

TANGAZA COLLEGE
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

MISSION STUDIES DEPARTMENT

**TOWARD A MODEL FOR AN IGBO CHRISTIAN
SPIRITUALITY**

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DEDICATION

**This essay is dedicated to the loving memory of
Sir C. I. Nwachukwu, Bro. Michael Owolabi and
Rev. Fr. Jude Maria Nwaolisa Ogbu.
May the good Lord be their eternal peace and joy.**

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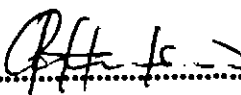
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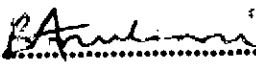
I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflections. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has never been submitted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

Signed 

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

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INTRODUCTION

As many scholars have noted, there has been an increasing interest in spirituality since Vatican II Council. This has been evidenced by the number of people who enroll in spirituality courses each year, many writings on spirituality, number of workshops on spirituality designed to foster the lived experience of the spiritual life. People wonder why there is this increasing interest in spirituality. This should not be surprising because the church since Vatican II has focused on the importance of inculturation of the gospel values in the different cultures. Perhaps, the most effective way of doing this is through an understanding of local spiritualities. Spirituality being a lived experience, the progressive, conscious striving toward personal integration through self-transcendence within and toward the horizon of ultimate concern,¹ could be a good perspective from which to assess and appreciate the cultural context of the gospel values.

Spirituality deals with day to day striving towards one's life goal. When we come to Africa, we may ask ourselves, what is that that an African strives for and how is he or she living out this life project? According to John Mbiti, Africans are notoriously religious. Religion penetrates all the aspects of life so fully that it is not easy to isolate it.² This means that the principle which controls an African's day to day striving lies in his or her religion. Similarly, the principle which governs the life of an Igbo person in Nigeria, is his or her religion. This implies that in all their life activities, religious beliefs is a guiding force. But when we examine the attitudes of the Igbo Christians today, we are forced to ask, how far has Christian values penetrated their life and their daily activities? Thus one wonders, is Christianity making any impact among the Igbos who are committed to religion and whose religious values guides all their

¹ C.f., Ewert H. Cousins, "What is Christian Spirituality?" in Modern Christian Spirituality, Bradley C. Hanson (Ed.), Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990, pp. 39-44.

² John S. Mbiti, African religions and philosophy, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1992, p. 1.

activities?

According to an English saying, “there is no smoke without fire.” When I look at many Igbo Christians, I wonder what actually is the force behind what I can call a “double lifestyle” and their inconsistent adherence to the gospel message. Contemporary Igbo Christians manifest elements of “double religious consciousness” and are not completely faithful to the gospel message. “Double lifestyle or religious consciousness,” is the situation where, one is a Christian and at the same time an adherent of traditional religion. One may attend Christian worship in the morning, and in the evening go to the traditional priest’s shrine or participate fully in the traditional worship practices.

My experience of this “double lifestyle” and unfaithfulness to the gospel message during my 1999 long vacation (May to August 1999) which I spent in some Igbo Christian communities raised many questions in me. First, what is the force that makes Igbo people to live as both Christians and believers in traditional religion simultaneously? Second, how rooted is Christianity among the Igbos, and how meaningful is Christianity to them? Lastly, how far has Christianity been incarnated in the Igbo culture? This essay, therefore, aims at examining the root cause or the force behind this “double religious consciousness,” and will attempt to show how Christianity can solve this problem. This search for the cause of the “double religious consciousness” is examined from the perspective of spirituality. Spirituality in this essay is considered to be the underlying principle behind any human behaviour. This principle is considered to be the root of all human actions and the core of any human existence.

In order to achieve the aim of this project, we shall divided the work into three chapters:

Chapter one examines the concept of spirituality. It analyses the Christian and African Indigenous spiritualities. Chapter two focuses on aspects of African spirituality as they are found and lived in the Igbo traditional community. Then, chapter three is dedicated to establishing a

model for an Igbo Christian Spirituality. In this case, the need for inculturation, the process of and approaches to inculturation of the gospel message in the Igbo culture are identified and analysed. This is followed by a general summary and conclusion of the work.

This essay is based on an evaluation of existing literature relevant to the topic of study. The literature analysed include both Christian and African theologians' texts. Furthermore, particular attention is paid to the daily life of the Igbos, that is, their experiences and their nomenclatures. This enables us to explain more fully the inner feelings of the people based on their own experience and their expressions. Also, the essay is based on discussion with some Igbos and interview with some missionaries who have worked among the people. In selection of the key informants interviewed, consideration was given to those with pastoral experience among the Igbos. Ten informants were interviewed,³ but out of this ten people, Fr. Declean was chosen as the Chief informant for more indepth interview. Rev. Fr. Declean has worked among the Igbos both as Parish Priest and also a lecturer in a Major Seminary for over twenty years. Also, coming from outside Igbo land and Nigeria, he was considered to be more appropriate to give an outsider's evaluation of indigenus Igbo Christians. The bible quotations in this essay are from The African Bible.⁴

³ See Appendix 1 & 2.

⁴ Victor Zinkuratire & Angelo Colacrai (G. Eds.), The African Bible, Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1999.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 THE CONCEPT OF SPIRITUALITY

I.1 INTRODUCTION

In all acts and words of a human being, a community or a group, there is a force within the person, community or group, that motivates their acts, knowledge, perception of life and words. In other words, in every act or word there is a source from which actions flow. For Dunne, all human activities come from the inner processes of the real person.⁵ In every human being, there is something that shapes and moves him/her in all that the person does and says. This thing, at the core of all human activities, can be called by different names depending on one's own orientation. In this paper, we will call this motivating force "Spirituality." Gutierrez describes Spirituality as an all-embracing attitude, precisely a force that bestows constancy and prevents our being tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.⁶

This chapter explores what spirituality is in general, and in a more specific way, what Christian and African Spiritualities are, as a basis for the comparative analysis of the spirituality of the Igbo community in Nigeria.

1.2 SPIRITUALITY

It is difficult to attempt a definition of spirituality because spirituality involves the whole person. Furthermore, there are many views about spirituality, and the term is used in different

⁵ Tad Dunne, Lonergan and Spirituality: Towards a Spiritual Integration, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985, p. 2.

⁶ Gustavo Gutierrez, We Drink from Our Own Wells, New York: Orbis Books, 1985, p. 105.

ways. Spirituality can refer to the style, mode or manner of a person's response to God or to the supreme value in a person's life. Alternatively, it can refer to the academic discipline that studies this response.⁷ To bring out these two ways of approaching spirituality, Joann Wolski Conn writes, "the term spirituality refers to both a lived experience and an academic discipline."⁸ No matter which perspective is taken, the important thing to note is that spirituality involves the person's whole life. Hence, Jon Sobrino defines spirituality as "life with a certain spirit, life lived in a particular spirit."⁹ In other words, what inspires or motivates one's actions, attitudes, thoughts, and behaviour or the whole person is the person's spirituality. This shows that every human person has a supreme value from which his or her daily life activity flows; that is the person's spirituality. Some people may not call it "spirituality," but a motivating force behind one's life.

So, in spirituality, there is a perceived value which one works toward. This serves as a sort of propeller pushing one to do things that are leading him or her to reach perceived goal. This value in some religions is God, while in other religions it is known by different names, but for the non-religious, its equivalence may be justice, peace, unity, etc. No matter what people call their deep-seated values, one important thing to note is that spirituality is not an empty thing. Spirituality has a "substance," and a goal which is concretized in one's daily life and reflected in one's daily life choices. This is why Aumann defines spirituality as "any religious or ethical value that is concretized as an attitude or spirit from which one's actions flow."¹⁰ In order to study the

⁷ Mary Anne Huddleston, Springs of Spirituality, Missouri: Triumph Books, 1995. P. 19.

⁸ Joann Wolski Conn, "Spirituality" in Joseph A. Komonchak, et al, Eds., The New Dictionary of Theology, Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1987, p. 972.

⁹ Jon Sobrino, Spirituality of Liberation: Towards Political Holiness, New York: Orbis Books, 1985, p. 2.

¹⁰ Jordan Aumann, Spiritual Theology, London: Sheed and Ward, 1980, p. 17.

spirituality of a person, a group, or a community, one would need to watch how they live, do things and what they produce through their actions. This is put in a nice way by Yarnold who says that, to study the spirituality of a person or a community, you would look at what they read and what they wrote.¹¹ In other words, to study the spirituality of any person or community, an understanding of what they take in and what they produce is required. In short, one seeks an interpretation of what lies at the core of their actions, beliefs or what shapes their behaviour and what they produce. Hence, O'Halloran sees spirituality as a lived experience of faith or value, which springs from whatever motivates us in our relationship with self, God, neighbour, and environment.¹²

As a pursued value, spirituality is something that one is aware of and aims at achieving.¹³ Hence, in spirituality there is no time one can say that he or she has fully achieved spiritual height, because it is a continuous striving. Thus Downey defines spirituality as, "a way of consciously striving to integrate one's life through self-transcending knowledge, freedom and love in the light of the highest values perceived and pursued."¹⁴ In this definition, there are some essential elements which a genuine spirituality must have. First, there is a supreme value which one consciously strives to attain. This implies that one is aware of what he or she does and aims at, and in everything that he or she is doing the person aims at attaining this value. The whole person is involved; psychologically, physically and intellectually, in order to achieve the basic value being

¹¹ Edward Yarnold, "Media of Spirituality," in Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, & Edward Yarnold, Eds., The Study of Spirituality, London: SPCK, 1986, p. 39.

¹² James O'Halloran, Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Companion, New York: Orbis Books, 1996, p. 158.

¹³ Ideally, one should be conscious of his or her spirituality. But in reality we see that some people only have a partly consciousness of their spiritualities, while some can be said are not conscious of their spirituality, for instance children.

¹⁴ Michael Downey, "Christian Spirituality" in The Modern Catholic Encyclopedia, edited by Michael Glazier & Monika K. Hellwig, Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd., 1994, p. 166.

pursued.

Furthermore, spirituality entails a sort of self- transcendence, which implies that there is no selfishness in spirituality. One goes beyond himself or herself and all the limits and barriers of the self for the sake of the value being pursued. While one strives for self- transcendence, this is not done in isolation, for spirituality is not something that can be attained in isolation from others but in communion with them. Human beings live in community and strive together to achieve their goals. Thus, Schneiders views spirituality as “the experience of consciously striving to integrate one’s life in terms not of isolation and self- absorption but of self- transcendence toward the ultimate value one perceives.”¹⁵ This implies that spirituality should not be dehumanising. Spirituality should not make one to isolate himself or herself from the community, since it is in and through the community that one realizes his/her value.

To sum up, we concur with Dorr that spirituality is that which is most deep in a person.

