

THE THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF *IKPU-ALA* AS A SOCIAL JUSTICE  
VALUE IN IGBO CATHOLIC CHURCH (NIGERIA)

BY  
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## DECLARATION

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

Okey Jude Uche

June 23, 2016.

DEDICATED TO MOM MARGARET OGOETO ENENDU

&

GRACE AMAKA OKEKE

&

The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus

For teaching me how to live: “Mary treasured up all these things

And pondered them in her heart” (Lk. 2:19).

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## ABSTRACT

The Igbo are one of the ethno-cultural language groups in Nigeria who live on both sides of River Niger. Every human society is blessed with a culture that is properly hers and the Igbo's is not different. The Igbo society is richly endowed with enviable cultures, traditions and religious values. It is a nation with deep religious and moral code, *Omenala*, which permeated every aspect of their lives. In their worldviews, the world of the spirits and that of the material are together, separate though but at the same time, intertwined. However, the early missionaries and colonialists in their encounter with the Igbo traditional customs started from non-recognition of the Igbo cultural and religious values to condemnation and total destruction of Igbo traditional and religious values as well as their symbolisms. They gave the impression that Igbo has no history, laws, morality and therefore, no social order or social organizations. The total disregard and destruction of the cultures, traditions and religion of the Igbo people has resulted in discrepancies between the private and public lives of the Igbo Christian. The aim of this study is to examine *Ikpu-ala* as an Igbo social justice value system and to investigate if Igbo social value system could be integrated into Christian social value.

In the study, the researcher used sample populations from a cross-section of Igbo communities. This approach enabled the researcher to generate data from large pool of respondents. The methodology of this empirical research was modelled after the Richard Osmer's and Ray Anderson's model in practical theology. The analysis of the data generated in this study showed that *Ikpu-ala* as an Igbo social justice value system has been and is still an effective tool in the administration of justice among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria. The result of the study also showed that *Ikpu-ala* is integral to social justice and reconciliation in Igbo land. The result of the study also indicated that *Ikpu-ala* with its theological value can assist the Igbo Church in the Sacrament of reconciliation.

## CHAPTER ONE

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION:

For centuries, western scholars have either largely ignored or have commonly oversimplified the nature of Igbo/African society (Green 1964, Basden 1966, Radcliffe-Brown 1976). Traditionally western writers have focused upon the myths, gods, and rituals of the Igbo, while missing the more substantive underpinnings of social and religious life. The Igbo moral conception of humanity is far more complex and nuanced than has been previously appreciated. The sum total and substance of Igbo moral philosophy draws upon numerous, deep-seated sources of social, spiritual, familial, judicial, and theological concepts that are aligned in ways which are radically different from those seen in European or North American liberal democracies.

The Igbo concept of justice is far more nuanced; the ideal state is not one of severe punishment in isolation, but of restoration to wholeness of the entire society. The underpinnings of this radical (by western standards) ideal of justice are drawn from the complex Igbo conception of the nature of man and his relationship to the greater society. This concept involves notions of personal identity, justice, freedom, destiny, gods, ancestors, social ethics, and the nature of man's relationship with the land.

At the root of the Igbo concept of justice is the idea of the land as the inalienable centre for defining human relationships, individual transgression, and communal redemption. The words *ala* and *ani* are identical expressions derived from the dialects of the northern and southern members of the Igbo society. These words literally translate into the English word *land*. In Igbo cosmology *ala* is central to any discussion of justice or social relationships within the social and political structures. In traditional Igbo society (Johnson 1970:95), land is greatly respected. In the rituals for celebrating the passage from childhood to adulthood in traditional Igbo society, land is given to the young man as a symbol of his maturity. In return, this new adult member of society is charged with

the responsibility of safeguarding and up-keeping (*omenala* or *omenani*) the land. Therefore, a person who is faithful to the land is committed to social norms and obligations and stewardship of the land serves as a living metaphor for the Igbo system of justice and the ideal of restorative justice or *ikpu-ala*.

Igbo society is deeply traditional. Decision-making is largely based upon consensus and an acceptance of social norms that are grounded on the Igbo faithfulness to their history. This fidelity is manifested by the fact that the Igbo continue to borrow norms, rules, regulations, and laws from previous generations. A key differentiator between Igbo and western society is that in Igbo society individual roles and society governance are largely defined by the goal of maintaining social continuity and ensuring the stability of the multigenerational relationship between the people and the land. Therefore in Igbo society, *ala* or *ani* (land) is an important factor in interpersonal and group relationships.

Drawing upon this concept of multigenerational fidelity to the society, another important element of the Igbo social justice system includes the town council of elders who are representatives of the population that are charged with maintaining social order. These elders are closely linked to the native population and their members are drawn from the relevant social community. This imparts a sense of ownership and inherent credibility to the system of social justice in the eyes of the members of the society. The elevation of the elders to their position as guardians of social order is further underpinned by the Igbo respect and deference to the elderly. Thus, as part of the maintenance of social order, the Igbo typically rely upon the elders of each community to manage grievances and settle disputes (Ottenberg 1971:246-269). Justice therefore is largely communal and social relationship-based, rather than based upon the interaction between the individual and the rule of law that forms the basis for the western judicial system.

*Ikpu-ala*, the Igbo paradigm for restorative justice, is not an isolated example of a judicial system that seeks a return to wholeness for the society. The biblical concept of justice is comparably grounded in the ideal that all of human behaviour is ultimately judged by the relationship between humankind and God. In this biblical concept of

justice, there is no other ideal to which justice must conform than that of maintaining the relationship between God and His people. This is well illustrated through the covenant between Yahweh and the Israelites in which God demonstrates that He is just through His actions and in the process He sets the standard for justice (Kaufmann 1961:22-33).

This relationship standard for biblical justice extends through Christian social teaching in the ideal that a person is both an individual and a social being, and that this dual nature is irrevocably linked to that of the individual's relationship with God and his fellow human beings. This is the starting point for Christian social teaching. Within Christian social teaching, the well being of the individual person is the basis, subject, and abiding purpose of every social institution (*Gaudium et Spes* [GS] 25). Therefore no person or entity has the right to destroy or diminish the individual for expediency or the supposed good of society. Conversely, individuals are materially and spiritually diminished when they seek to divorce their own interest from that of their community. Throughout the early Christian church, ex-communication was viewed as the most severe form of sanction; one in which separation from the relationship between the individual and their community constituted the ultimate punishment.

In 1988, in his address to the “*Ad Limina*” visit of the Bishops of Zimbabwe, Pope John Paul II demonstrated both his understanding of African cultures and values and the urgency of the challenges that faced the Catholic Church in Africa (John Paul II 1988). His Holiness observed that, “The good news ... takes the spiritual qualities and endowments of every age and nation and with supernatural riches it causes them to blossom, as it were, from within; it fortifies, completes and restores them in Christ” (GS 58). The nature of faith and ministry therefore is defined by relationships between the individual and the society, and the society and God. Faith is therefore not a superficial trapping, but a deep-seated, inextricable part of the definition of that society (Onwu 2002 & Oforchukwu 2011). In this process, faith becomes an incarnate part of the society and its social values. This process is called inculturation. John Paul II argued that the inculturation of faith cannot be reduced to merely adopting the externals of a given culture. True inculturation comes from within and ultimately consists of a renewal

of life under the indelible influence of grace. The evangelization of a culture, therefore, is not just geared toward that society's adoption of the external symbols of faith, but is a process by which faith becomes an inherent part of the definition of that society (Oforchukwu 2011:139-143).

The example of the difficulties and challenges of the Orlu Diocese demonstrate the complex nature of the church's inroads into African society. In 2000 the bishop of the Orlu Diocese in eastern Nigeria enacted a number of reforms that were geared toward making access to the church easier for members of the Igbo community. Some of the bishop's reforms were designed to purge the local church of practices that were viewed as vestigial aspects of paganism. These included changes such as the banning of Ozo-title taking (the process by which elders are distinguished as members of the social decision-making leadership) and the discontinuation of traditional final burial rites that linked the dead with their ancestors. New laws for the creation of multiple new parishes were also enacted that were intended to ensure greater proximity of parishioners to their places of worship (Oforchukwu 2011:139).

These reforms produced highly mixed results. The fast-track process for the creation of new parishes allowed lay people to build churches within their local communities. While this facilitated more local access to priests and obviated the need for long journeys to get to the regional church, it also placed the lay sponsor in a position of power over the priest and the parish community, creating a parallel power structure to that of the traditional elder councils and system of justice. Many communities became broken and estranged from their traditional systems of structure and governance, effectively becoming ungrounded from their traditional structures for decision-making. These communities often struggled with one another over asset settlements. The resulting social upheaval entangled the Diocese in unintended webs of social intrigue and instability that ultimately became economically unsustainable and pastorally insurmountable. There was a loss of the relative stability of the old parishes and in some cases the traditional social justice (*ikpu-ala*) was subverted (Synod 2000).

The subversion of the traditional structures for social justice and the new criteria for the establishment of parishes provided great opportunities for the wealthiest people, often people with questionable character and wealth derived from dubious sources, to promote themselves as the “god-fathers” of the new parishes. These wealthy people eventually became the sole funders of the parish who presided over their parishes (or made use of surrogate chairmen as their puppets) and dictated their direction. These “god-fathers” exercised enormous and capricious control over their parishes and their priests according to their selfish interests. The social order thus shifted from one couched in tradition to one in which virtually everything was up for grabs to the highest bidder. The end result of this process became the subversion of the traditional system of social justice as the wealthy took increasing control of the economic, political, social and religious fate of their communities.

As the traditional social order was undermined, familial disputes and intra-familial competition were renewed, families became divided, and the family authority structure (a key ingredient in Igbo political system) was questioned. *Ofo*, the symbol of authority in Igbo political structure (Ahiajoku 1988), was debased and a new social order, based on the idea that money could buy authority, was imposed by the “god-fathers” on the Church membership and leadership. This eventually led to the disillusionment of the parishioners and cast doubts on the Church’s ability to be a community of believers (Acts 2: 42-45) rather than a community that was controlled by the wealthy. The priests of most of the communities were subsequently seen as the pawns of those of men/women with wealth of questionable origin and morally questionable character (Ahiajoku 1988).

Clearly the well-intentioned breaking of the traditional cultural order has had numerous unintended, downturn consequences. As a result of these changes the character of the Igbo church has been profoundly changed: many of the church communities have dissolved into factions. New generation churches have arisen amid accusations and counter accusations of one faction against another (Cf. Luke 12:50-53). Each accuses the other of denigrating the customs and cultural values of their

respective communities. In the process, the capacity of the church to speak to its people has been compromised. Traditional societal values and structures have succumbed to the corrosive influence of the wealthy and those who have sought to undermine the foundations of the social order for their own selfish benefit.

Under the worst of these circumstances, the behaviour at the level of the parishes has served to further undermine the greater social order. According to Achebe, the white man (the Church) is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act as one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (Achebe 1958:160). Even those who remained in the Church are grieving the absence of justice among the people of God. Questions about the relevance of the Church's celebration of the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation have been raised. Some of these rituals do not make a deep impression on the worshippers; hence they go to Church as a kind of social event while they go to the prayer houses (New Religious Movements) to feel connected and interact with God, the living, and the dead (ancestors). Of course, one of the problems is that many Catholics, especially in the hierarchy, believe that what they have received from the early missionaries is what Catholicism is all about. Any deviation from that is regarded as unorthodox and unacceptable (Ndiokwere 1994:37).

The Diocese of Orlu failed to incorporate *ikpu-ala* into the Church rituals or give serious thought about inculturation theology. The problem was formidable. In the Diocese, some objected on theological grounds. For example, some argued that it is not the Church's business to take up the political issues in the particular community because it may give a false impression that the Church is supporting one group against the other. Other objections are based on the fact that things appear to still be new. It will settle down with time and the priest, perhaps, has to interact with the people pastorally.

Furthermore, there was no justice, reconciliation, and peace commission in the Diocese to further the Church's role in peace capacity building, a condition necessary for effective evangelization. *Ikpu-ala* was not seen as laying the foundations for

forgiveness. It is a social value that focuses on establishing truth, acknowledging harm, and providing appropriate forms of compensation and punishment. Thus, justice becomes a balancing of rights of victims and offenders rather than taking a stand on the breaking of trust with a community. This is because *Ikpu-ala* (justice) is presented as a pre-requisite for reconciliation and peace-building. To this effect, justice is the retributive system in which the community takes up the responsibility of carrying out justice (Aagengnuo 2009). The importance of this approach in Igbo communities is that the system of ownership or rights in Igbo society clearly recognises the moral responsibilities involved as a result of membership in the community. The Igbo community is characterised by shared commitment on the part of its members to the realisation of some fundamental human purposes and by structures and activity appropriate to bringing this about, and within this context the judgement of justice is usually made (Uche 1985:22). In this case, *Ikpu-ala* as a justice value satisfies our sense of what is right but it does not hear us. It brings us peace as an absence of war but not peace as a harmonious ordering of differences (Aapenganuo 2009). The uncontrolled spiral of warring parishes in the Orlu Diocese stands as a tragic example of the unintended effects of the Church undermining the traditional social values of an African society. Invariably, inculturation has no other goal than helping every human person, of different cultures, to mature if it has taken root in the matrix of our being so that we may truly believe and love as Christians rooted in the authentic values of our own cultural traditions. However, Chapter four of this work will look more into the problems and challenges of inculturation.

As the Church seeks to exist and grow within Igbo society, the tensions between the influence of wealth and the maintenance of traditional societal values have threatened to tear the Church and the society asunder. In the search for the restoration of peace, harmony, and the sustainable presence of the Church in Igbo society, *ikpu-ala* seems to be both a social and spiritual concept that can successfully bridge this enormous gulf. The theological underpinnings of *ikpu-ala* and its relevance to the Church in general and the Orlu Diocese in particular may offer some important insights as to how the Church

can reclaim its position as a leader and teacher of the community while maintaining fidelity to traditional concepts of social order, decision-making, forgiveness, multigenerational continuity, and spiritual healing that mutually enhance the well-being of the community and of the Church. *Ikpu-ala* is an Igbo social concept that has essential pastoral implications for the Church and speaks to the centrality of the concept of the relationship between humankind, society, and God in the full realization of human and social potential.

This thesis explores the theological basis of the Igbo concept of *ikpu-ala* as a paradigm for restorative social justice. It examines the implications for this concept in the Catholic Church today and highlights how this intrinsically African social construct speaks directly to the affirmations contained within Jesus' message. The goals of this thesis are four-fold:

- I. It investigates *Ikpu-ala* as a social justice value and a force that has held the Igbo community together in peace and harmony for generations.
- II. It investigates *Ikpu-ala* as a method of social cohesion that has ensured the integrity of interpersonal relationships and reconciliation in Igbo society.
- III. It investigates the Church's theological approach to social justice and inculturation and its implication for the *Ikpu-ala*.
- IV. Finally, it establishes a pathway toward the integrated practice of justice by Igbo Christians.

A small subset population of Igbo communities was the subject of this analysis. This small group better enabled in-depth research and scientific study of the Igbo concept of *Ikpu-ala*. The targeted populations for this research were the Igbo clergy, laity, and non-Christians within the social group. This research used both comparative and polemical methods, as well as, the Osmer and IMRAD models for the descriptive and empirical study of *ikpu-ala* within the Igbo culture and the Igbo Catholic Church.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND

Most African scholars subscribe to the fact that African indigenous institutions of social control remain relevant in the affairs of the people (Elechi 2004, Anyacho and Ugal 2009). This is especially true of Igbo traditional society where the objective and purpose of this research lies. The African people's disappointment with the colonial powers and missionaries' onslaught on the traditional value systems, including social justice, caused the displacement and degeneration of the people's communitarian values. It also created continuing chaos in society and gave birth to numerous social, political, religious, economic, and moral/ethical problems.

Syed J. Hussain (2010), agreeing with Achebe, argued that the disrespect Christian missionaries showed towards the traditional cultural values and beliefs, which were generally suited to tribal society, created mayhem and disorder that will be studied by every generation of Igbo people. Essentially, the traditional ways of Igbo society were at variance with Christian philosophy of life and hence clashed with missionaries' well intended interventions. In other words, colonial agents and the missionaries' perception of the native's concept and practice of values of justice as alien, prone to abuse and corruption was antithetical to both Biblical and African concept and practice of justice.

The colonial masters and missionaries failed to understand that the African, and indeed the Igbo, traditional justice value system employs restorative and transformative principles in conflict resolutions. Victims, offenders, and the entire community are involved and participate in the assessment of harm and search for resolutions acceptable to all stakeholders. According to Achebe, missionaries "failed to understand that these (African) beliefs may form an integral part of an internally consistent system of thought and enable people to make sense of their everyday experience. For instance, the practice of *igbu ehi*, justice system and *omenala*, to name but a few, have social and economic implications for the orderly maintenance of social norms, so that its prohibitions may often profoundly affect everyday family and domestic life" (Oliver 1981:409).

Many scholars (Basden 1966, Green 1964, Meek 1937) before this time who have written about Igbo society and institutions conspicuously missed in their analyses the overriding influence that the Igbo native beliefs wield in the conception of justice/social control and the moral life of the community. Previous analyses have tended only to focus on the religious cum social influence of the Igbo institutions. Questions remain as to what constitutes justice and social order/control in a typical African traditional society such as the Igbos of South-East Nigeria. Is the Igbo traditional justice value capable of respecting and protecting the rights of suspects and litigants? To what extent can the Catholic Church (mainstream) inculturate the traditional values to enhance some of her methods in evangelization and governance so as to be fully incarnate in Igbo culture? In other words, is the Catholic Church in Orlu province capable of producing an integrated Igbo Christian?

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT:**

This Dissertation is a theological analysis of *Ikpu-Ala* as a social justice value in the Igbo Catholic Church in Nigeria. The problem is: how can *Ikpu-ala* be incorporated into the Igbo Catholic Church's social values without adulterating the message of Christ? To what extent is the Catholic theology of inculturation compatible with *Ikpu-ala* as a social justice value?

### **1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study aimed to achieve the following objectives through investigation of the theological role (analysis) of *Ikpu-Ala* as a social justice value in an Igbo society:

- (i) The need to examine the state of a traditional social justice system in a traditional Igbo society so as to bring out very important social values for consideration in this Dissertation.
- (ii) The need to investigate *Ikpu-ala* as a very important justice value and to define its relationship with the general Igbo concept of social justice so as to guide the integration of Christian and Biblical justice with the Igbo traditional concept of social justice.

- (iii) The need to identify the strengths and weaknesses of traditional *Ikpu-Ala* as a means of social justice vis-à-vis social control so as to guide theological analysis and formulation of an integrated concept of social justice compatible with Igbo Christians.
- (iv) The need to examine how Christianity has affected the traditional justice system and methods of social control so as to correct the missionary pitfalls that have confounded Christian understanding and application of *Ikpu-Ala*.
- (v) The need to formulate new Christian approaches, engagement, and interactions of Igbo Christians with their kith and kin in Igbo communities.
- (vi) The need to propose ways of integrating Christian social justice values with *Ikpu-ala* so as to bring about better social cohesion, understanding, fear of God, peace and harmony, social and human rights.
- (vii) The need to have integrated Igbo Christians living within Igbo communities as salt and light bearers.

### **1.5 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH**

In these days of increased interests in human anthropology, we must probe traditional concepts and institutions in depth, asking how meaningful they are for our concrete human life and for life in the society in which we find ourselves. This approach may pose grave dangers, but the authentic ecclesial and civic responsibility of our commitment requires that we embark on the road of experimentation and take risks which offer new possibilities that are in line with the modern Church outlook and reality.

Consequently, this research among other things investigated possible ways of inculturating *Ikpu-ala* so that the Church would not only become meaningful and useful to the lives of Igbo people but would also be a place where equality (as children of God) is both an aim and a goal. In other words, *Ikpu-ala* as a social justice value would become the cornerstone of interconnectivity of the community of adherents of Christ's message, as well as a goal that perpetually renews and reminds adherents that to belong to the Church is to become one's brother's/sister's keeper (Matthew 25:31-46). Inculturation of *Ikpu-ala* means an effort or a process which makes it possible for the

Church and its social teachings to become part of the life of adherents based on their cultural view and understanding of life, a life that does not create a dichotomy between private life and public life, between saints and sinners, and between the rich and the poor. Although many Igbo people do not understand the Church and her social justice system, yet they see the Church as a place where people are treated not for *who* they are, but for *what* they are.

Consequently, this study explored the Igbo contextual theology of *Ikpu-ala* with the aim of systemically reconstructing and re-evaluating Igbo juridical and legal systems, the people's praxis of *Ikpu-ala* in the face of numerous challenges, and the implications for Christianity, especially the Catholic Church in Igbo land. It aimed at finding ways to solve problems similar to those described above. For example, to tackle the problem of proper catechesis, its method and language should be both appropriate and adequate to impart social teachings. It has been said that values, morals, and ethics are inextricably tied together. Therefore, the Igbo concept of *Ikpu-ala* was treated in this research as an ethical theory of justice, which was repositioned to be compatible with Christian social justice. *Ikpu-ala* guides the Igbo people in conviviality and observance of the juridical and legal systems in their community. To this effect, chapter four is focused on *Ikpu-ala* as social justice in Igbo land that is compatible with Biblical and theological foundations.

Furthermore, to achieve our stated purpose, it was necessary to have a short review of the teachings of the Catholic Church on Social Justice, from early Christian times through Vatican II, especially the *magisterium*. Onwubiko considers the papal documents as the first official approval of the incarnation of the Church in Africa (Onwubiko 1992:92). The position of Vatican II touches on the family, social life, and traditional rites that mark important occasions (Isiuzoh 1998). This was the task of chapter five. The study also explored the Church's teachings on the social justice system as well as the Igbo understanding of social justice.

## **1.6 BIBLICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Bible as a book is the history of God's relationship with God's people. This concept of relationship is the core concept for understanding the Bible and the implications of *Ikpu-ala* as a social justice concept.

The stories of the Bible are understood in the context of interplay between God and his creation. The Christian understanding of God is increased as God's nature is revealed through the depths and complexities of God's relationship to all of creation. Our nature as God's people is understood, and judged, in terms of how we live out our relationship to God.

The fundamental concept of relationship is specifically defined by the term "covenant." There are two key ways in which the sense of covenant, of relationship, is understood. The first of these is a covenant offered by God as a gift. God makes a promise to his people which is an unconditional promise of God's love, grace, and blessings. The covenant was instituted when God created the world, blessed it, and pronounced it all "good" (Genesis 1). The history of this covenant throughout the Bible shows that God's relationship with human beings is both conditional and unconditional. God does act sometimes unconditionally towards human beings to manifest his grace, love, and mercy. This act of God does not depend on any human merit, but God's sovereign will and counsel. This is quite different from a covenant.

The covenant relationship is a conditional one based upon a legal contract, implying a two-way relationship. Both parties are bound by an "if-then" agreement. If one party does certain things, then the other party will fulfil other agreed obligations. God initiates the covenant, for it is not within the power of people to bargain equally with God.

This covenant relationship has huge implications for *Ikpu-ala* as a social justice value in Igbo cosmology and religion. We need to understand that the Igbo worldview is not far from the biblical world. For any person who infringes a moral norm in traditional Igbo society has not only the members of the community to fear for reprisals but also God and the spiritual beings. This is discussed in Chapter Four where the biblical and theological aspects of Igbo social justice are evaluated. Some Bible, *New International Version (NIV)* passages, such as (Leviticus 26:12; 19:11-37; Exodus 22: 25-27; 23:1-13;

Deut. 15:1-4; Matt. 23:1-12; 25:14-30; 31-46) and many more, were of great assistance in this research. This justice in the Bible is always relational: how a thing acts, or how a person relates to a standard of justice, that is, God. In biblical religion there is no order or fate beyond God to which things conform. God, the Most High, is the standard of justice and those properly related to God become just (Kaufmann 1961:22-33).

### **1.7 JUSTICE IN IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

The examination of the Igbo judicial and socio-political institutions is meant to show how interconnected the religious, social, political, and judicial beliefs and values are in Igbo traditional society. Social scientists generally believe that religion is concerned with sacred beliefs and practices. It is pre-eminently social; therefore, in established societies, religion is one of the most important institutional structures making up the total social system (Weber 1964: xxxvii-xxviii). Religion embodies the most sublime of human aspirations. It strengthens, defines, defends, and protects morality, and it is the source of public order and inner individual peace.

In relation to society, religion goes beyond our knowledge; it gives security beyond the guarantees of human relationship. Consequently, throughout the ages, religion has been the normal way of looking at the world and experiencing life itself. For that reason, it is found wherever people are. For people in any society then, religion is held as a part of their particular way of life that at the same time is coloured by what they regard as sacred. It is integrated so much into different areas of life that most languages, especially the Igbo language like most other African languages, do not have a particular word for religion. They only have words for religious ideas, practices, and objects or places. Hence, in an almost spontaneous way, Africans link their lives with the world of the unseen; they recognize the universal presence of God, the Source of life, and they pray to Him willingly (John Paul II 1980:12). What Mbiti (1969) says about Africa is true in particular of the Igbo, namely that religion permeates all the departments of life; there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Thus, we can conclude that religion is an important or even essential part of the social system, as are

morality and law. Religion is also part of the complex system by which human beings are enabled to live together in an ordered social system.

The Igbo religion, like other African religions, comprises a hierarchy of beings, from the Supreme Being, *Chukwu* (God), the divinities, the ancestral spirits to the cultic groups that represent some of the major hierarchical rungs of the ladder connecting the supernatural and the natural in Igbo religion (Okure 1983:36). The Igbo believe that having created the world, God (*Chukwu*) established an order which enables man to live in this world. They hold that God did not create evil because the order which he established was perfect. Having created all things he made provision for *sanctions* through *laws* and *customs*. Onwumechili in his Ahajioku lectures strongly affirms that their (the Igbo people's) daily lives are guided and governed by special norms and a strict sense of what is lawful and just (Onwumechili 2000). Hence they believe that God created things in an orderly and harmonious world where everyone could perform his own duty. In short, the Igbo believe that *Chukwu* is the God of Order, *Chukwu Okere* (God created the world and all it holds). Talbot (1967:21) is right when he affirms that most Igbo people have a firm belief in the justice of government in the world. Perhaps because of their strong attachment to the community, the Igbo like other Africans, have a very strong sense of justice. Without justice, life in the community would be impossible; there would be no harmony. A victim of injustice often makes a direct appeal to God. The Igbo strongly believe that God, *Chukwu*, who is just and who sees and knows everything, hates injustice as is illustrated in this Igbo name: "*Chukwu maa*," God knows who did what. Thus Igbo justice has cosmic dimensions.

## **1.8 THE ETHICAL AND PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS**

In Igbo belief, the Supreme Being, *Chukwu* is conceived as a Good God, beneficent in character and is above all spirits, good and evil. This *Chukwu* is called Almighty (*Chukwu ji ike nile*). He is believed to control all things in heaven and on earth and to dispense punishments and rewards according to merits. In the Igbo mentality, everything belongs to God and is intimately associated with him since it is part and parcel of God's household. This may also support the idea that the Igbo visualize God

as Father, *Nna anyi bi n'igwe*, both in terms of his position as the universal Creator and Provider and in the sense that He is always available to help in time of need (Okure 1983:36).

However, the practical aspect of belief in Igbo traditional religion is not only worship but also human conduct. For the Igbo, belief in God and in the other spirit beings implies a certain type of conduct that respects the order established by God and is watched over by the divinities and the ancestors. With the emphasis on the existence and power of *Chukwu* and the spirits and their influence on human daily life, the Igbo very much link morality with destiny. In the Igbo religion, God is *just* in the way he exercises his will, and also in the way he exercises *judgment*. He is considered to be the *Perfect Judge*. Above all, it is the Igbo belief that *Chukwu's* will and justice rule over all without question. Hence, Mbiti (1967:206) rightly states that most African peoples accept and acknowledge God, the Supreme Being, as the final guardian of law and order and of the moral and ethical codes.

Consequently, in Igbo traditional religion, law, justice, and politics are inextricably bound and embodied in what is known as *Omenala (omenani)*. It is often referred to as moral code. By this code, *omenala*, every Igbo is directed on how to behave in every aspect of life, encompassing civil, criminal, socio-economic and religious laws. This moral code was passed down through the generations, but it was never written down. It was developed through custom and derived from the interpretations of those who hold the *Ofo*, the titled men (*nze and ozo*), the council of elders, the age grades, and all those who provide *umunna* leadership. Living harmoniously within a community is a moral obligation ordained by God for the promotion of life. Religion and harmonious relationship provide the basic infrastructure on which life-centred, community-oriented morality is based. Mbiti's (1987:108f) formulation, 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am' captures this ethical principle well. The implication is that one has an obligation to maintain harmonious relationships with all the members of the community and to do what is necessary to repair every breach of harmony and to strengthen the community bonds, especially through justice and sharing. And this is not

only socially important, but is religiously necessary and obligatory since God, the divinities and the ancestors, the guarantors of his harmonious order of things, are quick to punish defaulters. Thus *ikpu-ala* becomes an important ingredient in the restoration of any torn relationship.

### **1.9 THE MAGISTERIAL PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS**

Down through the ages, the magisterial encyclicals have shown the great concern and interest of the popes in issues concerning human dignity and social justice. Pope Paul VI in *Octogesima Adveniens* (A Call to Action), urged greater efforts for justice and indicated that local churches have duties to respond to specific situations. Furthermore, he noted that beneath an outward appearance of indifference, in the heart of every person there is a will to live in community and a thirst for justice and peace (OA 1971: #43, #45-47). In the Synod of Bishops in 1971, their reflection was centred on “the mission of the People of God to further justice in the world,” affirming the right to a culturally-sensitive, personalized development. They held that Gospel principles mandate justice for the liberation of all humanity as an essential expression of Christian love. The Church, they insisted, must witness for justice through its own lifestyle, educational activities, and international action. These clarion calls came at the right time and make this research necessary for the enrichment of Igbo Christians.

### **1.10 CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS**

Pope John Paul II insisted that there is an organic and constituted link between Christianity and culture and that “the synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith” (Shorter 1997, McGarry 1995, Ogutu 1989, Waligo 1986). The Pope’s sentiments and the Second Vatican Council thus express the need for inculturation. Increasingly from Vatican II onwards, the movement of inculturation has been advocated and insisted upon in numerous Papal pronouncements, Bishops’ synods, and pastoral letters and in books by scholars in the field (Pobee 1979, Flannery 1983, John Paul II message to Zairian Bishops 1984). Thus, the Second Vatican Council has opened the eyes of many to see in the traditional African religions ‘a ray of truth which enlightens all men and women,’ and also ‘to admit that the Church is not tied exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, to any customary practices, ancient

or modern.’ Accordingly, the Church can enter into communion with different forms of cultures, thereby enriching both itself and the cultures themselves (Radoli 1993:112, Baur 1999:231). What is the Catholic Church doing to enhance this process of inculturation? What steps has the Catholic Church taken to make an authentic Igbo (African) Christian Church? How successful has been the process of inculturation of social justice and leadership? This study has investigated these questions regarding the impact of inculturation on the Igbo Church in Igbo land. The empirical results of this research are presented here together with conclusions and recommendations drawn from the research findings.

### **1.11 THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

As a term, justice recurs frequently in the literature, albeit often as a comprehensive but undefined concept or as a summary term evoking the vision that Catholic social teachings and practices seek to embody in this world. The vision of justice has scriptural overtones, including the establishment of the reign of God or fidelity to the demands of the covenant relationship (Burghardt 2004). In a document that is important in the Church’s social teaching, *The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes, GS)*, the Second Vatican Council (1965) encouraged theological investigation into cultural beliefs, but also announced the duty of the People of God to scrutinize the “the signs of the times” in light of the Gospel of Christ. In other words, the Church’s duty in the world is to work for the enhancement of human dignity and common good by renewing and advancing its own culture as well as the culture of other peoples.

Thus, the human response to God’s invitation of love is a direct response to the justice of God. For it is not our own human justice we are called to work for as we try to respond to God’s love made visible to us in Jesus Christ. It is rather the justice of God and the purpose of the Kingdom of God. The full human response is to live in the mystery of God’s presence, and, in calling God “Father” from the depths of our being, to receive the grace and light we need to become “people for others,” like Christ, the “man for others” because he was first of all “the man for the Father”.

### **1.12 THE MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The crisis of the early Christian community (cf. Acts 15), was the problem of social justice, human dignity and identity. Consequently, the convocation of the Council of Jerusalem tasked itself with the definition of Christian identity. The Council based its definition of Christian identity separable from adherence to the Jewish cultural practices. For instance, on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, people from other cultures: Parthians, Medes and Elamites, people of Mesopotamia, Capadocia, Ponthus and Asia, Egypt and Libya, Cretans and Arabs (Acts 2:9-11), could understand the message that Peter communicated to them through the power of the risen Christ in their mother tongue, without first becoming Jews. The Bible is crucial for understanding the mind of Christ and how his message is to be transmitted to his faithful ones including the *Igbo* Christians. Thus, his mission involves evangelism, healing and deliverance ministries, social concerns, and political action for justice in a broken world, wherein suffering and oppression is rife. As a result, some passages like Ezekiel 18:5-9, Jeremiah 22:3, Matthew 5:17-20, Romans 4:17 and Matthew 6:33 and others are discussed in this study and applied to the Church in *Igbo* society. These passages see righteousness as a central element of the Kingdom of God and as the driving motive for the conduct of one's life, and are thus later expounded in this study. This study in the light of the mission of Christ will become an action on behalf of social justice, the preaching of the Gospel for the redemption of *Igbo* society and its liberation from every oppressive situation.

### **1.13 SCOPE AND LIMITATION**

It is not always easy to study social justice values in *Igbo* traditional society because of the variety of *Igbo* traditional justice systems brought about by the different political institutions/structures representing the *Igbo* Republicanism and monarchy. There is therefore need to define the scope of this research by giving a panoramic view of *Igbo* traditional society before its meeting with the Europeans through colonization and evangelization. This history also runs through the colonial and post colonial periods, paying special attention to *Igbo* traditional society and concentrating on the theological

implications of *Ikpu-ala* for the Catholic Church in Igbo land. The study is centred on Igbo traditional society and its social justice system, *Ikpu-ala* as social control system, including its theological implication to the Catholic Church. Due to the need to demonstrate that the concept of social justice and the contextualization of *Ikpu-ala* are the same throughout Igbo traditional society, this study was limited to Igbo land in general and to the Catholic Diocese of *Orlu* in particular. Nevertheless, reference is also made to the wider African Church and to African culture. The primary focus of the study is on Catholics and their ways of dispensing social justice. There were two main reasons for choosing this topic *vis-a-vis* *Orlu* Diocese. In the first place, the researcher had been a missionary for most of his life and had been involved in social justice issues in many missionary endeavours. Secondly, there was a great need for the Church to build up a solid pastoral approach in matters of social justice as it affects its members both in private and public life. The main limitation to this study was a lack of relevant sources on the subject to be used for reference purposes. Most of the available literature was written for Western countries and for other African contexts. An effort was made in this study, however, to consider how some of the available information on inculturation of the *Ikpu-ala* as social justice value could be applied to the Igbo context.

#### **1.14 DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a modified version of Richard Osmer's model of practical theological reflection (Osmer 2008). The modification was the adaptation or inclusion of the IMRAD model in the empirical section of the research. The major instruments for the study were mostly qualitative and partially quantitative, as the research involved both oral interviews (questionnaire) and numerical data. It also utilized closed and open-ended questions to solicit information from respondents. Questionnaires and face-to-face interviews were used to facilitate this exploration and co-relation. This is the task in Chapter Seven, to determine what the people believe and practice as Christians. In Chapter Eight, in part, the importance of *Ikpu-ala* is explored. The study is aimed not only at communicating to Catholics the basic understanding of the inculturation of *Ikpu-ala*, but also at exploring practical means of inculturating *Ikpu-ala* in the Catholic Church

in Igbo land. In this way it is hoped that *Ikpu-ala* as social justice value may become more interesting, attractive, meaningful, and enduring in the lives of Igbo Catholics (Christians). This is what the second part of chapter eight helps to achieve this aim and shows the way forward.

## **1.15 METHODOLOGY**

To implement the present research, the approach adopted is important. According to Lonergan (1990: xi), method is not a set of rules to be followed meticulously by a dot. It is a framework for collaborative creativity. It would outline the various clusters of operations to be performed by theologians when they are about their various tasks. Those clusters of operations that helped the researcher carry out this research effectively were outlined. A two-pronged approach was undertaken, namely, (a) method of research and (b) method of presentation.

### **1.15.1 Method of Research**

In the method of research, the researcher used:

- (i) Literature Review
- (ii) A questionnaire Study
- (iii) Oral Interviews
- (iv) Personal Experiences

- (i) Literature Review

According to Vakalisa (1999:38), literature study is the focused attempt to get more familiar with what has been said and done on your problem area from documented information. According to Smith (2008:214), literature review helps to avoid duplication of what has been already done and identifies gaps in the research plan. In view of this, the researcher surveyed the origin, application, and significance of inculturation from biblical and Church sources, specifically as they related to *Ikpu-ala*, in the Gospels and Bible in general, as well as in the teachings of the Catholic Church on the subject from the early Christian period to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

- (ii) Questionnaire Study

A questionnaire study samples peoples' opinions on a specified topic with the help of formulated questions. For this thesis, the questionnaire study targeted priests, catechists, a section of the members of the congregation, as well as small groups of youth and young adults, Christian mothers and Christian fathers, and non-Christians. Separate questions were formulated and administered to each of these groups. It was important for these groups of people to be included in the questionnaire study because both the subject of study and its outcomes concern them. They live and feel the impact of social justice in society. The questionnaire study:

- Made it possible for the researcher to reach as many people as possible, especially at the grassroots
- Helped to complement information derived from the literature review
- Helped to lead the writer to more rounded conclusions based on the context of the people

#### (iii) Oral Interviews

Some people who were not available for the questionnaire study, but whose experiences were vital and important to this investigation, were approached individually and asked to share orally their experiences. These oral interviews were important for this study because they helped the researcher to correlate the information gathered through the questionnaires.

#### (iv) Personal Experience

The researcher's personal experience also played an important role in contributing to this study because implementation of *Ikpu-ala* as a social justice value is an activity that involves a personal commitment on the part of a Catholic theologian.

### **1.15.2 Method of Presentation**

The methods of presentation in this study are exploratory, historical, analytical, descriptive, and critical.

#### (a) Exploratory

Efforts were made to find what Igbo Catholics want in their journey of faith and life so as to know how to build a community suitable to their cultural set up. This called for an exploration of ways to bring about interpersonal relationships and interconnectivity that is real, acceptable, and meaningful to their lives in their communities. This study was also exploratory in the sense that an effort was made to see how other Christian churches (e.g. The Redeemed Christian Church of God [RCCG]) have inculturated the Christian message to their lives and situations. The advantage of this approach was that it:

- Enabled the researcher to know the context and the cultural set up in which Catholics operate
- Enabled the researcher to know areas that need more emphasis or change
- Helped the researcher to discover new grounds and even new methods with the help of other people.

(b) Historical

The historical approach facilitated an in-depth examination of the Church's teachings on social justice in some of the Church Councils, especially before the Second Vatican Council and also in the doctrine of the Fathers of the Church. This enabled the researcher to examine various trends of events and developments in the history of social justice and to identify traces of inculturation in this history. This reference to history is important because, according to Torquil (1990:2), without a constant dialogue with the historical, social justice, as an historical medium, could become allied to the dominant forces of society and become a means of oppression. In contrast, *Ikpu-ala* as a justice value means hope, dignity, freedom, and equality, the much desired goals of every society.

(c) Analytical

The researcher tried to analyse every situation presented by the historical findings as well as all the responses obtained from the questionnaire study and the oral interviews. In this way the researcher was be able to determine which information was

relevant for inclusion in the findings of this research. The analytical approach thus guided the researcher in the selection, use, and application of information.

(d) Descriptive

The study described some of the various developments that took place from the time that Jesus started his ministry (Mark 1:14, 15) until our present time. It also described the intended outcome of the research findings for the Catholic Church in general and Igbo people in particular.

(e) Critical

In its critical aspect, this research sought to determine whether the present application of social justice in the Catholic Church is still meaningful and helpful to Catholics. It also looked at the weaknesses of *Ikpu-ala* in Igbo traditional society and to what extent it is still relevant to an integrated Igbo Christian. It is hoped that self-criticism will be an important tool particularly for the Church in Igbo land which is in need of extensive restructuring. Inculturation is not only needed for meaningful social interaction and interconnectivity, it is also relevant for measuring whether Igbo Christians are up to date when compared to other Catholics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **1.16 HYPOTHESIS**

This study brought about a clear understanding of Igbo social justice and its relationship to social justice application in the Igbo Catholic Church.

This study identified European interpretations and applications of Christianity without due consideration of Igbo traditional values as the major issues that have brought about moral decadence and lawlessness in *Igbo* society today.

The study showed that *Ikpu-ala* as an Igbo traditional social justice value acts as an agent of social control as well as strengthening the bonds of human interpersonal relationships and interconnectivity between individuals and societal structures in any *Igbo* community.

