one's receptivity of the divine life through the Son, Jesus Christ. So, the Son is both the **One** through whom the divine life is received by the human person and the **One** through whom the attainment of the supernatural destiny of human life, lost as a result of the effects of sins, becomes definitive. The distinction between the divine and human can be helpful to the Igbo for knowing better the limitations of the human life and how it can find its fullness in the divine life through Christ.

The second difference is on the identity of the Igbo and Christian transmitters of life. Here, we mean, how we can tell who the ancestors and Jesus Christ are in the context of the transmission of life. The ancestors are creatures of God. They are not God. Jesus Christ is not a creature, because he is the Son of God, fully God, and it is through him that the ancestors were created. Again, Jesus Christ is life itself and all that has life received it through him. He is the giver of life and an intercessor before his Father. The ancestors are not life itself, but channels of life and intercessors like Jesus Christ. Because the ancestors are channels for the transmission of life, they are called transmitters of life. And because Jesus is also a channel for the transmission of life, but remains God, divine and human, life in himself, he can be called **the Archetypal, Original and Unoriginated transmitter of life.**

The third difference between the Igbo value of life and the Christian value of life is on transformation of the human person. For the Igbo, the transformation of the human person

⁹⁸Sins: original sin and personal sin. Original sin is the sin of Adam. Personal sin: the sins of an individual, whether mortal or venial.

seems possible through the observance of the Igbo customs and traditions believed to be under the custody of the ancestors. But this is like the observance of law, which does not live within the human person. By implication, the ancestors do not live within the human person and therefore cannot transform the Igbo persons from the destructive emotions within them. If the ancestors have the power to transform the human person, they would have transformed those Igbo who developed some negative attitude towards life. But they do not seem to have such a transforming power. For Christianity, neither the human person nor the law can change a person from the destructive emotions within oneself. But the only possible change comes from the receptivity of the divine life through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ transforms the human person, fills that person with the Spirit, makes the person capable of living the divine life and attaining the fullness of life. Union with Christ in this present life guarantees fullness of life, because he continues to be the source of life for those who believe in him before and even after their death.

From the above study, we saw that the Igbo value of life and the Christian value of life have some common grounds and their differences show that they are not the same. However, from what they share in common, it can be said that they are closely related, share some similar views and constitute the background on which inculturation can be possible.

Inculturation seems possible when we see that both Christianity and the Igbo hold life as a value with its origin from God, given for a purpose, and realises its fullness in God. The three stages of life emphasized by the Igbo can help the Igbo to understand the divine life and distinguish it from the human life. The Igbo belief that life flows from God, passes through the ancestors and is then received by the human person is like the Christian belief that divine life is communicated by God the Father through His Son. With this similarity, the Igbo can understand that the divine life is distinctively the manifestation of God's love through His Son, an invitation to live God's own life which is uncreated, immortal, eternal, abundant, unending and as such the divine value, the highest value. It can help the Igbo understand that human life which has a beginning and an end can find a continuity in the divine life which is unending.

The three stages of life described in the Igbo value of life: Life from God to us through the ancestors, and back to the ancestral domain for its fullness can help the Igbo grasp how Christian life is Trinitarian. Trinitarian life is the life of God, which the Father gives through His Son and in the Spirit reaches us. And in its return to God for its fullness goes in the Spirit through the Son to the Father. This can help the Igbo reshape their way of praying, by asking God the Giver of life to give them life through the Archetypal transmitter of life, Christ our Great ancestor.

Furthermore, the ancestral role in the transmission of life can help the Igbo understand Christ's role in the transmission of life. Seeing Christ as an ancestor, as suggested by Nyamiti Charles in his book Christ As Our Ancestor, could be helpful in seeing Christ as the Archetypal transmitter of life and the one through whom life attains its fullness. If the Igbo could see Christ not just as an ancestor, but as the Greatest ancestor, then the Igbo attribute to the ancestors as the transmitters of life can help them to see Jesus Christ as **the Archetypal, Original and Unoriginated transmitter of life**. In accepting Jesus Christ as the Archetypal transmitter of life, the gospel message of salvation, which reaches its climax in the death, and resurrection of Jesus can be allowed to take deeper root in the lives of the Igbo. Such attribute of Jesus can help the Igbo live the gospel and see how salvific is Jesus' role in the transmission of life and its full attainment. So the mediation role of the ancestors can help the Igbo deepen their reflection on the mediating salvific role of Jesus Christ and see him as God's Son, life itself, the giver of life and the one through whom the fullness of life is attained.