My spirituality is me. Not the ‘me’ that so often is distracted, scattered, and inauthentic, but the most genuine and profound ‘me’ that exists. Spirituality involves the outlook, the approach and the set of attitudes and values which are the expression of this ‘me’ at my most authentic level.¹⁶

Thus, every human person, social group, community or tribe has a spirituality. We can talk of Christian Spirituality, Moslem Spirituality, Hindu Spirituality, Liberation Spirituality, Justice and Peace Commission Spirituality, and so on. The working definition of spirituality in this paper, in a nutshell, is a life lived in a certain spirit or ethical value; the breath that inspires our actions, attitudes, thoughts and behaviour in general. So, we may ask ourselves, what is the breath that inspires Christian life?

¹⁵ Sandra M. Schneiders, “Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners,” in Horizons 13/2 (1986), p. 266.

¹⁶ Donal Dorr, Spirituality and Justice, Ibandan: Ambassador Publications, 1993, p. 20.

1.3 *CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY*

When we talk of Christian Spirituality, we are also talking of Christian life, which St. Paul describes as a life which should be a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, a spiritual worship (Romans 12:1-2). Thus Christian Spirituality is geared toward the goal of making the Christian a living sacrifice, a spiritual worship that is acceptable to God. In this regard, therefore, Christian spirituality is not an empty search. There is a value which one concretely strives for and which prompts one's quest for personal integration in the light of levels of reality. In Christian spirituality, the value sought for is God; there is a striving to unite oneself with God. Thus, Downey holds that in Christian Spirituality, the ultimate values perceived and pursued are rooted in the God disclosed in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit active and present in the community of discipleship called the church.¹⁷

Downey's explanation of spirituality above contains the essential elements of what can be called an authentic Christian spirituality. First, it has a reference to God who is present, active and reveals Himself to humanity through creation and history. Hence, Christian spirituality has the God revealed by Jesus Christ as its cornerstone. An awareness and experience of this God is the beginning of Christian spirituality. Thus, God's presence and activity in one's life or in the world gives rise to Christian spirituality. This is explained better by Wood who holds that, Christian spirituality as a whole is always focused on an awareness of and faith in the abiding presence of God, the spirit of being, life, and relationship that grounds and supports all human experience. He further says that, "Christian Spirituality originated and developed as a growing consciousness of the special reality of God's presence as companion and friend in Jesus."¹⁸ This implies that

¹⁷ Michael Downey, Understanding Christian Spirituality, New York: Paulist Press, 1997, p. 32.

¹⁸ Richard Woods, Christian Spirituality: God's Presence Through the Ages, Allen: Christian Classics, 1996, p. 10.

Christian spirituality first recognises the existence of God who is active in human history, and inspires a Christian to respond to him.

Christian spirituality is aimed at union with this God who is present in one's life and in the world, and is the source of everything. The human desire is to surrender completely and freely to God so as to reach union with him. Christian spirituality is embedded in surrendering and responding to God's love. God takes the initiative by revealing himself to us and invites us to share in his divine life. God also gifts us with the potential and the grace to respond to his invitation, through the Holy Spirit. This does not imply that we sit down and watch without doing anything. We must cooperate with the grace of God working in us, but always, we must realise that even our cooperation is only possible through the grace of God. This is well expressed by Downey who holds that in Christian Spirituality, human efforts, hard work and productivity are all facilitated by God's presence and action.¹⁹ God's presence and actions are parts of his revelation of himself to human beings, which human beings ideally respond to in faith, trust, obedience, love and confidence.

At the apex of God's revelation is the revelation through the person of Jesus Christ. This revelation through Jesus Christ is what marks out Christian spirituality from other religions' spiritualities. As many scholars on Christian spirituality hold, Christian spirituality is a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, and following him in discipleship, living in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.²⁰ This is what makes one to be in union with God. According to Vatican Council II, Christ is the fullest of God's revelation to humanity.²¹ It is through Christ that we get access to

¹⁹ Michael Downey, 1997. Op. Cit., p. 30.

²⁰ Cf., Catherine Mowry LaCugna & Michael Downey, "Trinitarian Spirituality," in The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality, Michael Downey, ed., Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993, pp. 968-992.

²¹ Vatican Council II, Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 1965, n.2.

God. Thus, Christian spirituality begins with faith in God through Christ, who is the word of God made flesh. In Christ, one is incorporated into the divine life and can have communion with God. The Christian spiritual discipline is modelled on the pattern revealed by Christ. Thus, St. Paul presenting Christian life and spirituality in a metaphoric way, urges Christians to *put on the Lord Jesus Christ* (Romans 13:14), or to allow him (Christ) to be formed in them (Galatians 4:19). Once this putting on of Christ is achieved, one automatically reaches a union with God. But this demands a continuous striving, hence, Christian spirituality emphasis a continuous striving to attain union with God. This striving for union with God is a life journey which can be fully attained only after death.

An authentic Christian spirituality is led by the Holy Spirit and it is the Christian life in response to the spirit. As St. Paul says, the Spirit has been poured into our hearts and it makes us to cry out Abba, Father (Romans 8:15). He further says that without the spirit, we can not please God (Romans 8:7-9). It is through the help and work of the Spirit that we reach union with God. The Holy Spirit is accompanied by the gifts which enable us to live our spiritual life. Through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we are able to respond to God's love and invitation. Hence, for many scholars, the Spirit of God, or the Spirit of Christ- the Holy Spirit- lies at the heart of all Christian spirituality.²² In other words, to reach maturity in Christ or to attain union with God is only possible through the help and work of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, Christian spirituality has a Trinitarian dimension. It is a life rooted in the mystery of the Trinity. This Trinitarian dimension is brought out clearly by scholars who define Christian spirituality as "the quest for an ever deepening integration through union with God in and through

²² Mary Anne Huddleston, *Op. Cit.*, p. 28.

Jesus in accord with the Holy Spirit.”²³ Christian spirituality, therefore, is a sharing in the life of the Trinity. It is a union with the Trinity. According to Christian belief, the human being is created in the image and likeness of God: “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him...” (Gen. 1:27). From creation, the human being was created to have communion with God. Therefore, from creation, human beings have the capacity to know what God wants and also to do it. The human being comprises both body and spirit. Through the spirit, human beings share in the divine nature and can please or do the will of God. Thus a Christian believer has the capacity to share in God, who is Trinity, and hence to attain union with God. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the divine image is present in every person. “The image shines forth in the communion of persons, in the likeness of the union of the divine persons among themselves” (n. 1702).

Due to this sharing in the Trinity, Christian spirituality emphasizes community over individualism. God lives in community; Father, Son and Spirit. Also, in creation, human beings were created male and female (Gen. 1:27); thus human beings were created as a community. Hence, in an authentic Christian spirituality, individualism is not the rule. It is a spirituality in the community of believers, that is, the Church. As Walter Principe writes,

the goal of the spiritual life entails perfection of one’s relationships with others, rather than an ever more pure gaze of the mind’s eye on some eternal truth ‘out there’ or in one’s interior life. From this perspective, spirituality naturally connects with the ethical demands of the Christian life, which flourish in the increase of communion among persons rather than personal sanctification rooted in an ever deepening inner gaze.²⁴

Principe further holds that Christian life is guided or influenced by the Holy Spirit, who is given by the Father and the risen Christ in order to make persons brothers and sisters of Christ and

²³ Catherine Mowry LaCugna & Michael Downey, Op. Cit., pp. 968-992.

²⁴ Walter H. Principe, “Spirituality: Christian,” in Michael Downey, ed., The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1993, p. 932.

children of the Father, in communion with one another. As a result of this common sharing, self-transcendence is involved in Christian spirituality. One has to overcome all barriers that hinder this communion.

Christian spirituality also involves the whole person. Downey points out that, Christian spirituality concerns absolutely every dimension of life: the mind and body, intimacy and sexuality, work and leisure, economic accountability and political responsibility, domestic life and civic duty, health care and the plight of the poor and wounded both at home and abroad.²⁵ In other words, Christian spirituality embraces all aspects of human life.

Christian spirituality which is led by the Holy Spirit is manifested in various ways and charisms. It integrates and transforms every dimension of human life and endows individuals with different gifts. This is why there are varieties within Christian spirituality; these include the Catholic spirituality, Protestant spirituality, Catholic Orthodox spirituality and Pentecostal spirituality. Within these spiritualities, there are many other spiritualities; for example, there are those engaged in justice and peace, education of the youth, missionary activities, and so on. As St Paul points out, though there are varieties of gifts and works, they all flow from the same Spirit and aim at the same goal (1Corinthians 12:4-7). Therefore, though there are differences, for instance, between Catholic spirituality and Protestant spirituality, the difference lies in gifts and emphasis, for both come from the same Spirit and aim at leading their adherents to union with God.

Moreover, Christian spirituality is guided by many disciplines that help one to achieve a union with God. Such disciplines include liturgical celebrations, prayer, alms giving, fasting and abstinence, scriptural reading, care for other people, justice and ecumenism, which help one to

²⁵ Michael Downey, 1997, Op. cit. , p. 45.

nourish love, honesty, peace, joy; which are the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:19). All these are among the concrete ways in which an individual or a community expresses its spirituality. In Christian spirituality emphasis is laid on one's daily life, and whether it corresponds to one's spirituality or not.

In sum, Christian spirituality is rooted in the experience of God, the Triune God, who is active and present in human history and in a special way through Jesus Christ. He reveals himself and invites the believer to unite himself/herself with him. In response to this invitation, a believer develops concrete ways and disciplines that will lead him/her to achieve this perfect union with God and in communion with other believers. This commitment of the believer is made in freedom and expressed in the daily choices and life. Christian spirituality is putting into practice in the concrete conduct of life, specific proclamations, doctrines, ideas, values, hopes, commandments, instructions, traditions, or habits of Christian faith by a particular way of living.²⁶ All these practices aim at having a union with God. Thus in Christian spirituality, union with God is the breath that should inspire the Christian life. But for a non-Christian such as an African indigenous religionist, this breath is related to human life. This is elaborated in the following section.

1.4 *INDIGENOUS AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY*

As many scholars hold, it is an illusion to talk of an indigenous African spirituality or philosophy, and so on, because the term "Africa" covers a range of cultures and religions. Similarly, in the African perception of things, the African mind does not divide life or thinking into categories such as theology, philosophy, psychology, and spirituality because things are seen as a whole. Thus, Kalilombe notes that "one of the basic characteristic of African culture is its

²⁶ Mary Anne Huddleston, *Op. Cit.*, p. 20.

holistic and integrating nature.”²⁷ There is no exclusive division between the sacred and the secular in African systems of thought. Although it may be an illusion to talk of an indigenous African spirituality, we can attempt to point out some common features of any indigenous African spirituality. These features may not pertain to spirituality alone since in African thought phenomena are not strictly separated. According to Mugambi, “although each ethnic community had its own beliefs about humanity and the world around it, anthropological and ethnological studies have made it possible to make some general remarks about those ideas and beliefs...”²⁸

For an understanding of indigenous African spirituality, a mention must be made of the African conception of reality. To a traditional African person, reality is basically divided into the visible and invisible. According to this perception of reality, existence is also divided into the visible and invisible realms. The visible realm of existence consists of things perceptible to the physical senses; all tangible, corporeal and material objects including human beings. Conversely, the invisible world is inhabited by all the incorporeal and immaterial beings called spirits. For a traditional African mind, there is only a thin line of separation between the visible and invisible realms. There is a great deal of interaction between the two realms of reality, since an action in one realm affects the other realm in a direct or indirect manner. Thus, we concur with Berinyuu that “in Africa, there is no division and/or differentiation between the animate and inanimate, between spirit and matter, the body and spirit, theory and practical, etc. The society is not segmented into for example, Medicine, Sociology, Law, Politics, and Religion. All these are

²⁷ Patrick A. Kalilombe, “Spirituality in the African Perspective,” in Rosino Gibellini, ed., Paths of African Theology, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1994. p. 115.