It is also anticipated that the inculturation of *Ikpu-ala* as both a social justice value and a social control will restore the dignity and equality of personhood of all members of

the Church in *Igbo* land and prevent the concentration of power, authority, and recognition in any one person, group of persons, or any association.

This research learned that *Orlu* Diocese is the only Diocese that is still acting as a colonial (missionary) church towards the *Igbo* customs and traditions. Hence, it is sometimes referred to by neighbours and visitors as “being more Roman than the Romans.”

This research based upon the principles and theology of inculturation expects that when the leadership of *Orlu* Diocese reviews some of the guidelines of 2000 Synod on “customs and values” of *Igbo* traditional society, it will be able to reconsider its positions on *ozo* title taking, *igbu ehi* (second burial), authority, and a host of other practices.

It is thus envisaged that this study will demonstrate that *Ikpu-ala* should play a significant theological role in the current social justice system and leadership in the *Igbo* Church. Finally, it is anticipated that this study will assist the church in *Igbo* land to shift and re-envision her missionary strategies and prevent many Christians from falling into syncretism, which is common among *Igbo* Christians.

### **1.17 STRUCTURE**

Chapter Two covers among other things the literature as explicated from the *Igbo* worldview relating to *Ikpu-Ala* as social justice [*Igbo* deities, *Chukwu* as the Supreme Being, naming ceremonies, theophoric names, other deities, *chi* and ancestral spirits, shrines].

Chapter three focuses on the biblical and theological evaluation of traditional *Igbo* social justice [*Ikpu-Ala*]. This chapter also examines the theories of human behaviour and *Igbo* cultural leadership that made social control possible in the pre-colonial *Igbo* community (Meeks 1937, Leonard 1972). Thus, it advances reasons for the inculturation of *Ikpu-ala*. This chapter also examines leadership and means of social control in the Old and New Testament of the Bible.

Chapter four focuses on the theological position of the Church’s social teachings - the *magisterium* (papal encyclicals), Vatican II, and other Church documents and Inculturation and its implications for the *Igbo* concept of social justice and *Ikpu-ala*.

Inculturation becomes a matter of necessity because it is expected to help the Catholic faith to be deeply rooted in the culture of the people and to help that faith become a way of life. Jesus Christ remains not only the ideal but also the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Hebrews 1:1). *Ikpu-ala* in its application, defines the moral rectitude of the Igbo with the sole purpose of creating a harmonious and peaceful co-existence in the society.

Chapter five of this study focuses on the research methodology used. IMRAD was used to collect and analyse the empirical [questionnaire and survey] data for the study. This research employed the Osmer and IMRAD models for the descriptive and empirical portions. It includes interviews of fifteen people including clergy, religious men and women, elders, community leaders, and youth.

Furthermore, chapter six deals with the research findings. The data collected from the interviews, questionnaires, arguments, and opinions were analyzed to show whether or not the Catholic Church has done enough in enunciating and inculcating those justice values which constitute social control as a means by which a society preserves itself from social and moral chaos and extinction. These research findings also demonstrated that *ikpu-ala* may be key to the incarnation of Christ's message of knowing God in spirit and in truth (John 4:21-24).

Chapter seven endeavours to answer some of the questions in the course of this study by proposing strategic/pragmatic tasks to transform the situation – bridge the gap between the Church and the traditional Igbo social justice system.

Finally, chapter eight provides an evaluation of some of the positive and negative aspects of the Igbo *Ikpu-ala* and where Christianity can help in discerning what is good and valuable in Igbo Christian notion and practice of *Ikpu-ala* as a social justice value.

### **1.18 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY**

In order to achieve the primary goal of the Dissertation, the researcher will undertake to investigate the following sub-themes as research questions:

1. Who are the Igbo people, their worldview, and their notion of *Ikpu-ala* and social justice?

2. Why *Ikpu-Ala* (restorative) as justice value is a very powerful instrument of holding together an Igbo community as means of promoting and maintaining peace and harmony?
3. How does *Ikpu-Ala* as a method of social control moderate social relationships, processes of reconciliation and distribution of social justice and rights in an Igbo traditional society?
4. How does Igbo traditional concept and practice of justice relate to the major concept of *Ikpu-Ala* in this Dissertation?
5. How do we formulate a theological framework from the Catholic theology of Inculturation that can meaningfully establish an integrated practice of justice for Christians within an Igbo community?

The other set of questions are focused on *Ikpu-ala*, its concept and practice in Igbo traditional religion and culture. They are our interviewing questions focusing on *Ikpu-ala* and on its challenges to the Catholic Church in Igbo society.

The questions were sent to the participants early enough before the interview so that the participants had time to study them and articulate their answers. The interviews lasted between 25 to 60 minutes. The exercise was entirely voluntary and participants were free to join or to opt out from the study without any consequences.

1. What is *Ikpu-ala*; what are the purposes and necessities of it in the Igbo perspective?
2. In what ways is *Ikpu-ala* an Igbo concept of social justice? Is *Ikpu-ala* the hub of Igbo social justice?
3. What obligations and responsibilities are embodied in *Ikpu-ala*? What is the significance of *Ikpu-ala* in shaping Igbo community life?
4. In what ways do Igbo people participate in *Ikpu-ala* and also in what ways does it control communal life? What exempts someone from taking part in it?
5. Was everyone in the community a member of African traditional religion before the advent of Christianity?
6. Before the advent of Christianity what was the role of *Ikpu-ala* in an Igbo community?
7. With the advent of Christianity, what is the state of *Ikpu-ala*?

8. What does the Church teach about *Ikpu-ala*?
9. Are there conflicts between *Ikpu-ala* and Christian beliefs? If any, in what ways can the Church address and resolve them?
10. Does the Church have a method of addressing *Ikpu-ala* and/or traditional values and institutions?
11. Historically, how did the Catholic Church address traditional cultural and religious issues similar to *Ikpu-ala*?
12. Are there ways and means by which Christians can participate in full traditional or Christian modified *Ikpu-ala*?
13. In your personal view, what do you think should be done to ensure harmony in the conflicts between the Church and the traditional values?

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**LITERATURE REVIEW**  
**THE INFLUENCE OF IGBO WORLDVIEWS ON IGBO CONCEPT OF JUSTICE**  
**AND IKPU-ALA**

**2.1 INTRODUCTION:**

This introduction presents a summary of the arguments that justify the direction taken in this research. The intention is to address a number of central questions, like why has the Christian faith not taken root in Africa in general and among Igbo in particular, and how can it then deepen its root in Igbo land? This introduction contains also a summary of some salient elements of Igbo traditional religion and morality vis-à-vis ethics with particular reference to justice values. This is necessary to help the reader locate the Igbo traditional justice system within the larger forum of African traditional societies. Lastly, it should introduce, for those not acquainted with it, the Igbo traditional religion vis-à-vis social justice. Thus, this second chapter will be dealing with literature review on the Igbo traditional understanding of the world, human beings, and God. There is the tendency, in view of the many political and economic problems facing Africa, to question the relevance of efforts made in the area of the Igbo traditional social justice value: *Ikpu-ala* and its theological implications/challenges to Catholic Church in Igbo society. One can understand Westerners who raise such questions because they see that the Igbo traditional justice system is either non-existent or is treated with indifference by many people as a result of dying traditional customs.

Research into the Igbo traditional justice system has become urgent in view of the fact that Africa has become a synonym for poverty, wars, and under-development, unable to catch up with technological advancement with total overlook of its socio-cultural cohesion. Consequently, the working definition of culture as used in this work (except where otherwise stated) conceives culture as the totality of the answers which human beings give to the questions of life. It is not only life that poses questions to the human being, but the humans also pose questions to life. Human beings are confronted with the hard realities or questions of life. They try to find ways of dealing with these

realities or answers to these questions. On the other hand, the same human beings search for meaning not only in, but also of life. All these ways, answers, and meaning are examined, practiced, and systematically preserved. They are constantly brought into use, tested, preserved, and passed on to younger generations who, in turn, continue the whole practice. As part of culture, the religious and justice questions cannot be ignored even in our working definition of culture.

The questions are of different types, with different content and directions. This does not abolish their interdependence but some of these questions are religious in nature or have religious content and orientation. Social justice concerns itself with the basic human questions. These include questions about the origin and destination of human beings: what or who is the human being, the search for meaning and purpose in and of life. These questions are not restricted to the justice sphere, but justice concretizes them. What would happen if one were to try to put the Igbo traditional justice aside in a bid to solve the problems one deems necessary? It would turn out that, even if all the other problems were solved, there would still remain the unsolved problems of the meaning in and of life.

It is a fact that Africa has never produced a great form of justice system that could bring an all-encompassing unity to her widespread areas. The concept of social justice is a sort of umbrella-concept for all forms of justice which originate from black Africa. The word “traditional” demarcates these from other social justice systems in Africa, which today are referred to as African social justice because of some elements of the African traditional justice system that they imbibe. For instance, among the *Gikuyu* elders of Kenya, they had it impressed in their minds that their primary responsibility to their people was the prevention of deadly conflicts in which people would resort to supernatural powers or open hostilities, bloodshed, and destruction of property. The *Kpelle* people of Liberia had a well established forum for informal settlement of conflicts. It was called “House of Palaver” or “*moot*” which was made up of an ad-hoc council of kinsmen and neighbours of the parties in conflict. Every claim was investigated with honesty and at the end, just judgment was delivered and all parties involved shared a drink. This is

similar to the *moot* of the Tiv land in Nigeria. In most communities of southern Africa, there was the concept of '*ubuntu*' as an indigenous social philosophy, meaning collective personhood or member of the human family. It was a customary law whose violation attracted sanctions ranging from fines to isolation (Masina 1969).

The following discussion examines justice and its social dimensions in Igbo traditional society. It covers the entire Igbo society from before the advent of the colonialists and missionaries to the present time. Each people, race, or identity group in the world has its own ways of doing things, especially as it concerns justice, social control, and conflicts. In Europe, for instance, the juridical system, the courts, and the congress are the means of attaining justice, while the Igbo society relied on oath taking, divination, and blood covenant in pre-colonial times. These methods still thrive in some areas, though at very limited scales alongside the modern justice systems. Europeans rely on commissions of inquiry, constitutions, and court systems of lawyers and judges. Igbo society used councils of elders, kings' courts, people's assemblies and market places for dispute settlement and justice dispensation (Nwolise 2004). Braimah (1998) carried out a study on the traditional methods of social control in African societies before the advent of colonialism such as citizen diplomacy, joking relationship (as found among the Tiv and Fulani in the Northern areas of Nigeria) oaths, symbolic diplomacy (peaceful methods) and blood feuding, raiding and warfare (violent method).

The principles and values guiding *Ikpu-ala* included impartiality, fairness, accommodation, reciprocity, moderation, compromise, and genuine reconciliation. In Alagoa's own words, there is, along with impartiality and fairness:

The principle of accommodation, compromise and genuine reconciliation is opposed to the principle of "winner takes it all." It would do no good if the parties to a conflict did not possess a spirit of tolerance sufficient to encompass the opposition. There must be a willingness to live and let live (Alagoa 1998).

An Ikwere proverb states 'when other people's goats graze, let mine graze with them(Alagoa 1998).' The desired spirit of accommodation is related to love among the people for '[where] there is no love, the skin of an antelope is not big enough for two to sit on.'

Gluckman (1959) notes that when conflicts or strife emerged in traditional Africa, there were institutions and people to resolve them, based on certain moral or legal principles and ethical ideals, and following established procedures and methods. Well known codes of morality, conventions, and rituals existed though were not written but persisted for generations before the colonial invasion.

Harunah (2003:123) maintained that elaborate mechanisms for social control and deliberate efforts at peace and social harmony between individuals and groups were established because:

Indeed from... oral sources and some existing written accounts, it is clear that all African indigenous cultures, customs, traditions and civilizations had emphasized not only the value and significance of peace in society but also, the necessity of having to ensure that there was peaceful co-existence and harmony among the various groups that lived in a community and between them and their neighbours. This sort of premium which was placed on peace, and the essence of ensuring peaceful co-existence in pre-colonial Africa, stemmed from the realization by the people about the negative results and allied adversity that usually followed the demise of peace in a society and in inter-group relatives.

Despite the evidence that points to the fact that the Igbo of southeast Nigeria have long had viable and effective methods of social justice, the Church in Igbo land has refused or been slow to work towards the integration of the Igbo traditional methods [*Ikpu-Ala*] and the Judeo-Christian methods of social justice. The resulting effect is that

in Igbo land, there is a large percentage of people who are only Christians on Sunday and followers of the Igbo traditional methods of social justice the rest of the week. Thus it created a dichotomy and double standard in the private and public lives of its members.

## **2.2 THE IGBO BACKGROUND:**

### **2.2.1 Historical Origins**

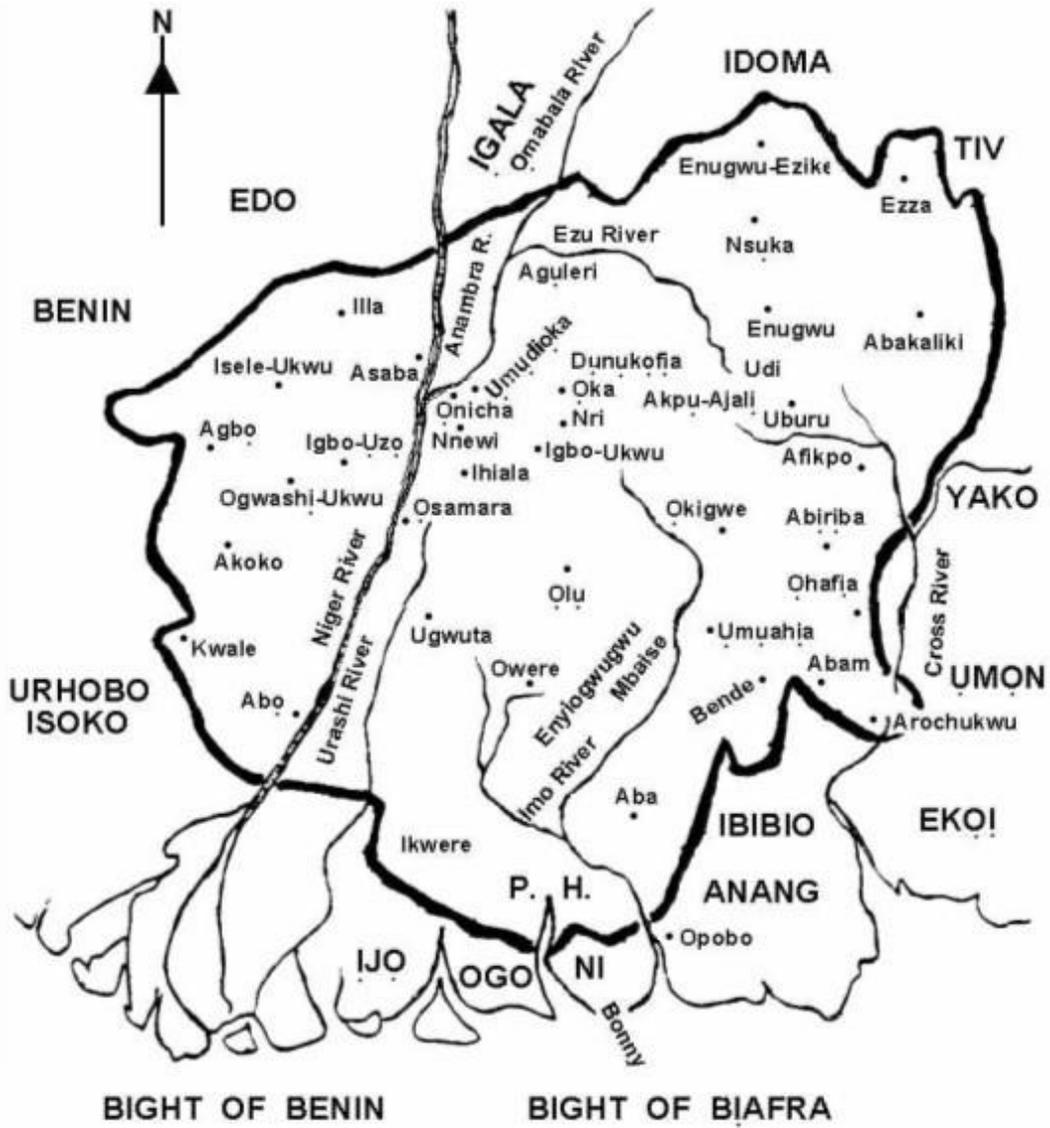
The historical origin of the Igbo people has not yet been fully investigated and written down, and until that is done we can only depend on oral traditions, myths, and legends, all of which have been recorded in recent times, to understand how they happened to occupy their present territories and how they are related. The problem was compounded by the fact that some Igbo people did not accept others as being 'Igbo,' for instance; Mbieri people did not regard the Onitsha people as 'Igbo' (Green 1964:7, Isichei 1976:19).

The origin of this the word 'Igbo' is not very clear. According to Onwuejeogwu, the word Igbo means "The Community of people." He tries to support this view through several linguistic uses of the word Igbo. Due to the pejorative use of the word by European slave dealers in referring to slaves from the interior, it became a practice among some sections of the Igbo to speak of the rest as Igbo people. This practice is still to be found in some parts of Igbo land even though it no longer has the same pejorative connotation. As Afigbo puts it "Thus the West Niger Igbo refers to all East Niger Igbo as Igbo; the Onitsha people refer to all living east of them as Igbo, the Nri refer to others including Onitsha as Igbo while the *Aro* refer to others including Nri and Onitsha as Igbo" (Nwala 1985:19)..

### **2.2.2 The Geographical Location of the Igbo Country**

The Igbo people are located principally in the south-eastern part of Nigeria and are presently comprised of the people of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and parts of Delta, Rivers, Cross River, and Akwa-Ibom States. The Igbo have common boundaries with the Igala and Idoma on the north, the Ijaw and the Ogoni on the South, the Yako

and the Ibibio on the East, and the Bini and Warri on the West. The Igbo geographical area is what scholars call a culture area, rural or urban, manifesting distinctive characteristics or traits. Onwuejeogwu (1975) in his Article claims that the Igbo Culture Area has to do with the six basic traits: linguistic, social, political, economic, ritual, and cultural. Four identifiable sub-culture areas within the traditional Igbo society include (1) Eastern or Cross River Igbo (2) Southern or Owerri Igbo, (3) Northern or Onitsha Igbo, and (4) North-Eastern Igbo (Forde and Jones 1950:10). In spite of the obvious sub cultural differences, the Igbo see themselves as one people and outsiders also see them as a homogeneous entity. Nonetheless, when Igbo homogeneity is examined, it becomes clear that Igbo people are not Igbo people because they have a common ancestry, nor are they Igbos because they constitute a political unit. They are rather Igbos because they have a common language and the same cultural pattern.



GULF OF GUINEA  
 0 25 50 75  
 KM  
 MAP OF IGBOLAND IN NIGERIA

Boundary of Igboland  
 Rivers

## 2.3 THE IGBO WORLDVIEW

In this section it is necessary to mention a problem with terminology. Ekwunife (1990:17) believes that this is the problem of trying to convey the exact meaning of religious words or actions as understood within the structure of that religion. This pertains to the Igbo worldview because there is a close relation between Igbo social and religious life. In Igbo traditional communities, as in other African communities, social and religious units are hardly distinguishable (Edeh 1985:61).

The Igbo social setup, which is characterized by the interconnectedness of religious and social units, is closely linked with the political and economic units so that any of these units is best understood in its relationship with the others. The interdependence between them is indicative of the fact that the traditional Igbo societies have a unified picture of the universe with ideas about its origin, structure, and the nature of the various forces that occupy and operate within it (Nwala 1985:27). Hence it is difficult to convey the Igbo worldview in a language that has neither the cultural background nor the linguistic categories of the Igbo. There is a danger of distorting the original meanings of that worldview. Bearing this in mind, efforts will be made in trying to involve the techniques of presentation, description, interpretation, and evaluation of the facts. Thus Nwala (1985:26) has this to say

Effort will be made to use worldview here as referring to the complex of beliefs, habits, laws, customs and tradition of a people. It includes the overall picture they have about reality, the universe, life and existence; their attitude to life and to things in general; what they do and think of what life is, what things are worth striving to attain; what man's place is in the scheme of things; whether or not life has a meaning and purpose...

For the Igbo, their worldview encompasses the practical life of the people; particularly the political, social, artistic, economic, and religious life. Generally speaking, traditional Igbo people hold a unified picture of the universe, which includes their ideas

of the origin of the universe, its structure and the nature of the various forces that inhabit it. Though these ideas are speculative, their original impetus is quite empirical. Like other peoples of Africa, the Igbo do not consider the origin of the universe a serious problem, for though they believe that the universe was created just like it is by *CHI-UKWU* (Supreme Being). The Igbo see this universe from a religious perspective.

#### **2.4 IGBO DUALISTIC VISION OF THE UNIVERSE**

In many African societies, it is believed that the universe is divisible into two. These are the invisible and the visible parts, of the heavens and the earth. Some people, however, hold that the universe is in the form of a three-tier creation, namely: the heavens, the earth and the underworld, which lies below it. African people do not think of these divisions as separate but see them as linked together (Mbiti 1975).

This applies also to the Igbo people. An example of the Igbo three-tier creation concept of the universe is found among the Ezza people of Abakaliki. As late as 1905 when the British had smashed almost every resistance to their colonial penetration, the Ezza of Abakaliki were reported to have told the emissary of the colonial government that they recognized no superior authority except the heavens above and the earth beneath, and that between these two awe-inspiring super (sic) human potentates they constituted a third force (Ukaegbu 1991:70). One of the implications of such a three-tier creation concept – is that instead of thinking of the universe in the sense of material and immaterial, one may have to think of it in such categories as the physical, metaphysical, and the abstract. This could be related to the conception of the human being as consisting of the body (physical) and soul (spiritual).

The Igbo people, as will be seen later, conceive the human being not only as consisting of body and soul, but having also a third element. The three elements which complementarily constitute the human being are: the human physical body and two other spiritual elements which give life to the physical body. One is the life-force which comes from God; the other is a spiritual element which comes from the ancestors. For the proponents of the dualistic vision of the universe in Igbo land, the universe is basically structured in two main interrelated parts – visible and the invisible. Edeh

(1985:75) believes that for the Africans, as well as for the Igbo, the world is dual in nature. Beyond and over above the visible, tactile, physical world, there is a non-visible, non-tactile world, which envelopes the former. Furthermore, it permeates the former through and through; it is simultaneously within and outside of the earth and the seas.

For the Igbo traditional cosmology this division of the universe into visible and invisible is an approximate description because the two are intertwined and what is invisible to the lay person may not be so to the uninitiated. This is the reason why the Igbo are understood as a deeply religious group. This view originates from their religious view of life and reality. Like many Africans, the Igbo people have a world view of extraordinary harmony and cohesion in fact and belief that do not contradict one another. This means a system of philosophy in which theology, politics, social theory, land-law, medicine, psychology, birth and burial rites were all logically concatenated in a system of beliefs so that to subtract one item from the whole is to paralyse the structure of the whole (Okoye 1977).

For the Igbo there is interconnectedness between these different elements of reality. The distinction between two worlds could be seen from two standpoints, via: the idea of reincarnation and the Igbo concept of death. Edeh (1985) aptly put it thus:

If human beings after passing away from this visible world can come back after a certain period has elapsed and be born again, there must have been a place where they remained within that period. That place could not have been seen this visible world; otherwise they would still be continuously visible to the living and not have passed away. It must be a place completely different from this material world in terms of imperceptibility to the senses.

However, there are some weaknesses in this argument: one is that the reality of reincarnation is not a proven fact. If reincarnation were real, how would one react to the

view which holds that there is one world, only that the dead who are yet to reincarnate inhabit this one world as bodiless entities, like spirits?

The argument supporting the Igbo distinction between two worlds is also based on the Igbo ancestral belief. A central point here is the Igbo understanding of death as transition into another life. Proponents of this argument hold that, this new life cannot be without a place in which it is being lived. There must, therefore, be a world other than this visible world where the ancestors are dwelling and from where they exercise some influence on the goings and comings of the living (Edeh 1985). Again it could be argued that both realms of the universe in the Igbo worldview are merely convenient ways of grouping events.

Arguably, this is a possible way of justifying the duality theory, but as for the existence of the spiritual world which is based on belief it is difficult to obtain an objective basis for verification. The difficulty here points to the problem of translation of thought-patterns into foreign categories. Language is a vehicle of thought, and the Igbo have terms and categories that bring out the two realities clearly. Nwala (1985) believes that *uwa* (world) and *ani muo* (land of the spirits) are Igbo terms for the visible and invisible world respectively. Consequently, the theory of duality among the Igbo involves a functional unity between these realms. Due to the fact that they are inclined to be more practical than speculative, there is the tendency to make the two realms equally real, as if both were material. This could then be an explanation of why the Igbo express the spiritual concepts linked with the invisible realm in a material mode.

The relation to objects is what is often misunderstood by non-members of Igbo traditional religion. It is a point which Eliade expresses when he maintains that for the religious person, nature is never only natural; but is filled with religious meaning. The cosmos is a divine creation. The world is created in such a way, that the religious person finds various forms of the sacred and being in it. The order, harmony, stability, and fertility manifest themselves in cosmic rhythms. The cosmos as a whole is a real, lively, and holy organism (Eliade 1987:103).

For the Igbo, a sacred object is worshipped because it is sacred, not just because it is an object. The object's holiness reveals its real being or essence. This is an indication of the mistake made by those who think and talk of naturalism and natural religion with regard to African traditional religions. The sacred, for the African, can manifest itself in objects. The Africans do not worship the stone or the tree as such. The sacred stones, trees, rivers, seas, mountains, forest, animals, etc, are revered because they manifest "something" which is no longer an object, but the sacred, the "wholly other." They become something else, but do not cease being themselves due to their cosmic sacredness (Nwala 1985: 49). In the Igbo ontological hierarchy objects stand below the spirits and human beings. They are subdivided into animals, plants, and inanimate objects and elements.

In summing up the Igbo view of the world, it is a multi-dimensional field of action admitting of three types of reality: physical, spiritual, and abstract; they see objects and people, events and situations as existing and functioning in dualities; they acknowledge that things may not be what they seem and that things may change their nature. To the Igbo, the world presents a mixed outlook where what is good can do damage, where reality has to be sought under the surface of things, where the thoughts, words, and actions of people can change things for better and for worse. It is this world view that provides the framework for the goals of Igbo community life and for the hopes and aspirations for the good life of individual Igbo persons (Nwoga 1984).

The ecological implications for the Igbo are in the belief of the existence of order and interaction among the different spheres of existence as this could be destroyed through the improper actions on the part of the human beings. Thus the survival and continual existence of human beings depend on the proper maintenance of this order.

## **2.5 THE IGBO SOCIAL LIFE - COMMUNALISM**

The principle of social life or community living is centred around the themes of moderation, solidarity, respect for truth, willingness to work and strive for self and community advancement, respect for authority, sense of honesty, modesty, tolerance, sense of goodness and kindness, love of one's neighbour, and respect for life (Okoro

2010). (Davidoff 2012: 15-24)notes that throughout Africa, there are initiation rites and the various rituals in the passage from childhood to youth in the community, involving sense of respect for the elders, of brotherhood among members of the age set in question, and a sense of commitment to the moral values of the community.

The one word around which these themes revolve is communalism. The term communalism is derived from the word “communal,” something shared or collectively owned. The etymological root is French, which itself is derived from the Latin words, *communalis*, *communis*, meaning that which is related to one or more communes, or community. Its main characteristics include: (a) collective ownership (b) reciprocal use of property (participated in, shared, or used in common by members of a group or community), and (c) a basis in racial or cultural groups with collective ownership. These principles can be summarized in the concept as social solidarity or *Ibuanyi Danada/Umunna bu ike*. *Umunna bu ike* is not only highly prized among the Igbo people but it also encompasses all the elements of communalism. Iwe highlighted this virtue in Igbo traditional society when he wrote that the kinship system is based on respect for elders, reverence for ancestors, and on the extended family culture. The sense of *Umunna bu ike* solidarity is experienced at the major levels of social intercourse – domestic, village, clan, and age-group (Iwe 1991: 144). It is interesting to note that each level of solidarity is a true instrument of social harmony, social security, and protection of individual rights through the duty of mutual co-operation and mobilization of resources and loyalty it enjoins. Ifemesia citing Equinos notes that everyone contributes to the common stock and thus the Igbo people are known for industriousness and do not have beggars among themselves (Ifemesia 1979).

This social solidarity underscores what Pantalon Iroegbu referred to in his concept of ‘*uwa*’ as the enfolding ideology which defines the thought and ontology of the Igbo people as comprehensive, a totality and wholeness of reality itself. Furthermore, Innocent Azouzu claims that the understanding of this reality is in consonance with the central moral education of the Igbo, which emphasizes complementarities as the philosophy of social living, opining that ‘*uwa*’ ontology evokes feelings of

complementarities in the character of all reality, and mutual interrelatedness of all existent realities within the framework of the whole (Azouzu 2007). Thus, he equated 'uwa' ontology with the concept of 'umunna' (kinsmen), which he maintains is a key to understanding the worldview of the Igbo people expounded around the idea of communalism.

In the same stretch of thought, the central idea of both 'uwa,' ontology and 'umunna' is the sense of belongingness. Ireogbu and Azouzu hold that 'belongingness' is the defining paradigm of Igbo social living (philosophy), because this concept makes clear that a thing exists because it belongs to a community in relation to other things (Azouzu 2007: 374). Therefore, to belong means to belong to a community after the Igbo traditional model of 'umunna.' Thus it is in this solidarity of relationship that the Igbo traditional society is sustained. Nwoga adds an important note when he holds that for the Igbo, nothing is purely physical or merely spiritual or abstract. Things exist as combinations of elements. When somebody is sick, the Igbo do not fail to recognize that there are physical causes of the illness. But beyond the physical elements of the illness they also see the counterparts of the illness that could have been caused by the actions and wishes of other people, the abstract entities that could have been interjected by others with whom he has had differences of opinion or will. This attention to the forces set up by people, or by the ancestors, or by deities, makes it impossible for Igbo people to accept that anybody could die, even by a publicly recognized motor accident, without *iga n'afa* (consulting the local diviner).

The ontological status of community identity provides some explanation of why there is a near instinctive rejection of opposition within the community. There is violent resentment against those who say anything that might be construed as reducing the sense of group solidarity. The principle of government among the Igbo is one of consensus rather than the oppression of the minority by the majority. Consequently, a consensus is achieved at the expense of long and tedious discussion as every person has to have a chance to make his or her contribution. Njaka (1967) once put it thus: to

the Igbo, a government that does not afford him an opportunity to participate actively is not democratic and cannot be countenanced.

Arguably, even in postcolonial Africa, the sense of community is still a major theme in the African worldview. Magesa (1997:52-53) notes:

The African view of the universe contains the following major themes: the sacrality of life, respect for the spiritual and mystical nature of creation, and especially of the human person; the sense of family, community, solidarity and participation; and an emphasis on fecundity and sharing in life, friendship, healing and hospitality.

Magesa thus holds that the community is considered as an individual, and the individual is not made up of only flesh and blood; it is a complete and self-sufficient whole, animated by diffused life. In a way, the group, like the individual, is a microcosm of the universe. The whole universe subsists, so to speak, in it (Magesa 1997). Thus, within this ontological unity, there is the paradox of duality. Complementarity becomes the principle of social justice rather than equality. An Igbo proverb brings it out clearly when it says *oke amadi nweegbe, anyi nwe igu* (literally: the chief has a hawk, but we (the people) own the palm frond upon which the hawk perches. This is an acknowledgement of the chief (Eze). But it is also said that Eze cannot have both the hawk and the palm frond. Although due respect is given to the traditional ruler, there is the expectation that he establish with the people that what he wants to do is justified and that he fulfils all the promises that he makes.

The willingness of the citizens to participate directly in the civic affairs, identify their good with the common good, and to crave and sacrifice for public weal was at the epicentre of the Igbo republican spirit. The republican virtues in the traditional society were the moral sense in the citizens that enables them to pursue the common good. The republican spirit generates a sense of public affection and mobilizes solidarity and community consideration in feeling and behaviours (Okoro 2009). This republican spirit

defines the Igbo traditional society as a humanistic society and helps to organize it in a way that ensures values are harmonized and at the same time ensures the autonomy of individual members of the republic. Arguably, the traditional Igbo republicanism combines personal enterprise, striving, and independent mindedness with the moral commitment to solidarity (*umunna bu ike*) and devotion to common good of all.

Consequently, the democratic principle of the Igbo people is predicated on the belief that all should be consulted about and participate in things that concern everyone. In other words, Igbo traditional society is not only egalitarian, democratic, and based on decision making through open consensus of relevant groups of persons (e.g. council of elected and appointed representatives), it is also one where maintenance and protection of civic virtues, public morality, and group harmony becomes the most cherished value. Hence, republicanism is a value that affords every Igbo person an intrinsic worth. Anything less causes injustice and upsets the whole ontological Igbo worldview, resulting in undesirable influences and consequences. The Igbo way to avert these catastrophes is to resort to *Ikpu-ala* (restorative justice) according to 'Omenala' (in the subsequent chapter).

In summary, the concept of *Ibuanyi Danda* and *Umunna bu ike*, as it were, characterizes Igbo social life as shared, socially related, political openness, and ensures group harmony as the highest group virtue.

## **2.6 THE IGBO CONCEPT OF HUMAN BEING: DESTINY AND THE CHI**

The Igbo concept of human being is simple, though it is different from that of Western philosophy. To understand the Igbo concept of human being better, it is necessary to observe that in Igbo thought a human being does not have a split personality: He is an organic whole (Ruch and Anyanwu 1981:149-151). All his/her parts, the body, the heart, the spirit, and so on, form a unity which responds together to the source of its being.

Tuche (2009:22) quoting Dzobo in an article titled, "*The Image of Man in Africa*" contended that the African view of human beings is derived from the African view of reality as found in the indigenous religion, creation myths, personal names, symbols,

and proverbs. West Africans believe that God created all people and endowed them with gifts and personality, or a personal creative force known as *chi* to the Igbo. This creative force or principle is considered as part of the divine, and is thus a personal god to guide the person through life. However, Onwu (2002:11) notes that among the Igbo, in spite of the concept of *Chukwu*, the Igbo world remains homo-eccentric. In other words, although *Chukwu* is the foundation of Igbo religion philosophy, yet the Igbo world and philosophy are focused on man.

Among the Yoruba, Hallen (2000:43) also observed the importance attached to the personal element arising from self-consciousness. For the Yoruba,

When it comes to others I may have to rely upon verbal and nonverbal behaviour. But for the self that I am, consciousness privileges me with introspective awareness. My behaviour follows upon thought, and my thought originates in my conscious self, my inside or *in*.

What Hallen observed among the Yoruba is also true among other West Africans in particular and Africans generally. John Mbiti insists that African ontology is basically anthropocentric: Man is at the very centre of existence, and African peoples see everything else in its relation to the central position of man. God is the explanation of man's origin and sustenance: it is as if God exists for the sake of man (Mbiti 1969:90). Tuche citing Madu holds that life to the Igbo is the consciousness of being. The reason for this is that *mmadu* (human) for the Igbo is the highest of all creatures. That is the meaning of the Igbo name *mmaduka* (human or man is greater) (Madu 1992:159).

Furthermore, the Igbo conceive *mmadu* as integrally composed of a material element *ahu* (body) and an immaterial spiritual element (*mmuo* [spirit], *nkpurobi* [soul], *obi* [heart]) often spoken of as a tripartite (Madu 1992:160). However, Metuh (1991:110) insists that

The Igbo believe that man is endowed with three different principles or selves. Man can operate in one or more of

these selves in different contexts. These three principles are: *Obi*, Heart or (*Ume*) Breath, *Chi*, Destiny and *eke* or *Agu*, ancestral Guardian. *Obi*, Heart, is a man's life-force, the animating principle which links man with other life-forces in the universe. *Chi* is the Destiny Spirit believed to be an emanation of the Creator which is in man, and the '*eke*' is the ancestral guardian which links man with his family and clan.

One can see how it is possible for the human being, in the understanding of the Igbo, to be in interaction with the different spheres of his/her environment in the universe.

The Heart, *obi*, is the principle of animation in the human being; it is the seat of affection and volition. Biologically, *obi* – Breath resides in the biological heart which is also called *obi*. Though located here, this does not mean that breath is material. Breath is an immaterial spiritual substance which is believed to leave the body at times. This life principle may be attacked, weakened, or killed, but equally can be strengthened. It is believed that at death this life-force leaves the body, but does not survive it. This principle is not identical with the Christian soul, despite some translations (Metuh 1991).

Other West Africans, like the Igbo, believe in immortality, and traditional Igbo emphasize that death is only a temporary separation (physical): men and women come, they stay for a while, and they go. They fulfil some purpose in their day and generation, and then they pass on to the beyond and, later, reappear again in this world and so complete the cycle (Madu 1992:162). This is the concept of reincarnation. It is believed that only people who have lived well and died well are entitled to reincarnate or re-embody themselves in a beneficent manner (Onwu 2002). Reincarnation is the reason that most Igbo people place a great deal of emphasis on a proper or befitting burial, as it is considered a rite of passage into the spirit world, and preparation for the eventual return to earth. Improper burial could hinder a person from being reincarnated by the ancestors or by the gods (Tuche 2009).

Another important element in the Igbo concept of humanity is that all men and women are created equal. For this reason, the Igbo strive for equality or, as Uchendu (1965:19) put it, near equality. According to him, equality ensures that no one person or group of persons acquires too much control over the life of others. This is an ideological obstacle to the development of a strong central authority. Furthermore, Uchendu emphasizes that what the Igbo mean by an egalitarian society is that which gives to its citizens an equal opportunity to achieve success. The stress is on achievement. The emphasis, Uchendu (1965:20) maintains, has two major effects: firstly, it makes the Igbo world a highly competitive one in which the rules of competition may be manipulated by the status seeker in order to attain his goals. Secondly, it fosters a socio-political system that is conciliar and democratic. The quest affects the social behaviour or attitude of the Igbo (Uka 2004).

The underlying individualistic Igbo social organization is clearly institutionalized in the concept of *chi*, which is a pronounced aspect of Igbo religion. The traditional belief is that a human is an encapsulated spirit, not an animated body, a characteristic which differentiates human beings from mere animals. Hence it is highly offensive to call a human being an animal (*anu-oha*) among the Igbo people. The implication, according to Dzobo (1992) is that the human is

...free and self-determining and has a say in shaping his own history and destiny. Through his free action he releases forces which shape the world and society, and because of his dual nature he also can release forces which will destroy society and the world

The complexity of the Igbo concept of a human being is further exemplified by the Igbo belief that each individual is endowed with a spiritual affinity known as "*chi*" at the very moment of his conception. This *chi* is the spirit in charge of destiny, an emanation of the creator in the human being. It is seen by scholars like Meek as one of the most striking Igbo doctrines. Every human being is associated with a genius "spirit-double" – *Chi*. It was an emanation of the ancestors which apparently guided and protected the

human being during his lifetime and to which he returned after death (Metuh 1991). For the Igbo believe that

...at conception (i.e. at the moment of conception of human being), God assigns a *chi* to each person, and places before the *chi* several parcels of fortunes. Whichever the *chi* chooses becomes the destiny of the child entrusted to his care. This parcel of destiny which is also referred to as *chi* contains the total luck or misfortunes that the child will have. *Chi* has, therefore, two ambivalent conceptions – the parcel of destiny and the guardian spirit who chooses the destiny parcel (Metuh 1991).

A lucky person is called among the Igbo people *onye chi oma*, someone who has a good *chi*, and on the other hand, the unfortunate person is called, *onye chi ojoo*, (someone who has a bad *chi*). The role of *chi* as a guardian spirit is brought out by the Igbo proverb, *Nwata n'amu iri enu, chi ya achiri uche n'aka* (when a child is learning how to climb a tree, his *chi* is breathless with anxiety) (Metuh 1991). This life principle goes back to God at the death of the individual and is believed to give an account of its work on earth. Furthermore, when a person reincarnates, according to the Igbo belief, one receives another *chi*. In general, a person's abilities, faults, or misfortunes are at times ascribed to this *chi*.

*Chi*, as it were, represents individual freedom, destiny, and responsibility. Destiny as found in Igbo life and thought is assumed to be an ancient and basic concept in the Igbo religious system. African beliefs about the Destiny spirits shed light on their notions about predestination and human responsibility. In African thought, predestination and human responsibility are conflicting, but they are not diametrically opposed concepts (Metuh 1991). For the Africans, what one may hope to get out of life is only what has been predestined by *Chi-ukwu* (God). What one actually gets is one's responsibility. One only gets what one has worked for. Thus, where a person is not resourceful, a

particular fortune in his destiny package may be lost. Since no one knows the contents of his/her destiny, one must keep trying as if what one wants is there.

Succinctly, Africans in general and the Igbo in particular hold that the human being is both subject to fate and free at the same time. He/she is at the same time a victim of restriction imposed by destiny and the architect of his own future within his destiny's limits. He/she is both innocent and responsible. In other words, human destiny in Igbo thought is both unalterable and alterable (Uka 2004). Perceived as a package sealed by God and given to human beings, it is unalterable and it is a resource which can be exploited (Metuh 1987:191).