Inculturation can also be possible if Jesus Christ is accepted as the transformer of the human persons from the "destructive emotions" in them to the "saving emotions", namely, love, tolerance, peace, kindness and generosity. Since the Igbo understand that there are some destructive elements in the human persons, which they cannot change by themselves, seeing Jesus as the transformer of the human persons, "**Ogbawe-ndu-mmadu**", can help them overcome the forces of the destructive elements within them. Jesus as the transformer of the human person, therefore, can help the Igbo develop positive attitude towards life and discover the depth of life as a value.

But the problem now is how, by what means can we help the Igbo to understand that Jesus Christ is the Archetypal, Original and Unoriginated transmitter of life and that Jesus Christ is life himself, the giver of life and the one who transforms the human person into a loving person?

4.3.1. PASTORAL DIMENSION: The minister of the word and sacrament who engages in the work of evangelisation has to consider the following strategies.

4.3.1.1. IGBO WAY OF PRAYING: The traditional Igbo way of praying is said to be incomplete if the Igbo persons at prayer have not asked God through the ancestors for the gift of life. Their way of praying has to be affirmed, appreciated by the minister. But the Igbo people can deepen this way of praying by praying to God, the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ, the Archetypal transmitter of life, “**Onwetara ndu n’onweya**”,. And in this way, they can be sure of having their prayers answered. Since the traditional Igbo see God as someone who is transcendent, they can begin to see God present in His Son.

4.3.1.2. NAMING: Some Igbo names are theophanic and reveal God’s action in Igbo lives. For example, the names “**Chinenyendu**”, “**Ndukaku**”, “**Ndubuisi**”, “**Chinwendu**” and “**Nwandu**” are valued names in Igbo culture. “**Chinenyendu**” means God the only giver of life. The minister of the sacrament can say yes. That is true. But he can add, God gives life through His Son, Jesus Christ the Archetypal transmitter of life. This name can tell the one named after it how Jesus is close to him or her. “**Ndukaku**” means that life is greater than wealth. The minister can tell the Igbo that the greatest wealth God has given each human person is life. The greatest gift of God to human being is not only the gift of existence but also His only Son, Jesus Christ, sent to make our life more meaningful. This is the gift money cannot buy. “**Nwandu**” means the son of life. The Igbo can be told that this is the name that tells us that Jesus Christ is the only Son of God who is life. “**Ndubisi**” means that life is first, a paramount gift from God. “**Chinwendu**” means that God owns all life. Everyone of these names can show how closely related one is to Christ. The minister can acknowledge that these names give people their identity and say something about their personality. Hence, the minister can permit the Igbo who want to take any of the above names for baptismal names and live their lives in line with what such a name represents.

4.3.1.3. CATECHETICAL INSTRUCTION: Jesus Christ can be seen as a transmitter of life like the ancestors. But his own transmission of life is not only nurturing human persons spiritually, but also salvific. For that reason, we have to call Jesus Christ by the name the Archetypal transmitter of life, “**Onwetara ndu n’onweya**”. Jesus can be taught of as the transformer of the human person who has faith in him. He comes to dwell in those who believe in him. In his Spirit, he transforms the human person when they relate to him. So, the transformation of the human person by Jesus Christ depends on the relationship one has with him, by paying attention to his message of love of God and neighbour as a requirement for being in the kingdom of God in which eternal life is attained.

4.4. DIALOGUE: Through dialogue with the Igbo traditional religion or non-Christian Igbo, the concept Jesus Christ, the Archetypal transmitter of life, the Son of the God of life, can gradually take part in the heart of the Igbo. If the Igbo can pray through Jesus Christ as the Archetypal transmitter of life during the opening prayers to the dialogue it will not be difficult to have faith in him. And if faith in Jesus Christ, then faith in his Spirit and in his Father becomes possible. Such faith can help them in their relationship with Jesus Christ. When the Igbo relate with Jesus Christ their transformation will no longer be impossible.