²⁸ J. N. K. Mugambi, African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity, Nairobi: Longman Kenya Ltd., 1989, p. 56.

different aspects of one reality.”²⁹

At the centre and core of these realms is the human being. These realms exist to enhance human life. So, in the activities of life, harmony, balance and tranquillity must constantly be sought and maintained among the visible and invisible elements of the universe. Thus African indigenous spirituality is inspired by human well being. In other words, the core of African Spirituality is human life.

Furthermore, in the African conception of reality, there is a common belief in God, the creator of all things both the invisible and visible worlds. There is also a belief in spirits which are invisible beings that are between God and man and can be good or bad. Most of the times, prayers, sacrifices, offerings and invocations are addressed to these spirits, with the intention that they offer them to God. All these forms of worship being offered to spirits are aimed at maintaining harmony and enhancing the unity between the visible and the invisible levels of the African universe.³⁰ In seeking harmony and unity between the visible and invisible, an African seeks to prolong and enhance human life, for any disruption in the unity and harmony of the universe affects human life.

In the traditional African thought, the human being is created by God and comprises both physical and spiritual elements. These two elements in human beings cannot be separated except by death. Human beings have powers in themselves which, when harnessed, can be used for different purposes; thus, there are medicine men, sorcerers, witches, magicians, etc. The spiritual aspect of the human being according to traditional African beliefs does not die. Though one may die physically, he/she continues to live in the invisible world. Thus, for Africans, life continues

²⁹ Abraham A. Berinyuu, Pastoral Care of the Sick in Africa, New York: Verlag Peter Lang, 1988, pp. 5-6.

³⁰ J. S. Mbiti, African Religions and Philosophy, Second Edition, Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1990, p. 29.

after death, but the level of life after death depends mainly on one's earthly life. This is why for the traditional African man or woman, one's life and relationship with the spirits are important because, through these, one can live a life that will earn him/her life after death.

According to Kalilombe, the main concern of indigenous African spirituality "is how to make sense of this life and ensure that it is meaningful, harmonious, good, and worth living."³¹ This concern is expressed in the values and day- to- day life of an African. African values and daily activities are motivated and geared toward life in its fullness; that is, the community life and the individual's life. Thus traditional African Spirituality is manifested in the entire lifestyle of an African.

African spirituality, therefore, is rooted in the whole experience of life. One must do everything possible to protect, keep, enhance and attain full life with the ancestors. The only way to achieve this goal is through a harmonious relationship with one another, the environment, God and spirits, that is, a harmonious living with the visible and invisible realms of the African universe which leads to good health. If one causes any imbalance in the realms of the universe, the person must automatically experience ill-health or dis- ease.

African spirituality first recognises the existence of human life and other things around the human being. Then, reflecting on life, the African recognises the existence of God and God's presence in one's life through the gift of life. Zahan puts this very well when he writes, "the essence of African spirituality lies in the feeling man has of being at once image, model, and integral part of the world in whose cyclical life he senses himself deeply and necessarily engaged in. All of African spiritual life is based on this vision of man's situation and role."³² Unlike the

³¹ Op. Cit., p. 122.

³² Dominique Zahan, The Religion, Spirituality and Thought of Traditional Africa, translated by Kate Ezra Martin and Lawrence M. Martin, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, pp. 4-5.

Christian spirituality which first focuses on God, African spirituality first focuses on human life. Thus Christian Spirituality is based on what we can call *an up- down spirituality*, while African Spirituality is a *down- up spirituality*.

Due to the emphasis on life in African spirituality, many scholars have seen it as a kind of humanism. Thus Michel Kayoya writes;

This is the mentality that forged my father 's humanism (spirituality)
A humanism that does not allow a man to be a slave.
A humanism which repudiates all debasing customs.
A humanism in which one battles against individualism and social evils.
A humanism with a state for respect.
Respect for the poor
Respect for the lowly
Respect for the elderly
Respect for the infirm.
Not any kind of respect
Not the respect based on sharing the same nature
Not purely human pity.
*But because the poor, the lowly, the child are Imana 's creatures.*³³

The above poem implies that African spirituality includes respect for life and hence respect for any thing that has life. This respect is given to all beings that have life; human beings both rich and poor, the young and the old, the healthy and sick, the living and the dead, trees, animals, etc. All living things are perceived to share in the same life force and come from the same Creator. This is why African spirituality is described as one that encourages respect for all living things. According to Chagenda, this respect is also accorded to everything; "even the life of a fly is an expensive sacrifice."³⁴

African spirituality also fosters respect for human dignity. The human being, whether rich or poor, young or old, dead or living, etc., has a dignity. Human dignity is not merited through

³³ Michel Kayoya, My Father's Footprints, trans. Aylward Shorter, Nairobi: East African Publishing house, 1973, p. 40.

³⁴ Wandera Chagenda, "Martyrdom," in Aylward Shorter ed., African Christian Spirituality, New York: Orbis Books, 1980, p. 94.

status, but by virtue of the fact that one is alive or has a life force. In Africa, even the dead are still alive, participating in the day to day family and community affairs. According to Laye, death is not the end of everything for an indigenous African. He emphasises this point in the expression: “think what a life would be that was to be finished by death! Think what a vast swindle our life and all its activity would be! Is such a swindle conceivable?”³⁵ In other words, in African system of thought life does not end. Thus, our dignity lies in the fact that we have life.

The observance of the customs of the land is very important and is a way of living faithfully African spirituality. The traditional customs are made to enhance life and they are not a detriment to life. All the customs are geared toward protecting life. The observance and keeping of the customs help to bring harmony and peace which are also aspects of African spirituality.

In African spirituality, individualism is not the rule. One is born into a community and grows into personhood within the community that declares him/her to be a person. Thus any attempt to cut oneself from the community, is cutting oneself from being a person. As Berinyuu would say, “the human person is not an isolated individual... He/she is at all times interacting with other beings in the universe, whom he/she is linked to by a network of relationships. The human being is essentially a member of a community of beings as well as a unique individual person.”³⁶ This also shows that African spirituality is dynamic and cannot be fully achieved at any one time. As one grows into personhood, the person also strives to attain full life and spiritual maturity. Another characteristic that flows from this communitarian aspect of African spirituality is that of reciprocity. Individuals help each other without expecting direct, immediate rewards, because in their own turn, they will be helped by others. Thus there is a self-giving to the community and

³⁵ Camara Laye, “The Soul of Africa,” in Aylward Shorter ed., African Christian Spirituality, New York: Orbis Books, 1980, p. 94.

³⁶ Op. Cit., pp. 6-7.

others in the community.

Moreover, there is a religious dimension in African spirituality. The indigenous Africans believe that there is a creator. According to Mbiti, “in all the African societies, without a single exception, people have a notion of God, and this belief is expressed in proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories and religious ceremonies.³⁷ The Africans keep in touch with this creator through prayer, sacrifices and offering. All religious activities are focused on protecting and enhancing life and they do not make any sense if they are separated from life.

In this chapter, we have given a general view of what spirituality is; that breath that inspires one’s life. This breath for Christianity is union with God while for indigenous Africans, it is human life. An African has to prolong and protect life by maintaining peace and harmony between the visible and invisible realms of the universe. Both Christian and African spiritualities are geared toward the same goal, that is, to live a fulfilled life. Christianity aims at union with God while for the traditional African, it is fullness of life. This goal is approached by both spiritualities in different ways, for instance, for the indigenous African, the approach is *down- up*, while for Christianity the approach is *up- down*. In the next chapter, the case of the Igbo community is used to elaborate on the aspects of African spirituality.

³⁷ Op. cit., p. 29.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 ASPECTS OF AFRICAN SPIRITUALITY IN THE IGBO COMMUNITY.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapter, spirituality was defined as the breath that inspires one's life. For Christianity, that breath lies in communion with the triune God, while for indigenous Africans, that breath is human life. In this chapter, the aspects of African Spirituality with particular reference to the Igbo Community of eastern Nigeria are examined.

2.2. THE IGBO COMMUNITY

The term 'Igbo' refers to both the language and the name of an ethnic group in the Southeast of Nigeria. This ethnic group is knit together by geographical, linguistic, social, political and cultural factors.³⁸ All efforts that many scholars have made to trace the origin of the Igbos have not been successful up till today.³⁹ Hence nobody can say with conviction the origin of the Igbos because the Igbos as at then had an unwritten history, and there are many Igbo sub-cultural groups with different mutually intelligible dialects and villages that are independent and yet make up the Igbo community.

Igbos have a rich culture, according to Onuh, "an observation of the Igbos even from a

³⁸ See Appendix 3: Map of the Igbo Territory.

³⁹ Some of the authors include, Elizabeth Isichei, A History of the Igbo People, London: Macmillian Press Ltd., 1976, V. C. Uchendu, The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria, London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, P. A. Talbot, Tribes of the Niger Delta, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1967, and M. M. Green, Igbo Village Affairs, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1964.

distance would immediately reveal them as having a very rich and complex culture.”⁴⁰ Igbo cultural elements emerge from their vision of life. This vision of life, as in many other African cultures, has its deep roots in religion. Elements of Igbo culture branch off from the religious base and each cultural trait is highly charged with a deep religious character. These elements are strongly tied to the Igbo world view presented in the following section.

2.3. IGBO WORLD- VIEW

The world view of any people, according to Emefie Metu, “is the complex of their belief and attitudes concerning the origin, nature, structure of the universe and the interaction of its beings, with particular reference to man.”⁴¹ This implies that whenever we talk of a people’s world view, we are dealing with the people’s way of thinking, perceiving reality, their philosophy, vision of life and the world in which they live, attitudes, beliefs, origins, values, ideas, institutions, practices, myths, ways of expressions, their conception of the interaction of beings (both physical and spiritual) in the world, and so on. In all these, the human being is at the centre because he experiences all that happens in this complex universe and describes what he experiences.

Underlying the Igbo mentality and philosophy is the principle that every effect must have a cause. As Nkemnkia pointed out, in the African system of thought, anything that happens has a cause and nothing happens by chance.⁴² One finds this principle operating in every system of life of the people. Hence, the Igbos see their universe as an effect of an artifice, who is God. Igbos

⁴⁰ Charles Ok. Onuh, Christianity and the Igbo Rites of Passage: the Prospects of Inculturation, Berlin: Peter Lang, 1989, p. 16.