## **2.7 IGBO CONCEPT OF MAN, CHI: RESPONSIBILITY AND MORAL BEHAVIOUR**

A person is, in Igbo thought, considered first and foremost as a constituent of a particular community, for it is the community which defines who he is and who he can become (Ray 1965:135). Mbiti (1969) aptly puts it thus: the individual is conscious of him/her-self in terms of "I am because we, and since we are, therefore I am". In other words, in traditional Igbo society, a person experiences life through his/her family, lineage, clan, and tribe. Even today, in a village, one is not asked "who are you?" But "whose child are you?" and/or "what lineage or clan do you belong to?" Thus from birth an Igbo learns to believe "I am, because I belong." It is the family that makes the being human; the family in turn is made up of not only the living, but also of the dead and those yet to be born. There is an ontological element in the human being that links him/her to his/her family, and through the family to the clan. This is not only a physical and biological, but also a spiritual element (Metuh 1987:193).

Furthermore, the Igbo recognize every individual person as a unique person endowed by the creator with his/her own personality and talents, and motivated by his/her own particular needs and ambitions. At the same time, in the Igbo socio-political system (institutions), there are various checks and balances on personal rights and freedom in relation to the total social and historical context. The Igbo socio-political structures never approximate the western notion of individualism, namely the idea that human beings are independent of their social and historical circumstances. The Igbo

worldview is, in a way, too systematic for such a doctrine. It is also logically and dynamically integrated.

In other words, freedom and individuality in Igbo traditional society are always balanced by destiny and community, and these are in turn balanced by natural and supernatural powers. Every person is a nexus of interacting elements of the self and of the world, which shape, and is shaped by, his behaviour (Ray 1965:132). Thus life in the Igbo world is founded on interaction and most importantly on reciprocity. The interests of an individual and of the community are to a large extent interwoven. The interests of the community are assured when the individual acts in concern with the community, i.e., acts in compliance with the values of the community. The community in turn gives moral and concrete support which assures continued protection of the individual interests as a person-in-community. But achieving this balance, like any other human endeavour, is never totally successful.

In the Igbo traditional society, relations and interactions are reflected in the various ways in which the people have practiced and preserved justice in their tradition. This is the relevance of their concepts of God, man, and community in their worldview, for it is on the mutual relationships existing between them that the Igbo base their concept of total social harmony as an ideal. Thus sin and morality in Igbo traditional societies are generally societal. God is believed to have decreed morals, but it the duty of the elders and community to enforce them. According to Mbiti (1975:180),

God is thought to be the ultimate guardian of human morality. But people do not believe that he punishes moral offenders, except very occasionally. It is up to society to deal with those who break its morals. If society fails to find out who may have committed certain crimes such as murder, then the community concerned may pray or perform rituals to ask God to punish the unknown murderer.

The invisible world of the Deity, non-human or non-ancestral spirits, is considered amoral according to Megesa (1997:71), in the sense that ethical judgments cannot be

attributed to the actions of its inhabitants; morality is for human beings who are capable of being ethically right or wrong.

The Igbo, like most traditional African societies, are culturally complex. The core of Igbo cosmology and metaphysics is the theory that the universe is permeated throughout by spirits and supernatural forces of various kinds (Nwala 1985: 36-41). It acknowledges the reality of matter as well, but holds that spirit is primary. At the top of the ontological pyramid of beings is *Chi-Ukwu* or Supreme Being, the creator of the universe and everything it contains, followed by spirits and forces immanent in the very texture of reality (Iroegbu 1995:338). The spiritual order of the universe includes numerous local deities, ancestral spirits, spirits of the dead and of the living that manifest extrasensory capabilities, forces in-dwelling in natural objects and phenomena, evil spirits, and the mystical power of *ogwu*.

However, on top of the ontological ladder is man, the being-with-intelligence, a being that has both body and soul. Animals, plants, and all inanimate objects follow in that order. Traditional Igbo metaphysics presents a vision of the universe in which everything is interconnected in a complex web of relationships emanating as life-forces from *Chi-Ukwu*, right down to the lowest levels of being. Witch doctors and medicine men/women (*dibia*) can manipulate spiritual entities and *ogwu* either for good or evil. They serve as intermediaries between the world of spirit, the living-dead, and the living. In the Igbo cultural worldview, the dichotomy between the visible and the invisible, the natural and the supernatural, the “inside” and the “outside” are blurred by the intuitive perception of the unity of all things. In this connection, Ruch and Anyanwu (1981:89) also argued thus:

In a unitary, as opposed to the analytical world, nothing is lifeless or soulless. Everything is filled or bedded in life-force. This force dominates or prevails in the whole universe... the (Igbo) assume that life-force lies behind nature itself or the things experienced.

Furthermore, consistent with the basic tenor of Igbo metaphysics is communalism (Ekei 2001:193). As indicated earlier, the Igbo theory of being posits that the various orders of reality are interconnected, which means that everything is in some way linked together. Therefore it is impossible, from the perspective of the Igbo worldview, to conceive of a completely isolated entity. At the social level, such an outlook entails communalism, the belief that each member of the community is ultimately related to others and must live in such a way as to preserve the harmony between the cosmic forces and the larger society. Consequently, when an Igbo commits a moral wrong or breaks a taboo, his act is not seen merely as an infringement of natural law understood in a rationalistic and secular sense. Instead, his/her act is capable of endangering the ontological balance of the entire group. His action could result in some physical effects harmful to the individual, his/her relatives, or the clan as a whole. This is because every act contrary to *Omenala* in the traditional Igbo belief system has a ritual dimension. Unless the necessary and appropriate cleaning rites are performed, sickness, deaths, draught, or other disasters would afflict the entire community, not just the offender. It is therefore not surprising that in traditional Igbo communities, ontological morality held sway. Thus, we are led to our research topic: *Ikpu-ala* and its theological values in Igbo justice system in the subsequent chapter. The truly individualistic outlook dominant in Western society was rare, because of the widespread belief that an individual never receives anything, does anything or suffers anything alone, all by him/her-self. The strength and weaknesses of this basically humanitarian attitude of the Igbo can be ascertained from the words of Ruch and Anyanwu (1981:146):

Of course, this attitude considerably restricts and even stifles individual creativity, originality and freedom, but it also ensures a warm fraternity, hospitality and togetherness which could be the envy of individualistic cultures. It accounts for the Africans' love for feasts, family gatherings, parties and communal activities.

In summary, the Igbo concept of the individual is not individual purely and exclusively in contrast to others, but is principally relational: one is in an individual-communal/interdependent relationship with the rest in an ontological as well as in a spiritual sense of the word.

## **2.8 IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

The world of the Igbo is a world of spirits. Their belief system and an elaborate religious worship organized around it confirm this assertion. According to Basden (1966:33), this conception of 'spirit' is deep and powerful, operating from within, and is not merely an outward conformity to religious observance although it includes that. It is such a prime elemental force that it might fairly be described as a sixth sense as keenly active as the normal five. In Marx Weber's view there is no known human society without something which modern social scientists would classify as religion. Every society possesses a conception of a supernatural order, of spirits, gods, or impersonal forces that are different from, and in some sense, superior to the forces governing ordinary "natural" events. These forces, by their nature and activities, somehow give meaning to the unusual, the frustrating, and the rationally impenetrable aspects of experience (Weber 1964: xxvii-xxviii).

Religion is concerned with sacred beliefs and practices. It is pre-eminently social; therefore, in established societies religion is one of the most important institutional structures making up the total social system. Religion therefore has been characterized as:

- 1) embodying the most sublime of human aspirations
- 2) forming a bulwark of morality
- 3) being a source of public order and inner individual peace
- 4) having an enabling and civilizing effect upon mankind
- 5) forming one of the strongest buttresses of the social order and the *status quo*
- 6) being one of the most revolutionary motivations in society
- 7) providing the source of all higher culture

In relation to society, religion goes beyond our knowledge; it gives security beyond the guarantees of human relationship. Throughout the ages, religion has been the normal way of looking at the world and experiencing life itself.

Furthermore, religion in traditional societies is an essential part of the social machinery; as are morality and law, part of the complex system by which human beings live together in the orderly arrangement of a social order. According to Radcliffe-Brown (1976:154), there are many persons who would say that it is only true religion that can provide the foundation of an orderly social life. The hypothesis we are considering here is that the social function of religion is independent of its truth or falsity, that religions which we think to be erroneous or even absurd and repulsive, may be an important and effective part of the social machinery. Without these “false” religions social evolution and the development of modern civilization would have been impossible. Hence, we may assume that any religion normally involves certain ideas or beliefs, on the one hand, and on the other certain observance which can be positive or negative.

In the same vein of thought, Radcliffe-Brown agrees with Fustel de Coulanges that in ancient Greece and Rome the religion on the one side and the many important institutions on the other are closely united as interdependent parts of a coherent and unified system, that the religion was an essential part of the constitution of the society. The form of religion and the form of the social structures correspond to one another (Radcliffe-Brown 1976:162-163). The Secretariat for Non-Christians has also highlighted the close bond that exists between religion and the social life of the community. Reduced to essentials, their vision of the world is a unifying factor because it does not imply any clear-cut difference between profane and sacred, between matter and spirit (Secretariorum Pro Non-Christianis 1969:23). It follows that we cannot understand the social, juridical, and political institutions of traditional societies unless we take their religion into account. It is equally true that we cannot understand religion except by an examination of its relation to institutions. Hence a systematic or at least a general notion of a people’s traditional religion should precede any moral construction for that people.

African religion is an essential part of the way of life of each people. Its influence covers all life, from before the birth of a person to long after he has died. People find it useful and meaningful in their lives, and therefore they let it spread freely. They teach it informally to their children through conversation, proverbs and myths, as well as through practice. Young people also learn about it through participating in religious activities, as whole of existence is a religious phenomenon; man is a deeply religious being living in a religious universe. Failure to realize and appreciate this starting point has led missionaries, anthropologists, colonial administrators, to misunderstand not only the religions as such, but the peoples of Africa (Mbiti 1969:15).

At this point, it will be necessary to outline the essential features of Igbo traditional religion and these include belief, worship and morality.

## **2.9 BELIEF**

The Igbo traditional understanding of the world and reality as a whole is religious and holistic. The universe is conceived of as a cyclical order as the seasons of the year, the sun, the moon, the stars and natural events in general repeat themselves in an interminable way. Elide (1959) calls this repetitive order in nature as the 'myth of eternal return.' This ordered succession symbolized harmony, persistence, and dynamism. This order must not be disrupted in the Universe in which the different levels of space as perceived are inhabited. A critical look at the Igbo worldview would throw light on the rationale for man's insistence on maintaining the delicate balance or cordial relationship between him and the spirit beings in the spirit world, as well as ensuring the maximum success of his life on earth.

As already indicated, the Igbo religious beliefs begin with the conception of the Supreme God variously called *Chiukwu*, *Chukwu*, *Chineke*, *Obasi di n'elu*, and so on. The Supreme is the primal being. Philosophically, the Supreme Being is conceived under two major principles (1) the principle of creation (*Chi-Okike*) and (2) the principle of Absoluteness (*Chi-Ukwu*, *Chukwu*). Both are implied in the principles of (i) divinity and (ii) absolute dependence, which are expressed in the conception of "*Chi*" or personal god (Nwala 1985:115-116). Regarding creation, *Chukwu* is the creator of all

things including man whom he endows with his nature and his destiny, referred to as '*chi*'. The principle of creation (*Okike*) thus shows man's divine origin.

On the basis of this principle, the Igbo invoke the ultimate power and protection of the Supreme Being especially when all else has failed them. Other attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, goodness, and justice, are expressed in non-abstract, concrete concepts. This shows the importance of Igbo naming ceremonies. Sometimes God is thought of in masculine terms and even as a Father, at other times she is conceived in feminine terms and as a Mother. But in most cases the Igbo do not specify, and gender categories are totally absent.

This keen awareness of God is expressed in the Igbo traditional ritual of Igbo *Ofo*, symbolizing the concept of the Supreme Being's authority, justice, and truth. The belief in the Supreme Being among the Igbo has been strongly attested to by many other foreign writers like O'Connell, Talbot, Basden, Meek, and others. There is no risk of pantheism since the Supreme Being is thought of and approached as a Person. Most traditional Africans are so overwhelmed by the uniqueness, majesty, and supremacy of God that they lack images for the Source-Being. Daily prayers are addressed to God, again showing the source of human's dependence, existence, and welfare.

## **2.10 DIVINITIES AND DEITIES**

Next to *Chukwu* are the divinities and deities. These spiritual beings owe their origin to and are dependent on God. Some of them are personified attributes of the Supreme Being, like the thunder divinity, which usually represents God's wrath. Others are God's manifestation in some natural phenomenon, like the sun. These include *Anyanwu* (the sun-god), *Igwekaala* (literally: sky greater than land), *Ala* (the earth goddess), and *Amadioha/Kamalu* (the god of thunder and lightning). However, there is a twist. With so many divinities and "*chis*," these are not really called "gods," but are better known as "messengers" of the Supreme Being (*Chi-Ukwu*). Not understanding this basic fact creates the impression of polytheism among the Igbo. These divinities and "deities," the messengers or ministers of God, may be prominent in some localities but totally

unknown in others (Onah n.d.). As God's messengers and intermediaries between God and humans, they are the targets of numerous cults and prayers.

Onwu (2002) disagrees with Onah, insisting that altars were built for these divinities throughout Igbo land, unlike *Chi-Ukwu* who was acknowledged publicly but never worshipped with cults. Furthermore, he claims that these divinities/deities constitute the Igbo pantheon. Nevertheless, *Chi-Ukwu* is well known by all, albeit by different local names. On the other hand, the divinities were usually dreaded for their uncompromising stance on some moral issue, and are therefore in themselves good and just depending on their ability to assist those who cultivated them as their personal *chis* (gods). The Igbo believed that at conception, *Chi-Ukwu* gives each man that man's particular portion of the divine being called *Chi* (Ilogu 1974:34). The *Chi* (Spirit) becomes the personal god, or guidance from the Great Spirit, *Chi-Ukwu* (*Chukwu*). Adeyemo (1997:1) in his book, *Salvation in African Tradition*, agrees with this notion. He argues:

The assertion of the traditions is that only Deity has the eternal prerogative of putting the essence of being into man. In Igbo as well as in Yoruba, the designations of the essence of being, *chi* and *ori*, derive directly from the name Deity: *Chukwu*, *Orise*; this by implication means that the essence of man's being derives directly from Deity.

Regardless, God in the African mind is essentially good. Magesa underlined this belief when he states, the relationship between God and creation – specifically, humanity, is one of solicitude on the part of God. To associate god with anything that is not good, pure, just, and honourable is ridiculous (Magesa 1997:41). The Igbo like most Africans, acknowledge that misfortune and suffering can and do happen, but they believe that it is always with the knowledge or permission of God. Yet *Chukwu* is never blamed for this; instead the ultimate source of misfortune and suffering is to be found in created order (Metuh 1981:43).

There is yet another class of spiritual beings who are not always good. Some of them are good, some are, to say the least, mischievous, while others are outright evil. Some of these are human, like the wandering spirits of some dead persons who due to

some lack did not make it to the home of the ancestors, and also the spirits of living witches and wizards who are believed to be able to leave their bodies and inhabit lower animals in order to harm other persons.

The Igbo belief in the ancestors is a clear expression of the people's faith in an after-life, even though perceived in the context of return to the earth through reincarnation. It is believed that one's status in the after-life depends entirely on one's status here on earth since the spirit-world is a mirror of the human world with the same topography and similar organization. Their status in the spirit world offers them the opportunity to enjoy some special relationship with God, the divinities, and the good spirits. They are also believed to have some power over the evil spirits and are therefore able to protect the living members of their families from harm. To qualify to be an "ancestor," it is not enough just to be dead. An ancestor is one who died after having lived a life judged to be fully realized and morally upright. The ancestors are so dear to the heart of the Igbo, and so central in their traditional religious practices, that some outsiders have mistakenly described African traditional religion as "ancestor-worship." It is merely, however, the aspiration of every Igbo to be a good ancestor, a motif which common in Christian religion (the cult of the sainthood).

## **2.11 THE EARTH-GODDESS**

Our treatment of Igbo traditional religion will not be complete without saying a few words about the Earth-Goddess *Ala* (*Ani* or *Ana*). Of all the divinities, *Ala* the Earth goddess is generally worshipped in Igbo land as the arch-divinity and seen as the goddess of fertility and guardian of Igbo morality. She is a power that controls divinities and a force which brings fortune and economic prosperity. *Ala* is therefore the most common divinity in Igbo land. Breaches of public morality or social prohibitions and taboos (*nso ala*), such as stealing from the barn, homicide, incest, infidelity, a woman climbing the palm tree or wrestling her husband down in a fight, and the like, are all considered offences against the community (*Ala*). Ilogu (1974:123-127) has itemized about twenty-four abominations or ethical and social prohibitions and taboos of Igbo moral code. Any violation of these prohibitions is considered to be moral, spiritual, and

social pollution of the land, requiring appropriate ritual purification of the offender and the community in order to appease the earth goddess (Nwala 1988).

Emphasizing the pre-eminence of *Ala* among the other divinities, Echeruo (1979) remarks:

One divinity, however, was beyond the capriciousness of Igbo men: that divinity is neither Igwe, nor even *Chukwu*, but *Ala*, the goddess of the earth. She was the one deity which no man or woman and no community could afford to offend, much less discard. If ever there was a supreme god among the Igbo it was *Ala*.

From the reflections here on *Ala*, it is evident that any serious study or research into the foundations and principles of Igbo ethics and morality requires reference to *Ala*, the earth-goddess, from which all Igbo moral patterns derive inspiration and support.

## **2.12 WORSHIP**

Like all other Africans, the Igbo are naturally and profoundly religious. Everybody is a religious carrier. Not that they are one-dimensional in their approach to a vision of life, but simply that God is the Source and Origin, Centre of Existence and the End of all life. He is the source of all life-force. Their religion is their existence and their existence is their religion. Thus, it permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible to isolate. Everything is consecrated to God (Jones 1968: Genesis 1:25). He is *Chi-neke*, a name used to emphasize the creative activity of the Supreme Being and also as the source of all life, for spirit beings as well as humans. Everything is through him, with him, and in him. Religion simply impregnates the whole life of the community: it is the beginning and the end of everything.

According to Tuche (2009), quoting DomNwachuku, the ancestors among the Igbo are looked upon for protection by those who are living in the visible world. Ancestors stand before the gods as intercessors and intervene for the good of their living relatives, especially if a deity seeks to inflict harm on the living. Furthermore, DomNwachuku (2000:35) insists that ancestors are respected and sometimes deified, but not

worshipped. The fact that most Western anthropologists and theologians, as well as some African ones, talk about ancestral worship does not mean that Africans, especially the Igbo, worship their ancestors. Mbiti was in agreement with DomNwachukwu when he insisted that the departed, whether parents, brothers, sisters, or children, form part of the family, and must therefore be kept in touch with their surviving relatives. Libation and giving of food to the departed are tokens of fellowship, hospitality, and respect; the drink and food so given are symbols of family continuity and contact. According to Mbiti (1969:9), “worship” is the wrong word to apply in this situation but devotion. Africans in their worship believe in the “communion” with their departed members of their family.

In any case, the Igbo like most Africans are notoriously religious (Shorter 1978:49). Since the Igbo worldview is a religious one, religion and religious practices are their waking thought. This is why their entire culture is permeated with religious practices. Mbiti (1969:1) has this to say about the African culture intertwining with religion.

Religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it. A study of these religious systems is therefore ultimately a study of the people themselves in all complexities of both traditional and modern life... Religion is the strongest element in traditional background, and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned.

In corroboration of Mbiti, Ezeanya (1980:324) agrees that in Africa, life is religion, and religion is life. This means that religion could not be explained away in Africa. Whoever tries it will be seen as a stranger to Igbo community. The Igbo do not separate their religious life from economic or social affairs; their way of life, their beliefs, their conduct in the life of the community, all form an integral unit in such a way that each penetrates the other in a continuous and common destiny.

### **2.13 THE PLACES OF WORSHIP (SHRINES)**

The shrine is primarily a religious institution and an essential element of ritual sacrifice among the Igbo (Arinze 1978:97). It is the spacio-temporal element of Igbo

traditional religion and the most visible symbol of the cult and worship of any deity. Physically, it is essentially a place set apart, harbouring ritual objects and symbols (such as the remains of animals, pots, coins, feathers, knives, plants, etc.) and dedicated to a divinity, or ancestor for official and solemn worship.

#### **2.14 THE ETHICAL/MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE IGBO SHRINE**

The shrine among the Igbo is of special moral and social importance and significance, apart from its fundamental and primary religious and cult role. The shrine is invariably in every community acknowledged as the institutional embodiment and custodian of public morality and order. A few illustrations will suffice here. Infringement of any of the major prohibitions of the Igbo moral code (such as suicide, induced abortion, incest, stealing of yams, etc.) is considered pollution and a dangerous alienation of the community from peaceful and safe communion with the divinities. Only the performance of the appropriate rituals at the appropriate communal shrine will purify the culprit and the land, appease the divinities and ancestors, and restore the community to spiritual harmony and peace. Thus the shrine as an institution inculcates a personal awareness of the social dimensions and gravity of serious moral lapses, and serves thereby as a useful moral deterrent and educator of conscience. This ethical role of the shrine is generally less well appreciated than the more usual social function.

In any dispute involving rival claims to land or any other property, or even in the case of disputed responsibility for a given pregnancy, the rival claimants may be required to appear publicly before the community shrine to swear before the authority of the shrine and its divinity in support of their claims. In the *Umuobom* area, the rival claimants along with their immediate nuclear families will be required to swear, standing with their feet placed in the ritual basket of *Ogwugwu*, the local deity.

Furthermore, solemn occasions of local community festivities and celebrations are usually preceded and concluded by the observance of relevant rites at the shrines of the local deities by the elders and priests (Kalu 1978:45-57). For the chief priests and the elders and custodians, the shrine is the focus of periodic social interactions and

planning for the harmony and progress of the community. Indeed, it may be said that; the shrine is to the Igbo traditional religion what the altar is to the Christian church.

## **2.15 MORALITY**

The traditional dominant Igbo orientation to the ultimate is their great respect for morality and dread is in-built of the consequences of committing any offence against the Supreme Being, the ancestors, local divinities and deities. We have earlier indicated that part of what the traditional Igbo were known for is that they were a very spiritual people. That is the philosophical understanding behind their morals, customs, traditions, beliefs, and myths. The ultimate which a traditional Igbo person cherishes is to live a good and worthy life, to die and receive proper burial rites, and finally to rejoin his ancestors who lived well and died a good death. This could only be achieved within a decent moral order.

However, at the centre of traditional Igbo morality like most African societies is human life. The Igbo have a sacred reverence for life, for it is believed to be the greatest gift of *Chukwu* to humans. The concept of ethics in the Igbo traditional society is based on the notion that no human being is ever alone. Thus, society according to Opoku (1978:168) is a series of interrelationships in which each one contributes to the welfare and the stability of the community, and avoids that which is disruptive or harmful to the community's life. Mbiti (1969:8) affirming this communal dimension of Igbo ethics asserts, 'I am because we are, and because we are, I am.'

Furthermore, Omonzejele (2008:95) claims that African ethics is based on communal living in the sense that it fuses the society into one big whole. In African traditional society, there is no 'me' but 'us,' no 'my' but 'our.' It is within this perspective and context that African ethics has been formulated. The promotion of life is therefore the determinant principle of Igbo traditional morality and this promotion is guaranteed only in the community. Living harmoniously within a community is therefore a moral obligation ordained by *Chukwu* for the promotion of life. Religion provides the basic infra-structure on which this life-centred, community-oriented morality is based. The implication is that one has an obligation to maintain harmonious relationships with all

the members of the community and to do what is necessary to repair every breach of harmony and to strengthen the community bonds, especially through justice and sharing. And this is not simply a social need but a religious obligation since *Chukwu*, the divinities, and the ancestors, the guarantors of this order of things, are quick to punish defaulters. Any person who infringes a moral norm in traditional African societies has not only the members of the community to fear but also god and the spiritual beings.

In discussing morality, Parrinder (1968:24) says of West African peoples: though god is generally regarded as upholding the moral laws, and judging men after death in accordance with their actions, many practices seem to have little to do with him. However, this research is inclined to believe that the above statement is more representative of Igbo beliefs and practices than Arinze's opinion on this subject when he says: Ibo morality is not clearly referred to God... Since *Chukwu* does harm to no one, fear of the spirits and a narrow utilitarianism elbow Him into the background (Arinze 1970:31). Nonetheless, this opinion does not seem to distinguish principles from practice. The orthodox ethical norm does not consist in the ordinary behaviour of men (Tempels 1969:118). Basden finds this dichotomy also in the Igbo approach to morality. According to him, certain delinquencies like murder, theft, and adultery, are considered heinous crimes and deemed contrary to the will of God and punishment will surely follow. But actual fear of retribution is not sufficiently strong to check wrongdoing... to be found out by his fellow-man is regarded as far more shameful as offending God. In this he is not different from the rest of mankind (Basden 1966:42).

Yet the beings immediately concerned with law and morality are *Ala* (the earth-deity) and *Ndichie* (ancestors). In other words, *ala* deprives evil men of their lives and her priests are the guardians of public morality (Meek 1937:25). Thus most heinous crimes are called *Nso-Ala* or *Alu* (land taboos). Of a person who commits such a crime it is said "*Omeru nso Ala*" or "*omeruru Ala*" [he defiled the land] (Green 1914:102). However, it is important that in Igbo traditional religion, there are two ways in which God exercises control over morality: (i) through the prerogative he has of allotting a good or bad *chi* to an individual in his reincarnation cycles; (ii) through his control over

reincarnation itself. This will be the centre piece of this dissertation. As the Igbo proverb says: *nwata mesuo ebu, ogba ya* (it is the one who disturbs the wasp will be stung by it). Literally meaning, the one who defies the earth-deity will face the consequences of his/her actions (*onye meruru ala na-akpu-ala*).

Thus, the perception of Igbo cosmology is that the moral order must be maintained so that they can live in peace and have abundant life. The Igbo ancestors constructed a number of socio-cultural controls. The first was to emphasize character. Character refers to moral uprightness, peace with the gods and peace with human beings. Purity among the Igbo was seen as essential in blocking the anger of the gods or the ruin of evil spirits, this is the implication of *onye aka ya di ocha*. Hence seasonal festivals included purification rites (*ikpu-ala*).

In the same vein, Idowu (1973:6) elaborating on the concept of immorality in African traditional religion posits that since the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporally, every member of the community is expected to act in such a way as to promote the good of the whole society. It is held that whatever happens to the individual is believed to happen also to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group, happens to the individual. This is why, according to him, as character makes for good social relations, it is laid upon every member of the community to act in such a way as to promote always the good of the whole body (Udo 2008:6). A person's misdeeds can bring calamity to his/her immediate family, extended family, his/her lineage and the entire community (Opoku 1978:168). To avoid the shame that his/her misdeeds will bring to the community every Igbo tries to live a good life. Dime (1986:38), corroborating the above assertion contends that the Igbo relation holds that man must watch strictly his conduct so that it does not bring nor cause calamity for him or for the society at large. It is in this sense that Popkin and Stroll define ethics as "a code or set of principles by which men live" (Popkin and Stroll 1981:1). It, therefore, means that the concept of ethics in traditional Africa is in living according to the code to avoid shame in any family or community.

The Igbo, because of their sense of community, have a very strong sense of justice. Without justice, life in the community would be impossible; there would be no harmony.

A victim of injustice often makes a direct appeal to God. The Igbo believe that God, who is just and who sees and knows everything, hates injustice as is illustrated by the following Akan proverb: *Nyame mpe kwaseabuo nti ena wama obiara edin* (It is because God hates injustice that he has given each one a name). Thus, the Igbo traditional morality has cosmic dimensions as will be seen in the next chapter.

## **2.16 CONCLUSION**

Our discussion of the Igbo social structure, cosmology and, to some extent, beliefs has demonstrated the close affinity and community orientated consciousness which exist among the Igbo people. Sharing, co-operation, responsibility, solidarity, good relationship, mutual respect, and the practice of justice and charity in both private and public life, are given strong emphasis. We have seen that the community concept spreads vertically and horizontally. The idea of the family community also extends to include the departed as well as those who are about to be born. There is no place for individualism. Man is a community-building person. Person is not the opposite of community, rather both are correlated realities. Man is intended for community with other persons (*Chukwu* and man) and there is community only where there are persons and where persons are protected. The community must show justice to the individual, for this is a moral duty of the community, and above all, the person is a perfect person only in the measure in which he opens himself in love and service for others. The family is seen as the primordial community. As the font of new human life, it is normal if not the only centre in which the human person can develop bodily, spiritually, in a healthy fashion. The moral and religious life of man/woman and his/her capacity to love are first awakened by parental love. Through the family as its cell, society renews and maintains itself. The Igbo have an essentially religious view of the universe. For them, the world is perfect and under God's control. The universe, like the lineage, is eternal and comprises the visible and the invisible aspects. Life is sacred and belongs both to the visible and the invisible worlds. Life becomes a process, one step resulting from another and giving rise to the next. Any abnormal situations are attributed to and judged to be caused by unfriendly supernatural powers.

So far, I have sought to portray the basis of the Igbo religious worldview and its theology. I have also highlighted the shrine as the spatio-temporal focus and visible symbol of the communion of the Igbo with the invisible universe of God, the divinities, and venerable ancestors. The ethical significance of the shrine for public order and peace was briefly illustrated. Although the overwhelming majority of the Igbo have converted to Christianity for well over a century now, our discussion here should not be regarded as an irrelevant exercise in theological history. The development of the spirituality of the modern Igbo, along with the refinement of public morality in the light of contemporary beliefs, is a continuing task for our religious leaders. It is a task that Christianity cannot fully achieve without fruitful dialogue with the Igbo theological heritage, and without a sincere recognition of the positive elements of the latter. The following may be numbered among such elements:

- (a) The essential transcendence and dynamic immanence of the Supreme Being, God;
- (b) The immortality of the human spirit and the ethical implications thereof;
- (c) The integrated vision of the universe of God, the spirits, and man;
- (d) *Chi* as the foundation of religious liberty in all its dimensions and implications, and of personal conscience;
- (e) The communality of religion;
- (f) The altar as a social and cult symbol;
- (g) The social dimensions of sin and the need for an appropriate theology of sin as a moral and social pollution.

These fundamental concepts constitute the main theological legacy of the Igbo concept of deities and were seriously taken for granted and utterly neglected by the missionaries of Igbo people.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### ***IKPU-ALA* IN THE IGBO CONCEPT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE - ITS BIBLICAL FOUNDATION**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This word 'justice' is a common word and a familiar concept. Almost every mature person knows intuitively what is 'just', and can intuitively identify injustice. However, precisely defining what the word 'justice' means or what the concept of justice encompasses is not so simple.

In the Greco-Roman tradition, justice is seen primarily as that which orders man's relations to his fellows and which inspires the laws that guarantee the equilibrium and the tranquillity of the community (McDonagh 1965:152). When the Greek philosophers attributed this absolute primacy to justice they were implying the term in its more general sense as a principle of harmony in the community. Plato, for example, sees a just man as one who performs the task or function proper to him in accordance with his place in society.

This chapter will focus on the biblical and theological foundation of social justice and *Ikpu-ala* as a social control. To do this we will begin by examining the Igbo concepts of justice. I will also advance reasons for the inculturation of *Ikpu-ala* in the Igbo Christian Church. The applications of justice to general and specific issues faced by the church today are also examined.

#### **3.2 HISTORICAL VIEWS OF JUSTICE**

The most significant early treatise on the topic was presented by Aristotle in books V and VII of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle identified that there is a universal kind of justice that relates to all human beings: "...for there seems to be a kind of justice that obtains for any human being in relation to anyone capable of sharing in law and taking part in agreement... to the extent that the other is a human being" (Rowe 2002:221). In this sense, a person is just if he or she is moral, compassionate and obeys the law. In other words, a just person acts virtuously toward other people.

Furthermore, Aristotle also noted that there are multiple forms of justice (Aristotle Book V.2). He identifies 'merit' as a principle of justice and also its attendant problems: "everybody agrees that what is just in distributions must accord with the some kind of merit, but everybody is not talking about the same kind of merit" (Book V.3). Proportionality also features in his discussion: the just in the distribution of things belonging to the community always follows the proportion we have described. In other words, if the distribution is from public funds, it will follow the same ratio that the individual contributions have to one another; and the unjust which is opposed to the just in this sense is what contravenes the proportional (Book V.4).

Aristotle also believes that when it comes to 'rectificatory justice,' people should be treated equally before the law: it makes no difference whether a decent person has defrauded a worthless one or a worthless person has defrauded a decent one, or whether the adultery was committed by someone decent or someone worthless; the law pays attention solely to the difference created by the damage done, and where the one person is committing an injustice, another suffering it, or one person inflicted and another has been damaged, it always treats them as equal. So what is unjust in this sense, the judge tries to equalize (Book V.4). Aristotle's ideas undoubtedly had a significant impact on the Hellenistic world when the Christian Church was in its infancy. Thus, it is not surprising to see similar ideas echoed by Christian theologians down through the centuries. Augustine, for example, proclaimed justice and judgment according to merit or deserts: while our soul is shut up in this earthly body, judgment and justice are to be done, which shall be profitable for us hereafter, when 'every one shall receive according to that he hath done in the body, whether good or bad' (Sunden 1987). In addition, he presented the 'golden rule' (Augustine's Book of Psalms) as an ethic for just living:

What man if questioned about justice, when he hath not a cause,  
would not easily answer what is just? Inasmuch as the hand of our  
Maker in our very hearts hath written this truth, "That which to thyself  
thou wouldest not have done, do not thou to another." Of this truth,

even before that the Law was given, no one suffered to be ignorant, in order that there might be some rule whereby might be judged even those to whom Law had not been given (Sunden 1987& Markus 1970).

Thomas Aquinas likewise advocated the principle of merit or deserts: the act of justice in relation to its proper matter and object is indicated in the words, rendering to each one his right, a man is said to be just because he respects the rights (*jus*) of others (Aquinas 2.2.58).

Kulikovsky, quoting John Calvin also held to the principle of merit or deserts, but went beyond this to proclaim a principle of moral uprightness and ‘doing good to all.’

In the names of justice and judgment the comprehends that equity,  
By which to everyone is given what is his own. If we would make a distinction, justice is the name given to the rectitude and humanity which we cultivate with our brethren, when we endeavour to do good to all, and when we abstain from all wrong, fraud, and violence. But judgment is to stretch forth the hand to the miserable and the oppressed, to vindicate righteous causes, and to guard the weak from being unjustly injured (Kulikovsky 2007).

For Kulikovsky, this also means that injustice should be forcibly repressed and those who act unjustly must be punished for their deeds:

For in the minds of many the love of equity and justice grows cold, if due honour be not paid to virtue, and the licentiousness of the wicked cannot be restrained, without strict discipline and the infliction of punishment. The two things are comprehended by the prophet when he enjoins kings and other rulers to execute “judgement and righteousness” (Jem. 21:12;22:3). It is righteousness

(justice) to take charge at the innocent, to defend and avenge them, and set them free: it is judgement to withstand the audacity of the wicked, to repress their violence and punish their faults (Kulikovsky 2007).

### **3.3 THE NOTION OF JUSTICE IN JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN**

There is no generally accepted definition of justice. Etymologically, however, justice derives from the Latin word “*ius – iustus*” meaning law, a legal right. In this sense, “law” and “justice” would be synonymous terms. But this is a misnomer. What is more correct is that law is to justice what a means is to an end, or a cause to an effect. Thus, apart from this etymological denotation, justice means many things and sometimes different things to many scholars for which there are myriad theories of justice. For the positivists, justice is seen as conformity to the law. For the social right theorists, justice is seen as doing what promotes the social good. But for the natural law theorists, justice is tied to the idea of natural rights where right is regarded as the ultimate basis of justice. Besides, different scholars and jurists have also expressed their own ideas of justice. For instance, following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas defines justice as “firm and constant will to give each one his due.” Similarly, Spinoza identifies justice with the habitual rendering to everyman his lawful due. John Rawls describes justice as “fairness” (Schmidtz 2006:14-15). Kulikovsky, agreeing with Schmidtz, points that egalitarianism is not the same as humanitarianism. This is because, he believes, humanitarians are concerned with how people are while egalitarians are concerned with how different people fare relative to one another (Kulikovsky 2007). As a result and because the traditional Igbo society is an egalitarian, the concept of justice is as it affects the other is the objective of this study, *Ikpu-ala* as a social justice value. It is therefore the object of focus in this chapter three. Justice has many classifications including moral, civil, criminal, distributive, commutative, retributive, substantial, commercial, divine, private,

social, compensatory, vindictive, conservative, legal, penal justice, and so on. However, this is not the focus of this research, but shall be employed where necessary.

Consequently, in Judaeo-Christian tradition, one encounters an even wider concept of justice. First of all, there is the justice of God as the intrinsic harmony of the divine will. Corresponding to this justice of God there is a justice of man. It denotes holiness or action in conformity with the divine will, whether or not one's action has relation to other persons (McDonagh 1965:152).

Within these two traditions, one can already see the difficulties involved in the use of this term "justice", and such apparent lack of a clear-cut definition often conceals or distorts the meaning of justice. However, within this general concept of justice, one can still deduce a more technical concept which presupposes "otherness" and thus could be taken as 'rendering to each his due'. The theoretical rigor of these traditional presuppositions in the final analysis result in the classical division of justice: individual or commutative justice, social and distributive justice (Maguire 1980:65).

In Igbo tradition society, what is its concept of justice? And does this concept constitute any moral value in Igbo morality?

### **3.4 JUSTICE AS MORAL RECTITUDE**

Moral philosophers have maintained that every society has various ways of characterizing what is good and bad, true and false, just and unjust. This applies too to the Igbo society. The question of physical and moral good and evil is so elementary to the Igbos that one would be astonished in his attempt to uncover the coherence of justice within itself as an idea and within social reality.

In the Igbo worldview we saw God as the first in the hierarchical order of beings and, above all, as the source of life-force. Within this Igbo concept of God, one

finds that for the Igbos, God is all-powerful and lord over all inferior spirits. He is generous in his favours to mankind. Consequently, he is conceived as the upholder of social order, the source and sanction of public justice. Thus justice in Igbo thought rests fundamentally on the character and will of God (Chukwu) who established the social order of the universe. His justice, therefore, lies in his will and power to maintain the harmonious order of the world and also punished those who act contrary to the norms regulating this ontological social order.

In this respect the Igbo thought is very similar to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Hence, in biblical thought, justice (*mishpat*) is seen specifically as the righteousness (*tsedeq*) of God (New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. VIII 1967:73).

Justice was, in Igbo language, a moral value. It appears frequently in synonymous relation with “righteousness”. “Righteousness” is a quality of intention and act, a characteristic of persons (Mays 1983:8) and from thence it flows out into interpersonal relations, and, ultimately terminates in a quality of the community itself.

To express this concept the Igbo use *ikwubakaoto*. Etymologically, ‘*aka*’ which means ‘hand’ represents the whole person and is suffixed to ‘*nkwumoto*’, meaning ‘straightness’. To say that something is straight ‘*kwuoto*’ in a physical sense means lack of curve or crookedness. ‘*Nkwumoto*’ can also refer to a subject in a sentence to describe the action of such a subject in a sentence. For example, *nkwumoto amalugo obi ahu*, standing has become a part of Obi’s life. Thus, when the Igbo use *nkwumoto* to describe somebody, then it is not just a physical description, the moral character of the individual is what is now under consideration. In other words, *ikwuba-aka-oto* in this sense is more than mere physical straightness: it is a moral straightness. It is a moral quality which questions how the individual fares in relation to another and, therefore, presupposes an attitude of love, peace, justice, integrity and, above all, self-

regulation. The individual is righteous relatively to others. All these elements give rise to inner harmony, as manifested in external actions of the individual as opposed to struggle, tensions and conflicts between self and his external action.

In another sense *ikwubakaoto*, keeping hand straight metaphorically refers to a person who is even-handed and considerate in his transactions with others. Justice in this sense means fairness, an attitude seeking for a friendship, a harmonious relationship between persons. Friendship though it has a very broad meaning, is used here to describe the relationship of persons who are close to one another. As a basic purpose of good, however, friendship encompasses many other things, including justice, love and peace among individuals and groups. Hence much has been said in favour of the fact that justice is held to be normative for the relation between individuals and communities (Grisez & Shaw 1974:60-70). Justice as a moral quality is therefore present when a person tries to fulfill the possibilities of a given or assumed relationship in a way that is fair and favourable to others.

“To do justice,” says Mays, “is to love good, to prefer that which makes for life” (Mays 1983). Thus, the Igbo man seeking harmony between himself and his environment, not only seeks the correlates of justice such as truth, love, integrity for the purpose of good life, but also seeks to respect other persons around as a way to realize the good life. And for the Igbo, good life here includes long and prosperous life, many children, many titles, good death and elaborate funeral ceremonies and reincarnation after death. There is what every Igbo man seeks in life. This is the value of justice: that harmonious relationship and mutual respect for another and which is *sine qua non* for life. This is what O’Donnell meant when he said: the Ibo have a strong sense of justice, and are keen to sense your friendly or unfriendly attitude towards them (O’Donnell 1931:57).