4.5. EDUCATION: Education is a powerful means of instilling in people the knowledge of good values. People learn both formally and informally. Formally, at schools the word Jesus the Archetypal transmitter of life may be introduced during the course **Religious Education** or **Moral Instruction**. This can help the pupils get in touch with the concept. Informally, at homes the parents could tell their children that there are many transmitters of life, but only one is the Archetypal transmitter of life and his name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Through the education of the Igbo that Jesus is the Archetypal transmitter of life, he can gradually be given a permanent place in Igbo thought and reflections. By implication, Jesus will be seen as not only the Archetypal transmitter of life, but also life himself, the Son of the God of life as well as the giver of life.

When Jesus is accepted as the Archetypal transmitter of life, the transformer of the human persons who believe in him, the life itself, the one who gives life and makes the God

of life known, then the Igbo value of life will be appreciated by all Igbo people. Consequently, the destructive emotions in the Igbo persons, who act against life will be transformed into loving people who would serve, protect, promote life and value it fundamentally.

Chapter 5

5. General Conclusion: From all that has been presented we see that the value of life cannot be overemphasised. It is not so simple as one might seem to think of life as a value. There are so many other things connected with life, which the limit of this essay could not address. For that reason, there is the need for making some recommendations for further exploration of the value of life.

5.1. Recommendations.

I have tried to present life as the value, which can be possible vantage for inculturation. But I have not exhausted all that can be said about the value of life. Based on this, therefore, I would like to make the following recommendations.

A) Research work is to be carried out to find out how the other African values, such as marriage, naming, hospitality, community are deeply connected with the value of life. This would make the importance of such values uncovered.

B) Most African values are theological and can find a link with the Biblical values. The theology and biblical link of those values are sometimes not clearly defined. To clarify them therefore, further studies on African values, such as proverbs, myths, folklore, could be helpful.

C) Africans agree that life is a value. But how many parents teach their children about it? The three stages of life mentioned in this essay can be informally taught in every family by parents and formally learnt in schools. This would help all to know that life originates from God and reaches abundance in God.

D) Africans agree that life should be promoted. Offering some organized workshops and seminars to the youth, at least twice yearly can be helpful. They can offer the individuals time to reflect and see each person as harbinger of the gift of life accountable to God. In so doing, the need to promote life, reverence life, avoid all forms of anti-life forces, see how valuable life is and its goal found in God may be seen.

5.2. CONCLUSION: With the study of life in Igbo society as something, which originates from God, has a purpose and destiny in God, it can be said that life is really an important value. It is a value with a deep theological, social, moral and religious meaning. It tells us

about the origin, dignity and destiny of every human person. What else could be of enrichment to the human persons if not the value of life, which helps them to discover their origins, dignity and destiny?

The presentation of the value of life has opened our mind to respond to the request of the Church in Africa, namely, to study the African values so that the good values can be used for the purpose of responding to the urgent task of inculturation. It can be said that it is possible to carry out the work of inculturation through the value of life. The Igbo value of life has led us to understand that through inculturation the divine life, Trinitarian life, although a mystery, can be understood. It has led us to see Jesus not only as the Archetypal transmitter of life for the Igbo, and African societies, but also their life. When Jesus is accepted as the Proto-ancestor, Archetypal transmitter of life, understanding, recognizing, appreciating him as our life may not be impossible.

If life is meaningless, if there is any negative attitudes shown towards life or any anti-life forces it is because of ignorance. Ignorance of the value of life can bring about the destruction of life. The understanding of life as a fundamental human value that calls for protection, respect and promotion cannot be underestimated. If there is any value that is very fundamental to every human being, it is the value of life. The Igbo value of life enlightens us on how life transcends the moral and social levels. It is theological, spiritual and can be christological when we understand that Christ is the centre, giver of life, the Archetypal transmitter of life and life itself. From all this therefore, the value of life can help us find our eternal destiny in God through Christ, Our life, and as such a vantage point for inculturation.

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