⁴¹Emefie I. Metu, God and Man in African Religion, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981, p. 48.

⁴²Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia, African Vitalogy: A Step forward in African Thinking, Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1999, p. 117.

believe that God created the world, thus they call him *Chukwu* (the Great God) or *Chineke* (the Creator). The concept of God, the Supreme being, is fundamental. This God is transcendent, but immanent in his effects through the intermediary actions of the deities, spirits and one's life. The deities and spirits are looked upon as divine messengers and representatives in the visible world.

The actual relationship between *Chukwu* and these deities remain ambiguous.⁴³ These deities have shrines among the people who are their adherents. At these shrines, the adherents offer sacrifices, offerings and prayers to the deities. The deities, as the Igbos see them, are closer to them than the Supreme Being. Their closeness to the people have made them to a certain extent "take the place of the Supreme Being". For the Igbos, deities are mainly there to solve human problems. The Igbos have a pragmatic attitude to deities, in that when a deity is unable to solve the problem for which it is made, it is abandoned for another deity. Hence, an Igbo saying *oburu n'arusi arughi oru ekworo ma ya, omwe si uru obara* (If a deity cannot perform the work for which it was made, it is of no use then).

Directly below the deities according to the Igbo hierarchical world-view are the spirits who are less powerful than the deities. Deities are owned either by communities, clans or the tribe and an individual can own a spirit or spirits and not a deity. Everything, including plants, trees and human beings has a spirit. The spirits are generally personified forces found in nature and they can be very dangerous depending on whether they are properly controlled or mishandled.

Many authors hold that, strictly speaking, there are only two categories of spirits: the natural and the human spirits.⁴⁴ These spirits serve as intermediaries between the living and the Supreme being. The natural spirits are the spirits which are associated with natural objects as either inhabiting or as using the forms or shapes of natural objects. There are as many of these spirits

⁴³ Charles Ok. Onuh, Op. Cit., p. 40.

⁴⁴ E. G. Parrinder, African Traditional Religion, London: Sheldon Press, 1962, p. 25.

as there are natural objects. For instance, there are spirits of the mountains, rivers, trees and many others. The human spirits are the spirits that were once ordinary men, women and children. Once dead, these spirits go to the invisible world to begin a new form of existence. The Igbo perception of life and death agrees with Mbiti's observation that, in the traditional African world-view, human life does not terminate at death, it continues in the invisible world.⁴⁵

The universe for the Igbos is a complex, single whole with two phases- the visible (Ala Mmadu) and the invisible (Ala Mmuo) sectors of the one single reality. The Igbos see the world as a fluid, coherent unit, in which spirits, men, plants, animals, and other elements, are engaged in continuous interaction.⁴⁶ According to Uchendu, in this interaction of the invisible and visible,

... the Igbo world is a real one in every respect. There is the world of man, peopled by all created beings and things, both animate and inanimate. The spirit world is the abode of the Creator, deities, the disembodied and malignant spirits, and the ancestral spirits. It is the future abode of the living after their death. There is a constant interaction between the world of man and the world of the dead, the visible and the invisible forces.⁴⁷

The invisible sector is inhabited by God, deities, spirits and ancestors, while the visible part is occupied by human being and other lower beings. Human beings occupy the centre in this world as they serve as a pivot and seek through rituals to maintain an equilibrium and a harmonious relationship with all the beings and forces that impinge on their life and being.

Kalu sees these two levels of the universe as falling under three tiers: *Elu* (the sky), *Uwa* (the earth) and *Imeala* (the underworld). *Chukwu* and the universal deities, except *Ala*- the Earth goddess, occupy the sky, while human beings, other physical things, the community's deities and some spirits occupy the earth, while the ancestors and some other spirits, especially the spirits of

⁴⁵ *Op. Cit.*, p. 83.

⁴⁶ Emefie I. Metu, African Religions in Western conceptual Schemes, Ibadan: Claverian Press, 1985, p. 4.

⁴⁷ V. C. Uchendu, The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria, London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, p. 2.

the dead human beings, occupy the *imeala*, that is, the underworld.⁴⁸ But no matter how many tiers we can identify, they are perceived as (one and the same) reality. There is no division or separation in the way the Igbos perceive their universe. Division occurs in expression because of the lack of words to communicate what is perceived. Both the visible and invisible aspects of the universe are in constant interaction with one another, and what happens in one affects the other. At death, a human being continues his/her life in the other part of the universe; the invisible part.

Death is perceived to be a transition from the visible to the invisible form of existence. It is a change of residential address, while the office address remains the same. Thus a human spirit continues to be what it was in the visible world. The experiential social stratification is also acceptable among the human spirits, but there is no division of the dead on the basis of character. Apart from the witches and outcasts, all the living dead, good or bad, live together in the world of spirits (*Imeala*). Therefore, life from the realm of visible existence to the realm of invisible existence implies similarities in the two worlds. In fact for the Igbos, fullness of life is achieved in the invisible realm of existence. Those who have achieved this fullness of life are the ancestors.

Thus, the ancestors can be defined as the spirits “who have realized to a remarkable degree the values and aspirations of their communities and groups.”⁴⁹ The spirits of those people who lived a good moral life, made distinguished achievements, and were prominent in their human societies when they were alive, and have been accorded a befitting burial, are the ancestors. The moral life and achievement of these spirits elicit and command respect, honor and admiration from the living; thus the living continue to take them as models, and as part of their clan, community,

⁴⁸ O. U. Kalu, “Precarious Vision: the African’s Perception of his World”, in Kalu, O. U. ed., African Cultural Development, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978, p. 40.

⁴⁹ B. A. Abanuka, A New Essay on African Philosophy, Enugu: SNAAP Press, Nigerian Ltd., 1994, p. 37.

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⁴³ Charles Ok. Onuh, Op. Cit., p. 40.

⁴⁴ E. G. Parrinder, African Traditional Religion, London: Sheldon Press, 1962, p. 25.

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⁴⁵ Op. Cit., p. 83.

⁴⁶ Emezie I. Metu, African Religions in Western conceptual Schemes, Ibadan: Claverian Press, 1985, p. 4.

⁴⁷ V. C. Uchendu, The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria, London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965, p. 2.

and nation to eternity.⁵⁰

The Igbo name for the human being, *Mmadu*, explains to a great extent the people's belief about human beings. According to Mozia, etymologically "mmadu means 'let goodness be' or 'there is goodness'.... Man is, therefore, seen as the most beautiful of God's creations. For the Igbos, man is a special creation - the most perfect of God's creatures- the one who best manifests God's goodness."⁵¹ The human being has two elements, spiritual and physical. These two elements make the human person to be able to relate with the universe around him/her and with the invisible realities. Due to the human makeup, human beings can communicate with God- *Chukwu*, deities, spirits and the invisible realities.

The Igbos hold that God is specially bound to each one through a personal spirit, *Chi*. "Chi" is God's personal emanation as well as one's destiny, dictating the natural package for every one: one's *akala aka*, which means literally one's natural palm- prints. According to Isichei, "the 'chi' a personalized providence, comes from Chukwu and reverts to him at a man's death. Each man has his own chi who may be well or ill- disposed."⁵² Also, Francis Arinze on this issue of chi writes, "most Ibos believe that each individual has a spirit, a genus, or a spiritual double, his chi, which is given him at conception by Chukwu and which accompanies this individual from the cradle to the grave."⁵³

Human beings according to the Igbos are relational in nature. It is in community that one

⁵⁰ According to Mbiti, after five years these spirits are forgotten but for the Igbos, they are remembered forever. Even if forgotten, they still remain ancestors. Their existence does not depend on our memory of them.

⁵¹ Michael Ifeanyinachukwu Mozia, Solidarity in the Church and Solidarity Among the Igbos of Nigeria, Second Edition, Ibadan: Claverianum Press, 1987, pp. 184-185.

⁵² Elizabeth Isichei, A History of the Igbo People, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976, p. 24.

⁵³ Francis A. Arinze, Sacrifice in Ibo Religion, Ibadan: University Press, 1970, p. 15.

can grow and attain fullness of life. Community embraces the visible and invisible realities, therefore, one has also to relate with the visible and invisible realities. This calls for other values like religion, morality, etc., but all these values are useful only when they help to enhance life. Where they cannot help to make life enjoyable, liveable or longer, etc., the values then do not mean anything. Hence, the Igbos will be at home with Michel Kayoya's song which holds that the customs are not debasing.⁵⁴

From the discussion of this section, it has been established that for the Igbos there is one universe generally perceived at two levels, the invisible and the visible. There are spiritual beings made up of *Chukwu* (the Supreme being), deities, spirits, and ancestors, who inhabit the invisible level. At the physical level there are human beings, trees, plants, and other visible and tangible things. Both the spiritual and physical beings are in constant interaction with one another. In this interaction, peace and harmony are sought and maintained because lack of peace and harmony between the visible and invisible result in danger for human life.

2.4. *THE CORE OF IGBO SPIRITUALITY*

Life is the central concern or the core of Igbo world view. Life comes from God, and it is his property which he gives to all living things including human beings. This is brought out well by the name *Chibundu* given to some of the members of the Igbo community, which means God is life. The various nomenclatures and names which the Igbos give to their members express their understanding of life. For instance, the name *Ndubuisi*, which means "life is first," shows that life is the basis for every other thing one can do. The Igbos would be at home with Nkemnkia idea that "life is superior to the entity by notion.... Life remains identical in everything, it is the very

⁵⁴ *Op. Cit.*, p. 40.

first possession and is the soul of the African, the principle of African identity.”⁵⁵ Thus in everything, they aim at protecting and enhancing human life. Mozia unequivocally says that, behind all that the Igbos do is the intention to preserve life, to have a more healthy life and to attain fullness of life.⁵⁶

Among the Igbos, life can be classified into two categories. The first category is the community life, which comprises the life of all the community members and associated elements in the universe which include the living, those who have died, plants, animals, and the spiritual beings. The second is the individual’s life. Each person has his/her life to live and protect. But community’s life is more important than the individual’s life; hence in everything, the community’s life takes precedence.

An Igbo saying, *Ndu adighi abuo*, which literally means that life is not two, suggests how precious life is to the people. It is only one life that one has to live both in the natural and spiritual world. This implies that whatever one does, the person should see that he/she lives a good life and protects it properly. All this means that to define life among the Igbos is not easy.⁵⁷ This life comes from God through the cooperation of the ancestors and the deities, especially *Ala* (Earth goddess). Life, for the Igbos, means more than physical living as it includes pleasure, suffering, joys and wealth. Adibe holds that, “a successful life is for the traditional Igbo one that is fully enhanced in all its respects, one that has achieved the ideals and values recognised in the society.”⁵⁸

Hence, we can say that among the Igbos, life is the binding force between the natural and

⁵⁵ Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia, *Op. Cit.*, p. 171.

⁵⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 187.

⁵⁷ Anthony Ekendu Onyeocha, *Family Apostolate in Igboland*, Vicegerante: Giovanni Canestri, 1983, p. 21.