Buttressing the above, Kelbley believes that justice's primary role is to specify the conditions under which personal harmony may be attained. It always seeks to disclose the factual circumstances which ground personal harmony. In its capacity, justice aims at the widest possible understanding of human being, both in its frailty and in its strength (Kelbley 1979:60). Thus, justice for the Igbo is not just a mere moral value but cannot be separated from existence because its absence is regarded as disclosing a radical flaw in the whole character of a person or an institution. In Igbo tradition, therefore, justice is seen as an attitude inherent in man and enforceable by the sanction of *Chukwu* and other gods as part of the social order of the universe.

### 3.5 JUSTICE AS JUDGMENT

This notion follows necessarily from what we have seen already. Here justice as judgment represents that situation or state of affairs which is frequently referred to as something which "ought" to be as opposed to that which "ought not" to be. This is judgment, an attitude which recognizes an act as good or bad, just or unjust, depending on whether what is done has any relation with that which "ought" to be. That is, acts are judged good or bad, just or unjust if they conform to the publicly accepted standards of actions.

It is less surprising that in Igbo traditions, '*onye n'akwuba aka ya oto*', a person who keeps his hand straight, is one who conforms to the law, *Omenala* (Aristotle). And as Aristotle noted, such conduct produces and preserves the happiness of the community.

On another note, justice too, is usually referred to leaders who pronounce judgments while presiding over disputes. As it were, they hold the "mean" between law and lawlessness. Quoting Nzomiwu, Dine holds that *ikpe nkwumoto*, just judgment, refers specially to justice in judgments. *Ikpe* (judgment) *nkwumoto*, straightness, therefore literally means judgment that

stands straight, without any crookedness whatsoever or any quibbling to evade the truth involved in an issue (Dine 1974:86-87). This is in line with Pritchard's remarks that the obligation to speak the truth involves a relation consisting of the fact that others are trusting us to speak the truth, a relation the apprehension of which gives rise to the sense that communication of the truth is something owing by us to them (Melden 1977:59-60).

Evading truth in judgment is equal to the destruction of justice and consequently risking life itself. It is worth remembering that in the Igbo worldview, life is guaranteed by observing and maintaining the moral character and the ontological structure of the universe (Uzukwu 1983:167). Otherwise, it would mean the negation of the life-force which would automatically invoke the wrath of *Chukwu onye n'ekesara o bie*, God the supreme Judge, and who, together with the other spirits, especially *Ala*, are the upholders of social order. The Igbo look upon their leaders as God's delegates who are therefore expected in all their actions to show the same impartiality which God would show in dealing with His people. In other words, they are expected to exhibit a high standard of justice. They are also expected to deal with petitioners in accordance with the law and equity and help them to their rights especially when it concerns the weak and oppressed. *Ikwubakaoto* is here a very important and supreme value. For acting on the contrary could lead to death and punishments.

Nzomiwu (1999:87-102) observed that as the history of the Igbo people progressed, the words "*akankwumoto*" and "*ikpenkwumoto*" gathered a metaphorical and a more comprehensive meaning. According to this development, justice becomes any action that conforms to the *omenala* (tradition). Justice, thus, becomes conformity with the requirements of the custom and tradition. A man who keeps the injunctions of *Omenala* which contains the duties of a citizen in all its ramifications is regarded as a just man. In the same vein, the word "*ikpenkwumoto*" became a judgment that conforms

to the tradition (*Omenala*). In other words, any judgment that is not consistent with the *Omenala* is not constitutional and as such null and void. Such a judgment cannot be binding on any party. Besides, the Igbo sense of justice is quite condensed in Igbo oral tradition. Illustrations from two of the sources of this tradition may be helpful.

No wonder the Igbo hold that “*eziokwu bun du*”, truth is life. And of course, not everybody can be a leader in Igbo land (Kuper 1965:79-97) and those who happen to move into such a position of leadership are expected to possess the traditional value of justice which obliges a judge, especially with the *Ofo* as symbol of justice, to pronounce *Ikpe Nkwumoto*. He must uphold justice at all costs, because the survival of the people and tradition depends on this. Thus, this brings out the fact that justice is an indispensable value among the Igbo in general and the leaders in particular.

In the Igbo view, therefore, justice is a reality as that which assigns each is due, grounding his relationship in all transactions and associations, and holding balance in social relations. All are submerged in corporate and mutual existence. For the Igbo therefore, it is possible to act justly in the courts and in the economy as a necessary consequence of man’s personality and individuality as well as of the social order of the world.

Thus, there is a direct and indissoluble link between the idea of justice and law. In this case, *Ikpu ala/Ikpu aru* is that link through which justice and law bring about peace and harmony: social order. Consequently, the aim of law is to pursue and actualize the demands of justice. This study will examine the notion of justice in Igbo traditional Igbo worldview and investigate its applications which give meaning to human relationships.

### **3.6 THE COMMUNAL JUSTICE**

The justice, with which we are concerned here, is society, a moral quality of human relations and structures as they cohere to form the Igbo traditional society. The aim here is to show as much as possible, given a historical and cultural context; it is possible to assert that Igbo society practiced social justice, perhaps, in a way peculiar to them following what we have seen in Igbo concept of justice. To this effect, we shall concern ourselves with the analysis of the criteria which the Igbo apply in distributing socially those benefits and burdens to which no particular person had a prior claim or responsibility.

The 'thing' to be distributed in this connection does not include land, since under the Igbo 'land tenure' (Meek 1937:100-104) and as primary agriculturists, no member of the lineage is without land. However, in discussing social justice in Igbo land one thing one needs to be clear about is the traditional Igbo view of life which emphasizes above all else is the human individuality and interdependence. Thus, starting from the basic social unit, the family, to the highest socio-political organizations, life is conceived of and interpreted in terms of sharing. It is a precious value that binds people and families together. It is a value that enables people to have a common understanding, leading them to mutual trust, help, respect for personal freedom, as well as mutual responsibility. In other words, life as experienced in an Igbo community is one that calls for constant inter-action and inter-relationships of people working for the benefit of all, co-operating with one another in meeting the basic necessities of life. One only needs to read some of the numerous materials on African way of life.

It is within this shared community-life that one could discover most principles of the justice family explicitly expressed in other societies. There may be aberrations, but as Aristotle rightly noted: we apply the term "justice" to whatever tends to produce and preserve the happiness of the community (Nicomachen Ethics 5, 1, 13). It is in this context that one can really interpret

the various forms of justice: commutative, general justice, distributive, etc. according to the Aristotelian – Thomist concepts of justice.

Thus, in the classical notion of ownership, it is something which implies an absolute and exclusive right to the object by an individual within the legal norms including the right to use and to dispose of it as one wishes (Miller 1976:296-299). In Igbo society, ownership is rarely of this kind. Within the Igbo system distinctions have to be made between those things which the individual holds exclusive and unconditional rights such as farming tools and clothes, and those which the individual holds under certain conditions such as land or even cattle. Land, for example, is based on kinship and controlled by the senior member of the lineage, *Di Okwara/Okpara*.

However, from whatever angle one would see the notion of ownership in Igbo land, what is clear is that particular individual right to anything is in essence the rights of his/her (extended) family. It is therefore family property which matters, both to the family as such and to the individuals in the family. And because it is family property all members have an equal right to a share in its use, and all have a right to participate in the process of sharing (Sempebwa 1983:122-130).

The idea of sharing is thus basic to the notion of social justice and consequently, necessary for a harmonious relationship among the individuals of any community. In *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII lays down this principle:

Every human being is a person, his nature is endowed with intelligence and free-will. By virtue of this he has rights and duties, flowing from directly and simultaneously from his very nature, which are therefore universal, inviolable and inalienable (Pope John 1963:9).

The system of ownership or rights in Igbo society clearly recognizes the moral responsibilities involved as a result of the kind of the membership of the community. As we said earlier, the Igbo community is a community characterized by shared commitment on the part of its members to the realization of some fundamental human purposes and by structures and activity appropriate to bringing this about. And within this context the judgment of justice is usually made.

The members may not get an equal share in the goods available, but one person taking what he wants, and the rest having what is left over; every consideration, indeed moral consideration, is taken to status is stressed and that which makes them unequal, say physical or mental disability is also stressed. This illustrates the attitude of the Igbo towards material goods or economy of goods, contrary to the Hobbian world of “jungle” in which social relations and the society are means of achieving selfish-interests. Hobbes conceives justice as an arbiter restraining men from doing harm to the other and assures them of their benefits they wish for themselves (Campbell 1981:73-79).

The Igbo hold the opposite view; benefit is not the essence of life. Its economic theory therefore is that there is an abundance of goods and no man is in control of these goods except *Chukwu* (God) but in his generosity has given man power to accumulate as much as he can for his benefit and the well-being of his kinsmen (Compare Genesis 9:1-3). But acquiring as much goods as one wishes is impossible except through cooperation of one’s neighbor. And according to the Igbo belief values, everybody has not been endowed with the same personality and destiny. Therefore no man is in competition with another in the negative sense as used by Hobbes. Instead of fighting to attain to economic goals, men must help each other because, according to the proverb: *udele erighi ma ozu anwughi*, (the vulture does not eat except where there is carcass). In other words, no man attains a position, however prominent, except with the help of his brothers. The Igbo go further than this by saying that even in a situation where the goods are scarce, people must share with each other. This idea is contained in the Igbo proverbs: *Ogu ugali onwa ano bu onu nratu nratu* (the time of the famine is sustained by sharing the little you have).

Thus, sharing is an important notion in the Igbo attitude to the economy of goods. As Nyerere points out, it was the right of sharing which served to maintain and strengthen the social unit and make it worthwhile to all its members, so there was a corresponding common duty. Every member of the social unit had the obligation to contribute to the pool of things to be shared (Sempebwa 1983:129). But that does not mean that all must contribute equally, though equality is the ideal.

Therefore the notion of sharing work to produce goods and the notion of sharing the produced goods go hand-in-hand in Igbo thought. As a result these two notions constitute moral obligations: firstly, no one individual can accumulate wealth at the expense of others despite his/her freedom to do so. Secondly, the nature of the community obliges individual to practice distributive justice as a virtue by accepting uncomplainingly the just distribution of burdens and privileges without making immoderate or excessive claims against the community (Haring 1967:26).

This once again illustrates the fact that every form of justice is included in and presupposed by social justice, but in the latter case it is always a question of rights and duties that derive from the nature of human community and of the person. Transactions are not primary. It is rather the social nature of man that is primary, the encompassing social purpose of all earthly goods, and also the abilities of the person. That is, whatever right individuals may hold, there is a corresponding obligation in justice: to one man's right there corresponds a duty in all other persons; the duty namely of acknowledging and respecting the right in question (*Pacem in Terris* 1963:15). This is the law of reciprocity, of mutual dependence.

Thus, the most valuable general definition of justice seems to be that which brings out its distributive character most plainly: justice is *suum cuique*, to each his due (Miller 1976:20). Furthermore, social justice is that in which each individual has exactly those benefits and burdens which are due to him/her by virtue of his personal characteristics and circumstances. Therefore, social and distributive justice in the Igbo concept not only includes other aspects of justice, but it emphasizes the oneness of justice and thus

becomes a springboard for the other values that make life worth living in a social setting.

The tension arising from the duties of justice is further demonstrated by the Igbo philosophy of “live-and-let-live (Achebe 1958:17-18), a maxim which has become a watchdog among the Igbos against over-individualistic tendencies and emphasizes the demand for altruism in social relationships. Thus, in the Igbo tradition, the principles of socio-distributive justice states either how the good is to be divided (say, on equal basis), or it may specify some property of the individual which will determine his/her share including the allocation according to needs, all for the realization of communal solidarity. In this sense justice is a supreme moral value for the Igbo. However, some of the principles already enunciated in this section will be given full treatment in the subsequent sections.

### **3.7 PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE IN TRADITIONAL IGBO SETTING**

When considering what justice entails many related principles come to mind including equality, fairness, merit, need, and reciprocation,. However, these different principles, when applied to specific situations, will more often than not lead to mutually exclusive judgments. Furthermore, many of the concepts may be applied in different ways. If justice is giving people their due on the basis of what is fair, then what is their due? It may be fair that they receive the same pay for the same work. However, if Joe works harder than Jane, is it not fair that he is paid more?

However, in order to discover the primordial sense of justice among the traditional Igbo, it may be necessary to first and foremost, analyze the Igbo words for justice: “*akankwumoto*” and “*ikpenkwumoto*.” While “*akankwumoto*” denotes justice as a virtue of a particular person, “*ikpenkwumoto*” or “*ikpeziriezi*” refers to the expression of this virtue in practical judgment at the event of

dispute. The latter can also be described as truthfulness in making judicial decisions. Etymologically, “*akankwumoto*” derives from three other Igbo words: “*aka*” (hand), “*nkwu*” (stand, remain, stay), and “*oto*” (straight, erect, upright, not crooked, etc). Thus, the word “*akankwumoto*” literally means keeping one’s hand straight. It denotes uprightness of conduct. In the same vein, “*ikpenkwumoto*” stems from “*ikpe*” (judgment, case, decision, verdict), “*kwu*” (stand, stay, remain), and “*oto*” (straight, erect). Literally, “*ikpenkwumoto*” means judgement that is straight. The analysis of these two Igbo words shows that the Igbo concept of justice stresses the notion of physical straightness. This idea of straightness in relation to justice can refer to an action or person. In the former sense, it means that one’s life is straight-forward, upright, honest, predictable and impartial. In the latter understanding, a just action is one that is not crooked, is performed as it should be, is done in a disinterested manner, or has followed a due process.

### **3.7.1 JUSTICE AS MEANING FAIRNESS**

Justice in traditional African society, and particularly in Igbo land, was justice as fairness. A practice is deemed fair when it is in conformity with the principles which those who participate in it could propose or acknowledge before one another (Wamala 1992).

Justice as fairness was a phrase used by legal philosopher John Rawls to describe his specific view of justice. Nevertheless, it is clear that the general concept of fairness is closely related to justice. However, it is not always easy to determine what is and is not fair. For example, just procedures when trying a person for alleged crimes are intended to be fair on the accused and give them every opportunity to defend themselves. However, in many cases, these strict procedures can result in damning evidence being rejected as a result of minor or inadvertent oversights by the prosecution, which in turn may cause guilty

parties to be acquitted and set free purely on a legal technicality. Thus, fair procedures could lead to an unfair outcome.

Among the Igbo people, justice as fairness can be appreciated very easily given the small size of the tribes where many people stayed together in extended families and many people knew each other. Justice followed not an elaborate canon of laws, but societal norms. To illustrate the point: if a young woman for some reason ran away from her husband's house and returned to her father's home, say after a quarrel, the traditional concept of justice demanded that before passing justice in favour for or against anybody, both sides, i.e., the girl's side as well as the boy's side, had to be listened to. Even here, consensus was very central. Judgment could be given only after the elders from both sides, i.e., the girl's side and the boy's side, had met and come to a consensus. Several interesting features emerge about the traditional conception of justice:

- (i) The offender had a right to be heard. This right, which is enshrined in modern constitutions, is not an exclusive concern of modern society, but goes back to the tribal society as well.
- (ii) Because justice was always given by the elders in the extended family, it was always given promptly. Justice delayed is justice denied seems to be an exclusive problem of modern society.

These two examples are of considerable importance when we realize that according to modern constitutions we have a right to be heard, but that this right has to be realized through a whole institution of the law courts and a legal system involving lawyers, etc. Because all this has to be paid for, in cases where the citizen is unable to pay, the right is denied. Nevertheless, it is interesting that modern states have witnessed an unprecedented incidence of 'popular justice'. This phrase is now very commonly used in law enforcement agencies, the administration of justice, discussions, and publications and in society generally. Thus, popular justice may be defined as what is fair in the

eyes of the public regarding a given case or in general (Kakooza 1989:6). Furthermore, it may now be asked why popular justice has become a common feature of modern social life? The answer seems to be that in the modern state justice is dispensed from a distance – by the police, the civil administration and law enforcement agencies all of which as centralized are generally located at a distance. As a result the practice of popular justice has to be seen against a background of justice delayed.

There were areas of patent injustice as well; here I am referring to cases, for example, of witch hunting where those accused of sorcery were expelled from villages and often killed. To traditional man that was seen as justice. What would have constituted an injustice would have been to let a sorcerer go unpunished, for traditional man saw those who practiced witchcraft, evil magic and sorcery as the very incarnation of moral evil. Their activities were directed to the destruction of social relationships and society, justice demanded that they be punished. Often, therefore, punishment would be payment of fines, after which the member would be allowed back into the mainstream of society.

(iii) A third feature of the tribal conception of justice was that its administration had to be based upon a consensus. The widespread application of the methodology of consensus as a way of coming to decisions implicitly points to an awareness in traditional mind of the possibility of a dictator emerging and imposing his likes on the rest of society. Consensus can be seen as an implicit safeguard against dictators infringing on the unwritten constitutional rights of the people.

Inferring from the above discussion, one may also ask: how did a political structure lacking elaborately organized law enforcement agencies ensure that decisions arrived at by consensus become binding? This point was raised also by Hobbes, observed by Martinich who argued that “just” and “unjust” presuppose a coercive power capable of enforcing obligations (Martinich

1992:48-74). The question how, in the African context, did society ensure that everybody abided by the decisions brings us to another important feature of traditional African society, namely, equality.

### **3.7.2 JUSTICE AS MEASURE OF EQUALITY**

The Igbo people say, *eme nwa ka emere ibe ya, obi adi ya mma*, when a child is treated in the same manner as others are treated to which he belongs, he does not feel cheated. This is the principle of equality and inequality. It means that individuals who are equals must not be treated as unequals and those who are unequals must not be treated as equals.

This explanation is neither sufficient nor exhaustive. The principle extends beyond the treatment of persons as equals or as unequals. It means equality before the law. It ensures that persons in the same class, group, or category are treated alike. It ensures that there is no discrimination based on arbitrary indices or grounds that run counter to the demands and imperatives of *Omenala*.

In the determination of desert, the use of the principle ensures that there is equality of reward for the work done or not done. It means that like cases or situations are treated alike or that similar cases or situations are treated similarly. The idea that equals should not be treated as unequals and vice versa does not mean that there is no ranking or hierarchical order in an Igbo community.

As noted above, it is a common view that justice requires that all people are treated equally before the law. In other words, like cases should be handled in the same manner without respect for the parties involved. However, if a government or dictator passes legislation that everyone caught shoplifting shall have their hands cut off, we would rightly object that this law is unjust.

Alternatively, the government could legislate that all found innocent of shoplifting will have their left hand cut off. In both these cases, the government or ruler seeks to treat everyone equally, but the result is clearly unjust. Therefore, it is clear that impartiality or non-discrimination is not enough to satisfy the demands of justice. Moreover, equality at one level often leads to inequality at other levels (Schmidtz 2006:14-15). Put another way, to produce equal results one must treat people unequally. However, treating people equally will produce unequal results (Nash 2002:36). This is because all people are not inherently equal in character and ability. All people have different intellectual ability, physical characteristics and morals. The only attribute common to all is that we are God's creatures, and thus we all stand as equals in our relationship with God.

Nevertheless, Igbo society is not a classless society in Marxist term. There is hierarchical order which is based on biological age, achievement resulting from individual efforts, distinctive character traits, and professional competence such as in war, medicine or the performance of the appropriate ceremonies, *ozo*, *Okwara* title or some other chieftaincy title recognised and reckoned with in the various Igbo communities. Igbo communities value these and more and individuals are respected primarily because they are human beings and as such deserve respect and secondarily because of their position in the society.

The performance of the prescribed rites and ceremonies leading to the conferment of the *ozo* title or any chieftaincy title, for example, puts one in the class of *Ozo* titled men. Within this class, there is a hierarchical order in terms of when one performed the prescribed ceremonies. *Ozo* titled men are a class of their own and members expect to be treated on equal terms. Where the need arises for differential treatment, there is a procedure to be followed and reasons are given. The tradition of *Ozo* titled men, in such matters, is religiously observed in order to avoid injustice and the confusion that follows it.

In the wider Igbo society, *ozo* titled men have their place and function, and are accorded the respect due to them as individuals and as a class. What applies to members of *ozo* titled men as a class applies to other groups in an Igbo community, and what applies to individual members of *ozo* association applies to other members of Igbo community as individuals. In an Igbo community, therefore, it is simply a matter of to each person, his or her due. Socio-economic and cultural standing in the community is of value and is respected but is not more important in terms of the treatment and respect of individuals on the basis of our common humanity. Each of us has his or her origin in the common source of life.

There are problems, however, in the actual application of this principle. The first problem and the most relevant and profound is that it contradicts the wisdom embodied in the saying that the five fingers on the palm are not equal. This emphasises the inequality in nature and in the community. The import of the inequality epitomised by the five fingers in terms of size, function, individually and collectively was highlighted. This was linked to a community comprising individuals who are unequal in natural endowments, talents, physical strength, moral disposition, to name but a few.

The contradiction is one of terms, not material. The fact that the five fingers are not equal is a recognition and a tacit acknowledgment of inequality which is inevitable in the conduct of human affairs. To insist on treating equals as equals, not as unequals; and unequals as unequals, not as equals is to ameliorate the socio-economic and cultural impact of inequality. It is intended as a poignant reminder of the fact that though inequality is natural, unavoidable and perhaps indispensable, the community need not be held hostage to the consequences attendant on its cold and chilly application.

To treat equals on equal terms and unequals on unequal terms ensures that no person is marginalised on account of age, distinction, history, achievement or

professional efficiency. It is a subtle way of according recognition and respect for the station of each person, no matter what that station is, in real and material terms. In the determination of desert, it ensures that persons get their lot or due irrespective of age, station, history, achievement and professional standing.

Otakpor believes that the maxim of the five fingers is analogously related to the station and function of individuals in an Igbo community, specifically related to individuals *qua* individuals. Instead of taking them as contradictory pairs, they are, perhaps, better regarded as complementary (Otakpor 2009:57). Furthermore, equality and inequality complement each other since each operates from one side of the same coin (Otakpor 2009). Consequently, to insist on treating individuals in the same class in the same way is germane to the mechanism employed in dispute settlement. Similar cases are treated similarly and individual desert, though difficult to measure appropriately, is supposed to be the same. Without this, injustice prevails.

### **3.7.3 JUSTICE AS THE STANDARD**

Although there is certainly a deep connection between justice and equal treatment, this connection does not mean that equal treatment necessarily implies equal shares, as egalitarians argue (Schmidtz 2006:109). As already seen, egalitarianism implies that we must embrace certain kinds of unequal treatment in order to achieve a more preferable form of equality (Schmidtz 2006:110). Martin Luther once proclaimed that his 'dream' is that his children would be judged "not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (Kulikovsky 2007). Obviously, Luther was describing here a principle of justice based on *equal treatment* and *merit*, not a principle based on *equal shares* (Kulikovsky 2007).

The standard here implies equality or near equality to ensure that no one person or group of persons acquires too much control over the life of others

(Uchendu 1965:19). In this case, duties and obligations are shared proportionately on the basis of equality of membership rather than on a differential basis. Society, on the other hand, is meant to provide a safe and fulfilling environment in which to live where there is no arbitrary bias or exclusion. In order to live a happy and fulfilled life, people need a good and secure footing, not necessarily an equal footing (Schmidtz 2002:117).

Thus, in Igbo society, the consciousness of injustice is such that it is a rule rather than the exception that precedents are cited as a reminder of how a present dispute is similar to a previous one. Once this similarity is established, the same principle or principles are evoked. The decision in the present case would then be similar and the desert is at the same time similar, if the antecedent causal facts are also similar. In such situations the usual questions are: what did we do before? *Gini ka anyi mere mbu?* How did we do it then? *Kini ka anyi?* What decision or decisions were taken?

In other words, these questions and their answers, and the mechanisms for dispute settlement, using this principle, are encapsulated in the Igbo proverb which says that a human corpse is neither novel nor alien to earth: *Ozu bughị ala ihē ohu?* The answers to these questions ensure that arbitrariness is minimised, when not avoided completely.

In extra-ordinary situations, often aptly expressed in the statement: *anyi ahughị ihē di otu a mbu*, that is, we have not seen or heard this kind of thing before, the stock of community knowledge and wisdom is at disposal of those involved in decision making. *Omenala* may not provide a comprehensive guide to thought and action in such a novel situations, but its reliance and use is clearly unavoidable. The general principles enshrined in *Omenala* are evoked, reformulated and reshaped to suit the problem at hand. Nwala puts it thus, in such moment's new ideas can emerge and precedence is set, or old ideas could be expounded or reformulated (Nwala 1985:10).

In reality, to treat equals on the same terms and unequals on the same terms, also implies even-handedness and impartiality. Impartiality: *eleghi mmadu anya n'ihu*, (literally, dealing with any person irrespective of his/her social status) is a precondition for objectivity in the conduct of human affairs. Impartiality means detachment from personal likes and dislikes, from vested interests, primordial loyalties and orientations in order to establish in a given situation what the case is: *ka okwu si diri*. It implies the lack of consideration of what a person is or is not. Without impartiality the road to truth is clogged, blurred and perhaps remains unexplored and unknown. Without the knowledge of truth, justice cannot be done. The determination of individual reward, *okem* (my share), is impossible to achieve unless the truth concerning the situation is known. Truth is, therefore, a precondition for justice.

Predictably, impartiality does not mean that there are no personal interests worthy of pursuit, or that we cannot be passionate, jealous, loving and hateful any more. This is far from what is demanded by the insistence that equals and unequals be treated in the same manner if justice is to be done to the members of the same class. Impartiality means applying the same norms, rules and principles, *Omenala*, consistently irrespective of personal interest and emotional attachment or involvement.

Inferring from the above discussion, impartiality is central to moral life: *ezi ndu*, in all its aspects. It has an overriding regulative role in all aspects of morality. It is a successful resistance to the vice of bias and prejudice in making and acting upon critical judgements. Impartiality is therefore necessary but not sufficient for strictly objective judgement because obstacles other than bias and prejudice may still prevent one from judging correctly. The natural limits of intelligence or imagination may impair judgement of even scrupulously impartial agents and so, when lapses are to be explained in that way, accusation of bias and prejudice are misplaced.

Thus, it also amounts to a blind egalitarianism, guaranteed to avoid havoc in a situation where alertness to morally relevant differences between persons is needed. Here, the connection between impartiality and equality is closer than the relation to impartiality to other standards or principles found in *Omenala*. The conflation of impartiality with the principle of equality is easy to understand. Therefore, given the widely held belief among the Igbo that human beings are equal, have equal moral worth, we naturally suppose that in the more difficult task of practical deliberation, such as the design of the conception of justice, some principle of equality will constitute the right standard of impartial judgement. There is reason to expect damaging consequences where this is not the case.

Furthermore, impartiality is also linked to integrity or authenticity for a people to whom community life really matters. A partial judgement or standpoint is thus a signal of lack of integrity. A misplaced concern with impartiality has a withering effect upon the Igbo sense of life's goal and meaning. It is not an indispensable ally to its role in the Igbo conception of the good life. Impartiality makes the vast differences between human beings legally and morally irrelevant. A case for partial treatment can be allowed but a case has to be made for it: the experiences of illness and old age and the situations of the very young, the widow and the orphan are good grounds for such a case.

When equals are not treated on the same terms or when unequals are treated equally or when individuals in the same category or class are arbitrarily selected for the differential treatment, the result is social conflict and disharmony. The social conflict may be traced to either one or all of the following:

- (1) The partial and incomplete application of rules, standards and norms pertaining to a class, category or social position as embodied in *Omenala*;

- (2) The attempt to alter the width of the social cluster to which certain rules and norms apply in order to accommodate the partiality and inconsistency;
- (3) The imbalance resulting from the division of the class or category into 'we', *anyi*, and 'them', *ha*.

To this effect, even-handedness is at the core of justice among the Igbo. It implies that norms, rules and principles are applied to every member of the social group consistently and indifferently, in action and in judgement. Differential treatment is justified only by reference to relevant differences of attribute or condition, that is, differences recognised by the rules and principles embodied in *Omenala*.

### **3.8 BIBLICAL JUSTICE**

It goes without saying that any serious discussion about Biblical justice must be based on the actual statements of Scripture with respect to their proper theological, historical, and literary context. Yet, increasingly, many writers on this topic approach the Bible with preconceived ideas of what Biblical justice entails and proceed to read these ideas back into the text.

#### **3.8.1 MORAL UPRIGHTNESS**

Righteousness is often synonymous to justice, and the two words are sometimes used interchangeably (Wallis 1994:193). This assertion is based on the fact that both righteousness and justice are possible renderings of the Hebrew word *sedeq*, and the Greek word *dikaiousune* in one particular context may be translated as justice, and the assumption that all instances of these words may be translated as justice. In other words, Wallis incorrectly assumes that the meaning of the word in a specific context is

much broader than the context itself allows. Donald Carson notes that this is a common exegetical fallacy and labels it as the unwarranted adoption of an expanded semantic field (Carson 1996:60-61).

The Hebrew word *sedeq* appears in the Old Testament 119 times in 112 verses (Kulikovskv 2008). Although it usually refers to personal holiness or moral uprightness, it is also used in many other different ways including as a reference to honest scales, weights, and measures, (Lev. 19:36, 25:15; Job 31:6; Ezek 45:10), judging in legal disputes (Deut 1:16; Ps 9:4; 58:1; Isa 16:5; 58:2; Jer. 11:20), fairness (Prov. 31:9), legal rights (Ecc. 5:7), in reference to ritual sacrifices (Deut 33:19; Ps 51:19), personal integrity (Job 6:29), honesty (Prov. 12:17; 16:13), and in reference to restoration/rectification (Job 8:6). The feminine form, (*sedaqah*) is used 159 times in 150 verses (Kulikovskv 2008) and also usually refers to moral uprightness. It also has other meanings, including honesty (Gen 30:33), good government (2 Sam 19:28; Neh 2:20), legal rights (2 Sam 19:28; 2 Chr 6:23; Isa 5:23), innocence (1 Kgs 8:32; 2 Chr 6:23; Isa 5:23), vindication (Ps 24:5; Isa 54:17), salvation (Ps 69:27), prosperity (Prov. 8:18), and integrity (Isa 45:23).

The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis notes that *sedeq* and *sedaqah* indicate

... right behavior or status in relation to some standard of behaviour accepted in the community. It also entails the adjudication of such behaviour or status as well as the more abstract sense of some claim to it. Nowhere, however, is this standard made explicit, nor is covenant invoked as a ground or basis for *sedeq*. If a special notion like covenant is assumed, it remains firmly in the background. The picture is rather one akin to natural law, where tacit assumptions about behaviour are held in common, but nonetheless real for that (Van Gemeren 1997).

Further evidence that *sedeq /sedaqah* does not in itself directly correspond to justice is the fact that it appears many times in close connection with the Hebrew word *mispat* which is routinely translated as 'just' or 'justice' (Ps. 45:8; Ecc 3:16).

Perhaps the best description of the kind of personal righteousness or moral uprightness referred to may be found in Ezekiel 18:5-9:

Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right. He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel. He does not defile his neighbour's wife or lie with a woman during her period. He does not oppress anyone, but returns what he took in pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked. He does not lend at usury or take excessive interest. He withholds his hand from doing wrong and judges fairly between man and man. He follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws. That man is righteous; he will surely live, declares the Sovereign Lord.

Jeremiah 22:3 describes this kind of moral righteousness thus: "This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place."

In the New Testament, the Greek word *dikaioisune* is used in a similar fashion. It appears 92 times in 86 verses (Kulikovshv 2008). It, too, most often refers to personal holiness and moral uprightness (Matthew 5:17-20), but may also refer to the just nature of a judge (Rev 19:11). John the Baptist was an example of righteousness (Matt 21:32), and the Holy Spirit will convict us of matters in regard to righteousness (John 16:8). Righteousness can be obtained through faith in Christ rather than by works (Rom 3:21-22; 4:1-8; 9:30-32; Gal 2:15-16), and righteous people live by faith (Rom 1:17).

Righteousness is a central element of the Kingdom of God (Rom 4:17; Matt 6:33). Abraham was righteous because he believed God (Rom 4:3). Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet 2:5). God loves righteousness but hates wickedness (Heb 6:1). Righteousness should be the driving motive for the conduct of one's life, but our acts of righteousness should be performed covertly (Matt 6:1).

Thus, when English translations of the Bible use the word "just" or "justice", in both the Old and New Testaments, the Biblical authors are most likely referring to personal holiness and moral uprightness, and the context will be the final determinant. The Hebrew and Greek words behind the translation are never used to refer to the kind of economic social justice principles advocated by those who stand on the "religious left" side of politics and economics.

### **3.8.2 THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

First, it is essential that Christians clearly define what social justice entails. On its face, the term has a positive connotation that conveys a seemingly strong sense of virtue and morality. Basing a claim on an appeal to "social justice: provides the claim holder with a degree of persuasive advantage – a kind of moral blessing on his or her political, theological, or social ideas" (Kulikoshv 2008). However, social justice involves much more than a superficial label or feelings of compassion. It must involve a clear understanding and delineation of each social problem, the root cause of the problem, and the best solution for the problem.

The interpretation of perhaps no other phrase has had a greater influence on the trajectory of Church history and theology than that of "righteousness of God" by prophet Amos. It is clear to me that the relational core of the covenantal concepts of justice accommodates postmodern critiques and yearnings, providing fertile ground for the nexus of Christ and culture.

### **3.8.3 AMOS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Amos, 760-750 B.C., prophesied in the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the mid-eighth century B.C., a few years before the prophet Hosea began his ministry. The 8<sup>th</sup> century was a period during which a privileged few in Israel were enjoying unprecedented

prosperity while most Israelites were facing dire poverty. Although Amos lived in Tekoa, a small village bordering the wilderness of Judah, his preaching to Israel provided a powerful prophetic witness for all ages because of his condemnation of the spiritual blindness of the Judean upper class and their unjust exploitation of the poor.

Amos forged an explicit and unbreakable link between justice (*mispat*) toward the neighbour and righteousness (*tsedeq/tsedaka*) before God, a link that went back to the covenant at Sinai and to the ancient prophetic traditions of Israel. Amos' ministry provides an eternal witness of God's opposition to economic, political, and social injustice. Since justice and righteousness are the focus of Amos' message, it is important to look at how the words justice and righteousness are used by the prophet. The words justice and righteousness are used together three times in two chapters of the book of Amos (Amos 5:7; 5:24; 6:12). The word justice is used once by itself (Amos 5:15):

“O you who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth” (Amos 5:7 RSV).

“Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph” (Amos 5:15 RSV).

“But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24 RSV).

“Do horses run upon rocks? Does one plough the sea with oxen? But you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood” (Amos 6:12 RSV).

Wormwood was an extremely bitter plant. The word was used several times in Jeremiah and in Lamentations to describe the bitterness of the calamities that befell Judah at the time of their exile to Babylon (Jeremiah 9: 15; 23:15; Lamentation 3: 15, 19). The justice that Israel's courts dispensed to the poor was nothing but bitterness.

Consequently, the oppression and injustice Amos found in the Northern Kingdom was evidence that righteousness had been thrown to the ground as something

worthless by those who were in power. Righteousness no longer had any meaning for the powerful people of Israel as a requirement of the worship of God. To Amos, “hating evil and loving good” was a simple yet powerful statement of how to establish justice “in the gate.” In very simple language, the prophet was presenting the principles of true justice to a group of people, only to find that those people argued about legal technicalities while tolerating bribery, corruption, and greed.

The gate of the city was fortified in order to protect the city from enemies and to serve as the place where the elders of the city would gather as a legal assembly to decide cases needing adjudication. The gate was also the place where the local judiciary met to determine right and wrong in legal disputes, and therefore, to decide who was innocent or guilty.

Amos spoke to an oppressed society and his concern for the poor and the oppressed made him a prophet for all times. Amos is also a prophet for the twenty-first century, a time when the gap between rich and poor has never been greater. The sources of oppression and injustice may look different today, but people’s concern for material prosperity reflects the days in which Amos lived. Amos’ message of God’s opposition to injustice, his criticism of the people’s worship of material things, and his witness of God’s special concern for the poor and oppressed, affirm that the worship of God in any age is worthless if social oppression and injustice are ignored.

#### **3.8.4 DEUTERONOMY 25:1**

This passage describes justice in this process: “Suppose two persons have a dispute and enter into litigation, and the judges decide between them, declaring one to be in the right and the other to be in the wrong.” If the judges successfully declared where the right was, then justice had been served. The decision of the court had a redemptive aspect for the parties involved in the litigation. The decision of the court was intended to vindicate the just part in a legal dispute. The decision was also intended to protect the social order by determining right and wrong and correcting the wrong. Thus, the decision of the court was particularly important in cases where the poor, the widow,

the orphan, and the alien, people without power and influence, could not find redress in the community apart from the decision of the court.

Thus, when the words “justice” and “righteousness” are used in Amos, justice is the primary word since it appears first in the parallelism of the two words. Justice is the result of seeking or loving good, as in Amos 5:15. Justice is also the fruit or the result of righteousness as in Amos 6:12. In other words, righteousness has to do with the relationship between a person and God, and a relationship between members of the community. Righteousness is a relational concept; its meaning is determined by the particular social context in which it is used. Righteousness is a quality of life which is displayed by people who live up to the demands of the covenant. The righteous person does what is right to other persons involved in the relationship.

Amos proclaimed that Israel had violated its ancient traditions. The poor and oppressed were individuals who deserved the protection of the court and fair treatment by those in a position of dispensing legal decisions. The only way for this to become a reality in Israelite society was for justice to roll down like waters, and for righteousness to run like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24).

Focusing on concepts and themes as we have done so far is to show how they relate to the comprehensive view of justice contained in the Old and New Testaments. A Biblical perspective brings together various passages to give the historical and literary context (Isa. 59:9-15). Thus, prophet Amos and others like him brought to the fore the ancient Israelite’s community struggles among themselves because some of their members were got caught in the web of greed, violence, and the abuse of power that caused a myriad of injustices, leaving the most vulnerable with no alternatives except to succumb to those who more powerful than themselves. Clearly, the root cause of injustice within the Israelite community was the loss of “right relationship” – right relationship with their God and, consequently, right relationship with one another.

Despite the depravity that existed within the social world of Israel, there was, however, always a sense of hope and the presence of the Divine embodied in other

prophets (leaders) from within the community. These leaders continually spoke out against injustice and for loving-kindness.

This was no different from the Igbo traditional society. When asking what the basis of traditional Igbo morality is, one need not to go far in search of the answer. According to Victor C. Uchendu, to know how a people view the world around them is to understand how they evaluate life; and a people's evaluation of life both temporal and non-temporal, provides them with a 'character' of action, a guide to behaviour (Uchendu 1965:12). Accordingly, Mbiti, Idowu, and Ilogu have strongly defended religion as the foundation of morality in Africa.

Morality is basically the fruit of religion and that to begin, it was dependent upon it. Man's concept of the Deity has everything to do with what is taken to be the norm of morality. God made man, and it is He who implants in him the sense of right and wrong. This is a fact the validity of which does not depend upon whether man realizes and similarly, Ilogu has this to say about the Igbo: in Igbo traditional society, religion is the basis of morality both through the beliefs of the people as well as through the sanctions imposed by customs and prohibitions (Ilogu 1985:24).

For the Igbo, the world is created by God, *Chineke*, who makes animal and plant life grow. *Chineke*, as the source of life and sustenance, which to the Igbo is the chief good, becomes therefore the source of goodness and benevolence. God gives to each person, at the time of birth, that person's portion of divine essence, his or her *Chi*. Hence the Igbo, according to Ilogu, name of God, *Chi-ukwu*, meaning the Great *Chi* in whom all human life and the sum total of individual *Chis* are gathered up.

In the same stretch of thought, Mbiti maintains that Africans live in a religious universe. Since religion plays a great role in the lives of African peoples, he concludes

that an African system of morality based on African cultural beliefs must have a religious foundation (Mbiti 1977: 48-57).

From both the Biblical perspective and African cosmic worldview, it is obvious that religions have influence on traditional African morality. For example, for the Igbo, traditional religion and morality are closely interwoven. They are not only complementary, but inseparable. In spite of this marriage of morality and religion, there is nevertheless a well-defined code of morality in Igbo society (Aja 1997:533).

However, the suggestion that religion is the foundation of African/Igbo morality overreaches the word "foundation". No one denies the influence of religion on morality, but to make it the foundation of morality would be the same as saying that the African or Igbo people lack the conception of "good" and "bad" in the social and political ordering of their society. Aja (1997) seems to capture the complexity when he says that it is one thing to claim that religion influences a people's approach to moral behaviour, but it is another thing to argue that religion must be the foundation of their morality. For him, that would mean that without religion the Igbo or the Yoruba people could not behave in a morally responsible manner. One might be tempted to think so with regard to some African societies, for example the Yoruba, who trace nearly every aspect of their lives to one deity or the other. However, for the Igbo, Basden (1966:34) testifies that the majority of Igbo towns had very clearly defined codes of morals. Infringements on these laws may lead to severe penalties. As Aja once argued, the religious view begs the question: which come first, religion or morality? Any answer is bound to be conjectural.

G. Parrinder (1968:24) seems to understand the marriage of religion and morality as he described the people of Western African people when he says: though God is generally regarded as upholding the moral laws, and judging men after death in accordance with their actions, many practices seem to have little to do with him. Ikenga Metuh (1971) criticized Arinze when he argued that Arinze (1970:31) does not distinguish principles from practice. He agreed rather with Basden who testifies that there is a dichotomy in the Igbo approach to morality. For Basden (1966:38-39) had argued that certain delinquencies like murder, theft, and adultery, are considered heinous crimes and deemed contrary to the will of God and punishment will surely

follow. However, the actual fear of retribution is not sufficiently strong to check wrongdoing. Instead, being found out by his fellow-man is regarded far more shameful than offending God.

Aja attributes this moral value of the society to what he calls the social phenomena. For him, society must keep itself alive and its machinery smooth-running. To this end, it evolves a system of self-preservation and sees conscience as a complex of residual habits, which society implants in man through traditional education (Aja 1997). This would seem to be the main plank on which the traditional Igbo found their moral values. For the Igbo, the classical sinner is the thief. This is because theft is seen as an aggression and an infringement on other people's right, which in turn is a violation of social justice (Okafor 1992:33). Clearly, Igbo moral values revolve around justice (Arinze 1970:29-30).

Again, among the Igbo, the beings concerned with law and morality are *Ala* (the earth-deity) and *Ndichie* (ancestors). *Ala*, for the Igbo, deprives evil men of their lives and her priests are the guardians of public morality (Meek 1945:25). Most heinous crimes are called *Aru*, land taboos. Of a person who commits such a crime, it is said that *omeruru ala*, he defiled the land (Metuh 1971).

In other words, in the Igbo worldview and morality, evil actions, *imeru ala*, contribute in a major way to the disruption of the relation between a person and God. In the previous chapter, it was clearly indicated that a good man has some relationship with God and relationships with his fellow men and women. Both relationships are to be maintained because it is in the maintenance of the two that man has peace and happiness. In both cases, God and his functionaries (divinities and ancestors) are the judges. As a result, man-to-man relationship is as great a concern to God as man-to-God relationship. Consequently, when man is isolated from God due to his disobedience, it disrupts his total well-being bringing disadvantageous and tragic consequences to him and to his social relationships. That is to say, the Igbo know the essence of being in good relationships with God and with their fellow men and are convinced that sin/evil acts such as theft and murder destroy good relationship. It

upsets the equilibrium of the society, drives a wedge between man and the super sensible world, and consequently brings suffering, pain, and death.

When they know that they have violated any of the norms, the Igbo do not look or feel unconcerned. They attempt to remove the stain and blemish which the evil act impresses upon them as individuals or as a community. As Evans-Pritchard observed, a man's spiritual state is changed; he is polluted, contaminated or unclean (Metuh 1971:283). Therefore, when moral offenses are committed, various exercises considered useful in removing such taboo are undertaken. These include *ikpu-ala*, purification (of the individual or community) - ritual shaving, ritual bathing in a flowing stream, confession, fasting, anointing the body, rolling on the ground, chasing out evil ceremonially, or conveying sin from the individuals and the community by means of human scapegoat or by offering propitiatory sacrifice. *Ikpu-ala* involves an outward act which is believed to have a socio-spiritual inner cleansing. The cleansing may be of the body or of a thing or territory or community.

Why do the cleansing? It is a common belief among the Igbo that a person who is morally good, or chaste in words and deeds, would find favour with the gods, and barring the evil machinations of the people of the world, he or she would prosper. African moral values are also justifiable by reference to their consequences for the individual and the society. Thus it is teleological and, by deduction, utilitarian. According to the Igbo, *ife ojo na agba ugwo*, (evil deed demands reparation). The Igbo also have it that *isi meturu ebu, ka ebu n'agba*, (the head that touches the wasp's nest, is the head that will be stung by the wasp). As it were, the prudential, teleological, and utilitarian considerations appear to be the ultimate appeals for *ikpu-ala* as an Igbo social justice moral value.

In addition, *ikpu-ala* as an Igbo social justice value can be described as theistic in that what is of moral value relates to the creative source of humanity, and the higher moral values of the society could be known from their pre-existing order. The values can be described as teleological. Social actions and relationships are guided by the consideration of the purpose of the universe. Taboos, for example, are observed,

because to contravene their proscriptions disturbs the harmonious relationship between human beings and the cosmos.

Another classical ethical system can be distilled from traditional Igbo morality, namely utilitarianism. Bentham's famous formula of utilitarianism that the good is the greatest happiness of the greatest number is interpreted by the Igbo to mean the greatest happiness of the greatest number of the Igbo race, instead of humankind as a whole. Whatever the twist, Igbo traditional social justice moral values emphasize what is prescribed as what works, what gives happiness, and what has enabled the group to survive. To that extent, Igbo ethical system can be characterized as pragmatic. For the Igbo, the *summum bonum* to which persons must aspire is the performance of those acts which will enhance the ontological well-being of their community. This is the basis of all ethical considerations in traditional Igbo culture.

### **3.9 CONCLUSION**

Thus both the Old and New Testaments attest that justice was more than a virtue. For the people of Israel and for Jesus and his followers, justice was a divine imperative. For the community of believers today, justice continues to be both a divine imperative and a contemporary challenge.

One thing that is clear even in this twenty-first century, is that the human community has continued to grapple with many of the same struggles as did the peoples of the ancient world whether in Israel or in Igbo land and that the search for justice still hangs in the balance. As a result, this chapter three endeavoured to look closely at the concept of *ikpu-ala* as an Igbo social justice value providing the society a standard for measuring or judging the rightness or wrongness of its members in relation to others irrespective of their social status. Consequently, its biblical foundations provides the reason for its theological engagement and inculturation in Igbo Catholic Church. Thus, *ikpu-ala* as social justice in relation to the biblical texts discovered how the texts' description of justice reflects the historical, social, and cultural situation of its day on the one hand, and, on the other, how it transcends its times to provide some hope,

eschatological vision of justice for all creation. Justice issues always have transformative potential for all of life.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE THEOLOGICAL APPROACH OF THE CHURCH TO SOCIAL JUSTICE AND INCULTURATION: IT'S IMPLICATION FOR *IKPU-ALA*

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

We know that every people, no matter at what stage of development and civilization they may be, have a culture, a way of life peculiar to themselves with characteristic features. If we take culture to be a design for living, or the way a given society tries to cope at various levels, we have to admit that every society has a culture. Understood in this sense, culture embraces all aspects of life. It includes man's way of life among his fellow men, his family life, his religious life, attitudes, customs, and traditions. Thus, in every particular culture one can find elements that are naturally good, just, and beautiful, elements that can promote the general welfare of humanity as God's creatures. There are also to be found, often side by side with the good, elements that are evil and ultimately opposed to the temporal and spiritual well-being of human beings.

In this research so far, we have seen the Igbo concept of justice and some of its applications in the Igbo social justice system. In this Chapter, the intention is to explore the role of the Church *magisterium*, Vatican II, other Church Documents, the Code of Canon Law of 1983 and its implications for *Ikpu-ala* as a social justice value in the Igbo Catholic Church. To do this, I have approached our topic from a historical perspective because inculturation means different things to different people depending on how the person wants to deal with the subject matter. Consequently, inculturation should not be seen as Europeans civilizing the African cultures, but from the perspective that *Ikpu-ala* as a social concept deserves a place in the incarnation process of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For inculturation means going to the heart of a particular culture to spread the message of God in a manner that promotes the good aspects and at the same time challenges the evil aspect of a culture and works for their elimination.

#### 4.2. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

##### 4.2.1 The Beginnings: The Inculturation imperatives in the Scripture

Church History shows that Jesus Christ, the Apostles, and the Church Fathers, in sowing the seeds of the Gospel, had respect for other people's cultures. Jesus and his disciples, in their lives and customs, portrayed in every way possible that they were from the Jewish background and culture. Jesus' attitudes towards the Jewish culture were represented by two categories: fidelity and autonomy. In terms of fidelity, Jesus had respect for the traditions of his time. Jesus once said that he did not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfil them (Matthew 5:17).

Christ himself was faithful in observing the offering of sacrifices in the temple (Matt. 21:12), the service of words in the synagogue (Matt. 6:6), the Sabbath, the feasts of Passover, Tabernacle, and Dedication (Matt. 26:17-19). Interestingly, his fidelity did not lie in passivity, but represented a "critical yes", a reforming fidelity, that demanded purification of the worship of his time. His autonomy found expression in his challenge to fellow Jews to spiritualize and interiorize the Jewish religion, and in this process he was giving birth to the era of Christian worship.

However, when Jesus preached the Gospel, he used categories familiar to his audience. He talked about the absentee lord and tenant revolts (Matt. 21:31-45); small family-run farms (Matt. 21:28-30); debts and debtors (Matt. 18:25-35); extortion and corruption (Luke 16:1-9); the uncaring rich man (Luke 12:18); day labourers paid merely subsistent wages (Matt. 20:1-6); and many other matters. These graphically reflect the picture of the Jewish countryside during his time.

In the same line of thought, St. Paul once wrote, "To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews... I have become all things to all people so that by all means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:20 & 22). Metuh (1996) believes that St. Paul was talking about missiology, and at the same time using the language of contextual theology in which lies the theology of inculturation: bringing the Christian experience into the culture of the people, a process that makes alive the dynamic and eternal motion of the incarnation. On a stretch of imagination, Freyne (1980: 38) observes how St. Paul crisis-crossed the Mediterranean world on sea and land with the Good News of Christ vying for the souls of the masses with religious leaders and philosophers. Thus it is

quite clear that St. Paul was well versed in the language and cultures of the people and had the ability to share many of their assumptions with them.

Given these conditions, Dulles argues that after Jesus, his apostles continued to employ the same model in their attempt to bring the Good News to the peoples of their time (Dulles 1983: 750-786). Consequently, with the conversion and subsequent mission of St. Paul to the Gentiles, so many Gentiles were converted to Christianity and there arose the question of whether to allow the Gentiles to become Christians without imposing on them the law of circumcision held in high esteem by the Jews. This led to the first Council of Jerusalem in 49 AD. It was a Council for social concerns, justice, and peace. For those earlier Christians with Jewish origins, circumcision as contained in the Old Testament was necessary for salvation, while St. Paul and those with Gentile background held that all that was needed for salvation was faith in Jesus and baptism in this name (Acts 15). To this effect, Schineller (1990:30) concluded:

Peter's position which agreed with Paul's, prevailed, and it was decided not to lay extra burdens on the Gentile converts. Because of this liberating decision, the mission of Paul continued with great success, and the Church expanded far beyond the borders of Palestine. One did not first have to become Jewish before becoming a Christian.

#### **4.3 INCULTURATION AND THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

From the beginning of the spreading of the Church, social concerns had vital links with evangelization. As the Church has pursued her mission of salvation, it has become obvious that the Church in the world, and especially in Africa, cannot neglect active involvement in efforts to bring about justice and peace. Long before now, many in the Church had come to realize the extent that, to use Pannikar's phrase, "theological colonialism" has prevailed in the Church (Pobee 1992:34). Well into the twentieth century there was almost a total dogmatic disqualification of non-Christians and of non-Christian religions, as well as a denigration of their cultures and ways of life. In other

words, Western ideas and mentality were extended into the Third World as the only valid ones and almost nothing was said about inculturation.

However, today we have become more aware of the fact that inculturation is an essential part of any Christian theology. Thus, any theology worth its salt and responsible to the faith and not just handed on as doctrine is necessarily a theology of inculturation. Christian theology cannot exist outside the world or the cultural-historical situation of men and women here and now. In the same vein, if the Church is to have an impact in areas outside of the Western sphere, she must abandon a one-sided adjustment to European history and culture. To diversify means a new set of adjustments whose unity cannot be sought in uniformity on a world-wide scale, but only in faith made visible by the historical expression and profession of allegiance to the one people of God.

The importance of this task for the Church's evangelizing mission is illustrated by Pope Paul VI (1974:563) when he says:

Between evangelization and human advancement – development and liberation – there are in fact profound links. These include links of an anthropological order, because the man who is to be evangelized is not an abstract being but is subject to social and economic questions. They also include links in the theological order, since one cannot dissociate the plan of creation from the plan of redemption. The latter plan touches the very concrete situations of injustice to be combated and of justice to be restored. They include links of the eminently evangelical order, which is that of charity: how in fact can one proclaim the new commandment without promoting in justice and peace the true advancement of man? We ourselves have taken care to point this out, by recalling that it is impossible to accept that in evangelization we could or should ignore the importance of the problems so

much discussed today, concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the world. This would be to forget the lesson which comes to us from the Gospel concerning love of our neighbour who is suffering and in need.

Thus, inculturation is primarily the task of the indigenous local Church. Yet, during the colonial period, the church was established and maintained by foreigners. Even today, in most of the Third World, the situation has not changed much as Western theology remains the mirror through which other theologies are evaluated and measured. This is even more painful as the Universal Church believes that its future lies in the Church in the Third World, especially in Asia and Africa. The reasons for the present imbalance are found in the history of the Christian missions. However, it is beyond the scope of this research to go into them here. The fact of that imbalance and its consequences is what concerns us. Rather than speculate on the Church's inability to speed up inculturation in the Third World, it will be appropriate to look at the practice of inculturation and the Early Fathers.

#### **4.4 INCULTURATION AND THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH**

Inculturation, in its importance to evangelization, is an ongoing concern for the whole Church. Born into a Jewish world, the Church soon found itself in non-Jewish environments, and has therefore always had to deal with the question of its relationship to the cultures in which it was taking root. The Gospel of Christ has Semitic trappings. As a result, although it communicated something about the teaching and personality of Jesus, those trappings do not belong to the essence of Christianity. In every age, the Gospel has taken the cultural trappings of that age. Consequently, the early Fathers, attempting to make the Gospel intelligible to the Greek world, expressed it in Greek philosophical and moral theologies (Kalu 1978:8).

One of those early Fathers was Justin the Martyr. E. Shorter quoted him as having argued that the Christian faith is compatible with whatever is good and noble in Hellenistic Roman cultures. He held that the different cultures were inspired by God and should be appropriate for his service. He saw these cultures as prefigurations of Christ

“a *Logos spermatikos*” (seed-bearing word). He was also credited with teaching that the Spermatic Logos has been implanted in the heart of every human culture, since all things were created through Christ, with him and for him (Shorter 1988). According to Shorter (1988:76):

We are taught that Christ is the first born of God, and we have explained above that he is the word (reason) of whom all mankind have a share and those who live according to reason are Christians, even though they were classed as atheists... Thus, whatever has been spoken aright by any man belongs to the Christians, for we worship and love, next to God, the Word which is from the unbegotten and ineffable God.

In the same vein, Clement according to Shorter, established a fundamental theory – a harmony of faith and Greek culture, which places Greek philosophy at the service of faith. For him the ideas of Greek philosophy were a gift to mankind and find their unity in Christianity. He said:

Philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness until the coming of the Lord, and even now it is useful for the development of true religion, as a kind of preparatory discipline for those who arrive at faith by way of demonstration. For, “your way will not stumble” the Scripture says, if you attribute to Providence all good things, whether belonging to the Greeks or to us. For God is the source of all good either directly or indirectly as in the case of philosophy. But it may even be that philosophy was given to the Greeks directly; for it was a ‘schoolmaster’, to bring Hellenism to Christ, as the law was for the Jew (Shorter 1988:136).

Ikechukwu Kanu believes that the expansion of the Church from Palestine to Rome, forced the Church into other cultures and she needed as a matter of urgency to seek for new ways of expressing herself. Thus, in 312, Constantine, through the edict of Milan, gave freedom of worship to Christians, making possible the initiation of large numbers of people to Christianity and the shaping of their belief systems on Greek and Roman philosophical thought, principles, and methods. This is a time when the Greek language dominated and it was later on that Latin overpowered it in the West, while Greek remained in the East (Kanu 2012).

Furthermore, the dominance of Greek language also influenced the culture of the Church at the time, and many concepts of theology have their etymology from the Greek language. History also acknowledges that Constantine in favouring the Church relinquished to the Church his court for a place of worship, thereby influencing the architectural structures of the Church even to this day. Again, the Roman juridical system was a basis for the Church's hierarchical structure and other liturgical vestments and feasts. For example, the celebration of Christmas replaced the Roman pagan feast of the sun (Kanu 2012).

In addition, St. Augustine in his day learnt much from Greek philosophy, especially from Plotinus, which he used greatly in his writings. He believed that, as faith runs on earth and takes its citizens from all nations and languages, faith is not to be pre-occupied with customs, laws, and institutions, neither is it to reject or destroy any of these, but rather it should observe and conserve them so that they do not constitute an obstacle to the religion that teaches the true worship of God (Kanu 2012).

From the above discussion, the important question arises of how much the African thought system has influenced the faith that Africans have received, so that it becomes truly the faith of the African people? Since early Christianity was conveyed through the medium of Jewish language and culture, and Graeco-Roman language and culture, Africans in the same vein could also add value to Christianity through their language and culture.

#### **4.5 INCULTURATION AND THE AFRICAN CHURCH**

Pope Paul VI (1974) has been on the forefront of inculturation as a matter of necessity and urgency in the Church's evangelizing mission in Africa. He emphasized the crucial importance of inculturation when he wrote:

The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, is certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the Kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any of them. The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore, every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly, of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed.

St. John XXIII, who was much more forceful with a clearer vision than his predecessors, in 1959, convoked the Second Vatican Council with one mission in mind: ***aggiornamento, renewing tradition and not breaking with it.*** According to him:

It does not mean reducing the faith, debasing it to the fashion of the times using the yardstick of what we like and what appeals to public opinion. Quite the contrary, just as the Council Fathers did, we must mould the 'today' in which we live to the measure of Christianity (Vatican Information Service – VIS).

The Pope himself explained further that:

Christianity must not be considered as 'something that has passed,' nor must we live with our gaze always turned back, because Jesus Christ is yesterday, today and forever. Christianity is marked by the presence of the eternal God, who entered into time and is present in all times, because all times are brought forth of His creative power, of eternal 'today' (VIS).

In his proclamation, John XXIII sees religion as a constituent of humankind. First of all, he believed that God's salvation and redemptive plan extended to all men and women. According to him, despite deviation and wrong interpretations there are some valid things common to all of them. Clearly, Pope John XXIII was quite aware of the moral and socio-cultural values in their religions, and called for their recognition, arguing that there is no need for them to renounce their religious inheritance in order to become Roman Catholic. To do this therefore the Pope argued for the need to modernize the Church and the Christian faith because so much has changed in the modern world both among the faithful themselves and in the way in which they have to live: today it is required of the Church that she inject the perennial and vital divine power of her good news into the veins of today's human community (Pobee 1992:36).

Understood in this way, inculturation is no longer a new word in the theological vocabulary. Many books have been written on the topic, describing, criticizing, encouraging, and exemplifying what it is all about. Synods of Bishops and Church leaders had treated the topic with special attention. Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, following the 1994 Synod of Bishops for Africa, speaks of inculturation as "one of the greatest challenges for the church on the eve of the third millennium" and "a difficult and delicate task" (*Ecclesia in Africa* 1994:59 & 62).

The classic statement of it in recent times was made by Pope John XXIII who Pobee quotes as saying in opening the Second Vatican Council:

The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith (*depositum fidei*) is one thing: the way that it is presented (*modus enuntiandi*) is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a magisterium which is pastoral in character (Pobee: 1992: 51).

In the same way, the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, a collection of the sayings and writings of the Pope, commenting on the papal statement wrote that the truths preserved in our sacred doctrine can retain the same substance and meaning under different forms of expression (Pobee 1992). This distinction is also picked up by the passage from the *Unitatis redintegratio* quoted above.

The distinction means a more historical understanding of the Church's teaching. God's self-revelation in Jesus is the unchanging Good News. It is the *depositum fidei*. However, in the preaching, formulation and penetration of this message there is growth and development (Pobee 1992:52). Thus, according to Pope John XIII *depositum fidei* includes: the sacred books, venerable tradition, the sacraments, prayers, ecclesiastical discipline, charitable and relief activities, the lay apostolate, and mission horizons. In the same speech at the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII speaks of the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine which embraces the whole of humankind, composed as he/she is of the body and soul (Dickson 1976:178-179). In other words, it becomes evident that the Roman Church sought the new reformation through the Bible and tradition.

#### **4.6 BRIEF HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY AND INCULTURATION IN AFRICA**

In his book: *Skenosis*, Pobee is of the opinion that Christianity came to Africa rather early. We hear of it in Egypt, Nubia, Ethiopia and North Africa, sometime in the first century A. D. (Acts 8:26f). Already in A.D. 180 the Scillitan martyrs are mentioned in North Africa. However, Christianity coming to Africa south of the Sahara was late. That phase has been associated with the advance of European expansion into Africa. It

began in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century with the desire and efforts of Portuguese sailors to have a European and Christian presence in Africa south of Cape Bojador and to undermine Muslim threats to Christendom. The pace of it was intensified in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by the emergence of the Evangelical Revival and the Humanitarians (Pobee: 1992). The Act of Berlin in 1885, which states the agreement among European powers in respect of the scramble for Africa further advanced the expansion of Christianity in Africa south of the Sahara.

The association of Christianity with European expansion into Africa has a number of implications for the mission of the Church in Africa south of the Sahara that are of importance here. For one thing, it meant that the version of Christianity which came to Africa reflected the ethos of Europe at the time. Christianity was propagated as civilization because at the time the latter was synonymous to Christianity.

Later in 1828, William Huskisson was heard in a speech to the House of Commons at Westminster to say: “in every quarter of the globe we have planted the seeds of freedom, civilization and Christianity” (Pobee 1992). His assertion was that whatever else British colonialism was, it was also a promotion of freedom, peace, order, and Christian civilization. National expansion and Christian outreach flowed side by side, if they did not already coalesce:

To the men of that generation, to the European man of the nineteenth century as a whole, the two (i.e. Christianity and civilization) were opposite sides of the same coin. It is very easy to dismiss this as cultural hubris and theological illiteracy. What we ought to recognize is that in this close association of ideas we are seeing the vestigial remains of Europe’s medieval heritage of ideas, among them the idea of Christendom (Pobee 1992: 9).

In other words, the idea of Christendom so affected the idea of mission that mission was seen in part as the promotion of European civilization. Thus, throughout this period,

and more so in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Christianity and European civilization were treated as coterminous.

The corollary of this equation of Christianity with western civilization is that there was a tendency to adopt a negative attitude towards Africans and African customs. First, most Africans were regarded as savages. Consequently, Wood described the Fanti of the Gold Coast, as “the dirtiest and laziest of all the Africans, stupid, and liars” (Pobee 1992:9). Second, the missionary practice of the *tabula rasa* was employed regularly in the mission field. This was the doctrine that there was nothing in the non-Christian culture upon which the Christian missionary could build, and as a result every aspect of the traditional non-Christian culture must be destroyed before Christianity could be built up. It was even denied that Africans had religion; their religion was stigmatized as superstition or fetish or even magic (Pobee 1992:10). With hindsight we realize how blinded the European writers were by their own cultural arrogance.

Another part of the negative attitude to African culture was a certain militancy which characterized the Christian missions as a crusade whereby the Africans must be made subject to the European customs and beliefs. With such a history and experience it was inevitable that African Churches should at first be extensions of home churches abroad (Pobee 1992:12). In the same stretch of thought, this was possible because the Church had a monopoly on formal education and was established even in the remotest villages which exposed them to literacy and European civilisation with little or no room for cultural interactions.

#### **4.7 THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL AND CULTURE**

The word inculturation became dynamic in the ecclesiology of Vatican II and it resulted in the theology of culture, developed by the council and found principally in *Gaudium et Spes*. This development came as a result of the presence at the council of bishops and priests who were indigenous members of “the mission countries” and it led people like Karl Rahner and sociologists, anthropologists, and ethnologists of religion to come up with the concept of the “world church”. These theologians saw the Church as beginning to act through the reciprocal influence exercised by all its components and in

the words of Komonchak: it is a concrete universal, whole in the whole and whole in each part (Komonchak 1966:192). In other words, during the Council, the local churches (mission territories) were no longer seen as European export but rather as existing with certain independence in their respective cultural spheres, inculturated and not ruled from Europe with its mentality. Thus, the local churches became constitutive of the universal church which lives *in* and *from* the particular churches. This means that the church is truly universal only insofar as it is localized or particularized, not just spatially, but with reference to customs, practices, and life-style of the local people.

The importance of this vision cannot be overemphasized as this same principle was re-echoed by the Second Vatican Council in these words:

...the young Churches rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the Apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance. From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these Churches borrow all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, the revelation of the Saviour's grace or the proper arrangement of Christian life. Particular traditions as well as each family of nations can be illumined by the light of the Gospel and then be taken up into Catholic unity (Missions, #22).

Explaining further, the Council Fathers noted:

...that culture necessarily has historical and social overtones, and the word "culture" often carries with it sociological and ethnological connotations; in this sense one can speak about a plurality of cultures. For different styles of living and different scales of values originate in different ways of using things, of working and self-expression, of

practicing religion and of behaviour, of establishing laws and judicial institutions, of developing science and the arts and of cultivating beauty. Thus the heritage of its institutions forms the patrimony proper to each human community; thus, too, it created a well-defined, historical milieu which envelops the men of every nation and age, and from which they draw the values needed to foster humanity and civilization (*Gaudium et Spes* #53-62).

Consequent upon this, several points were highlighted by the Council Fathers. They agreed that true and full humanity is achievable only through culture. All persons have a right to basic cultural benefits. According to them, culture exists to serve integral personal and communal development – as well as that of the whole of society. From the foregoing account, special attention was even paid to the cultural needs of the poor, women, labourers, and minorities.

Furthermore, the link between the message of salvation and culture was affirmed, and revelation and church mission were noted to have utilized the cultures of the people they addressed. Thus, the Council Fathers affirmed that the church has a universal mission and is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, nor to any particular way of life or any customary pattern of living, ancient or modern. Pertinent to the above, the Council Fathers pointed out that faithful to her other traditions and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, she can enter into communion with various cultural modes, to her own enrichment and theirs. The gospel is not simply harmonized with culture, which, as a product of fallen human beings, stands in need of purification and elevation.

#### **4.8 THE SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH AND THE MAGISTERIUM**

##### **4.8.1 Pope Paul VI (1963-1978)**

As Pope, Paul VI continued the reforms of John XXIII. He reconvened the Second Vatican Council, and supervised implementations of many of its reforms, such as the vernacularization and reform of the liturgy. It was his policy for the Bishops to set up

councils of priests in their own dioceses. During his reign, powers of dispensation devolved from the Roman Curia onto the Bishops, rules on fasting and abstinence were relaxed, and some restrictions on intermarriage were lifted. He also established a commission to revise the canon law. In 1964, Paul VI made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, becoming the first pope in over 150 years to leave Italy. Among other places he visited in 1969 was Africa. He was also the first to meet with the leaders of other churches, and in 1969 addressed the World Council of churches.

*Popolorum Progressio* was the first social encyclical that fully deals with the development of nations and the relations between rich and poor countries. Integral development was emphasized, thus focusing not only on economic progress but also on progress in knowledge, culture, and basic human needs.

The new attention of the Church to social questions was beginning to be evident in the social encyclicals of Pius XII and John XXIII and was dramatically advanced in 1967 by Paul VI when he said: "Today the principal fact that we must all recognize is that the social question has become world-wide" (Paul VI 1967:#3). Paul VI is among the popes who made a deep impression on people with his association with the hungry and exploited people of the world, with personal contacts with the poor in Latin America, Africa, and India.

However, looking at the causes of global poverty Paul VI focused first on the evils of colonialism which left behind dependence on one-crop economies that made the nations vulnerable when prices for their export fell. Pope Paul VI tried to be even-handed in his assessment of the effects of colonialism on traditional civilizations, which sometimes disintegrated under the impact and deprived communities of the needed support-structures in their lives. He felt that the conflict of the generations is made more serious by a tragic dilemma: whether to retain ancestral institutions and convictions and renounce progress, or to admit techniques and civilizations from outside and reject the traditions of the past along with all their human richness. In effect, the moral, spiritual, and religious supports of the past have too often been given way without securing in return any guarantee of a place in the new world (Paul VI 1967: #10).

What is clear is that Paul VI (1967:#114) ignores the fact that many traditional languages and religious and cultural institutions were destroyed in the colonial period. However, based on the concrete person in a global context, the Pope contends that: “What we hold important is man, each man, and each group of men, and we even include the whole of humanity”.

#### **4.8.2 Inculturation in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN1975)**

Evangelization is a complex process composed of many elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative (EN: #24), all of which belong together.

Pope Paul VI is less sanguine about culture than *Gaudium et Spes* was. He once said: “the split between the gospel and culture is without a doubt attention given to the evangelization of culture and of cultures which is to be achieved not in a purely decorative way as it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots” (EN:#20). In other words, Paul VI, it would seem, wishes to make the concrete human person the starting point in the context of relationship to others and to God. In the same encyclical he continued: “the gospel and evangelization... are capable of permeating all [cultures] without becoming subject to any one of them” (EN: #20). Thus, by evangelization of culture Paul VI means the evangelization of persons with their thought-patterns, their standards for making value-judgments, their interest, affectivity, in brief the domain of meaning and vision where the deepest life-issues are concerned (EN:#20).

In his discussion, Paul VI shows that EN is aimed at people’s consciences both personal and collective whence it seeks to eradicate sin. Consequently, the implication seems to be that unjust structures in society (e.g. slavery) can cause people to interject false opinions and attitudes (for example, that “slavery is natural”) and that change in thinking and attitudes can lead to structural social change. This may be possible, but as one realizes the enormity of, for example, the proliferation of arms, pursuit of scarce resources, and enormously lucrative contracts for corporations, it cannot appear as an easy option to change such a system by changing attitudes.

On the other hand, Surlis (1985) believes that without clearer indications of how social injustice is linked to powerful interlocking militaristic, economic, and political interests would be responsive to evangelization of culture, which he is suspicious of in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Surlis 1985). Paul VI's option for a shift to the cultural values represents less than what we would expect in view of the poverty, hunger, injustice, and exploitation that people experience globally.

#### **4.8.3 Pope John Paul II (1978-2005)**

By all measures, the extent of John Paul II's social teaching is enormous. Right from his election, he advanced both in the encyclicals and in discourses around the globe the theme of "faith and culture". A subsidiary of that larger theme is John Paul II's teaching on "inculturation". I propose to look at his view of the human person, his anthropology, and then his account of human rights, his understanding of culture and its evangelization. It shall also include John Paul's social teaching in light of his views on the gospel which is truly inculturated. Thereafter, I shall address critical questions on practices by John Paul II and curia which represented counter-trends to genuine inculturation.

#### **4.8.4 His Anthropology**

At the outset of his pontificate, John Paul II taught the truth about man as found in Christ. In his homily at his installation as pope, he encouraged the world not to be afraid of Christ, since Christ alone knows what is in every man. He said, "I ask you... I implore you allow Christ to speak to man" (John Paul II 1978). In the same trend of thought, the expansion of themes from *Gaudium et Spes* became a regular feature of his *magisterium*. For example, in his first encyclical, *Redemptory Hominids* (March 1979), the conciliar document is referred to at least seventeen times. Again, common in *Gaudium et Spes* is "Christ fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling" and this became the theme of his pontificate (John Paul II 1998).

In the encyclicals *Redemptor Hominis* and *Dives in Misericordia* (1980), he tried to explicate the content of this idea from *Gaudium et Spes*, taking account of the anxieties

and expectations of his contemporaries. On the 15th anniversary of his pontificate, he says:

The Council proposed, especially in *Gaudium et Spes*, that the mystery of redemption should be seen in light of the great renewal of man and of all that is human. The encyclical aims to be a great hymn of joy for the fact that man has been redeemed through Christ – redeemed in spirit and body (John Paul II 1994:48-49).

Thus, McGovern (2001) holds that the central idea in Redemption, the task of salvation which the Church carries out in the world, consists in helping man to discover the full truth about his being, and this truth is to be found only in Christ.

John Paul II believed that the dignity of the human person is discernible by human reason since it is able to distinguish truth from falsehood, good from evil, and recognizes freedom as the fundamental condition of human existence (Surlis 1985). He identifies universal concern for human rights as evidence of the growing recognition of human dignity by natural reason. For him, at the level of faith, human dignity is also grounded in each human being created in the image of God. Furthermore, following the Second Vatican Council the pope constantly reiterates that

- a) Christ is the key, the focal point and the goal of all human history
- b) Christ reveals to human beings what it is to be human and
- c) Christ is personally united to each concrete man and woman, each individual person in their particularity.

Thus, each human person is of value for his/her own sake and the personal dignity of each one represents the criterion of which all societies, cultures and institutions must be judged (Surlis 1985).

#### **4.9 THE SYNOD FOR AFRICA - ECCLESIA IN AFRICA 1995**

At the beginning of 1989, Pope John Paul II made the announcement of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops, in order to promote an organic pastoral

solidarity within the entire African territory and nearby islands. Its theme was *The Church in Africa and her Evangelising Mission Towards the Year 2000: You shall be my witness (Acts 1:8)*. The central theme for this Synod, Evangelisation, was further divided into five topics:

- a) Proclamation of the Good News of Salvation
- b) Inculturation
- c) Dialogue
- d) Justice and Peace
- e) Means of Social Communication

The *Lineamenta* was prepared and presented at the Ninth Plenary Session of SECAM in Lome`, Togo, July 25, 1990. The representatives of the various Regional Episcopal Conferences spent five years in reflection, discussion, and in planning and preparation for the Special Assembly that was held from 10 April to 8 May 1994 and in Rome. Interestingly, of the five themes, the two most spoken of by the Fathers were inculturation, justice, and peace. These two themes also carried the highest number of submissions and interventions (Okoye 1995:276).

In the preparatory documents, the *Lineamenta* and the *Instrumentum laboris*, the challenges facing African society as a whole were highlighted. These included: instability and political violence, armed conflicts, poor democratic representation, poor management of public affairs, weight of the external debt, corruption, ethnocentrism, the collapse of the health services and public education, exponential spread of HIV/AIDS, and also the aggressive growth of religious sects and certain Christian and non-Christian fundamentalist groups.

Furthermore, these documents (*lineamenta* and the *Instrumentum*) showed clearly that the Bishops of Africa had rejected the theology of adaptation and indigenization:

Following this conception of mission, the bishops of Africa and Madagascar, considering as totally bypassed a certain theology of adaptation, opt for a theology of incarnation. It is then necessary to foster the particular incarnation of

Christianity in each country, in accordance with the genius and the talents of each culture so that a thousand flowers may blossom in God's garden (Okoye 1995).

Consequently, the above position found confirmation at the 1985 Extraordinary Synod which said:

Inculturation, however, is different from a mere external adaptation as it signifies the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the rooting of Christianity in the various cultures (Okoye 1995: 276).

John Paul's description of the Special Assembly indicates his conviction that the Synod was a golden opportunity for Africa (Ecclesia in Africa 1995:#6).

The Pope's expressions: "historical moment of grace", "a sign of the times", "an acceptable time" and "hour of Africa" indicate his conviction that the Synod was a golden opportunity for Africa. It was an opportune moment for Christians throughout the continent who demanded inculturation so as to embrace the liberating message of the Gospel. If this message is allowed to take root in people's hearts, the Good News of Jesus Christ would have been seen as being capable of setting them free from poverty, hunger, illiteracy, sickness, and other human-made problems (Kimaryo 1997). The Synod was, therefore, the favoured time to re-construct the disfigured image of Africa by interpreting the signs of the times and listening to what the Spirit was communicating through this historical moment. This explains again the need for our present studies of *Ikpu-ala* and the urgent need to inculturate its values in the Igbo Church. Failure to do this might lead to the present Church dying and disappearing in the same way as did the Post-Apostolic North African Church and the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese evangelization in sub-Saharan Africa.

The celebration of the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops was, among other things, a sign of maturity. It meant that the Church in Africa had come of age. John Paul II was clear about this when he said:

Through Inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within. Through Inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission (*Redemptoris Missio* 1991:52).

At the end of the Synod, he gave the African delegates Church uniformity and communion. He tells us what the Catholic Church understands by Inculturation in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia In Africa*, which he signed in September 1995. He says *inter-alia*:

By reason of its deep conviction that the synthesis between culture and faith is not only a demand of culture but also of faith, because a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived, the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod considered Inculturation a priority and an urgent task in the life of Africa's Particular Churches. Following in the footsteps of the Second Vatican Council, the Synod Fathers interpreted Inculturation as a process that includes the whole of Christian existence – theology, liturgy, customs, structures – without of course compromising what is of divine right and the great discipline of the Church, confirmed in the course of centuries by remarkable fruits of virtue and heroism. The

challenge of Inculturation in Africa consists in ensuring that the followers of Christ will ever more assimilate the Gospel Message, while remaining faithful to all authentic African values (#78).

In an extension of authority, he insists that in the transmission of the Gospel, and in particular, in handling the delicate but necessary and indispensable process of inculturation, every particular Church should be guided by the following criteria:

- (1) Compatibility with the Gospel, and
- (2) Communion with the Universal Church

Thus, any process of inculturation that is truly Catholic must scrupulously respect these two criteria.

In the same stretch of thought, Openibo commenting on the success of the Synod says that many felt it was an expression of the maturity of the Catholic Church in Africa and a call to proclaim the Gospel with ever greater fervour (Openibo 1995). However, she felt that the Fathers of the Synod were not encouraged to pursue their much needed inculturation in the continent. Instead, they were to seek for those principles and values that are compatible with the Gospel and directed to ensure that they are in communion with the universal Church. She noted that:

...the Synod was indeed authentically and unequivocally African, and was celebrated in full communion here in Rome with the universal Church, in a way that made the Synod Fathers feel that universality is not uniformity but rather communion in diversity compatible with the Gospel ... it was a Synod of "resurrection and hope" as Synod Fathers joyfully and enthusiastically declared ... We want to say a word of hope and encouragement to you, the family of God in Africa, to you the family of God all over the world (Openibo 1995 & L'Osservatore Romano, 11 May 1994).

Again, commenting on another strong theme: “the Church as the Family of God” in the Synod, Openibo agrees with the “Message of the Synod” on the image of the family. For her and in the Documents of the Second Vatican Council, the image of the Church as the “People of God” puts emphasis on the human and communal side of the Church (Openibo 1995 & *Lumen Gentium*: #9). John Paul II (1995) upheld this value, speaking during the signing of the Post-Synodal Exhortation: *Ecclesia in Africa*, in Kenya in 1995, he says:

Africa is the continent of the family. We all know that for Evangelisation to be fully effective the members of the family must be committed to their faith in God, to the knowledge of the Person of Jesus in their life, to the knowledge of the family as Church and the Church as Family.

He concluded with a symbolic gesture and hope that the Church in Africa will implement the Exhortation for the Third Millennium with the following words:

I hand over to you the Apostolic Exhortation, gift of the Synod for Africa ... Meditate on it; live it in your homes, in your grasslands, in your villages, on your farms, in your cities, in your streets, in your workplaces. Pass it on to your children, to your children’s children and to all generations to come (SECAM Newsletter December 1995).

The rapid social change in today’s Igbo society and, indeed, Africa is upsetting many of the traditional norms of behaviour, and signs of this disruption can be seen on all sides: lack of responsibility in family life, sexual promiscuity, corruption in public and private life, and so forth. It is often the case that the Church tries to assert the traditional norms by its authority, and this is no longer listened to by many people. In this situation, it is not enough to impose laws on people and to preach obedience as the only value. The aim has got to be that of helping people to become self-reliant, responsible and accountable for their own lives, and morally mature. This is all the more necessary

when we realise what a great value is given to freedom in contemporary Igbo society. If the first level of personal freedom, the level at which a person says, “I do what I want!” is to be surpassed, and it is not unusual that an Igbo person is inclined to say, “I do what I want.” If freedom is to be understood and exercised in a mature way, a way that takes account of the rights of others and of the community, then there is need for a careful evaluation of many of our methods of religious education, liturgical and moral approaches.

Granted that there is no uniformity with regard to the symbolism of sin in African traditional society; different moral codes account for this lack of uniformity. However, there was a sense of the reality of sin throughout Africa. In Igbo traditional society, there were symbols of sin and their consequences. This awareness of sin brings about a certain fear: the fear of the consequences of sin, or its effects. There is a strong belief that sin can destroy not only the sinner but also the whole family or lineage. Sin leads to a break-up in the relationship between a family and God, and it interferes with one of the most basic Igbo values, namely, the sense of community and of society solidarity. Hatred and dislike are the root causes that destroy community relationships, and this in turn leads to murder, adultery, incest, theft, witchcraft, sorcery, to witchcraft accusation. These and the like seriously upset community and social solidarity and therefore violate the established order in society. Destruction, want, sickness, and death thus become significant symbols of sin and evil. In Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, when Okonkwo beats his wife before the planting season, he is considered to have committed a serious offense. Therefore, he has to undergo a purification ritual.