⁵⁸ Gregory E. M. Adibe, *The Crisis of Faith in Morality of the Christians of Nigeria*, Onitsha: Etukokwu Publishers Nig. Ltd., 1992, p. 67.

supernatural as well as the human and divine. This is because life comes from the divine and when one dies on earth, he/she continues to live the same life as a supernatural being. Life continues even after physical death and its fullness is achieved in the invisible world. Igbos believe that life involves a cyclic process of birth, death, and rebirth. Life is enhanced and protected through a constant interaction, peace and harmony between the visible and invisible realms of the Igbo universe. The ways through which peace, harmony and interaction between the visible and invisible are maintained are the concern of the remaining sections of this chapter.

2.5. *IGBO ETHICS*

Igbo norms are contained in the code of conduct which is embedded in the *Omenani* (what ought to be done) and *Nsoani* (what ought not to be done). According to Osuji, “*omenani* contains all approved ways of acting, traditional beliefs and practices which are contained in the unwritten laws and customs and brought down from the ancestors to posterity.”⁵⁹ Through *Omenani* and *Nsoani* the Igbo behaviour is directed toward maintaining peace and harmony between the visible and invisible worlds and beings, and among the community members. This peace and harmony gives one the fullness of life which is desired in Igbo spirituality. The basis for Igbo ethics, *Omenani* and *Nsoani*, is the desire to live the fullness of life. Thus, Charles Onuh strongly holds that the Igbo vision of life and the Igbo belief in the principle of causality determines the ethical values.⁶⁰ Thus, Mozia holds that the ethical norms in the Igbo community are aimed at achieving full life, as they reveal a strong bond that unites the visible and the invisible,

⁵⁹ C. C. Osuji, The Concept of Salvation in Igbo Traditional Religion, Published Doctoral Thesis, Rome: Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, 1977. p. 25.

⁶⁰ Op. Cit., p. 44.

the human beings and the supernatural beings and the various aspects of their life.⁶¹

When one goes against these approved ways of life, he/she will be breaking the peace and harmony which exist between the visible and invisible, and between the person and the community and put the life of the community in danger. Ilogu gives us more clues on the role of *omenani* in the Igbo community life when he writes,

Omenani is the means by which the social ethos is measured, the values of the society are continued from one generation to another, and the processes of socialization through the education of the young ones are facilitated. Harmony and equilibrium are in this way maintained as every member of the society knows what to expect from his neighbours and what to give to them, simply by observing the well known customary ways of behaviour and moral code, that is, Omenani.⁶²

Through the *omenani*, therefore, traditions are handed on from one generation to another. Since there is a common belief among the Igbos that their code of conduct comes from *Chukwu*, through the deities and the ancestors, keeping *omenani* implies obedience to *Chukwu* and the ancestors. In short, therefore, through *Omenani* life is handed on from one generation to another and by obeying the ethical codes, one attains the fullness of life and spiritual maturity.

2.6. *SACRIFICE AND OFFERING*

Sacrifices and offerings are means through which communication is facilitated between the visible and the invisible worlds. Through sacrifices and offerings peace and harmony are maintained in the Igbo World. Animals, food materials, etc, are offered to the Spiritual Beings.⁶³ The purposes of sacrifices and offerings are expiation, warding off molestation from unknown evil

⁶¹ *Op. Cit.*, p. 221.

⁶² Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*, Onitsha: University Publishing Co., 1985, p. 23.

⁶³ "Spiritual Beings" as used here applies to God, Deities, Spirits and Ancestors.

spirits, petition and thanksgiving. In the words of Arinze:

every Ibo believed that an invisible universe was in action all around him, and that his life was short if he happened to fall foul of its denizens. He felt that it was up to him therefore to propitiate them and to treat them with courtesy and deference. That was the fundamental reason why he had such a penchant for sacrifice in all its many forms.⁶⁴

This implies that for an Igbo person to live long, he/she must see that peace and harmony are maintained between the visible and the invisible universe, the human and the divine. Thus sacrifice and offerings are used to enhance life. We may ask, are sacrifices and offerings the same thing?

According to Magesa,

Sacrifices refer to a situation where animal life is destroyed in order to present the animal in part or in whole to God, supernatural beings, spirits or the living- dead. Offerings refer to the remaining cases which do not involve the killing of an animal, being the presentation of foodstuffs and other items.⁶⁵

Thus sacrifices involve mainly shedding of blood, and taking of animal life. In this case, a sacrifice is concerned more with animal gift, in which case the animal involved must be killed. The animal is killed to save the life of the entire community. Offerings involve food items and where animals are involved, the animals are not killed but are left alive after the offerings. The animal involved in an offering belongs entirely to the Spiritual Being to whom the offering was made.⁶⁶ Furthermore, sacrifices are usually made when the life of the entire society is in danger. In other words, sacrifices involve the whole community, no matter who is offering it. An offering can be for the community or for individual reasons. As Mbiti rightly pointed out, which is also the case with the Igbos, what makes sacrifice stand out from offering is that “sacrifice is made when the

⁶⁴ Op. Cit., p. 34.

⁶⁵ Laurenti Magesa, African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life, New York: Orbis Books, 1997, p. 58.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 58-59.

lives of many people are in danger, the destruction of one becomes the protection of many.”⁶⁷

Sacrifices and offerings may be directed to God, spirits or ancestors depending on the reason for them. In some places, sacrifices and offerings can be offered directly to God, while in some it is through deities, spirits and ancestors. But in the final analysis, the ultimate recipient is God, whether the people know it or not.

No matter to which spiritual being they are offered, sacrifices and offerings are used to maintain an ontological balance, making and renewing contact between God and man, or spirits and man. They can also be used to show respect and to remember the ancestors. In any case, they help to maintain peace and harmony between the visible and invisible. And when we talk of the Igbo invisible world, we are referring to *Chukwu* (God), deities, spirits, ancestors, and other things which can not be perceived with our naked eyes. For Charles Onuh, “the Igbo does not think of life as possible without due attention being paid to the invisible higher powers. He insures himself to the spiritual powers to have this life.”⁶⁸ Sacrifice and offering are ways by which an Igbo person assures himself or herself to the spiritual powers.

The relationship between the visible and invisible lies much on trust and interdependence. On one hand, visible things depend on the invisible realities for their needs. The human being depends on the invisible for fertility of crops, animals, trees, and children. The visible things also depend on the invisible for rain, protection, prosperity, and so on. Hence, visible realities depend on invisible realities in every situation to provide for needs. On the other hand, invisible things depend on the visible for their existence in the sense that deities are recognised only when a community acknowledges them and builds shrines for them, then the deity comes into existence.

⁶⁷ Op. Cit., p. 63.

⁶⁸ Op. Cit., p. 46.

2.7. *PRAYER*

Sacrifices and offerings usually go hand in hand with prayer. Most of the times, prayers are made to the Spiritual Beings alone. Prayer as many African writers hold is the commonest act of communication between the visible and invisible realms.⁶⁹ “Prayer is comprehensive, requesting the removal of all that is bad and anti-life in the society, and demanding restoration of all that is good.”⁷⁰ In this sense, prayer is seen as a petition, through which human beings ask for favor, especially removal of all that is a detriment to life. But prayer can also be in the form of praise and thanksgiving, litany, stylized invocation and strict formula. Prayers can be made for benefits such as, good health, healing, protection from danger, safety, security, prosperity, preservation of life, peace. Like sacrifice and offering, prayer is made for both community and private needs such as the removal of all that are hindrances to life.

Prayers can be said at any time, usually, early in the morning, before embarking on any project like hunting, journeying, planting, etc. We can say that prayers are mainly made for protection, prosperity, and to express gratitude to God. For the Igbos prayer can be addressed to God, or to the deities, the spirits, or the ancestors. But no matter to whom prayer is addressed, the important thing to note is that, at the center of every prayer is life. It is either to thank the spiritual beings, or to petition them for the life of the community or the life of the individual.

2.8. *INTERPRETERS OF IGBO SPIRITUALITY*

At times the ordinary Igbos cannot explain spiritual mysteries or the experience of

⁶⁹ Adeyemo Tokunboh, *Salvation in African Tradition*, Nairobi. Evangel Publishing House, 1979, p. 35.

⁷⁰ J. S. Mbiti, *Op. Cit.*, p. 195.

phenomena which are beyond the people's comprehension. In such situations, the community needs some one who can explain to them what is going on. Also, when there is a perceived imbalance and disharmony between the visible and invisible world, there is need to restore peace and harmony. Since not anybody can interpret what is happening and carry out the required rituals to appease the spiritual beings, the specialists who are endowed with the power to do this work are consulted.

The diviners, traditional priests, medicine men, and even the ancestors are the interpreters of Igbo traditional spirituality. They help to facilitate communication between the visible and invisible worlds because they have been called by the deities or spirits whom they serve. Moreover, they have deeper insight into the world view of the community and are experienced in their work. These ritual functionaries are believed to be empowered by the spirits and Chukwu (God) to fulfill such roles in the community. This empowerment at times comes through dreams, where in dream one is called and given power by the spirit whom he/she is going to serve. In some cases, one is empowered by the spirit through possession, where the spirit enters into the person and takes control of the person. The spirits and deities direct ritual specialists to diagnose and give solutions to problems related to spiritual or mystical issues. Through the interpreters, peace and harmony are maintained between the visible and the invisible worlds, between God, deities and human beings, and among human beings themselves.

In situations where life is at stake, the interpreters help to ratify what has gone wrong. By helping to restore peace and harmony, the interpreters also serve as guardians and custodians of the indigenous Igbo spirituality for the sake of enhancing life. When there is confusion and lack of understanding of what is happening, the priests, medicine men or ancestors are consulted.

2.9. *RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN BEINGS AND THE VISIBLE WORLD*

For any Igbo man or woman, community is very important. Since it determines whether one is a person or not. The community assigns roles and determines the mode of behaviour, hence there is virtually nothing one can do without the community. The community comprises of a complex network among human beings, the visible and invisible phenomena which interact with one another.

The relationship of human being with the visible world is embedded in human cooperation, sharing, hospitality, respect for one another, truth, caring, honesty, and other values. Human beings need to cooperate and share because they all share in the same life which has its origin from God. Furthermore, the Igbos believe that, each individual has a personal *chi* which infuses a unique character into each person, showing that the human being is limited and cannot provide all that he/she needs. An Igbo name and saying, *Madubuike*, which is a short form for *Mmadu bu ike ibeya*, meaning “a man is the strength of his neighbour,” brings out clearly this need for sharing and cooperation. Hence Arinze writes, “... to exist is to live in the group, to see things with the group, to do things with the group. Life is not an individual venture, each one for himself.”⁷¹

Human beings and other species need harmonious co-existence to survive. The human being needs food and drugs from plants, animals, and trees to survive and in turn, plants, trees, animals and other visible things need to be cared for by human beings. This implies that all visible things have a spiritual connection and a chain of roles to play for each other as they constitute an ecosystem.

⁷¹ *Op. Cit.*, pp. 4-5.

In this chapter, aspects of Igbo spirituality have been examined. It is hard to divide into exact categories the Igbo universe which is made up of the visible and invisible levels and beings. All visible realities, including human beings, have physical and spiritual elements in them. This dual nature of perceiving realities makes it possible for the human being to relate with the visible and invisible levels of the universe. The indigenous Igbo spirituality is, therefore, embedded in all the activities of the community and individuals. In all the actions and words of the Igbos, the spiritual is not separated from the natural. All have the same purpose of preserving and enhancing life. Having gone through this chapter and the previous chapter, we may ask ourselves, can Christian spirituality be integrated into the Igbo culture? This is the concern of the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 INCULTURATION OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY IN IGBO CULTURAL CONTEXT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

From the above chapters, we have seen that, among the Igbos, the human person has spiritual and physical elements. These two realities cannot be separated. Hence in everything that one does, the person strives for a balance between these two elements. Also, we have established that spirituality is the breath that motives one's life's activities. Christianity sees this motivating force as the desire for union with the triune God, while for the Igbos, it is the desire to attain fullness of life. These two different views seem to be confusing and impossible for an Igbo Christian to attain; considering that Igbo spirituality is *down-up* while Christian spirituality is *up-down*. This chapter aims at bringing these two views together so as to show how an Igbo Christian can be fully African and fully Christian. To do this, we will first examine what inculturation is and the need for inculturation from life experience, scripture and theology. Lastly, we will attempt to develop a model for an Igbo Christian Spirituality.

3.2 INCULTURATION

Inculturation is a term that has been used in different ways. Inculturation has been used to mean tribalism, that is, where a local church is concerned only with the growth of its own

people while overlooking the unity and growth of the universal church.⁷² Another wrong understanding of inculturation is the practise of bringing some cultural values to liturgical celebrations.⁷³ These ways in which some people understand inculturation does not capture fully, the meaning of the term. According to Waliggo, Inculturation is “the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation ever more understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time.”⁷⁴ This implies that inculturation has to do with the expression of Christ’s teaching and Christian life and doctrine in the thought patterns of each people or culture. In that sense, the outcome of inculturation is that the Christian message becomes part and parcel of the people’s culture, and the culture is transformed through the message.

Inculturation covers the whole life of a community including the personal, religious, cultural, spiritual, economic, political and social aspects. Hence, inculturation would involve destroying anything that divides the lives of Christians. It aims at building an integration of mind, heart and every other aspect of the person. This is also the understanding of inculturation by the African Synod Fathers, who see inculturation as “a movement towards full evangelization. It seeks to dispose people to receive Jesus Christ in an integral manner. It touches them on the personal, cultural, economic and political levels so that they can live a holy life....”⁷⁵ This implies that inculturation involves a profound incarnation, by which the church becomes part of a given

⁷² This is the definition that I gathered from some of my informants, whom I asked, what is inculturation?

⁷³ This is what is practised in many churches, example is liturgical dance, in the name of inculturation.

⁷⁴ John Mary Waliggo, “Making a Church that is truly African,” in Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency, Nairobi: St Paul Publications, 1986, pp. 11-13.

⁷⁵ Pope John Paul II, The Church in Africa, Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 1995, n. 62.

society. According to Bishop Peter Sarpony, "inculturation is best defined as incarnation."⁷⁶ Inculturation should be based upon the mystery of the incarnation, seen not only as a mystery but as an event in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, our understanding of the mystery of the incarnation should serve as the solid foundation for understanding inculturation.

Incarnation presupposes the existence of two distinct realities, the divine reality and the human reality, which then become united to form a new and unique reality in Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. In this union, neither reality is destroyed, downgraded or absorbed. Yet each is enriched and mysteriously transformed by the other. Inculturation involves two realities: the gospel message and a particular culture. Both of these aspects are united to form a new and unique way of life for a particular people of a particular culture, in our case for the Igbos. Neither of these two realities should be destroyed or downgraded in the Igbo community, but each should be enshrined and enriched by the other.

In the words of Pope Paul VI, "the Christian faith has come to us through the further accretions of the cultures of the European Missionaries, who have evangelized us,"⁷⁷ hence the gospel message needs to be presented to the Igbo Christians in their own cultural context. This calls for the identification of the European cultural forms through which the Christian faith was framed, expressed and transmitted to the Igbos. We need to recognise them and reexpress them in the Igbo cultural values and terms.

Hence, Inculturation does not simply, or even primarily, mean finding suitable cultural expressions for our Christian faith as is done in many places today. The finding of suitable expressions is only the fruit of inculturation. Inculturation has to do with the incarnational union

⁷⁶ Sarpong, Peter K., "Inculturation and the African Church," in *Shalom* 6(2), 1988, p. 78.

⁷⁷ Pope Paul VI, "Address to the Inaugural Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar Meeting," (SECAM) 1969.

between Christ and the Igbo culture. As John Paul II puts it, “inculturation for Africans has to do with bringing Christ into the very centre of African life, and lifting up all African life to Christ.”⁷⁸ Inculturation has to do with seeing the whole of culture itself, as the “fertile soil” in which the Good News is planted, which culture fertilizes; and from which culture draws nourishment in a process of mutual enrichment. For the Igbos, inculturation means incarnation of Jesus Christ in the Igbo culture.

3.3 THE CONTEMPORARY IGBO CHRISTIANS

Looking at the Igbos today, there are wars, discriminations, individualism and all sorts of atrocities. The most painful “atrocities” among most of the Igbo Christians is their “double life attitude.” They attend church service in the morning and in the evening they are at the traditional priest’s house. Many carry around with them traditional protective charms along side their holy water. There is separation in the people’s life between what they do and what they profess. They are good people in the church and different people in their homes and working places. They see the gospel message as not able to solve their life problems; hence, when a problem befalls them, they go to the traditional priest for the solution. According to Rev. Fr. Brosnan, “the Igbos are devoted Christians and are devoted to their traditional religion. By this I mean, that they go to church and also are faithful to their traditional beliefs example “juju” practise.”⁷⁹ An Igbo Christian lives in two different religions that is, Christian and traditional. He or she does not know which one to choose and which one to leave behind. One wonders, what is the problem with Igbo

⁷⁸ Pope John Paul II, “Address to the Kenyan Bishops,” Nairobi, May 7th, in AFER, p.198.

⁷⁹ Rev. Fr. Declan Brosnan has been a missionary priest among the people for over twenty years. Also he lectured in the Major Seminary among the people. He gave me the information during my interview with him.

Christians? Surely, the problem is not with the Igbos nor with Christ, but with the way Christ is presented to them. Ozigboh observes that the early missionaries saw the Igbo religion as mere paganism, heathenism, fetishism, or idolatry. The tendency was to destroy all that was in the Igbo traditional religion and replace it with Christianity. As a result of this destruction, the missionaries created a vacuum that has not yet been filled up. Thus, we see the people running back to their traditions to fill the gaps.⁸⁰ The missionaries thought they had succeeded, not knowing that they only cut the stem while the root was still left behind. This neglect of the culture of Igbos during evangelization is evident today in the lives of the Igbos. Hence the need for inculturation.

3.3.1 NEED FOR INCULTURATION

If inculturation is nothing other than the incarnation of Jesus Christ in the various cultures, we may ask: is it possible for Christ to be incarnated in the Igbo culture? This question demands distinguishing between the message of Jesus in the Gospels, and the presentation of Jesus to a particular church with a particular culture. Another question is, is inculturation necessary at all? This question calls for an examination of the contemporary Igbo Christians which we have done above, the scripture and the teachings of the Magisterium of the Church, and theological reflections.

There are two aspects of Christian spirituality among the Igbos. That is, Christian spirituality as presented by the early missionaries and Christian spirituality as lived by the indigenous Igbos. A distinction needs also to be made between Christian spirituality as contained in the Scripture and that presented by the early missionaries to the Igbos. The scriptural

⁸⁰ Ikenga R. A. Ozigboh, Roman Catholicism in South Eastern Nigeria 1885- 1931: A Study in Colonial Evangelism, Onitsha: Etukokwu Publishers Ltd, 1990, pp. 36-40.

spirituality as seen in the New Testament is influenced by and rooted in Jewish and Greek cultures, while the Christian spirituality that the missionaries presented to the Igbos was influenced by European culture. These distinctions are necessary to make in order to have an effective Inculturation. Though all these different spiritualities contain the essential elements of Christian spirituality, the way they were presented to the different people such as Jews, Greek and Europeans, differs due to cultural influences. This implies that Christian spirituality can also be presented in many other cultures, as long as the essential Christian elements are retained. Hence, Pope Paul VI asked: “does the church in Africa retain a certain Christian religious form that was brought in from outside, and which makes it, as it were, a stranger and pilgrim among its people?”⁸¹ Pope Paul urges that where the answer is yes, the things that make Christianity strange to the people need to be identified and expressed in the people’s cultural values and elements. This encourages us to develop a model for an Igbo Christian spirituality.

3.3.2 *SCRIPTURAL BASIS OF INCULTURATION*

The Scripture, especially the New Testament, makes us see the need for inculturation. Christ was fully inculturated, in the sense that he was fully divine and fully human, yet there was no division in his life. For some scholars, Christ’s life is the source and model of inculturation. He showed what inculturation is through his life. According to the New Testament, Christ’s first step towards inculturation, understood as incarnation, consisted in a self- emptying (cf., Phil 2:6-11; Jn 1:10,14). Thus by incarnation, Christ emptied himself, not of his nature as God, but of the divine mode of operating. As Okure holds,

⁸¹ Pope Paul VI, “Address to the 4th Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) Meeting,” 1975.

he did this in order to create space in himself substantially, for the humanity which he was to assume, own and live as a full human being. This is a mystery, which we accept in faith, but it constitutes an integral part, a necessary aspect of inculturation. Christ's divinity, somehow, had to allow for his humanity.⁸²

Christ's self-emptying was followed by his taking on our humanity through the process of conception by a woman (Gal 4:4), birth, growth, and learning (Lk 2:51-52). Christ's assumed humanity did not exist in a cosmic vacuum, but within a specific historical culture. Jesus was a Jew (Jn. 4:9) and a Galilean Nazarene (Jn 1:45-46; 7:52). In other words, Jesus assumed and lived the Jewish cultural life of his day, identifying himself concretely with his people. He spoke their language, ate their food, wore their clothes, and submitted himself to the worthy ideals and practices of their culture and religion (Lk 2:22-24, 41-42). He mixed freely with everybody, even with sinners, visiting their homes and bringing salvation to these homes (Lk19:1-10). Jesus used the Jewish people's life experiences, their concepts and their ordinary activities such as, fishing, sowing and baking bread (cf. Matt 13.3-51), as the medium for revealing and teaching about the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. He imported nothing, either from imperial Rome or from Greece, to use as the medium for proclaiming the Good News to his people. Jesus also used the Jewish normal social and religious celebrations as the natural settings for revealing to them his true identity (Jn 2:1-11), or for instituting the sacraments such as the Eucharist at the Passover, and the imparting of the Holy Spirit or Confirmation at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

When the Gentiles joined the early church, there arose a problem and need for inculturation. The question was, who was Jesus? Who was he to the Gentiles? Was salvation to be found in Jesus Christ or in the law? These questions gave rise to the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). Hence Teresa Okure says, "inculturation for the New Testament Christians arose as

⁸² Teresa Okure, "Inculturation: Biblical/Theological Bases" in 32 Articles Evaluating Inculturation of Christianity in Africa, Teresa Okure, Paul Van Thiel et alii, eds., Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1990, p. 55.

an indirect, but natural consequence of living their faith in Jesus of Nazareth, accepted as the Messiah, the Christ, God's unique and final agent of salvation for all peoples of the human race."⁸³

The early church also followed the same pattern which Jesus took and this made way for the Gentiles to be Christians without needing to observe the Torah of the Jews. For St. Paul, whatever exists, whatever is good in culture and creation, comes from God and exists for God through Christ (Rom 11:33-36). Hence the early church teachers felt quite free to use the Gentile concepts and life experiences in proclaiming the gospel, as the need arose. For instance, they applied certain Hellenistic titles and mythic conceptions to Christ: for example, *Pantokrator*, that is, Almighty (2 Cor 6:18; Rev 1:8), and the *anthropos* myth (1Cor 15:21-22, 45-49). By so doing they elevated these myths and titles and gave them a new and full meaning.