Thus, the focus of this research is how we enable people to grow into a more mature sense of the meaning of life for a Christian, and to take responsibility themselves for their lives as they freely try to follow “the way of Life” that Jesus Christ has opened up for us.

#### **4.10 THE CODE OF CANON LAW 1983 AND SOCIAL JUSTICE**

The Catholic Church for most of its existence functioned without a codified system of law. The Councils and synods throughout history formulated obligatory norms for the

governance of the Christian community. The Popes issued decrees, decretal letters, bulls, and instructions and these were gathered into collections which served the purpose of law books. The Code of Canon Law was promulgated in 1917 and went into effect the next year. It lasted until St. John XXIII called the Second Vatican Council and at the same time announced revision of the Code of Canon Law. The revised Code of Canon Law was promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1983.

The Code of Canon law is extremely necessary for the Church in Igbo land because the Church is organized as a social and visible structure and therefore must have norms. These norms make the hierarchical and organic structure needed for the Church's exercise of the functions divinely entrusted to her, especially the sacred power and the administration of the sacraments. Further, the norms make it possible for mutual relations of the faithful to be regulated according to justice based upon charity, with the rights of individuals guaranteed and well-defined (Can. 204) and, of course, to ensure that common initiatives undertaken for a more perfect Christian life may be sustained, strengthened, and fostered canonically (John Paul II 1983).

#### **4.11 SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE IGBO CATHOLIC CHURCH**

Generally, every Catholic has the right and responsibility to promote social justice in the world at large as well as within the structures of the Church (Matt. 5:3-12). Christians are bound by a double obligation of promoting social justice, by which the systemic injustices in society are addressed, and of meeting the practical needs of the poor. The latter obligation is specifically tied in the canon to a precept of the Lord (Canon 222 #2).

Jesus came to establish a Kingdom of life, truth, love, and justice. A Church is not fully rooted among its people if it does not try to establish justice. The Old Testament was all about God's saving justice and it made a challenge of the prophets to the entire society to be just. According to the Bible, to know God is to do justice (Jer. 22:16). Jesus in the New Testament, made himself the champion of the poor, oppressed, marginalized, and he called for justice in relationship with one another and respect for cultures (Matt. 5:17-20). It is in this context that *ikpu-ala* as a social justice value lends

hands to ensure that the community, while executing its responsibility to its members, remains in harmony and peace.

Christian social teaching has long presented the dignity of the human person as fundamental to the social order. During the twentieth century various popes emphasized personal dignity over and against the pressures in society that would deny or restrict that dignity and the rights that flow from it. In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Catholic social thought has increasingly pointed to the disorders in social systems themselves as the object of justice critiques. It is not enough to show charity toward a person who is impoverished; it is necessary to do something about the social system that produces the conditions of poverty. Justice in society extends beyond relations between individuals and includes the whole fabric of societal relationships. Explaining the central point of Pope John XXIII's encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, 1963, Professor Theodore Hesburgh writes there will be no peace where there is no justice and no justice where human persons do not have their basic human rights (Hameed 2011). Vatican II and recent papal encyclicals have also stressed the global aspects of social justice because the interdependence of peoples is an integral element of any social system today (GS #1 & LG #8). Thus, any system in which social relationships are determined entirely by economic factors is contrary to the nature of the human person and his acts (CCC #2423).

Hence in a culture that sees progress as divine blessing, it is impossible to think of true progress in the midst of moral, social and cosmic disorder. In community where billions profess faith in God but few have any regard for the divinely established moral order, a community where human blood flows constantly like streams and so many innocent lives are taken both violently and subtly; in such a world as ours today, what possibilities does the Igbo Catholic see for peace and for her children? This is the question that has made the canon law of the Church become indispensable, and *Ikpu-ala* as a justice value is a wakeup call for the Igbo Church to make restitution and reparation for the injustices of its earlier practices towards Igbo Christians and communities. After all, the Synod of Bishops, 1971, in their reflection on "the mission of

the People of God to further justice in the world,” affirmed the right to a culturally-sensitive, personalized development. The Bishops teach that Gospel principles mandate justice for the liberation of all humanity as an essential expression of Christian love. The Church must witness for justice through its own lifestyle, educational activities, and international action (Schultheis et al 1984).

#### **4.12 EVANGELIZATION OF CULTURE**

John Paul II in his *Redemptor Hominis* (1990) makes no secret of his thinking that for a new synthesis between faith and culture to be achieved the church must evangelize culture. This consists in setting the message and person of Jesus Christ before culture and announcing that in Christ and the gospel the meaning of human existence is revealed. It is clear that the people envisage here a task with two dimensions that complement each other: one is the dimension of the evangelization of cultures, and the other is that of the defense of man and his cultural advancement (#16).

##### **4.12.1 Inculturation**

Pope John Paul II's writings clearly show that the one model of inculturation which he had in mind is the incarnation itself. For the term 'acculturation' or 'inculturation' may be a neologism, but it expresses very well one factor of the great mystery of the incarnation. The catechesis and evangelization in general are called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of cultures. In this stretch of thought, the Incarnation testifies to the goodness of human nature, and so inculturation testifies to the goodness present in culture prior to evangelization, and that goodness is already present in the germ of the divine Logos (John Paul II 1979:15-16).

In line with his views on culture and evangelization, John Paul II in 1980 encouraged the African Bishops to carry on the task of inculturation of the Gospel for the good of each people, so that Christ may be communicated to every man, woman, and child. In this process, cultures themselves must be uplifted, transformed, and permeated by Christ's original message of divine truth, without harming what is noble in them (JP II 1980:64). However, for him, this is a vast undertaking which requires a great

deal of theological lucidity, spiritual discernment, wisdom and prudence, and also time (JP II 1980).

#### **4.12.2 The Goal of Inculturation**

The First Synod of Bishops for Africa, *Ecclesia in Africa* (1994) focused on the “Church as Family of God.” It described the family as a place of belonging, dialogue, and solidarity, a place where everyone feels welcomed and the uniqueness of each member is respected and nurtured. The Second Synod (2009) placed special emphasis on the theological themes that are integral to the family of God, personal reconciliation, building a just social order, and promoting peace through living the beatitudes. Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (2009:#43), noted that the family is the place that propagates the “culture of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation”. The Church in Africa to be true to its name as an African Church and for its commitment to service, reconciliation, justice and peace, must inculturate the African values in its evangelization process. This is because inculturation is and has always been a necessary concomitant of evangelization (comp. Benedict 2009:#69). More so, there has never been evangelization without inculturation. Inculturation is, in relation to Africa and her mission, a *right* and not a *concession* (Okoye 1995:277). According to J.C. Okoye, to evangelise without inculturating would be to limit seriously the reach and depth of conversion to Christ, because culture enters into the very definition of the believer. It is the very air which he or she breathes (Okoye 1995).

Buttressing the above, and in clear support of inculturation, at the 34 General Congregation of the Society of Jesus in 1995, in Decree 4 on “Our Mission and Culture,” article no. 3 says:

When the Word of God becomes embedded in the heart of a culture, it is like a buried seed which draws its nourishment from the earth around it and grows to maturity. ...inculturating the Gospel means allowing the Word of God to exercise a power within the lives of the people, without imposing, at the same time, alien cultural factors which

would make it difficult for them truly to receive that Word. Evangelisation is not possible without inculturation. Inculturation is the existential dialogue between a living people and the living Gospel (Waldenfels 2009).

Hans Waldenfels holds that the above view theologically takes up the demand of Pastoral constitution on the Church "*Gaudium et Spes*", when it says:

To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other (Waldenfels 2009).

In the same trend of thought, Juan Scannone (2016) explained that Jorge Mario Bergoglio, as the Archbishop of Buenos Aires (now the Pope), insists on the inculturation of the Gospel, which targets the process of structural change (even the structures of the heart), must enforce justice in order not to betray the culture of our people, their values and their legitimate aspirations, without filtering them through our 'illuminist' mentality (Bergoglio 1975).

Furthermore, according to Scannone (2016), Bergoglio insisted on the fact that the people have habits, a capacity for appreciation, cultural contents that elude classification: they are supreme in their ability to question. As a result, this demands a refinement of the act of listening so that we may hear such calls and presume humility, affection, inclination to inculturation and, above all, rejection of the absurd expectation of becoming the "voice" of the peoples, thinking that perhaps that they do not have their own voices. All peoples have voices, sometimes reduced to a whisper by oppression. We must listen hard, but seek not to speak for them (Bergoglio 1975).

Though in the *Lineamenta* and *Instrumentum Laboris* of the African synod presented a consensus on the theological model of inculturation, namely the model of the incarnation of the Son of God who took human flesh among a definite people, the Synod Fathers in the Assembly hold that the goal was not inculturation but the evangelization of culture (Okoye 1995). They rather went on to emphasize that incarnation is not an end in itself, but is ordained towards the paschal mystery and the mystery of Pentecost (Okoye 1995:278). For them therefore, each mystery has some import for the practice of inculturation. The cross, for example, calls for the purification of culture and the renewal of its values. In other words, through Pentecost and the action of the Spirit, each culture contributes some specific note to the building up of the body of the Church.

The *magisterium* from the onset sees the dimension of the incarnation as calling indeed for the taking flesh of the gospel in culture, but would seem to demand that, like Na'aman, every evangelized culture brings home a portion of the earth in which Jesus lived. In concrete terms, this would mean that every Christianised culture should adopt water, wine from vines, bread made of wheat, oil of olive for its sacramental signs (Cantalamessa 2014). However, one does not miss the reference to the dispute about whether and to what extent the material of the sacraments should be taken from locally available materials.

#### **4.13 A THEOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF INCULTURATION**

A theological definition of inculturation can be made in variety of ways, but one distinct definition is the presence of God in African cultures before Western missionaries came. For Mutabazi holds that inculturation requires the acceptance of the fact that God has been at work in the history of all peoples and that their history is sacred. Therefore, culture is the sacred space of people. Hence, any agent of inculturation has to discern the presence of God within these traditions and cultures (Mutabazi 2004:64). Paul Gifford (2008) believes that Peter Kanyandago was more forceful in his presentation when he says:

God manifests him/herself in each human being, society and culture. The negation of the unique mission of Africa, as one can appreciate, has very serious theological implications. 'Tampering with Africa means tampering with humanity and, therefore tampering with God'.

This is a theological position and needs to be assessed on its theological merits. Yet there is another and distinct issue of a different level altogether, namely whether something traditionally African can bring Africa into the socio-economic and political systems of the modern world. Thus, in a stretch of thought, Gifford (2008), quoting Kanyandago (2005), writes:

There is no way a people can develop without using and building on its culture. Borrowing can be done on condition that it does not tamper with the unique identity of the one who is developing. In the case of Africa, it is not difficult to see the difficulties that have come mainly from trying to impose solutions which are strange to the culture and history of its people, especially in the economic, political and religious fields.

For his own part, Waliggo (1986:11) states:

Inculturation means the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his Gospel of salvation ever more understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time. It is the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought patterns of each people .... It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity 'truly feel at home' in the cultures of each people.

Arriupe (1978), the former Master General of the Society of Jesus, joined in the contention when he says:

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

This may explain why Arbuckle (1988:511) observed that inculturation is the conviction that Christ and His Good News are dynamic and challenging in all times and cultures as they become better understood and lived by each people. In view of this, inculturation can be considered as a continuous endeavour to make Christianity truly "feel at home" in the cultures of each people.

Seen from this perspective, inculturation becomes a process that applies the pattern of the "Word made-flesh", which would involve the gospel taking life and flesh in the beliefs of people who welcome Christ and the values of the gospel. In other words, just as Christ became man so as to win salvation for all, the gospel must become "culture" so as to win the heart of local people. In a way, Udoidem, citing John Paul II, shares the same sentiments with Arrupe when he defines inculturation as the incarnation of the gospel in autochthonous cultures, at the same time, the introduction of these cultures into the life of the church (Udoidem 1996:2). Thus, he was able to stress the need for reciprocity in the relationship between the gospel and cultures.

Among the definitions of inculturation, Roest Crollius (1986:43) remains the most widely acceptable. It has both theological and anthropological dimensions:

It is the integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this

culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the Church universal.

A close examination of Crollius' definition sheds light on important elements that make inculturation outstanding among other terminologies. First of all, "the integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people" is important because inculturation must affect the whole life of the people at the local Church. This Christian experience of the people can be summed up as their life experience, which includes the way they worship, marry, interact with one another, their general occupation, the way they rejoice when they have good fortunes such as a new birth and how they mourn when they have misfortunes such as bereavement in the family.

This integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people is also important because, in the words of Pope Paul VI, inculturation here has become 'a process by which Christ becomes native to or incarnated in particular African cultures. In other words, without this integration of the Christian experience into the culture of its people, in the words of Okure, Christ remains an outsider or a foreigner to the culture, he does not become a citizen; and then the culture itself cannot be said to be redeemed by him (Okure 1990:59).

Another important element in Crollius' definition is "creating a new unity and communion not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the Church universal". The aim of inculturation is not to sever the relationship between the local Church and the universal Church. Rather, an inculturated local Church enriches the universal Church with her cultural values, transmitted through inculturation. I regard this contribution of Crollius as a good foresight. It forestalls the fears of those people who think that inculturation will bring division in the Church by assuring them that, instead, it will bring about the expected unity between the local Church and the universal Church.

However, how one defines inculturation, it must not be forgotten that it is a conscientious effort to help the people of Africa in general and the Igbo people in particular to be converted down to the very roots of their culture. In this respect, it strives at attaining a confluence between the conversion of mind and the conversion of the way of life, so that African Christians would be able to live their faith in all its depth and be able to give it expression in their own way. This is because to make Catholic Church in Nigeria more Nigerian is to insure its vitality and its future. Although statistics would indicate that the Catholic Church in Nigeria is doing very well, Christianization does not lie essentially in the game of numbers.

On the other hand, Christianity that was introduced in Ethiopia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD is still vibrant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Why? Because, it was culturally anchored in the Ethiopian soil (culture) and thoroughly indigenized. Consequently, it withstood the centuries of pressure from Islam and resisted the injudicious attempt by the Portuguese and the Romans to latinize it during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. An inculturated church is one in which its members feel at home; are administered in accordance with their understanding and tradition of authority and power. It is a church in which few impositions come from outside the inherent ordinance of Christianity. It is a church that its members see and acclaim.

According to Kanu, there are many concepts that may suggest the same meaning at the pragmatic level as inculturation, but are neither fully synonymous in conceptual content, nor compatible in their theological or ideological implications. These concepts include interculturalization, enculturation, acculturation, indigenization, africanization, contextualization, adaptation, and reformation. Amidst all these concepts, inculturation is chosen by this researcher as an instrument for post-missionary evangelization in the Igbo church because, as a concept, it possesses a wholeness that would enhance intensive evangelization in the entire African Church (Kanu 2012).

#### **4.14 IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE**

From the *magisteria* and social teachings of the Church, it appears that the role of the Church according to John Paul II, with reference to social justice, is to be critical and

prophetic, that is, to denounce structural injustice and ideologies which conceal the truth and render people unaware of their true dignity. Again, it is the Church's responsibility to announce the possibility of a civilization of peace and love founded on justice.

Pope Paul VI for his part believed that it is up to the local communities or nations to do the requisite scientific and social analysis to uncover the systematic causes of oppression within their own society, or which their support in other societies or nations. The papal teachings tend to see one single oppressive economic system operating globally. John Paul II (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*: 1987:#16) in particular sees totalitarian regimes which deny people their civil liberties, or perhaps more accurately, their freedom of conscience and spirit-related human rights. For him, the evil lays not so much in the possession of so much material wealth as in the cult of "having", which leads to an inversion of the human and social priorities (#28).

Addressing an audience of university people about the evangelization of culture in Chile in 1987, John Paul II said *inter-alia*:

All man's "having" is important for culture, is a factor creative of culture, but only to the extent which man, through his "having", can at the same time "be" more fully a man in all the dimensions of his existence in everything that characterizes his humanity (JP II Address to UNESCO, 2 June 1980, no.7 was quoted in L'Osservatore Romano 4 May 1987:5).

Inferring from the above discussion, John Paul II clearly offers a much more demanding criterion of development. In this case, development must have an ethical and not merely a technical dimension – it has a clear moral character (1987:33).

John Paul II was even more forceful in *Reconciliation et Penitential* when he pointed out how sin caused a rupture in man's relationship with God, his fellow men, and the created world. According to him, the consequences of personal sin for society reflect the

interior disorder in a human. This is why, he says, we can speak of personal sin and social sin,

...of those who are in a position to avoid, eliminate or at least limit certain social evils but who fail to do so out of laziness, fear or the conspiracy of silence, through secret complicity or indifference (*Reconciliatio et Poenitentia* 1984:#15).

Thus, a human's vocation expresses itself in the fulfilment of responsibilities to neighbour. If these responsibilities are overlooked, offense is given to God and there are negative consequences which extend beyond the brief life span of the individual (L'Osservatore Romano 30 June 1986:1-4).

One is tempted to ask: what has all this to do with John Paul II's view of culture and its second evangelization which is called inculturation? John Paul II, given his background and circumstances, appears to denounce industrial culture, which can sometimes be thoroughly ideological and can evolve methods of controlling and manipulating the masses either for the economic reasons of profit-maximization or for purposes of political control.

The Church's responsibility is always present when she proclaims the gospel of the kingdom, and her defense of each person's dignity and full range of human rights can be a powerful instrument of consciousness-raising and a critical and prophetic force at local, national, and global levels. Fidelity to Jesus Christ demands this of the Church.

It is clear then, that the church can only fulfill its prophetic and critical mission if, along with knowing the Gospel, it knows what is going on in social, economic, political, and other systems. Consequently, for this knowledge it needs autonomous human disciplines – collectively called culture – which also have to contain about the human person (Surlis 1951:265). Hence, dialectically complementing each other, faith and culture can critique and correct whatever detracts from the dignity of human persons, any human person.

#### **4.15 INCULTURATION IMPERATIVE FOR AFRICAN SYNOD OF 1994**

As we have already seen, inculturation appeared as one of the five sub-themes of the Synod of Bishops for Africa, which took place in 1994. That theme was meant to be treated as a unit along-side Proclamation, Justice and Peace, Dialogue, and Social Communications, and yet in the course of the month-long Assembly, inculturation pervaded the entire discussion on the topic: “The Church in Africa and Her Evangelising Mission, Towards the Third Millennium – You Shall be my Witnesses.” It is important at this point to recall that from the onset, the Synod Fathers saw inculturation from the perspective of incarnation, and not adaptation. In other words, they saw that inculturation was involved in the very process of God-becoming-man, and that inculturation took place as a matter of course in the spread of the Christian faith throughout the Roman Empire in the early centuries. However, in the course of Western missionaries’ activities in Africa, the faith got too closely identified with what Ehusani calls the “sights and sounds”, and the “visions and voices” of the Western world (Ehusani 1999).

Failure to engage the African culture adequately in the process of evangelization has caused incalculable damage to the continent’s psyche in much the same way as the experience of the slave-trade and colonialism in Africa. Consequently, the Bishops pledged to reverse this situation by declaring a commitment to inculturation at all levels and in every dimension of the Christian faith. Credit should be given to the African Bishops for their courage in focusing on their mission rather than being intimidated by the document released on the eve of the Synod: *The Roman Liturgy and Inculturation: IVth Instruction for the Right Application of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy 1994). According to this Constitution, inculturation is essentially “adaptation” but the African Bishops went beyond the notion of adaptation, and insisted on inculturation as synonymous to “incarnation”. Thus whereas the publication limited the areas of inculturation to language, music, gestures and postures, and church art, the Fathers of the synod saw that genuine inculturation should include the whole of Christian existence – theology, liturgy, and structures (EIA 1995:#59, 78 & Ad Gentes art. 22).

Consequent upon this, the Fathers of the Synod understood inculturation to involve “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration into Christianity” as opposed to “the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.” Thus there is a new window of understanding as the Fathers of the Synod were able to make a synthesis between culture and faith as a demand not only of culture but also of faith, “because a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, and not faithfully lived” (Ehusani 1999). To this effect, the Synod saw the task of inculturation as both a matter of priority and an urgent task for the African Church. The result was tremendous as the African Synod gave room for wide-ranging initiatives not only in liturgical celebrations, but also in theological reflections and in the very structure of the local churches, in accordance with the established criteria for inculturation, which are: (a) compatibility with the Christian message and (b) communion with the universal Church (EIA # 62).

#### **4.16 THE CASE FOR THE INCULTURATION OF *IKPU-ALA* AMONG THE IGBO CATHOLICS**

Directly consequent upon the argument for the preservation of human dignity is urgent need for the Church in Nigeria, especially in Igbo land, to incorporate *Ikpu-ala* in the inculturation process. Why the emphasis on inculturation of *Ikpu-ala* in our present age? Peter Schineller offers two important reasons: First, this is obviously an age of mission, with tremendous challenge to, and activity on the part of the Church, given Pope John Paul II’s extension of the Church’s activities even to the re-evangelisation of Europe. Addressing the Convention of Missionaries to the Migrants in 1986, John Paul II said:

Today, after twenty centuries, the Church senses the urgency and the duty to carry on with renewed efficacy the work of evangelizing the world and re-evangelizing Europe. It is a pastoral choice, re-proposed in view of the third millennium that flows from the mission to save the whole man and all men in the truth of Christ. Today, more than

ever, the evangelization of the world is tied to the re-evangelization of Europe (1986).

Some of the obvious reasons for this re-evangelization of Europe are because of its permissive morality and what secularized Europe means to the world.

Second, we are in an age of global awareness, which includes the awareness of cultural diversity. In other words, though we are in an age of mission, the missionary activity of the Church is still on in Igbo land, for example, and calls for more intensified efforts because the challenges presented by our cultural values and disvalues are numerous. While there are hardly two towns with totally the same culture, there are still many cultural values that are commonly understood and cherished among the Igbo people even to this day. These include *Ikpu-ala*, *ozo* title, and ancestor worship, and marriage, sacredness of life, family, and solidarity.

The awareness of the diversity of cultures in the world, and the Igbo society as it affects social justice, makes *ikpu-ala* outstanding in the inculturation process of the Gospel in the Igbo Catholic Church. The papal call for the re-evangelization of Europe shows that the Church cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past. Pope Paul VI (1975) once wrote that “the split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the tragedy of our time” (EN #20). Pope John Paul II in his encyclical: *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), demonstrated his convictions about inculturation which he presented as one of the fundamental aspects of the Church’s total evangelizing mission points to the mutuality between the Gospel and the cultures it engages.

In other words, the Christian message is to be open to all cultures, bound to no single culture, and made accessible to every human person through a process of inculturation, by which the gospel introduces something new into the culture and the culture brings something new to the richness of the Gospel. According to John Paul II (1979):

Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces people, together with their cultures, into her own

community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within (*RedemptorHominis* #52).

The Second Vatican Council calls the inculturation process the “*Semina Verbi*” (AG 6 & 22). For God had for long carefully prepared the ground for the reception of this Christian seed. This awareness encourages the researcher to stress the urgent need for inculturation in the Igbo Church. However, I am not alone in this. Pope Paul VI addressing the African Bishops in Kampala said: Your Church must be above all Catholic... In this sense you can and must have an African Christianity (Paul VI 1969). Pope John Paul II echoed the same sentiment while addressing the Bishops in Zaire, saying: One aspect of this evangelization is the inculturation of the Gospel, the Africanization of the Church (John Paul II 1980). In another place, he stated beautifully that there is no question of adulterating the word of God or of emptying the cross of its power (cf. 1 Cor 1:17) but rather of bringing Christ into the very centre of African life and of lifting up all African life to Christ. Thus not only is Christianity relevant to Africa, but Christ, in the members of his body, is himself African.

Furthermore, the process of inculturating the Gospel of Jesus Christ within human culture is a form of incarnation of the Word of God that comes to take up a dwelling place in the human family (John 1:14). According to Krieg, the incarnation refers to the abiding reality of the hypostatic union of the divine nature and the human nature in Jesus Christ (Krieg 1995:659). For so many theologians, the idea of the incarnation expresses the whole process of inculturation. It is within the parameters of this understanding that *Gaudium et Spes* (1965) maintains that genuine inculturation should be based upon the mystery of the incarnation, seen not only as a mystery and as an event in the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, but as a process to be carried on in history till the end of time. In other words, when the Word of God becomes embedded in the heart of a culture, it is like a buried seed which draws its nourishment from the earth around it and grows to maturity.

The researcher believes inculturating *ikpu-ala* in Igbo Catholic Church would be seen as making adequate connection between Faith and social issues of our time. For in the African Synod of 1994, the *lineamenta*, the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the *Synod propositions* and *Ecclesia in Africa*, all are concerned with social issues and the numerous social and political problems affecting Africa and the Church's mission. Thus the idea of bringing Christ into the centre of African life is of paramount importance, though the African in general and the Igbo people in particular often tend to overlook this important fact in the process of inculturating the Christian message into the local culture. Understood in this sense, some Igbo cultural values are present and are in consonance with the Christian faith. The researcher does not deny that within the same culture disvalues are immanent which are totally at variance with the Christian faith and tradition. Nevertheless, I would like to illustrate how *ikpu-ala* would work if it were inculturated into the Igbo Church in subsequent chapters.

#### **4.17 CONCLUSION**

The Special Assembly for the Synod of the African Bishops was indeed a moment of grace. It was a turning point in many ways for the leaders of the African Church who became aware of the onerous but urgent task of engaging the African culture, religion, and tradition in a dynamic dialogue with the gospel of Christ towards achieving a more vital and vibrant Christianity in the continent, and towards making the gospel a catalyst for change on the political, social, economic, cultural, and spiritual levels.

Unquestionably, this is the task that has come to be known as inculturation: that of sufficiently Christianizing the African heritage on the one hand and adequately Africanizing the Christian tradition on the other, such that the African at the threshold of the third millennium can be authentically African, and yet truly Christian.

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ON *IKPU-ALA* AS SOCIAL JUSTICE VALUE IN**  
**TRADITIONAL IGBO SOCIETY**

**5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This Chapter presents the research design used in this dissertation. That is to say, the aim of this chapter 5 is to describe how data was collected regarding *Ikpu-ala* as a social justice value in traditional Igbo society and its implications for today’s Igbo Catholic communities.

**5.2 THE METHODOLOGY FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY**

Among the models for practical theology, Osmer’s (2008) approach seems to be outstanding, although he recognized the contribution of Browning model as illustrated by Anderson in “The Discipline of Practical Theology”. Consequently, I have used Osmer’s model of practical theology in conducting this research and employed Browning’s theological experience in data collection for the study. Osmer organized his model for practical theology around the following four principles:

1. The descriptive-empirical task asking: “what is going on?”
2. The interpretive task, asking: “why is it going on?”
3. The normative task, asking: “what ought to be going on?”
4. The pragmatic task, asking: “how might we respond?”

Task	Descriptive	Interpretive	Normative	Pragmatic
Question	What is going on?	Why is it going on?	What ought to be going on?	How might we respond?

Function	Priestly	Sagely	Prophetic	Servant
	Listening	Wisdom	Discernment	Leadership

Figure 5.1: The four tasks of Practical Theology according to Osmer (2008)

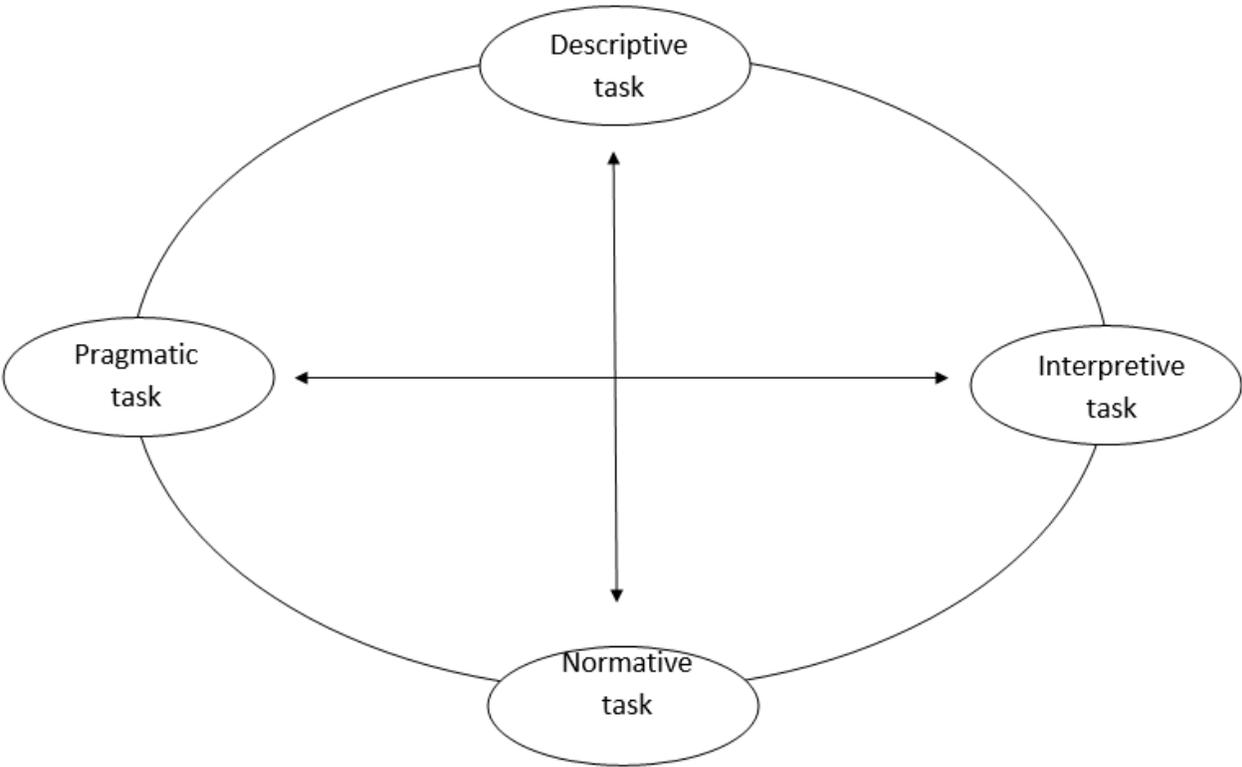
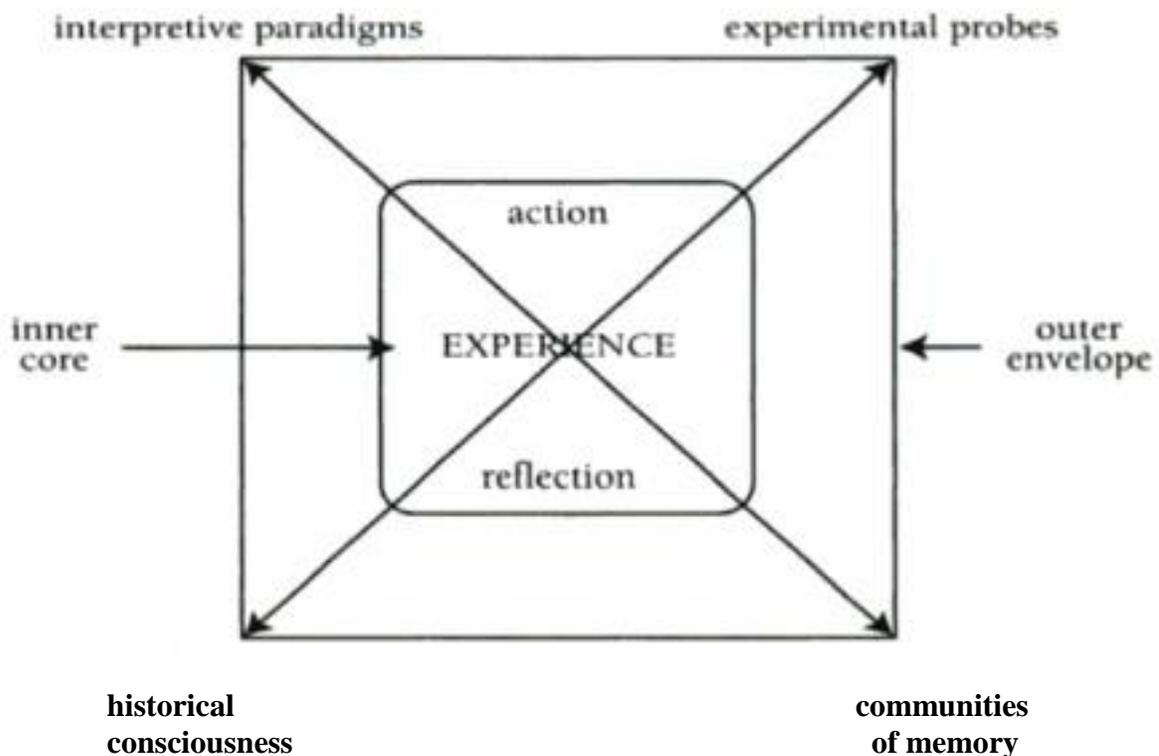


Figure 5.2. Relationships between the four tasks according to Osmer (2008)

Osmer in Figure 5.2 shows the interconnectedness of Osmer’s four tasks as well as employing Don Browning Model of practical theology. In conducting this study, the researcher believes that practical theology extends systematic theology into the life and praxis of the Christian community. While this approach includes cognitive reflection on truth as doctrine, practical theology takes into account the truth of experience. For Smith, while quoting Swinton, says “Critical, analytical thinking is important, but it is not the only source of truth... knowledge of God entails knowledge of the human person; the two are distinct but intertwined (Smith 2008:165).

### 5.3 THE BROWNING MODEL OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY



**Figure 5.3.** *The components of practical reason by Ray Anderson.*

Anderson using Don Browning's model offers a compelling and critical model that is developed from what he calls practical reason. He contends that practical reason has an overall dynamic, made up of two layers: an outer envelope and an inner core. Through this process he was able to integrate theory and practice in an ongoing process of action and reflection. Understood as such, the concept of practical reason places the theological task at the centre of the social context, where the theologian stands with and alongside the Church, mediating the gospel of Christ from the centre. Consequently, Anderson proposed the following questions:

- a. What then shall we do?
- b. How then should we live?
- c. What is the relation between the works of Christ in redemption to the word of Christ in Scripture?

Thus, he believes that practical theology moves out from this *centre* toward an "*outer envelope*" that includes *interpretive paradigms, experimental probes, historical consciousness and communities of memory*.

In this study, the researcher adopted Browning's original five levels, where transformation can take place through strategic practical theology:

1. Vision: a new or amended understanding of a person or community
2. Obligation: a new integration of old traditions and practices
3. Tendency-need: a more explicit way to allow people to deal with their needs in a conscious and intentional way
4. Environmental-social: a transformation of the community or the environment to more intentionally reflect theological convictions
5. Rules and roles: concrete patterns of living and changes (Smith 2008).

Again, looking at the inner core, Anderson's approach combined with Osmer's, these two approaches assisted the researcher to interpret the Documents of Vatican II, the *Magisterium* and other Church documents. It also helped in answering the question about "what is going on in the Catholic Church in Igbo communities. Thus, the

combination of the Osmer and Anderson models provide the opportunity to ask the questions these gentlemen posited in the research, namely, what is going on? Why is it going on? How might we respond? And what is the relation between the works of Christ in redemption to the word of Christ in Scripture? Consequently, the diagram read from the centre outward, towards the four corners helps the researcher to understand the direction and the interconnectivity of the community. For at the centre lies the “inner core,” where experience raises the questions: What then shall we do? How then should we live? According to Anderson, it is when practical theology engages the outer envelope in its action-reflection process that it becomes a living and vital theology of the Church and its mission in the world.

#### **5.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design used in this study as well as the procedures and techniques of data collection and analysis will be outlined here. Agreeing with scholars such as Fouché (2002), Hagan (2000), Huysamen (1993), Marshall and Rossman (2006), as well as Mouton and Marais (1993), Dastile (2004:134) defined research design as “the plan or blueprint of the study”. That is, it includes the who, what, where, when, and how of the subject under study. From the foregoing, it is clear that research design is the guideline according to which a choice about data collection methods has to be made.

#### **5.5 METHODOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION**

By choosing literary and empirical (qualitative) methods for this study, the researcher intends to show the philosophy of the research process, which includes assumptions and values that serve as a rationale for the research, as well as the criteria used for interpreting data. This methodology enables the researcher to provide the reasons for the choice of such methods by detailing the advantages as well as disadvantages of each method selected (Mouton & Marais 1993:33).

#### **5.6 DATA COLLECTION USED FOR THIS STUDY**

Data collection is an important aspect of any type of research study since inaccurate data collection can lead to invalid results. Data collection methods for impact evaluation vary along continuum from quantitative methods and at one end to qualitative methods at

the other. Data gathering is the precise, systematic gathering of information relevant to the research sub-problems, using methods such as interviews, participant observation, focus group discussion, narratives, and case histories (Burns & Grove 2003:373).

As already outlined in the very beginning of this study, the method of research adopted here includes both literary and empirical methods, and the researcher also uses qualitative and quantitative methods as outlined by Osmer (2008), including the process of collecting data. This mixed method make it possible to collect and analyse both forms of data in a single study (Creswell 2003:15). This method will allow the collection of data from a subset of a population and administers instruments that generalize the findings to the entire population. These designs show clearly how the use of intra- and inter-instrument approaches can draw on the advantages of Osmer's design while minimizing its weaknesses, thus achieving the three basic purpose of research, namely, exploration, description, and explanation/interpretation. In this way, the method will focus on the meaning of human experience. According to Schurink (2001:240) in a qualitative study different techniques and data collection methods are utilized in order to "describe, observe, and make sense of or interpret the phenomenon under investigation from the perspective of the subjects" (Dastile 2004:134).

## **5.7 THE SAMPLING STRATEGY AND IDENTIFICATION**

The site and place chosen for any study is important. The site for this study is a number of Igbo communities. Sampling is the process of selecting a subset of a population to represent the entire population (Babbie and Maxfield 1995:173). In the same vein of thought, Strydom and Venter refer to sampling as "taking a portion of that population or universe and considering it representative of that population or universe" (Dastile 2004:140). For this study, a multi-staged sampling procedure was adopted. It began with the purposive selection of the Catholic Diocese of Orlu as the study area. Hagan supports this type of sampling procedure in which the sample is selected on the basis of one's own knowledge of the population, its elements and the nature of the research aims. Such purposive sampling allows the researcher to select a sample based on his or her own judgement and the purpose of the study (Babbie & Maxfield

1995:206). The Diocese was next divided into parishes, of which there are ten. From here, random selection was used to select four parishes, and a clustering method was used to put them into towns. From each town within the parish were selected twelve people, comprised of clergy, catechists, title holders for men (*Nna-di-ebube*) and title holders for women (*Nne Oma & Ezi Nne*). Non-Catholics, including *Ozo* title holders and non-title holders, and Christians from other churches were also added to the population sample for the study. According to Oforchukwu (2011:150), thoughtful identification of those to participate in the study is crucial for the research.

## **5.8 DATA COLLECTION FORMAT AND COVERAGE**

For this study there were two sources of data. Primary empirical data collection was done using structured and unstructured interviews aimed at discussing a limited number of topics, sometimes as few as just one or two questions.

The interviews were fairly informal and participants felt they were taking part in a conversation or discussion rather than in a formal question and answer situation. The participants knew participation was voluntary after the researcher stated the purpose, objectives, and how crucial it was to conduct the study and the contributions to the overall benefits of this study. Thus the participants were mature adults, eager to discuss the social phenomenon of the study. This study involves (a) thought (b) preparation (c) the development of the interview schedule and (d) conducting and analyzing the interview data with care and consideration.

## **5.9 THE PROCESS OF INTERVIEWING**

The process of interviewing involved a face-to-face interaction with the research participants, representing a direct interaction with individuals on a one to one basis and/or direct interaction with individuals in a group setting as described by Dastile (2004:136). The setting where the interviews took place, how the interviews were conducted, the use of probing, the research participants' behaviour during the interviews as well as the length of the interviews will be discussed next.

Berg (1998:57) defines an interview as a conversation with a purpose. To this end, Osmer (2008) argues that interviews are one of the methods of empirical research as an instrument of gathering data. In this case, the interview could range from in-depth interviews or lengthy interviews with one subject, to fairly structured surveys of large groups. Hagan (2000:174) outlines the advantages and disadvantages of interviewing as a means of obtaining information. Among the advantages are the following:

- I. It provides an opportunity for personal contact between the researcher and the respondents and to obtain rich data which is not always possible in the case of questionnaires.
- II. It creates the face-to-face relationship with respondents.
- III. It prevents misunderstandings or confusions the research participants could have in interpreting the questions.
- IV. It provides probing in order to get research participants to answer in more detail and with greater accuracy.
- V. It also provides an opportunity for the interviewer to observe the research participants' body language such as fidgeting with hands or clenching their fists and nodding their heads.
- VI. Again, it provides opportunity to conduct the interviews freely through flexible wording, freedom in the sequence of questions as well as the amount of time the interviewer gives to each question.

However, interviews have their shortcomings as weaknesses. They can be costly and time consuming. They can also be too bureaucratic, requiring administrators, field supervisors, and in some cases public relations personnel (Bailey 1994:174). Other possible disadvantages include biases which can be introduced into the study when the interviewer misunderstands the research participants' answers or understands it, but makes an error in recoding it, or records answers when the respondent failed to reply.

Interviews also offer no assurance of anonymity especially where a sensitive subject is under discussion. In this way the interviewer poses a potential threat to the respondent if the information is incriminating or embarrassing. However, there is no

such incriminating or embarrassing subject under discussion in this research. As a result, there is no problem of storage, confidentiality, and anonymity for personal identity and personal information involved in this research and the research participants were made aware of the overall nature and end product of the study. Thus all those involved in this research are volunteers without any obligations on either side.

### **5.10 PROBING AND INTERVIEWS**

Probing as a way of clarifying with follow-up questions is a useful tool in research interviews. According to Greeff (2002:299) and Schurink (2001), probing involves asking follow-up questions to focus, expand, clarify, or further explain the responses given by the research participants. Mouton and Marais (1991:64) identify two major characteristics and functions of probing or follow-up questions in qualitative research:

- a) It is used when the respondent hesitates in answering or gives a vague and/or incomplete answer. This is useful when the answer to a question does not provide enough information for the purposes of the study.
- b) It is also used to structure the respondent's answers and to make sure that all the topics of the research problem are covered and that irrelevant information is reduced.

The researcher in this study used probing primarily to focus and clarify the responses given by the research participants.

### **5.11 FOCUS GROUP AND DATA COLLECTION**

This is an excellent approach to gather in-depth attitudes, beliefs, and anecdotal data from a large group of persons at one time. Quoting Gupta, Oforchukwu (2011:151) agrees that focus groups are becoming increasingly popular as a tool for gauging public opinion regarding policy issues. The focus group members could number between eight and twelve. Focus groups as a tool in data collection have the following advantages:

- a) As a tool to gather in-depth opinions, group dynamics always generate more ideas than individual interviews. There is no set methodology and the questions are open-ended (Oforchukwu 2011:151).

- b) It can be effectively used to focus on details regarding issues found through surveys or other data collection methods.
- c) In focus groups, participants are not required to read or write. The technique relies on oral communication and the facilitated groups are often individuals that have something in common (Durrance & Fisher 2005).

The downsides of this method include requiring staff time to set up and facilitate the focus groups and the requirement for someone to identify and schedule participants for the group. It can also require special equipment to record and transcribe the focus discussion.

For this study, the number of focus group members was ten. The topic discussed was *ikpu-ala* as a value of social justice and social control and its relevance in the Igbo Catholic Church. The purpose was to shed light on how to inculcate *ikpu-ala* into Christianity.

## **5.12 DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS**

Burns and Grove (2003:479) define data analysis as a mechanism for reducing and organizing data to produce findings that require interpretation by the researcher. Analysis involves “breaking up” the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends, and relationships. The purpose of this is to understand the various constitutive elements of one’s data through an inspection of the relationships between concepts, constructs, or variables so as to see whether there are any patterns or trends that can be identified or isolated, or to establish themes in the data.

Creswell (1998:190) observes that analyzing data has several components. For the purpose of this research, the following components were used:

- Preparing the data for analysis
- Documentation of field notes
- Moving progressively deeper into understanding the data collected
- Representing the data
- Making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data

The process of data analysis involved making sense out of text and image data. The descriptive method used in analyzing qualitative information (Osmer 2008) helped the researcher work with the data, analyze it, represent it, and make an interpretation of its larger meaning. It helped the researcher to think of this process as peeling back the layers of an onion, thus making a meaningful interpretation of the data collected. Data analysis involved collecting open-ended data based on asking general questions and developing an analysis from the information supplied by participants. It was an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytical questions, and writing memos throughout the study. In other words, the researcher used qualitative data analysis concurrently with gathering data, making interpretations, and writing reports.

The interpretive and descriptive approach helped the researcher to centre on the way in which human beings make sense of their subjective reality and attach meaning to it. This was done so that people were not treated as individual entities that existed in a vacuum, but rather their world was explored within the whole of their life context. Furthermore, I believe that understanding human experiences is as important as focusing on explanation, prediction, and control (Creswell 1994). As elaborated by Creswell (1998:194), the researcher was not only encouraged to report what the respondents said in narrative form but also to report their comments verbatim (Oforchukwu 2011:154).

The analytic strategy used by this researcher while listening to the reports and comments of the respondents represented a blend of general steps with specific research strategy steps. An overview of the data analysis process used is seen in this

diagram:

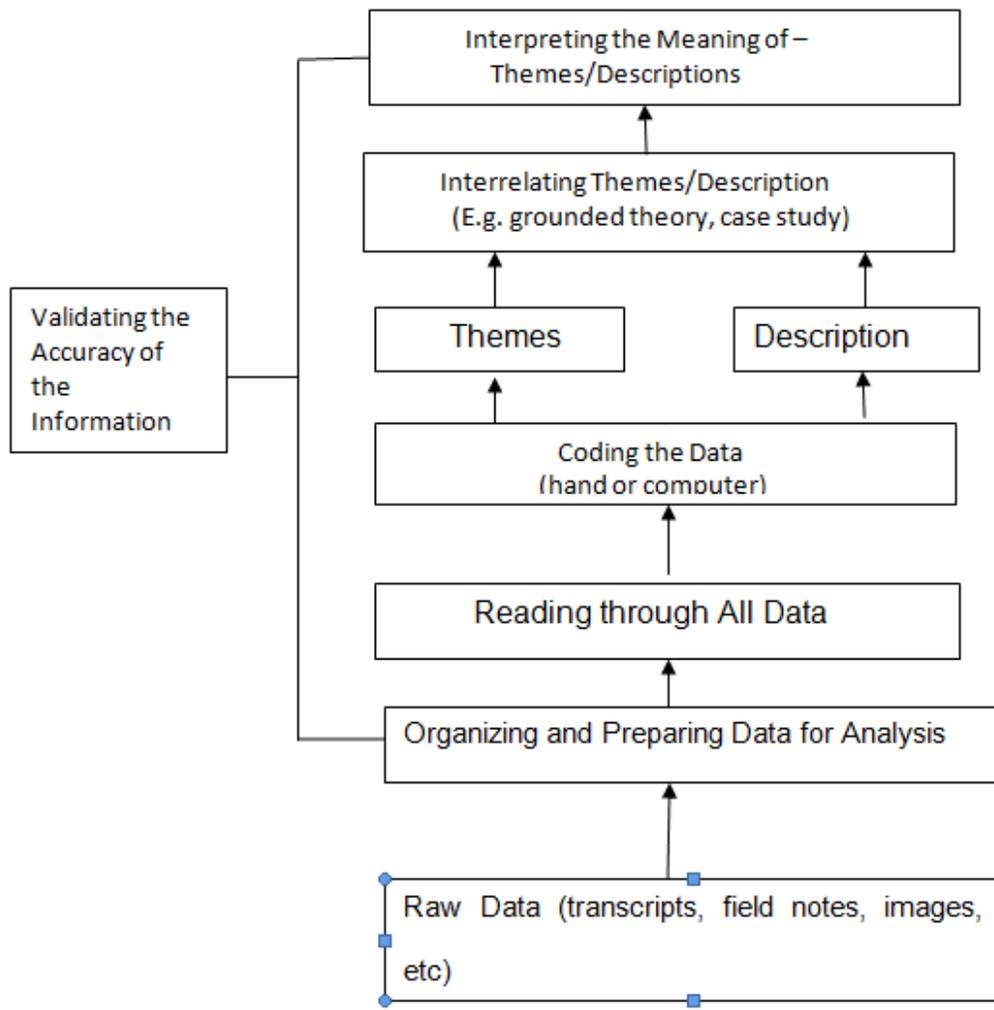


Figure 5.4. Adapted from Creswell 2009:185

This figure shows a hierarchical approach building from the bottom to the top, and the interactive in practice. The various stages are interrelated and not always visited in the order presented. These levels are emphasized in the following steps:

Step 1: *Organize and prepare the data for analysis*. This involves transcribing interviews, optically scanning material, typing up filed notes, or sorting and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information.

Step 2: *Read through all the data.* A first step is to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning. What general ideas are respondents expressing? This is important as they weigh what should be inculturated into Christianity and what should not. Or what should be interpreted as representing and reflecting the core values of Igbo society and the Church as an important partner in the social control of the society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What is the tone of the ideas? What is the impression of the overall depth, credibility, and use of the information? This was a crucial stage for me, the researcher. I was compelled to write copious notes in the margins and to record general thoughts about the data at this stage.

Step 3: *Generating Codes and Themes.* This is the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information (Rossman & Rallis 1998:171). It also involves taking text data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labelling those categories with a term, often a term based in the language of the respondents.

Step 4: *Interpreting the meaning of the themes:* According to Creswell (2009:177-189), “qualitative research is interpretative research”. This comes after having structured and presented the interview data, when the researcher interprets the meanings of the coded data against the backdrop of his or her own culture, history, and experiences and compares these findings with information gleaned from the literature or theories.

The strategies of inquiry chosen in a qualitative project have a dramatic influence on procedures which, even within strategies, are anything but uniform. Looking over the landscape of qualitative procedures shows diverse perspectives ranging from social justice thinking (Denzin & Lincoln 2005) to ideological perspectives (Lather 1991) to philosophical stances (Schwandt 2000), to systematic procedural guidelines (Creswell 2007; Corbin & Strauss 1990). As a result, all these perspectives vie for centre stage in this unfolding model of inquiry called interpretative/description. Consequently, the researcher reported the facts on *Ikpu-ala* as a value of social justice.

The research questionnaires for the study included the following:

1. What is *Ikpu-ala*? What are the purposes and necessities of it in the Igbo perspective?
2. In what ways is *Ikpu-ala* an Igbo concept of social justice? Is *Ikpu-ala* the hub of Igbo social justice?
3. What obligations and responsibilities are embodied in *Ikpu-ala*? What is the significance of *Ikpu-ala* in shaping Igbo community life?
4. In what ways do Igbo people participate in *Ikpu-ala* and also in what ways does it control communal life? What exempts someone from taking part in it?
5. Was everyone in the community a member of African traditional religion before the advent of Christianity?
6. Before the advent of Christianity what was the role of *Ikpu-ala* in an Igbo community?
7. With the advent of Christianity, what is the state of *Ikpu-ala*?
8. What does the Church teach about *Ikpu-ala*?
9. Are there conflicts between *Ikpu-ala* and Christian beliefs? If any, in what ways can the Church address and resolve them?
10. Does the Church have a method of addressing *Ikpu-ala* and/or traditional values and institutions?
11. Historically, how did the Catholic Church address traditional, cultural, and religious issues similar to *Ikpu-ala*?
12. Are there ways and means by which Christians can participate in full traditional or Christian modified *Ikpu-ala*?
13. In your personal view, what do you think should be done to ensure harmony in the conflicts between the Church and the traditional values?

### **5.13 OTHER MATERIALS:**

Since this is both literary and empirical research, and following Osmer's (2008) practical theological methodology, the research used journals, books, theses, dissertations, study bibliographies, search online bookshops, literature reviews, encyclopaedias, theological dictionaries, Bible commentaries, Church documents, Vatican Council II documents, interviews, and focus group discussions to resolve the

research problem. This research design and methodology allowed the participants to express their feelings, views, and opinions on *Ikpu-ala* and its implications for current social cohesion and leadership issues among Igbo Catholic communities.

#### **5.14 CONCLUSION**

This chapter described the methodology of the research study. As a practical theological dissertation, the research followed very closely Osmer's model for asking questions that helped to answer the research questions. Data was collected through in-depth interviews. Open-ended questions were asked to get more information from the respondents on their views of *Ikpu-ala* as an Igbo value of social justice and social cohesion in the Igbo Catholic Church in Nigeria.

**CHAPTER SIX**  
**DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS: INTERPRETATION AND THEOLOGICAL**  
**APPRAISAL OF IKPU-ALA AS SOCIAL JUSTICE**

**6. ANALYSIS OF ORAL INTERVIEWS**

**6.1 The Research Overview**

This chapter will focus on analyzing the data collected from the field research. It will demonstrate whether or not the Catholic Church has done enough in enunciating and inculcating those justice values that constitute social control, by which a society preserves itself from social and moral chaos and extinction.

Before diving into the analysis of this Chapter, it is important to remind the reader that this section embodies what was started at the onset of this study namely, the method of presentation (methodology) which is both exploratory, historical, analytical, descriptive, empirical and critical. These approaches have come under the umbrella of qualitative method as already stated in the previous chapter five. This is the method that allows us to use multiple methods such as interviews and observations in an attempt to understand the context of what is being researched. In addition, this method makes it possible for the researcher to explore the subject's or respondent's view with respect for the individual or the phenomenon under investigation (Dastile 2004:135). The questionnaires used in this study helps the researcher to situate a case study as a strategy involving an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context (Dastile 2004) through detailed, in depth collection methods such as interviews with participants in each case (Fouche 2002:275).

These research findings cover the fieldwork that was carried out in Igbo land, a vast area in Southern Nigeria. The Igbo people are the people whose language and culture is Igbo. (Note: Igbo people (or Igbos) are the English translation of the people's way of calling themselves. One sees in older books with the name spelt Ibo, or Ibos. This was because the Europeans who came as colonial masters, merchants, and Western missionaries had difficulties with the twin letters (double consonants) that are found in

the Igbo alphabets. These include: *gb, ch, kw, kp, [mm, nn] ny*. So they wrote and pronounced and even taught the natives to say “*Ibo*” instead of “*Igbo*”).

Some people who have written about the Igbo without adequate information have quite wrongly limited them to those who live in Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebony, and Imo States. Those who have proper information about the Igbo know that, in addition to the current to state names, there are Ndigbo in Rivers, Delta, and parts of Bayelsa States.

The research was to draw a sample from all the parts of Igbo land. And this was done without visiting every village because there is almost sameness in the most important aspects of *Ikpu-ala* in all the parts of Igbo land. There are of course little peculiarities in each village, just as there is one Igbo language spoken by all, but many dialects spoken in the many sub-cultures.

Every part of Igbo land is equally important, but there are four sections that one has to note. These are Nri, Arochukwu, Nsukka, and Delta. These research findings cover the interviews held at Umuobom, Ideato South Local Government Area (LGA), Ndiakunwanta, Ideato North, LGA, all in Imo State; Ikenga in Aguta LGA in Anambra State, and at Isienu, Nsukka LGA, in Enugu State. One of the problems with this research is that the topic is a relatively new one. There are no materials related to this topic and scholars have not really approached *Ikpu-ala* as a value of social justice in Igbo land. The research topic appears to be entirely a pioneering work. The interviews conducted in my village were very detailed. This is a place that is natural to me both in the dialect and the people. As the place of my birth, I have experienced firsthand most of the things the subjects I interviewed explained to me.

Among the people I spoke with was the traditional chief of my hometown of Umuobom: Chief Okwaranobi Anacletus Okwaranya. I interviewed him in March of 2013. The points he made about the meaning and celebration of *Ikpu-ala* in Umuobom were the same in every detail as the points made by the elders whom I interviewed in August 2012. So, instead of publishing two sets of interviews where people are saying exactly the same thing, I decided to merge the two interviews and include the names of all involved. Other respondents I spoke with were the title holders (*ndichie* and *ndinze na ozo*) within Imo, Anambra, and Enugu States.

I spoke to two close friends who were Catholics in their youth but who left the Church for Igbo traditional religion, *amala* life. Their answers showed that they still copy the Catholic life style, while mixing it with the traditional religion and *amala* life to be true custodians of the traditional values particularly for social justice.

Another person of interest I visited during the field work was Ofoegbu who teaches philosophy at the Spiritan School of Philosophy, Isienu, Nsukka. He has a special interest in the traditional values of Igbo communities. During the interview, he made clear the pioneering nature of the subject matter of the interview: *Ikpu-ala* as a social justice value. He gave me some books on Igbo culture but also recommended other people I should visit. Although my efforts to visit with Arazu, C.S.Sp., proved abortive due to lack of time, he recommended on phone his book "Covenant Broken and Reconciliation" to give me insight into Covenant in Judeo-Christian traditions and reconciliations in the communities.

In all the interviews I conducted, I tried to be impartial and objective in representing the views expressed by the participants in the study. This is important because the idea for the interviews was to have a cohesive and representative voice that would help to fashion systematic guidelines for social justice, reconciliation, and social control in the Igbo Catholic Church.

Consequently, a survey was conducted to learn more about the demographic and religious profile of the Igbo Catholic Church and the implications for current leadership issues in the Igbo Catholic Church, as well as to assess community needs. To this effect, a self-administered questionnaire survey was designed. The research findings examined the qualitative data from the questionnaire, which was designed to elicit open-ended comments and discussion. The questionnaires were completed by five title holders, five non-title holders including Catholics and non-Catholics respectively.

## **6.2 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW METHOD**

The researcher employed a qualitative interview which is person-centred and holistic in perspective. It is a tool that develops an understanding of people's opinions about their lives and the lives of others. It also assisted the researcher to generate an in-depth account that could present a lively picture of the research participants' reality

(Holloway 2005:5). It also allowed the researcher to cover a spectrum of approaches ranging from empirical, phenomenological psychology to hermeneutical-phenomenological psychology, depending on the data source (Van der Walt 1999:55).

The advantage of this method is that it is flexible and unstructured, capturing verbatim reports or observable characteristics. In conducting the interviews, the researcher:

- a) Made an appointment with each participant at a time which suited them
- b) Created a quiet room conducive to conversation
- c) Arranged chairs to enhance face-to-face interviewing
- d) Prepared a tape recorder
- e) Had a jar of water available.

At the end of each interview, the researcher also:

- a) Thanked the participant for the time and willingness to be part of the study
- b) Reminded the participant about the agreement
- c) To allow the interview to be unstructured and that probing questions would be determined by the information given by the participant and to allow their responses to be recorded and to be used for this dissertation.

The empirical part of this research study involved the actual collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data. The data collection occurred during the interviews which were recorded. Field notes were also made during the interview. Data analysis started as soon as the first interview had been obtained. I showed sensitivity to the uniqueness of each participant throughout the interview. To avoid having the topic and interview re-open wounds made by the participants' experiences, my approach was empathetic (Holloway & Wheeler 1996:5) with good listening, providing a non-judgmental, friendly, open, honest, and flexible and generally non-threatening environment (Holloway & Jefferson 2000). Thus a cordial atmosphere was created for the interviewees so they not only felt secure but had the confidence to speak freely (De Vos 2002:293).

The researcher sought to ensure that interpretation would focus on the usefulness of the findings for ethical practice or/and move toward theorizing. The research was to

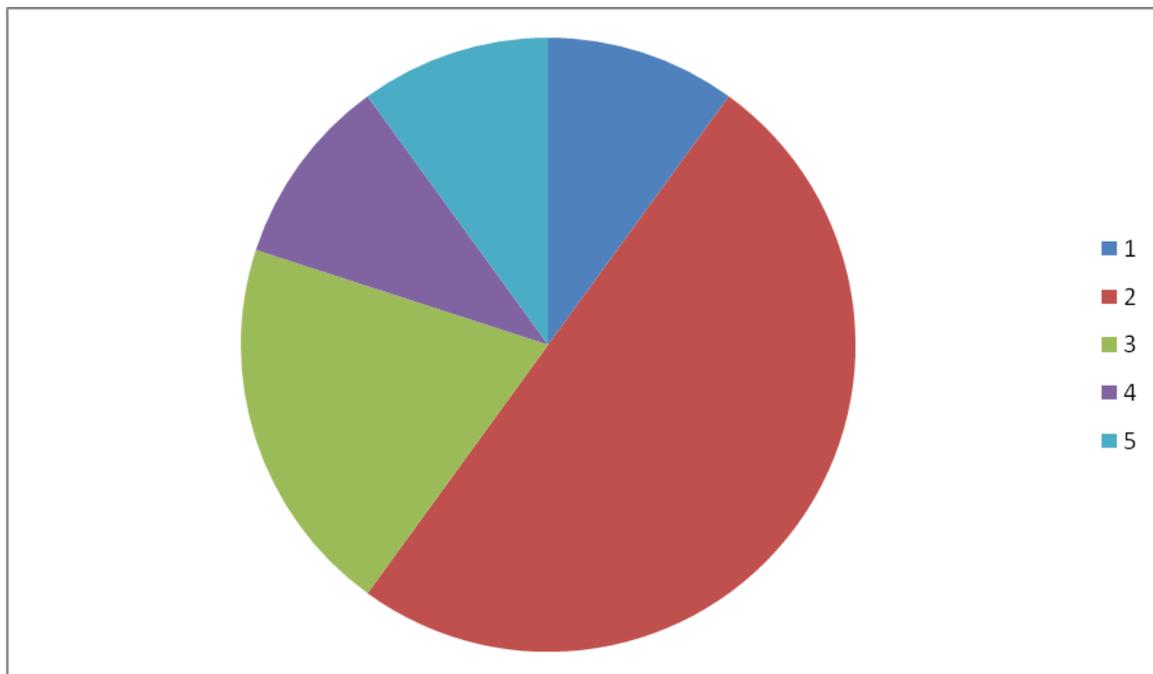
also identify any relations between categories that could be used to formulate tentative propositions for inculturating *ikpu-ala* as a social justice value in the ethical life and decisions of the Igbo Catholic Church (Burns & Grove 2003:479). The tentative propositions hopefully would assist in arriving at benchmarks for settling disputes, sealing covenants, and making reconciliations for the current leadership of the Igbo Catholic Church.

Finally, the interviews were used as a tool that allowed the researcher to explore in greater depth of meaning than could be obtained with other techniques. It developed interpersonal skills that facilitated co-operation and elicited more information. Again, it allowed me the researcher to collect data from participants who were unable or unlikely to complete questionnaires, such as those who were not literate or/and whose ability to express themselves was marginal.

### 6.3 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRES AND RESPONSES

The following interview questions were used for the study and the Pie charts represent the synthesis of the answers given by the respondents:

Question 1: **What is *Ikpu-ala*?**



Pie-Chart 6.1: (represents the respondents' opinions)

1. It is a tradition of Igbo people.
2. It is an important religious and social control in the community.
3. It keeps peace and harmony in social interactions and relationships.
4. It represents the Igbo unitary worldview of reality.
5. It is the religious and social Igbo way of life.

Responses		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	It is a tradition of Igbo people	1	10.0	10.0	10.0
	It is an important religious and social control in the community	5	50.0	50.0	60.0
	It keeps peace and harmony in social interactions and relationship	2	20.0	20.0	80.0
	It represents the Igbo unitary worldview of reality	1	10.0	10.0	90.0
	It is the religious and social Igbo way of life.	1	10.0	10.0	100
	TOTAL	10	100.0	100.0	

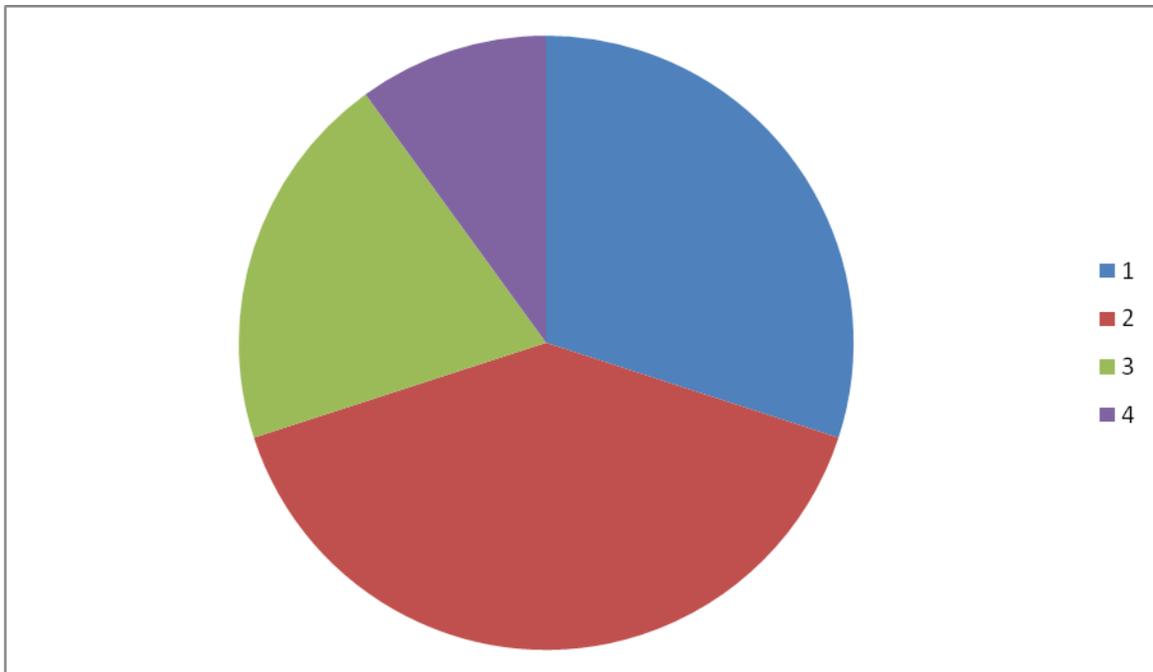
Figure 6.1: What is *Ikpu-ala* in Igbo communities?

*Ikpu-ala* is a ritual cleansing in Igbo traditional religious practice and culture. No one knows the origin of *ikpu-ala* (*alu*). However, it is “dirt” and a reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being and non-being, form to formlessness, life to death (Metuh 1991). From the above it can be seen that 10% of the respondents defined *Ikpu-alu* (*alu*) as a religious and social ritual of the Igbo people. It is done when a taboo or abomination (*nso-ala*) that violates the land is committed, and it is done to placate *Ala* – the earth or the wrath of the divinities lest the land will know no peace. Given that the traditional Igbo society has a unitary worldview of reality or the universe, *Ala* (the land) is considered as very sacred; the

resting abode of the ancestors and the earth goddess (*Ala*) who is the guardian of both morality and the moral code (*Ome-na-ala*). Therefore, when the ritual of *Ikpu-ala* is done, the land is restored to its sanity. For the Igbo, according to Metuh (1991:87), *ikpu-ala (alu)* is essentially a religious phenomenon. However, Mary Douglas's explanation of "*alu*" leads one to believe that it is merely a socio-cultural phenomenon.

Consequently, it is important to note that the idea of pollution, according to Douglas, is best understood in terms of the English word "dirt", defined as "matter out of place". Understood in this way, the Igbo people take dirt (*alu*) to imply a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. This is because the Igbo worldview is holistic, man-centred, and personal. Hence, pollution avoidance is a process of tidying up, ensuring that the order in the external physical events conforms to the structure of ideas about the universe. Thus, according to the survey, only 10% of the respondents agreed that it represents the unitary worldview of the Igbo people. On the whole, one can deduce this fact that *Ikpu-ala* is part of Igbo culture and this is why this aspect of the Igbo culture has survived to this day despite the missionary onslaught.

Question 2: **What are the purposes of Ikpu-ala in Igbo communities?**



Pie-Chart 6.2: The purposes of *Ikpu-ala* in Igbo communities

1. The purpose of performing *Ikpu-ala* is for justice for the victim and reconciliation for both parties.
2. It is the mainstay of Igbo social justice and a deterrent to those who break the moral and social code (*Omenala*). They represent communities in settling cases or disputes.
3. It is a process that signifies admission of guilt, forgiveness, atonement/purification and re-integration of the guilty into the mainstream relationships of the community.
4. To make sacred the tradition of Igbo and the place of peace and harmony in the community.

Respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	For justice for the victim and reconciliation for	3	30.0	30.0	30.0

both parities				
They represent communities in settling cases or disputes	4	40.0	40.0	70.0
To make sacred the tradition of Igbos and the place peace and harmony in the community	2	20.0	20.0	90.0
To safeguard the Igbo culture	1	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	100.0	

Figure 6.2 : The purposes of *Ikpa-ala* in Igbo communities

*Ikpu-ala* among the Igbo people is of special moral and social importance and significance. Apart from its fundamental and primary religious and cult role, every Igbo community acknowledges it as a cultural and religious embodiment of Igbo social justice set aside for public morality and order. To illustrate our points, any infringement of any of the major prohibitions of the Igbo *Omenala* (moral code) by committing such abominations as suicide, induced abortion, incest, stealing of yams etc. is considered a pollution of the community and a dangerous alienation of the community from peaceful and safe communion rites at the appropriate communal shrine. *Ikpu-ala* will purify the culprit and the land, appease the divinities and ancestors, and restore the community to spiritual harmony and peace. In other words, *Ikpu-ala* as a cultural social value inculcates a personal awareness of the social dimensions and gravity of serious moral lapses, and serves thereby as a useful moral deterrent and educator of conscience. Thus, the ethical role of *Ikpu-ala* is generally well appreciated for its religious, social functions and, above all, as a

social justice value. This explains the clamour of African and indeed Igbo people to revert to the cultural social justice system that clearly defined wrong and right, rather than their ambivalent Christian lives.

**Research Question 3: What obligations and responsibilities are embodied in *Ikpu-ala*? What is the significance of *Ikpu-ala* in shaping Igbo community life?**

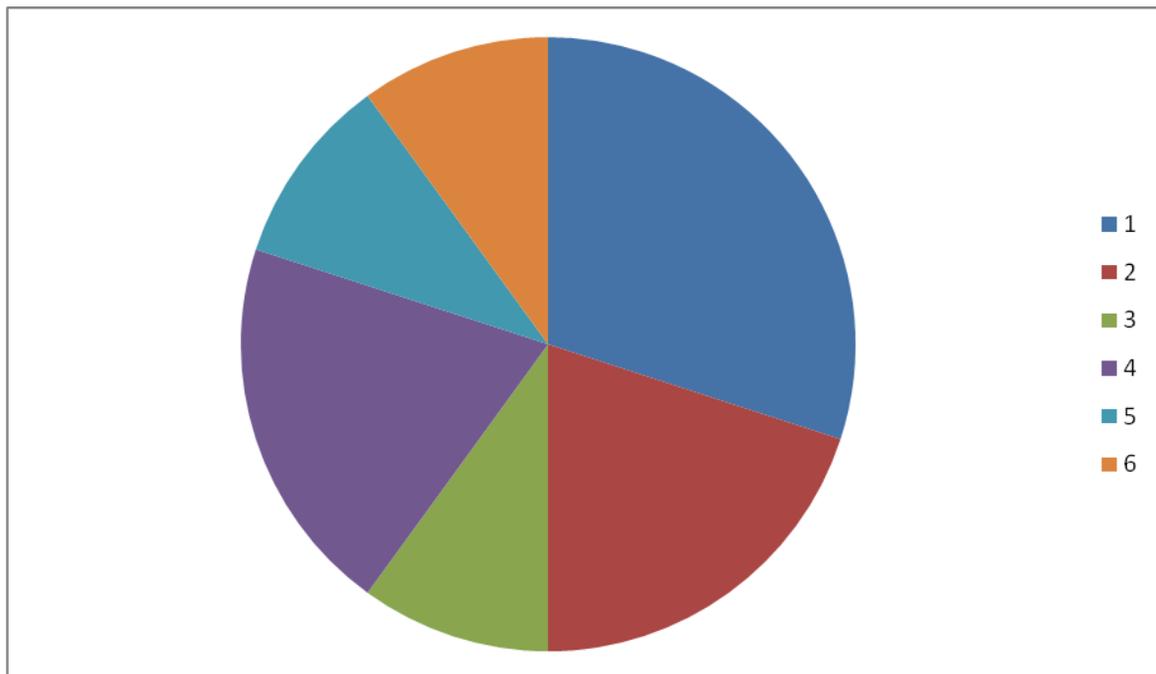


Fig. 6.3: Obligations, responsibilities and significances as embodied in *Ikpu-ala*

1. Obligations and responsibilities include admission of guilt, repentance, heavy fines, and costly rituals.
2. Punishment includes ex-communication and banishment, *Ikpu-ala* signals a process of reconciliation, atonement, purification, and re-integration of the culprit into the main stream of relationships in the community.
3. *Ikpu-ala* in this sense embodies holistic restoration of all relationships. That is, it is horizontal and vertical restorations of harmony and equilibrium in the cosmos and social order.

4. *Ikpu-ala* is a deterrent to would-be offenders as it instills fear and discourages the committing of the offence or crime.
5. It ensures greater happiness and peace and genuine relationships in the community.
6. *Ikpu-ala* also embodies reparation and unconditional forgiveness.

Respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Obligations and responsibilities include admission of the guilt, repentance, heavy fines and costly rituals	3	30.0	30.0	30.0
	<i>Ikpu-ala</i> signals a process of reconciliation, atonement, purification and re-integration of the culprit into the main stream of relationships in the community	2	20.0	20.0	50.0
	<i>Ikpu-ala</i> in this sense embodies holistic restoration of all relationships	1	10.0	10.0	60.0
	<i>Ikpu-ala</i> is a deterrent to would-be offenders as it instill fears and discourages the committing of the offence or crime.	2	20.0	20.0	80.0
	It ensures greater happiness and peace and genuine relationships in the community	1	10.0	10.0	90.0

	Ikpu-ala also embodies Reparation and unconditional forgiveness	1	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	10	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 6.3: Respondents' opinions, obligations, responsibilities and significance of Ikpu-ala

With regard to the above questions, majority (70%) of the respondents answered that *onye meruru ala* (the deviant) must provide and fulfill all the stipulated requirements in strict adherence and must participate actively during the ritual cleansing, *Ikpu-ala*. He must be available, showing readiness to make amends. To atone for the sins he has committed, he must be ready and willing to afford all the materials that have been prescribed by the medicine-man (priest) of the local shrine. Of course, before the *ikpu-ala* ceremony is arranged, the sinner must have done a private confession to his confidant, showing his remorse and readiness to make amends. This confidant in turn becomes his middle man who meets the elders of the *Umunna*. The medicine-man mediates between the sinner and the gods/ancestors (*mediator dei et hominum*), and a day is chosen for the actual ceremony during which the sinner makes a public confession. The *Ikpu-ala* ceremony can only go on as planned when the culprit meets all the requirements for the restitution of his/her sins.

**Research Question 4: In what ways do Igbo people participate in *Ikpu-ala* and also in what ways does it control communal life?**

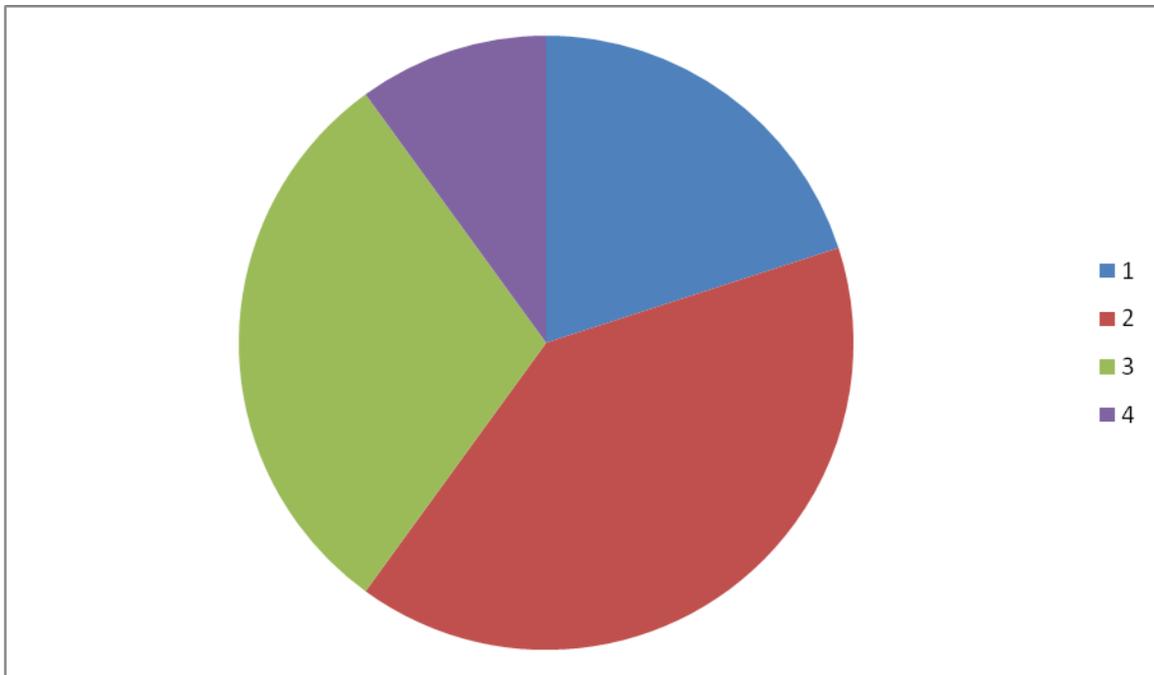


Fig. 6.4: Ways of participation and control.

1. Every member (by birth) of the community participates.
2. It is an important religious and social control in the community.
3. It keeps peace and harmony in social interactions and relationships.
4. It represents the Igbo unitary worldview of communal reconciliation.

Respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Every member of the community participates	2	20.0	20.0	20.0
	It is an important religious and social control in the community	4	40.0	40.0	60.0
	It keeps peace and harmony in social interactions and relationships	3	30.0	30.0	90.0
	It represents the Igbo unitary worldview of communal	1	10.0	10.0	100.0

	reconciliation				
	TOTAL	10	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 6.4: In what ways do Igbo people participate in *Ikpu-ala* and also in what ways does it control communal life?

The respondents as members of the society were quite aware of the dynamics of the society in which they live and majority of the people (80%) agreed that people participate in *ikpu-ala* ceremonies because

1. They are members of the community irrespective of one's social or religious opinion, and general participation ensures collective responsibility and accountability.
2. Not to participate may attract a stiff fine and punishment and can mean that the individual or individuals are guilty of the crime and therefore part of the problems of the community.
3. It is salvage. It is an understanding of the situation of the victim, and the victimizer, in order that the burden of injury or harm could be shared. It embodies a kind of sharing of the burden, pain, or injury which the strained relationship has caused on both sides of the conflicting divide. Emejulu believes that the strained relationship in the society is often salvaged because the experience of *Ikpu-ala* is to avoid a repetition of such an ugly experience in the future (Emejulu 2009:81).
4. Further, people participate because *ikpu-ala* is how restoration of love and trust, socially, politically, and economically, is achieved. The victim must therefore make him/her available to the entire community for the rebuilding of mutual trust and love. In this case, both the victim and perpetrator together with the community join hands to restore trust, love, and understanding so that the social relationships that used to exist can be operational again.
5. The other small group (20%) of the respondents also believed that people's participation in *ikpu-ala* because of its education and institutional values. In the traditional Igbo system, public ceremonies such as *Ikpu-ala* provide an invaluable opportunity for informal education to the youth as well as the emotional support in

the *Omenala*, ethos, and the ways of the native system of justice and other customs of the community.

6. It is communal reconciliation in which the vertical, horizontal, harmony and peace are re-established. During such occasion, important decisions can be reached including the banishment of the culprit(s) for couple of years or forever.
7. It is a religious practice and obligation. In the traditional Igbo society, there is no dichotomy between the religious and social, economic and political life. After all, *ikpu-ala* is basically a religious ceremony to appease the Earth goddess and the ancestors so that justice can be re-established between the living and the dead.

After the advent of Christianity, the missionaries started forbidding the Christians from attending such ceremonies as evil.

The important constituents of *ikpu-ala* include oath-taking and *oriko*. This is what brings about *Igba ndu* that ensures human relationships and conviviality in Igbo community. It binds Igbo people together and removes fear of any harm by others, essentially it means sharing. It is often associated with Igbo concepts of ethnic identity, community consciousness, solidarity, and indicates homogeneity in Igbo culture and tradition (Ugochukwu 2011).

Everyone who is member of the *Umunna* (community) by birth or through *Igba ndu* is obliged to receive the *Oriko* communion. There are, however, those who are forbidden by law to partake of it. According to Barrister Chidi Abajue of Umudibia, Okija, President of ODU, Lagos, everyone participates “except of course the murderer who must have been killed or banished”. Everyone partakes in the *Oriko* including the sons and daughters of the town who live outside the town. The daughters of the town who are married to men outside the town are also bound to partake in it. Nze Lawrence Ebulue of Ubaheze, Okija, a traditionalist, agrees with this, pointing out that “taking part in the meal is a mark of membership in the community”.

Ichie Kpokirikpo was of the opinion that every act of public worship brings the *Umunna* together. When the members share the kola nut, they celebrate their oneness as a covenant community. The same is true of other sacrifices and celebrations. However, it is important to understand that the *Umunna*, meaning the community, is

present in the fullest sense when it celebrates the *Ikpu-ala vis-à-vis oriko*. Understood in this sense, by virtue of this celebration, the community re-makes itself. This is because each time *Ikpu-ala* is celebrated, the foundation of the *Umunna* is, so to speak, re-established and all the mystical webs of relationships are renewed and strengthened. By involvement in the *ikpu-ala* ceremony and *oriko*, an individual's membership of the Community, *Umunna*, is also renewed. As a result, those members of the community who are in a sinless state are obliged to receive the *oriko*. This meal-sharing is a symbolic representation of the *Umunna*. By taking part in the communion "Common Union", therefore, the people become what they eat: one holy people bound together in a renewed covenant. Any other adult member of the community who is not participating in this ritual is considered to be under excommunication. This is why much care is taken to ensure that every member of the community partakes in the communion. In the mind of the custodians of *Omenala Ndigbo*, one's profession of the Christian faith should not be a hindrance to the reception of the *Ikpu-ala* ceremony, since as explained, failure to do so means self-ostracism. Damian Eze (2008:145) puts it aptly when he says: "*adighi ekete ya na choochi*". In other words, one's affiliation to Christianity or any other religion does not exempt him/her when such a ceremony is going on among the members of the community.