During his ministry to the Greek people, Paul made reference to Greek poets, philosophers and to the "unknown God" of the Athenians in Acts 17:22-32. Hence, scripture shows the need for inculturation of Christianity in every culture, because Christianity does not mean a set of external and imported practices to be performed, but a way of life to be adopted and lived in every culture (cf. Rom 6:1-23; Acts 9:2). For Paul, creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility not of its own will, but by the will of him who subjected it in hope: because creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay, and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom 8:19-21; 2Cor 5:19; also see Col 1:15-20). Every culture is "created" by God and thus all are to be redeemed in Christ.

⁸³ Teresa Okure, *Op. Cit.*, p. 60.

3.3.3 CHURCH DOCUMENTS ON THE LOCALIZATION OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE

As we can see from the above section, from the onset of the Church, the Magisterium has always laid emphasis on inculturation of the Christian message. Jesus himself inculturated his message, and the early church followed suit. In the past centuries, especially the 19th and 20th Centuries, the popes have emphasised the importance of inculturation. Among these popes, we will deal with the documents of a few of them, especially those concerning the church in Africa.

According to Pope Pius XII, “the church from the beginning down to our own time has always followed this wise practice: let not the Gospel on being introduced into any new land destroy or extinguish whatever its people possess that is naturally good, just or beautiful.”⁸⁴ In other words, the church should not make people aliens to their own culture. However, there are some practices of some cultures that do not suit the gospel message. Such cultural practices should be recognised and transformed; that is what the gospel message should do to a culture. Such practices should not be used as a reason for thwarting inculturation, but instead, to justify it. Thus Pope Paul VI says, “first your church must be first of all catholic, that is, it must be entirely founded upon the identical, essential, constitutional patrimony of the teaching of Christ.”⁸⁵ This implies that, the church must first of all be rooted in the teaching of Jesus, and then incarnated in the people’s culture. This proves also that the time has come for the gospel to be inculturated in the Igbo culture. The church, among the Igbos, has been fully catholic with catholic traditions. What is now needed is that:

⁸⁴ Pope Pius XII, *Evangelii Praecones*, 1951 in The Popes and the Missions: Four Encyclical Letters, London: Sword of the Spirit Publications, 1952, pp. 66-70.

⁸⁵ Pope Paul VI, “Address to the Inaugural of SECAM,” at Kampala in AFER, 11 (4) 1969, p. 404.

the expression, that is, the language and mode of manifesting this one faith, may be manifold. Hence, it may be original, suited to the tongue, the style, the character, the genius and the culture of the one who professes this one faith. From this point of view, a certain pluralism is not only legitimate, but desirable.⁸⁶

Thus Paul VI says that inculturation of the Christian life in the fields of pastoral, ritual, didactic and spiritual activities is not only possible, but is even favoured by the church. Thus, he supports the case for an African Christianity and in our case, an Igbo Christian Spirituality. Through this, he also gives us the method for inculturation, which is that the church must be first catholic, rooted in the teaching of Christ according to catholic faith, followed by inculturation.

Furthermore, Pope John Paul II, in many of his encyclicals and addresses to Africa, has called upon African Bishops to see to the inculturation of the Gospel, and the Africanization of the church. As the Pope says “the gospel, certainly is not identified with (particular) cultures, ... [it] transcends them all. But, the kingdom that the gospel proclaims is lived by men [people] deeply tied to a culture; the construction of the kingdom cannot dispense with borrowing elements of human cultures.”⁸⁷

In short, for the Magisterium, inculturation of the gospel in Africa should be a priority and an urgent need. But one thing needs to be kept in mind: inculturation of the gospel and Christian life do not mean fixing things together. It is not a replacing of certain Christian elements with African elements, but it means allowing Christ to be incarnated in Africa. In this case, the culture will provide the flesh for the incarnation. Through this, the culture is challenged and transformed.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

⁸⁷ Pope John Paul II, “Inculturation / Africanizing of evangelization,” Address to Zairean Bishops, 1980.

3.3.4 *THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR INCULTURATION*

The need for inculturation is not only the concern of Scripture and Magisterium, but also a theological concern. According to Okure, “theologically speaking, inculturation belongs to the very core of the history of the fulfilment of the church’s universal mission of evangelization. Though seen as a twentieth century resurgence, inculturation was a concern of the early church.”⁸⁸

The theological basis for understanding inculturation as the incarnation of Christ in a particular culture lies in the provision made by God himself in creation, in the mystery of the incarnation- redemption (the Christ event, the paschal mystery), and in that of the church. From the moment of creation, all of humanity was destined for God, since humanity was created in the “image” and “likeness” of God (Gen 1:26). When humanity forfeited this divine destiny, through the original sin (Gen 3), in the fulness of time, God in Christ (Gal 4:4) became incarnate. He became human to assume, to transform from within, and to save and restore humanity. When the time had fully come, God sent forth his son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption (Gal 4:4-5). Thus inculturation has its origin in God who created all human beings and, to certain extent, all human cultures. Also, he wished to save all people in all cultures by sending his son, Jesus Christ.

Also, according to faith, the church is universal because it embraces peoples from every tribe, tongue, nation, and culture (Rev 5:9). But, this universality becomes a physical reality only when the church is seen to embrace all cultures in their concrete manifestations, instead of adopting one culture as the norm to which all other members from other cultures have to conform. Therefore, theologically, Christ’s message should be lived by every human being in every culture. But we can ask, how can we make this message a reality in the Igbo culture? This is the goal of

⁸⁸ Teresa Okure, *Op. Cit.*, p. 55.

the next section.

3.4 *TOWARD AN IGBO CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY*

Having seen the need of inculturation we will in this section, attempt to develop a model for an Igbo Christian spirituality. This model aims at helping an Igbo Christian believer to be fully African and fully Christian. In the indigenous Igbo Spirituality, fullness of life is the breath that inspires everything. This desire is not contrary to the gospel, for Jesus says that he has come so that we may have life to the full (cf. John 10:10). This means that in all that Jesus did his aim was to help believers attain fullness of life in God. At the centre of an Igbo Christian spirituality is God, who is understood to be life, the source and giver of life and the creator of everything. God creates and gives us life through Jesus Christ, who has reached the fullness of life and thus is the Perfect Ancestor.⁸⁹ Jesus as Perfect Ancestor, should lead and show us the way to the fullness of life which the Igbos desire. In Jesus Christ, we have all we need to attain fullness of life. To help us attain fullness of life, Christ gives us the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to walk on this way of fullness of life without fear or trembling. Through the Spirit, one is able to follow Jesus on this way of fullness of life. Hence, this spirituality is trinitarian in nature.

In this spirituality, human life on earth is seen not as the Igbos see it, that is, an end, but as a means which leads one to life in God. This fullness of life is reached when we are in communion with God: a sharing in the divine life of God, who wishes to have communion with human beings. The only way to attain this communion is through Jesus Christ, the Perfect Ancestor, who lived on earth and reached fullness of life. Jesus through his life and teaching

⁸⁹ Jesus Christ as a perfect ancestor has all the qualities which the Igbos attribute to their ancestors as discussed in chapter two above. But unlike the Igbos' ancestors, he is divine and perfect in all things. The Igbos' ancestors are limited by their nature but Christ is perfect in everything because he is divine.

revealed to us what fullness of life is and how to reach it. Hence, by following him and obeying his words contained in the Gospel and teaching of the church, by being attentive to his daily revelation in our life, and by listening to the Holy Spirit which Jesus has poured in our hearts, we will achieve this fullness of life.

An Igbo Christian spirituality sees the human person as becoming as it is in indigenous Igbo spirituality. In this model of spirituality, the human person has the potentialities through the Holy Spirit to reach fullness of life. Nobody is seen as useless or incapable of reaching fullness of life because already we share, through our nature, in the divine life. This also calls for the respect of every human being. Each human being's dignity has to be respected. This dignity lies in the call which every one has received, the call to attain fullness of life- in other words, the call to have communion with God. Every Igbo person has this call and can reach this goal; hence the need to respect every person's dignity.

As God is life and human life comes from God, life should be seen in its totality. In the Indigenous Igbo Spirituality, there is no separation between the natural and supernatural, spiritual and physical; everything is seen as a whole. An Igbo Christian spirituality is one where there is no separation between the sacred and the profane, the secular and the religious, the material and the immaterial. Also, the human person is seen as a whole, without any division among the different aspects of the human being. The different aspects; spiritual, social, physical and psychological are all parts of the one person. In the process of pursuing the fullness of life, all aspects are integral to this life. If one aspect or part is ignored the goal of fullness of life is frustrated.

For the Igbos, human life comes to existence and is nurtured in the family and community. Thus Igbo Christian spirituality should encourage community and communal living. The community helps one to live out the values through which one attains fullness of life. In the Igbo Christian spirituality, this community lies more in the church than in the traditional community.

In this sense, the local community and the church community must have the same moral values. In other words, there should be an inculturation of the traditional values and the Christian values, which to a certain extent, contain the same moral values. Traditional values should be seen and evaluated from Christ's teaching.

Igbo spirituality encourages care for everything created; human beings, trees, animal, the sea, fishes in the sea, the environment, land, all physical and spiritual beings. For the traditional Igbo person, everything participates in the life of God and helps to enhance a person's life. Every living thing, both physical and spiritual, helps other living things to attain fullness of life. This care for everything is also embedded in Christian Spirituality; hence at creation, God told the human being to take care of everything (Gen. 1:28-30). The underlying principle for this care is Christ's love for everything. Everything deserves to be loved and cared for because everything plays a role in helping human beings to attain fullness of life.

The morals upholding this spirituality are fidelity, compassion, solidarity, respect, hospitality, charity, trust, confidence, etc. These values are both traditional and Christian, but they must be seen from the point of view of Christ. Through these values, one gives himself totally to Christ who came that we might have fullness of life (John 10:10). Also, in these values one gives himself or herself to the community. By observing these moral values, one asserts oneself and develops one's self fully. In short, what is demanded in this spirituality is a total commitment to the gospel. The Igbo traditional values which are not different from Christian values, should be seen in the light of the gospel.

Another important value in Igbo spirituality is prayer and liturgical celebration. In the Igbo traditional worship, prayer, sacrifice and offering are important mediums through which the Igbos have communion with God. In Igbo Christian spirituality, prayer and liturgical celebrations; which embrace offering and sacrifice seen in the light of Christ are the ways through which we share

deeply in the life of God; they are keys to attaining fullness of life. Through prayer and liturgical celebrations, Igbo Christians communicate with God and shares in the divine life which liturgical celebrations give. Also, listening to and reading the word of God in the Scripture is a necessary element for this spirituality. There are things from other religions that can also help an Igbo Christian in his spiritual life. In other words an Igbo Christian spirituality is that which should encourage an attitude of openness to other religions, such as, Bahai faith, Islam, and other non Christian religions. This implies that Igbo Christian spirituality should be viewed from the perspective of interreligious dialogue (see figure 1).

For the Igbos, spiritual interpreters and directors are very important. These specialists help the traditional Igbo to know whether they are in the right direction or not. Similarly, Igbo Christian spirituality needs dedicated spiritual interpreters and directors. This implies the importance of priests and those who are advanced in spiritual matters; whom the indigenous Igbos would call elders.

To sum up, an Igbo Christian spirituality should incorporate fully the idea of God as life. The goal of both Christian and traditional Igbo spirituality is to attain fullness of life, which is to have communion with God. This is the breath that should inspire an authentic Igbo Christian spirituality. It is a spirituality embedded in the Trinity where the Father is life, source and creator of everything. This life reaches us through the mediation of the son, and we live and attain the fullness of life in the Holy Spirit. The Igbo Christian spirituality should be viewed as that which cherishes communion with others, prayer, liturgical celebrations, hospitality, honesty, respect for one another, and other traditional values. It is a spirituality that should encourage interreligious dialogue. It should be a holistic spirituality, where there is no dichotomy between the sacred and profane. Similarly a culturally relevant Christian spirituality should encourage the respect for the human person as a whole.

3.5. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This essay attempts to provide a model and perspective for an Igbo Christian spirituality. Contemporary Igbo Christians exhibit “a double religious consciousness.” They are faithful to traditional religion and find it hard to be completely faithful to the Christian message. An attempt has been made to search for the roots of the problem and it has been found out that the Christian message has not been incarnated in the Igbo culture and pattern of thought. For the traditional Igbo people, the concept of life is the principle from which all actions and motivations spring. In everything, an Igbo person seeks to attain fullness of life. Thus all cultural values, activities, practices, norms and customs converge in reaching this goal. In Christianity, one aims at union with the Trinity. By means of values and practices, a Christian believer strives to reach this union through the Trinity.

Critical examination of the Christian and traditional Igbo spiritualities has revealed that both spiritualities share the same goal: namely, to help adherents live a fulfilled life so as to have an eternal life after death. However, the Christian and traditional Igbo approaches to this goal differ. While traditional Igbo spirituality uses a *down-up* approach, that is, from visible things to invisible things, Christian spirituality uses an *up-down* approach, which means, it starts from invisible things to visible things. Thus, we are challenged to inculturate the Christian message into the thought pattern of the Igbo people without watering down the message and “detrribalizing” the local people. The early Missionaries did not follow the principles of inculturation fully. They tried to destroy the traditional Igbo culture in order to plant the Christian message. This essay has attempted to provide a model for an Igbo Christian spirituality for both pastoral and missionary work among the Igbos. This model may also provide a framework for inculturating the gospel message in particular and Christianity in general in the Igbo culture. The question that remains to

be answered is, how can we go about this inculturation?

Inculturation is a union of two distinct elements or cultures, where neither of the elements is destroyed, so there is a need for a study of the two elements to be inculturated. Thus the first step to inculturation is knowledge about the Christian message and the Igbo culture. A sound study of Scriptures is not only necessary, but also indispensable. This will help us to come close to the person of Jesus Christ, to appreciate his own values and to be filled with the Holy Spirit, because inculturation is the work of the Holy Spirit. As we draw close to Christ and grasp his values, Christ fills us with the Holy Spirit, who enables us carry out the task of inculturation effectively. As a result of all this, the local people need to be educated in the Christian message and in their local culture.

The people need to accept their culture. In inculturation, acceptance of self (culture) is very important because it helps to bring the culture for inculturation. All negative attitudes toward the traditional culture ought to be avoided, for unless we see ourselves, our values, our customs and our way of living as good in themselves, we will never want to give these to God, or to place them in the service of Christian worship. This does not mean that we will not distinguish between the good elements from the bad elements. What we are saying is that we must first accept our culture and then make the distinction between the cultural aspects that are relevant to Christianity and those that are not.

Furthermore, inculturation involves getting rid of all fears. There is always the fear of going wrong and of betraying the church. Inculturation, then, calls for a love of the church, so as to dare taking the challenge of implementing inculturation process. Inculturation calls us also to empty ourselves of some of our previously received theological biases which have become obsolescent with time, especially those that are not in accord with Vatican II.

Lastly, inculturation must take into account the people's problems and aim at helping them

solve their problems. These problems and their solutions embedded in Christianity need to be identified. Inculturation should not be practiced in a vacuum or be a purely speculative exercise. It must be practical and concrete, its roots embedded in the people's economic, social, political and other daily life experiences. For a proper inculturation to be effective, the people need to be involved. This implies the participation of the people or the community and not the exclusive project of a few persons or an individual. Thus for a proper inculturation, we need to update our theology, be educated in the local cultures that are to be inculturated, accept the traditional cultures, be acquainted with the Scripture, love the church, and be filled with the Holy Spirit, who is the principal agent for inculturation.

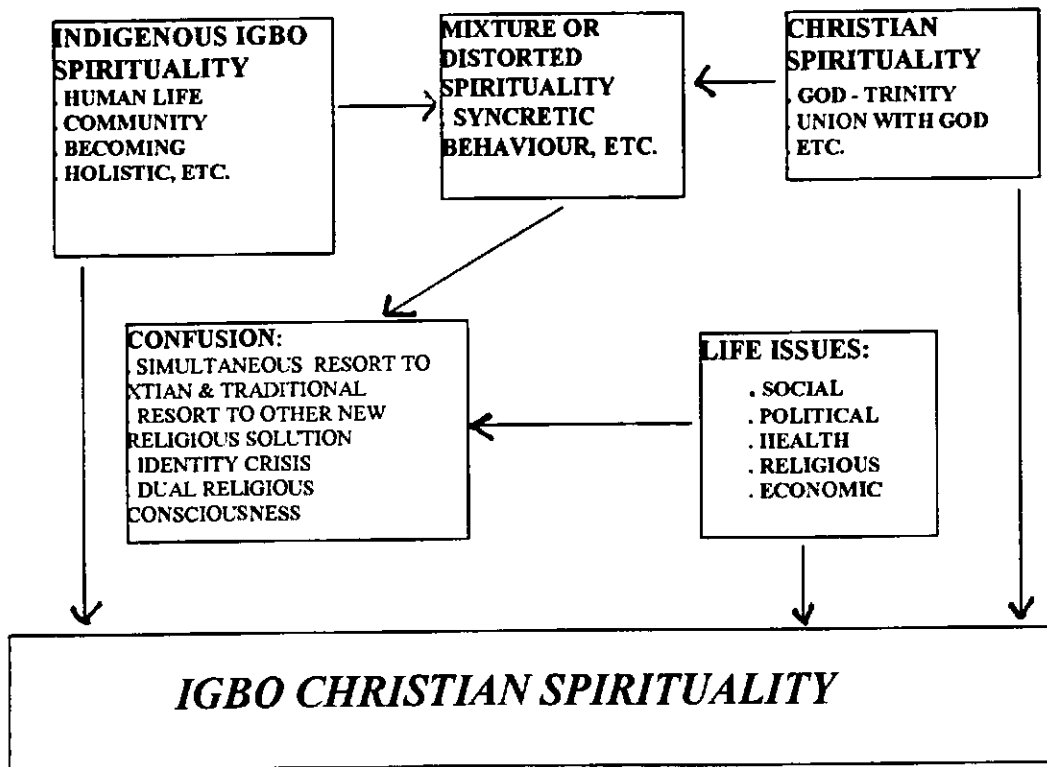
3.6. CONCLUSION

A close look at the Indigenous Igbo spirituality shows that it has great values that can enhance Christian spirituality. The traditional way of life of the Igbos has existed even before the coming of Christianity to Igbo land. Thus, the indigenous cultural base for spirituality need not be destroyed or obscured by any pastoral or missionary activity among the people. The local cultural values have been the means through which God communicated himself to the Igbos and through these values, the Igbos have had communion with God. However, there are some loop holes in the Igbo culture when compared to Christian teaching and these loop holes are the things that Christ has come to redeem among the Igbos.

In this essay, we call and advocate for inculturation not only of spirituality, but of all aspects of Christianity, in Igbo land in particular and Africa in general. The Christian message has a lot to contribute to the lives of the Africans, especially when it is made part and parcel of the people's life and cultures. We believe, to certain extent, that unfaithfulness to the gospel message

among the Igbos, and most of the problems which the Igbos and other Africans encounter today, can be attributed to the failure to inculturate Christianity and its message in African cultures. Christianity is still alien to African cultural contexts and thus cannot be faithfully lived among the people who are notoriously religious and whose religion permeates all their life activities. As long as Christianity is still alien to the people, it cannot play an effective role in solving the problems Africans are facing today. Therefore, we strongly recommend that inculturation should be given priority in all pastoral and missionary work.

FIGURE 1: MODEL FOR IGBO CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY



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APPENDIX 1: INFORMANTS INTERVIEWED

Rev. Fr. Brosnan Declean, O.S.A.

Rev. Fr. Chidi Obi

Rev. Fr. John Agu

Bro. Francis Odigwe

Bro. Emmanuel Nwadike

Bro. Stephen Ugwu

Bro. Canice Azuoma

Sr. Ebere Iyeh

Sr. Maureen Felicitas Obiorah

Sr. Philippo Obi

APPENDIX 2 : Key Informant Interview Guide

1. What is your experience with the Contemporary Igbo Christians with whom you have lived and worked?
2. How can you evaluate the Contemporary Igbo Christians with regard to their:
 - faith
 - and living out the faith?
3. Do you think that they practice their traditional culture?
4. Looking at the life of the Contemporary Igbo Christians, do you think that the first missionary efforts of those who evangelised the Igbos are bearing much fruit?
 - Please explain.
5. How can effective inculturation of Christianity be realised among the Igbo?

APPENDIX 3: MAP OF THE IGBO TERRITORY