**Research Question 5: Was everyone in the community a member of African traditional religion before the advent of Christianity?**

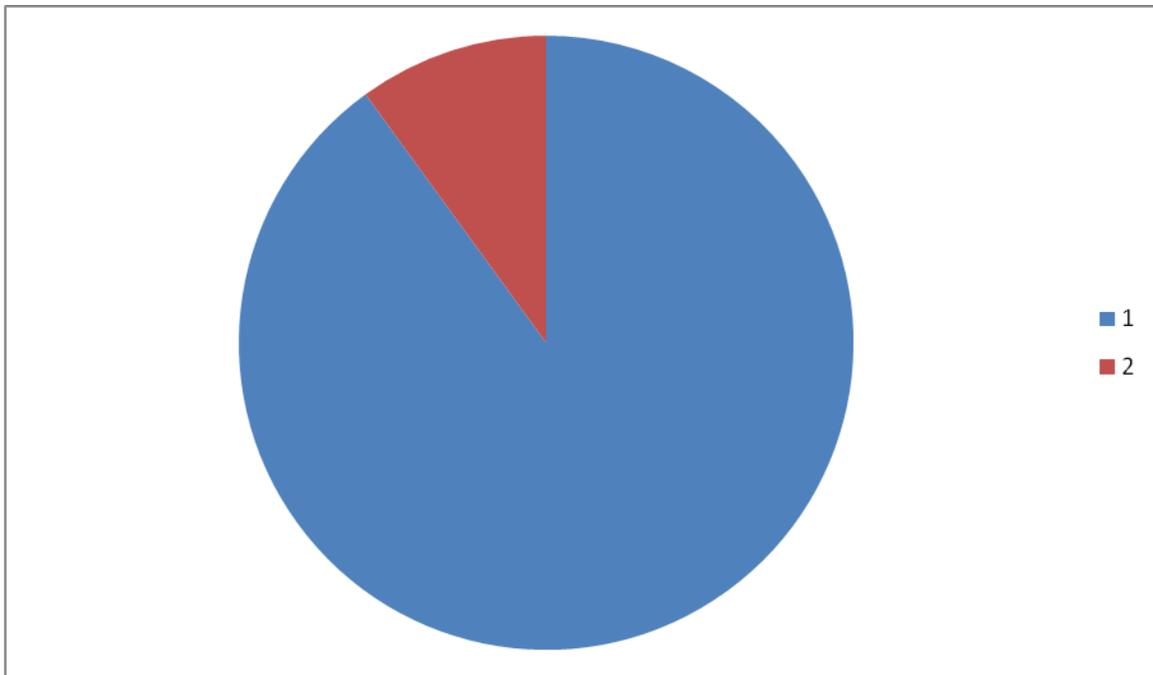


Fig. 6.5: Everyone in the community is a member of African traditional religion.

1. Every member of the community was a member of Igbo traditional religion.
2. *Osu* people are not considered as members of the Igbo traditional religion.

Respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Everyone in the community a member of African traditional religion before the advent of Christianity	9	90.0	90.0	90.0
	'Osu' people do not belong	1	10.0	10.0	100
	TOTAL	10	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 6.5 Everyone in the community a member of African traditional religion before the advent of Christianity.

To this question, almost all the respondents, 90%, agreed that everyone born in the community is a member of Igbo traditional religion. Even those who were brought to the community through war or slavery are automatically members of the traditional religion. According to Lady Pauline Uzochukwu, a retired Headmistress and President of the Christian Women Organization, Okija, “we are born into religion as Africans. We follow the religion of our parents and our parents followed the same as was handed on to them by their forefathers and ancestors. We, the women, are the ones according to Igbo culture who do not have religion, in this case, shrines, because we are married off to another man’s household. Yet we as women remember very well the deities of our fathers and ancestors. We have always observed all the rituals and observances associated with these deities.”

The minority (10%) of respondents said that those who were called *Osu*, people dedicated to the gods and Earth goddess, were not members even if they wanted to be because of their social status in the communities. The *Osu* people have no rights and the culture made them second class citizens without human rights. However, everyone else in the community was a member of Igbo traditional religion before the advent of Christianity.

For his own part, Rev. Bartho Iwu Ofoegbu, a lecturer at Spiritan School of Philosophy, agreed with what Lady Uzochukwu said and added that the Igbo traditional society/community is a religious one. Its life, practice, and culture are inextricably and incontrovertibly tied with its religion.

Ejizu (1994) holds that:

From early childhood through adolescence to full adulthood, the traditional African is formed to hold tenaciously to the belief in the ancestors, to reverence them as powerful and benevolent members of the community, although not in a physical but rather mystical sense. Ancestors are held up as models to be copied in the effort to strictly adhere, preserve and transmit the traditions and norms of the community. The African is psychologically, fully equipped and motivated

to promote the delicate balance and equilibrium believed to exist in the universe through ensuring harmony in his relationship with the invisible world and among members of the community.

Furthermore, Onyima (1992:108), quoting early missionaries in Igbo land says: For an Igbo, to live is to practice religion. For Basden (1935), religion is the heart of the Ibo. The Igbo like other Africans are deeply religious and this, more than anything else colours their understanding of the Universe and their empirical participation in that Universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon (Onyima 1992:109). Thus for the Igbo, to be is to be religious in a religious universe. That is the philosophical understanding behind African myths, customs, traditions, beliefs, morals, actions, and social relationships. In other words, up to a point in history this traditional religious attitude maintained an almost absolute monopoly over African (Igbo) concepts and experience of life.

In the same vein Arinze (1970:6) writes:

Tradition is the final court of appeal, so did our fathers; so have “ndi mbu and ndi abo” (the ancestors) handed on to us: this is the unimpeachable answer that returns again and again to forestall the acute probing of the clever philosopher or speculative theologian who asks the Iboman: ‘why do you do this or that?’

Ezeanya added that religion gets down to the very marrow of their bones. There is no aspect of life in which religion is not brought in. The Igbo firmly believe that human life is impossible without the help of God, the divinities, and ancestors (Onyima 1992:109) The Secretariat for non-Christian religions summed it all up when it said that “God is first and last for the Africans”.

**Research Question 6: Before the advent of Christianity, what was the role of *Ikpu-ala* in an Igbo community?**

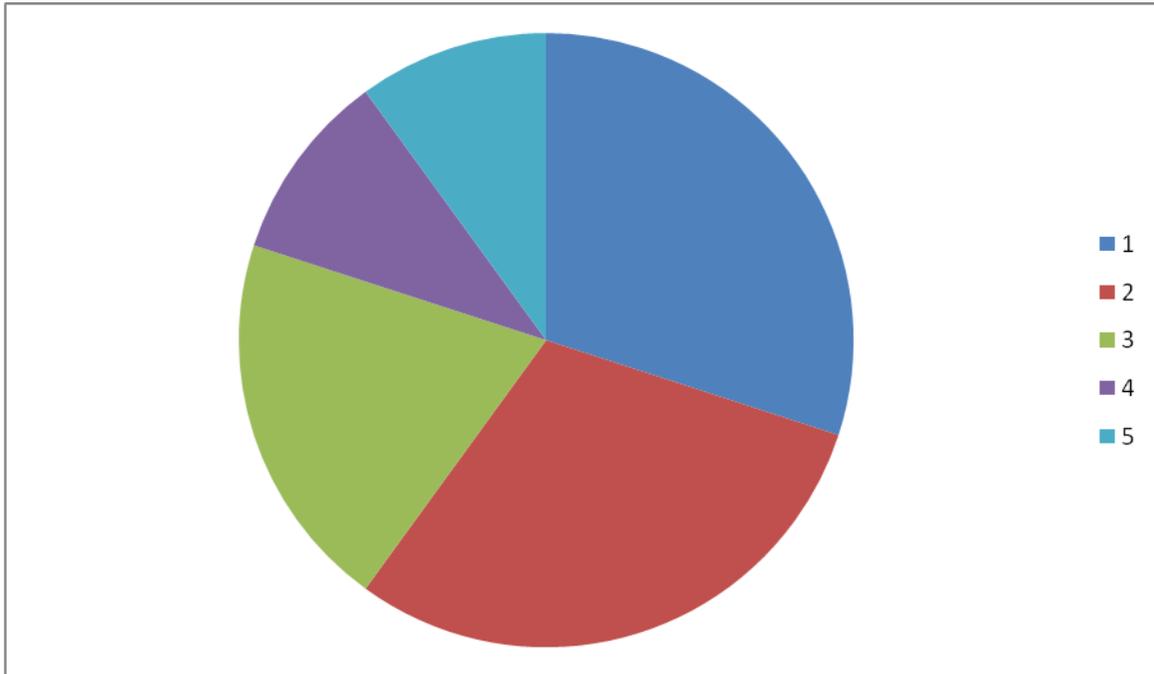


Fig. 6.6: This chart shows the role of Ikpu-ala before the advent of Christianity.

1. It was used for the purification and sanctification of the land – serving justice principles.
2. To appease the Earth goddess, ancestors and restore harmony and peace.
3. It was used to keep crime in check, i.e., to deter offenders.
4. It served to maintain social equilibrium in relationships.
5. It was a measure to promote communal co-existence among the various groups and sections of the community.

Respondents	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid   It was used for the purification	3	30.0	30.0	30.0

and sanctification of the land – serving justice principles				
To appease the Earth goddess, ancestors and restore harmony and peace	3	30.0	30.0	60.0
It was used to keep crime in check, i.e., to deter offenders	2	20.0	20.0	80.0
It served to maintain social equilibrium in relationships	1	10.0	10.0	90.0
It was as a measure to promote communal co-existence among the various groups and sections of the community	1	10.0	10.0	100
TOTAL	10	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 6.6: Represents the role of *Ikpu-ala* before Christianity.

Here again, about 50% of the respondents were in agreement that *Ikpu-ala* served the purpose of social justice in the Igbo society/community. There is affirmation among the respondents that in pre-colonial Igbo society, there were three classes of people: the Free-born (*Diala* or *Nwa-afọ*), the slaves (*Ohu*), and the Outcastes or ritual slaves (*Osu*). The concept of crime was not applied. Instead, there were two types of offenses: abominations (public offenses), otherwise called *aru*, or something the Earth goddess abhors, and defects called *mmehie* (private offenses). Among some Igbo, people who committed an abomination such as the murder of one’s parents, brother, sister, or kinsman or committed incest and many more could be dedicated to a particular shrine or to the gods. Thus, such people become *Osu* (outcastes or untouchables). With some other Igbo groups, people fleeing persecution may take asylum by pledging their servitude to oracles, thereby voluntarily inheriting the ritual slave status (*Osu*) in exchange for “safety.” *Mmehie* offenses such as burglary, robbery, stealing, etc. were disposed of not with imprisonment, but by shaming, restitution, a fine, compensation, a

communion feast (*oriko/igbu ndu* and *ikpu-ala*), or sale into slavery (for a persistent recalcitrant).

One notices clearly the Igbo attitude and approach to justice as an aspect of morality and *ikpu-ala* as an important tool with which to achieve peace and harmony. Cardinal Francis Arinze was aware of this position when he wrote:

Justice is one of the main pillars of Ibo morality... Justice is what rules the relations between man and man... Justice and piety dictate the cult of ancestors and the performance of final funeral rites... It is the Ibo man's idea of justice which drives him to justify revenge and say: *Eme mbolu aburo njo* (Revenge of wrong done is not sin) (Onyima 1992: 156).

About 30% of the respondents also emphasized that before Christianity in Igbo land, religion, and law were intertwined. When an abomination was committed, the sending of the offender to a perpetual exile may be accompanied with dedicating him or her to a god. Where an offense such as murder was inadvertently committed, an offender was sent to exile for a given length of time (Achebe 1958). The length of time varied among different Igbo communities. The whole community shared a sense of guilt for a member's crime, which must be sanctified through the *Ikpu-ala* ceremony. The entire community had to offer a communal sacrifice to propitiate the gods, so that the anger of the gods would not fall upon the entire community.

Furthermore, most communities had certain days in the four-day Igbo week, when nobody was allowed to work on a particular piece of land. If any person violated any of the above sacred rules, he or she must provide a fowl, sheep, goat, ram, or cow, kola-nut, and other items to the community to offer a sacrifice to the desecrated or violated entity to appease the gods. The sacrifice could be accompanied by reprimand and other sanctions. Any refusal by the offender to provide the sacrificial items could lead to his/her total excommunication from the community, which was the severest punishment. A person excommunicated in pre-colonial Igbo land was lost in a crowd, because if his/her kitchen fire went out, he/she could not go to the neighbours to get another. It was also believed that in death, he/she would neither be able to transmigrate nor

reincarnate. In fact, it is the fear of communal sanction, the thought of non-reincarnation, and non-transmigration after death which keeps members' behaviour in check.

The rest of the respondents, 20%, saw *ikpu-ala* as the base rock of the moral and ethical tools used in dealing with social and ethical issues and problems of the Igbo communities. Ejizu appears to support this idea when he describes *ikpu-ala* as maintaining the moral and ethical harmony of the communities and Igbo conviviality. For example, in cases of abomination, grave offence, or defilement against the community like murder, incest, etc., the moral pollution has to be cleansed or expiated by special ritual experts in order to appease spiritual beings and ancestors who are believed to have been also offended. In such a case, until the expiation is done, the entire community (and not only the individuals directly involved), stood a real and imminent danger of suffering a disaster. In other words, the serious moral breach has destabilized the fundamental peace, balance, and harmony that should prevail, and the community could therefore expect severe punishment from the supernatural custodians and guarantors of morality.

Ejizu (1994) summarized it thus:

African traditional religion clearly plays a distinctive role as the ultimate source of supernatural power and authority that sanction and reinforce public morality. It is pressed into full service to maintain social order, peace and harmony. Traditional Africans believe that success in life including the gift of off-spring, wealth and prosperity, are all blessings from the gods and ancestors. They accrue to people who work hard, and who strictly adhere to the customs, and traditional norms of morality of the community, people who strictly uphold the community ideal of harmonious living. Only such people could entertain a real hope of achieving the highly esteemed status of ancestorhood in the hereafter.

*Ikpu-ala* as a social justice value acts as crime prevention. This is because from birth, Igbo children are taught the “dos” and “don’ts” in their various communities. Early education is very important in Igbo societies: taboos, abominations, sacred and profane, sacrilege, and the importance of honour and dignity, respect for elders, women and older siblings, are taught through folklore, storytelling, music, early training in the art of living and role-play. Consequently, throughout Igbo communities, social control was informal but efficient. There was no formalized police system in the modern sense of the words.

**Research Question 7: With the advent of Christianity, what is the state of *Ikpu-ala*?**

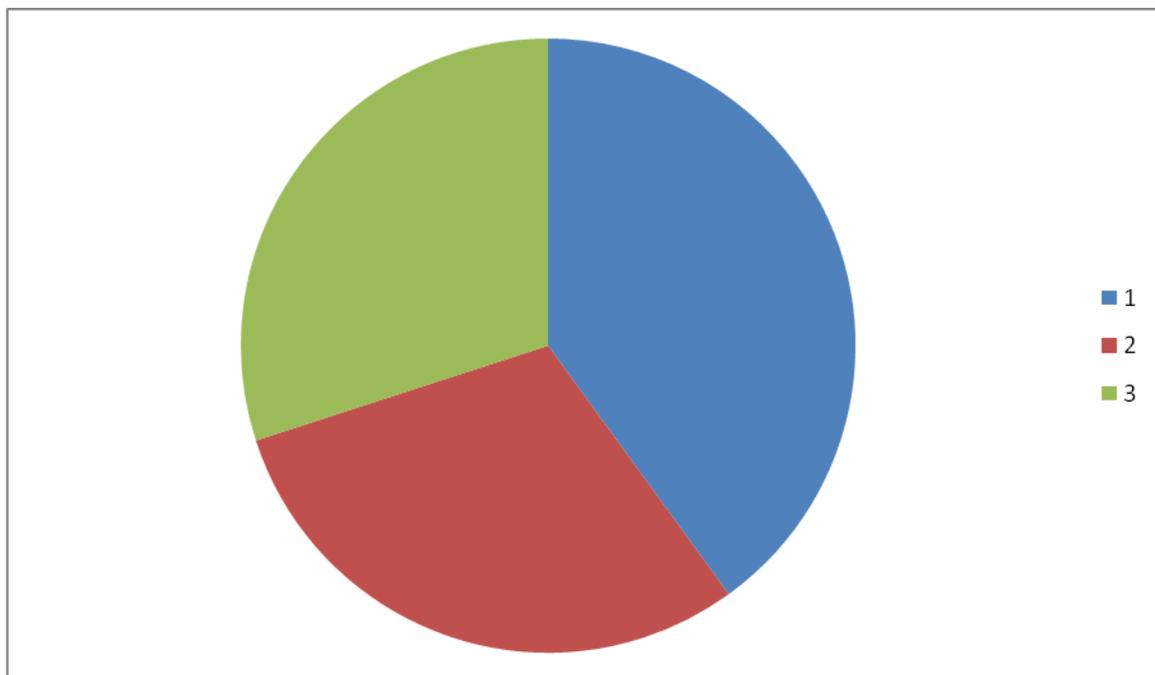


Fig.6.7: With the advent of Christianity, what is the state of *Ikpu-ala*?

1. The *Ikpu-ala* ceremony diminished as it was regarded by the missionaries as idolatry
2. It is mainly carried out by the traditional religionists and its supporters
3. It has moved from being a unifying to divisive agent in socio-religious matters

Respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	The Ikpu-ala ceremony diminished as it was regarded by the missionaries as idolatry	4	40.0	40.0	40.0
	It is mainly carried out by the traditional religionists and its supporters	3	30.0	30.0	70.0
	It has moved from being a unifying to divisive agent in socio-religious matters	3	30.0	30.0	100.0
	TOTAL	10	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 6.7: With the advent of Christianity, what is the state of *Ikpu-ala*?

With the advent of Christianity, bringing with it the conversion of many adherents of Igbo traditional religion, the state of *Ikpu-ala* has been watered down. It is no longer binding upon all. The majority of the respondents (70%) held that the advent of Christianity was the most important factor that affected the attitude of the Igbo people. There is also the economic factor. Following the advent of European missionaries, agriculture that was the mainstay of the African people entered a decline. Other respondents believed that the introduction of white-collar jobs such as teaching, clerks, police, and other government jobs over time made farming no longer a prestigious life. Suddenly, it was no longer something honourable to marry many wives. According to Nzemaduakolam Okonkwo, the missionaries prohibited their teachers and catechists from marrying many wives. Fr. Bartholomew Ofoegbu once remarked that no one should forget the fact that the missionaries declared “war” on Igbo culture and way of life as they did in most other parts of Africa. According to him, the local cultures and beliefs were not only declared “paganism” but were never inculturated, and anybody who participated in the local ceremonies, be they religious or social, and was punished

severely by the Western missionaries. For him therefore, this was how an Igbo Christian became “both a pagan and a Christian all at the same time.” When he is with his kinsmen, he is one with them and when he goes to the Church, he is a Christian. With the passage of time, the Igbo culture and way of life changed so much so that our *Omenala* can no longer hold the communities together. This was the beginning of an Igbo cultural and religious identity crisis.

This is well illustrated by Chinua Achebe (1958) in *Things Fall Apart* where he described the impact of that encounter between Igbo traditional religious and cultural systems and Christianity. Obierika said:

How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have risen against us. The White man is very clever; he came quietly and peacefully with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart (Achebe 1958:123-125).

The above words articulate the sentiments expressed by most of the respondents interviewed while describing how the new religion (Christianity) has gone about winning converts and dividing the members of the clan. Thus showing that after Christianity gained many converts, it became clear even to Achebe that henceforth things would never be the same for the Igbo.

This is how George Ehusani (1999) puts it:

The missionaries that stormed the continent of Africa with the salvific message of Jesus Christ arrived from Europe on the heels of their brothers whose message was not that of liberation, but that of political, economic and cultural subjugation in a system called colonialism. Whether it was by divine providence or sheer coincidence, this historical

linkage of evangelisation with colonization has a lasting impact on the African psyche that is counter-productive for Christianity. The experience of colonialism in combination with the horrors of the infamous slave-trade which went before it, have grossly distorted the African ego, leaving him or her with a lingering inferiority complex and a confused sense of identity.

Another group of respondents (30%) stressed the divisiveness of *Ikpu-ala* as it has come between traditionalists and Christians in every community. This division is a division in terms of approach rather than substance because both traditionalists and Christians believe in its effectiveness in administering social justice and social order, harmony and peace. Consequently, Ekwunife (1990:1), looking at the social order and life after the advent of the missionaries in Igbo land, concluded that “those institutionalized beliefs and practices of the indigenous religion of Africa, which are transmitted to the present rotaries mainly through oral traditions... sacred specialists and persons, sacred places and objects, and religious works of art became objects of devil worship or at best syncretism.”

**RESEARCH QUESTION 8: What does the Church teach about *Ikpu-ala*?**

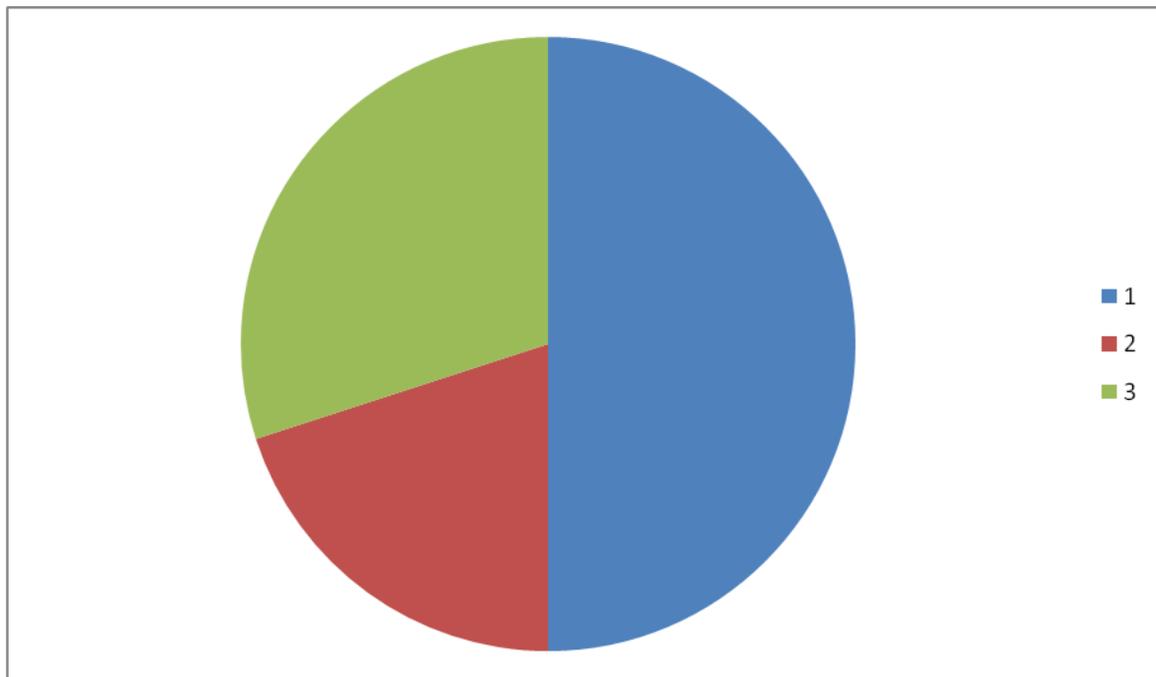


Fig. 6.8: The Church teaches about *Ikpu-ala*

1. It saw *Ikpu-ala* as a pagan ritual and practices, and banned Christians from participating in its ceremonies.
2. It is an instrument of oppression and miscarriage of justice.
3. It is incompatible with Christian values and particularly with the sacrament of reconciliation.

Respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	<i>Ikpu-ala</i> as a pagan ritual and practices, and banned Christians from participating in its ceremonies	5	50.0	50.0	50.0
	As instrument of oppression and miscarriage of justice	2	20.0	20.0	70.0

As incompatible with Christian values and particularly with the sacrament of reconciliation	3	30.0	30.0	100.0
TOTAL	10	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 6.8: What does the Church teach about *Ikpu-ala*?

The Igbo traditional/cultural values, like the traditional religions, continue to inspire varied responses across the globe, in the Christian world and this research shows that the Igbo traditional religion is such traditional religions. The responses are predominantly negative. About 50% of the respondents felt that the Church has condemned *Ikpu-ala* as a pagan ritual. Another 20% advanced as the Church’s reason for such an attitude that it was seen as an instrument of oppression and miscarriage of justice because those condemned by the community justice system plead their case in the Church’s system rather than in the traditional system. The remaining 10% of respondents said that the Church’s teaching on sin and reconciliation is less superior to the traditional which is both vertical and horizontal. This is understandable considering the role played by colonizers and missionaries who worked hand in glove in destroying various aspects of the local Igbo culture, contrary to the Church’s official teaching on local way of life (culture). They claimed that they were bringing civilization, while instilling an inferiority complex in comparison with the European cultural values and traditions.

The Catholic Church, right from apostolic times, has had a policy of not destroying whatever a people may have in their traditional way of life that is good, just, and beautiful, and also as far as possible making use of these elements in the work of evangelization. Vatican II states clearly that

She (the Church) respects and fosters the spiritual adornments and the gifts of the various races and peoples. Anything in their way of life that is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible, preserves intact. Sometimes in fact she admits such things into the liturgy itself, as long as they harmonize

with true and authentic spirit (Vatican II on Sacred Liturgy, no. 37).

Much of Vatican II on the theology of culture is found principally in *Gaudium et Spes*.

Yet *Ikpu-ala*, like most other aspects of Igbo culture, such as religious symbols, was associated with idolatry and condemned by the Church in Igbo land. E. Ilogu as one of the earliest scholars to focus on Igbo traditional ethics highlights the fact that *ikpu-ala* is part of Igbo morality. *Ikpu-ala* showcases justice as the basic disposition that keeps the existing realities and relationships that seem to disintegrate. Justice binds the cosmic, the social, the moral, and the metaphysical orders of realities, something that is enacted during the *Ikpu-ala* ceremony. Nwala (1988) believes it is “the highest principle of behaviour and actions” among all that is. The details of these principles are contained in *Omenala*, the Igbo traditional moral and legal code. Because it embodies the social order and the moral code, it automatically embodies the Igbo traditional cosmic order. For Nwala therefore, *Omenala* represents “what is traditionally sanctioned”, whether as “moral law” (or justice) or a part of the traditional belief system, it is all “*Omenala*” (Ahiajoku lecture series: 1988).

Ejizu (1984) supported the holistic vision of reality as a whole among the Igbo when he asserted that the traditional Igbo like other traditional Africans. They perceive life as an integral whole with the sacred flowing into all facets, underpinning and investing every worthwhile event with meaning and significance. (Ejizu 1984).

In the same vein, Raphael Ilegbune (2008) highlights some of the characterizations of Igbo traditional ethics. These include emphasis on “group morality” and not on “individual” attainments of goodness. This is because Igbo morality comprises supernatural, communal, and individual moralities. Although supernatural morality is the highest type of morality, yet, the Igbo emphasize communal morality. It is by acting in accordance with the individual and communal morality that one attains the supernatural morality: ‘I am because we are.’

On the other hand, in her ecclesiology and sacraments, especially in the sacrament of reconciliation, the Church emphasizes individual morality (vertical) over that of the community (horizontal). It is still a problem that the Church does not see Igbo cultural values and religious practices as having supernatural mandates for the good of the society. Understood in this way, it becomes clear that all Igbo traditional institutions, morality, and religion in the traditional setting have a communal nature. Thus, the Igbo traditional institutions and cultural values deal with the individual's relationship with the community, while in the Igbo communal morality the individual shares in the life of the community, and whatever affects one affects the other. Hence, the Igbo say *Anya bewe, imi ebewe* (when the eyes weep, the nose weeps also). Nwala supports the idea that there is a unity of all things among the existing reality (*omenala*) in the Igbo worldview. *Ikpu-ala* as social justice in Igbo society shows clearly that law and morality overlap; there is no clear demarcation between them as seen in the similarities noted above. Igbo law and morality are more practical than theoretical and are encapsulated in the *Omenala*.

Ezeanya (1994:133) clearly asserted the truth when he says:

The traditional religion of our ancestors sees religion as an indispensable element in a person's way of life. From conception until death, the individual finds himself in an atmosphere that is essentially religious. Every moment of a person's life is lived in union with and under the special care of god, the good spirits and the ancestors. Since the spirits and the ancestors especially the earth deity are watching the moral behaviour of human beings for reward or punishment, everyone tries to live his day to day life in a way pleasing to the spiritual powers watching him.

*Ikpu-ala* as a principle of justice and morality in the traditional Igbo setting and *Omenala* serve both existential and eschatological purposes. Existentially, they protect values of the community bequeathed to posterity; hence they prohibit things that

endanger people's integrity. Ilogu (1985:23), was quick to observe that *omenala* helps to maintain harmony and equilibrium in the community, with its socio-moral and cultural sanctions. Osuji (1985:43) agrees with Ilogu when he points out that "don'ts" handed down by the ancestors help to protect the community's moral principles and values.

The respondents unanimously agreed that the Catholic Church in Igboland treated *Ikpu-ala* as idolatry. They also agreed that the Church has continued to treat Igbo traditional religion as well as Igbo social values as part of the backwardness of African people and has failed to give these values the respect they deserve in a society like the Igbos. The respondents also believe that the Church has always discounted the traditional religion and cultural values because Christianity had presented itself as superior to the traditional way of life in order to feel justified in calling for conversion. This took various forms, ranging from a view of Christianity as the gateway to civilization to another which links Christianity to salvation. Thus, the traditional ways were presented as primitive and their adherents as doomed to damnation.

Some 20% of the respondents also agreed that there were things in the traditional religion and cultural values that were bad and against human respect and dignity, such as the killing of twins, human sacrifice, the *osu*-system (outcasts), and many others. However, they believed that the concern is no longer so much with traditional religion as a living tradition but with the possible stain that Christians carry about because they had fore-fathers (ancestors) who were adherents of the traditional religion and participated in the cultural deprivation of human dignity and human rights. The view of traditional religious practice as a contaminating stain is pressed into service in order to make sense of the negative experiences that people go through in life. For example, deaths, especially among the young, failure in business, infertility or infant mortality, and so on, are sometimes traced back to the contamination from the fore-fathers via their traditional religious practices. Remedy is then presented in terms of a ritual cleansing of the stain. This has been variously called "healing the family root" and the need for *ikpu-ala* (restorative justice).

In spite of the apparent demonization of traditional religion and cultural values and its adherents, the Catholic Church (theology) has tremendous respect for ***Omenala*** as preparations made by God for the announcement of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In its eschatological function, *Omenala* is a means of attaining the eschatological union with the Supreme Being and the supernatural world and this is the final communion. The observance of the *Omenala* fills the Igbo with eschatological hope. In the light of the above analysis, traditional institutions and morality as well as cultural values are the same from the Igbo perspective. The nature of Igbo social justice and morality can be conflicting, putting one in a dilemma about the rightness and wrongness of an action. *Ikpu-ala* and morality can cause conflict in the same person, and between the individual and the community. For instance, in the Igbo *omenala*, it is *Nso* (forbidden) to interact with or even help someone ostracized from a community. But when his life is in danger, a “moral” person is confused about whether to help him. *Ikpu-ala* and morality are intrinsically bound to religion, and every religion has some customary beliefs. Okafor (1984) posited that the link between law and morality generally should be held contingent, as this enables morality to assess how the law meets its functions in ordering the society as the people fulfill their duties.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 9 (a): Are there conflicts between *Ikpu-ala* and Christian beliefs? If any, in what ways can the Church address and resolve them?**

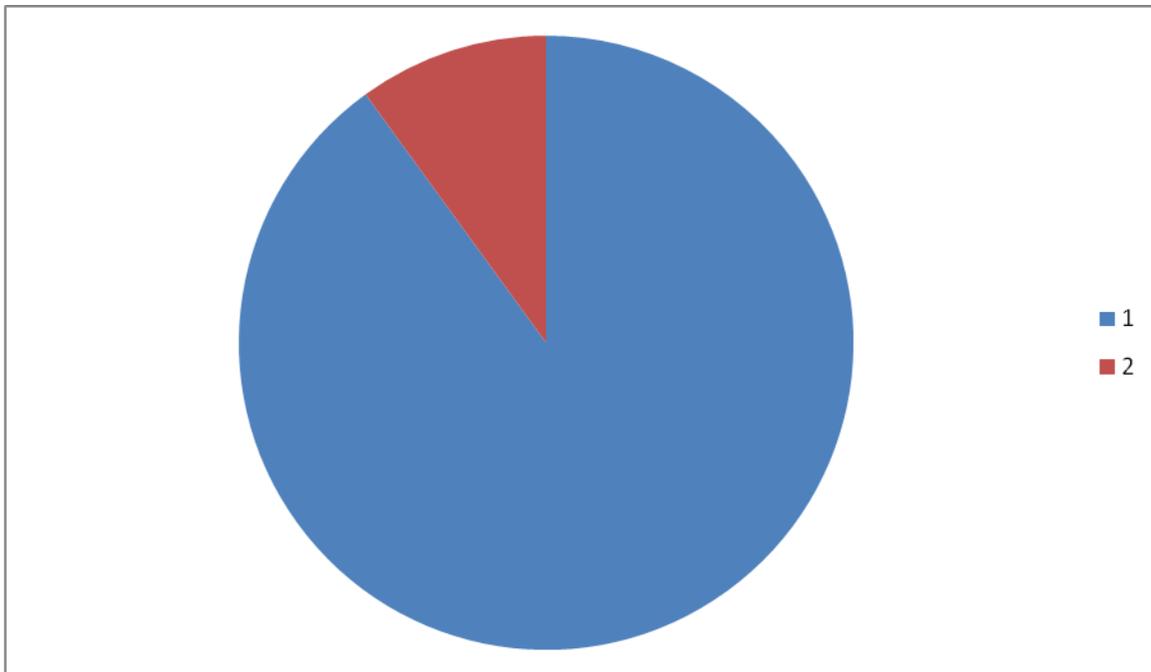


Fig. 6.9 (a): The conflicts between *Ikpu-ala* and Christian beliefs

1. Yes, there are conflicts between *Ikpu-ala* and Christian beliefs.
2. No, there are no conflicts between *Ikpu-ala* and Christian beliefs.

Respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes, there are conflicts between <i>Ikpu-ala</i> and Christian beliefs.	9	90.0	90.0	90.0
	No, there are no conflicts between <i>Ikpu-ala</i> and Christian beliefs.	1	10.0	10.0	100.0
	TOTAL	10	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 6.9 (a): Are there conflicts between *Ikpu-ala* and Christian beliefs?

The Igbo people restrained individual behaviour by means of a wide range of taboos. These are invariably expressed in religious terms, and they serve to co-ordinate the relationships among various hierarchies of humans, and between human beings

and the animal world and the world of nature. Taboos were used to educate and thereby restrict human beings in their social interactions, relationships to animals, nature, periods of the year, decorum of speech, and ritual process. Particularly significant is the symbol of the *omu*, (tender palm fronds) for sacralization and restraining (socio-religious) purposes. For example, if a grave or a building was encircled or cordoned off with *omu*, it became a sanctuary, or at least one was forced to pause and ascertain which restrictions were in force.

The Igbo word which encapsulates all these notions is *nso*, which could mean holy, sacred, to be avoided, forbidden, restricted, or abominated. This last sense is more forceful when qualified with *ala/ani* (earth, ancestors). It becomes an act which the community would regard as not just detestable but an offence or sin against the Earth Goddess. The earth sustains life and this elevates the earth goddess into prominence. Since the offences are committed on the earth, abominations are usually affronts to her. Thus, theft, murder, sexual offences, abusive language and allegations, and many other *nso* are regarded as pollution. In other words, they are taboos. Offenders must propitiate the earth goddess, and the cost of the propitiatory rites could serve as deterrence. Taboos and cleansing rituals are religious because they underpin a religious worldview. Ordinary life could not be secular under such conditions, especially when the gods frequently intrude in human world as masquerades.

Most of the respondents, 95%, believed strongly that the early Church missionaries and colonizers made a mistake by condemning and destroying those cultural values that kept the society both religious, harmonious and peaceful. Nze James Okeke explained during the interview that the missionaries did not understand the interconnectivity of relationships in the community and the universe. That the enforcement of morality was located in the political system (institutional values) meant that punitive social control was religious. Furthermore, the democratic core of the Igbo political system is that in all the polities, women and the populace featured prominently. However, offenses are not always defined the same or responded to in the same way in different regions within Igbo land. Sometimes, different people from different regions might react differently to the same offence because of their different definitions. They

also might react differently even to the explanations of the differences. All Igbo communities draw a distinction between offences which were abominations or ritually evil, and others which were practically evil but not abominations. Some abominable offences were major and others minor, but all abominations required that the whole community had to participate in the purification. Secondly, all Igbo communities punished witchcraft, sorcery, and sometimes murder, with ostracism. But attitudes to these offences sometimes differed.

These taboos, the ritual cleansing of abominable offences, and cultic symbols are all looked upon by the Igbo local Church as phenomena associated with idolatry. This was the beginning of the great polemics among the Igbo. Whatever may be the various schools of thought in the controversy among the traditionalist view, the Christian view, and the Traditional/Christian view, one thing remains obvious, namely that the positive values said to be inherent in Igbo traditional religion and incultural values such as *Ikpu-ala* are not anti-Christian. The Igbo Church must inculturate and come up with a strong catechesis based on these positive values. Christ is the source of our strength and the one that drives humanity to great achievements.

**6.9 (b). In what ways can the Church address and resolve such differences?**

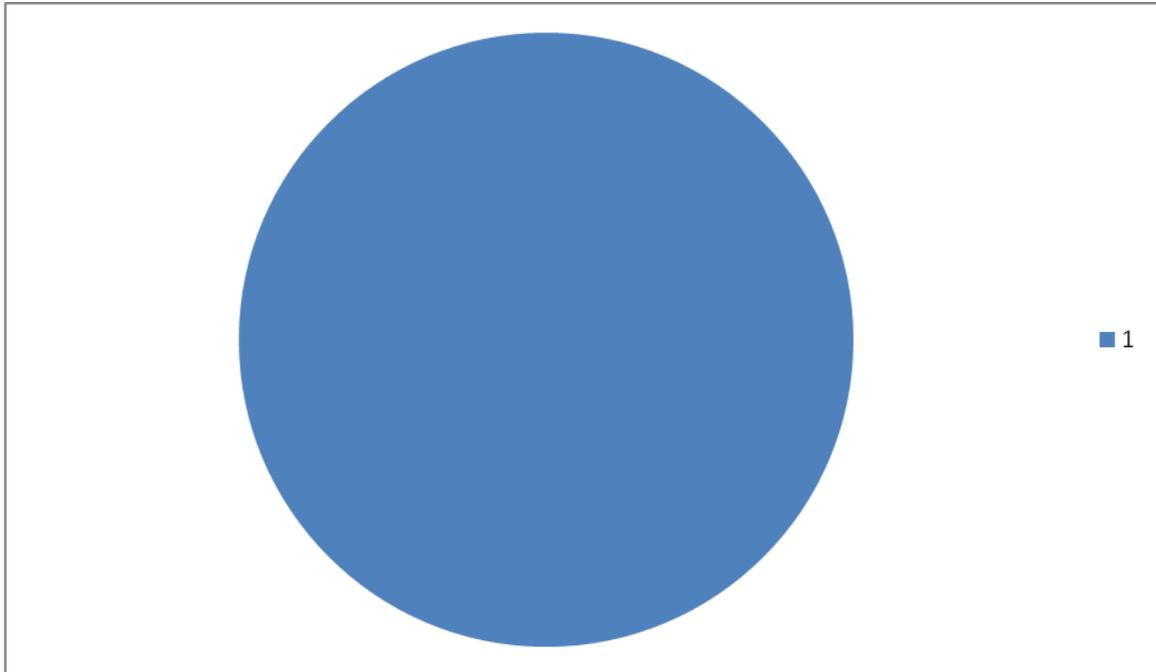


Fig. 6. 9 (b): The Church addressing the differences with Ikpu-ala

1. In interviewing the respondents, it seemed to me that most interviewees were unanimous in proffering a solution to the challenges posed to the Church by *ikpu-ala* ceremony. Almost all the respondents agreed that inculturation is the best way to address and resolve the differences and ambivalence in the life of the Igbo Christians. Inculturation here is the process that gives content to the Incarnation as a lived reality in a particular culture and time. Chimhanda (2013), quoting Sheldrake (2000) appears to support this fact that Incarnation is about a lived reality. According to her, in the Incarnation, God showed commitment in Jesus Christ to a world of place and time. Understood as such, Chimhanda goes on to enunciate that in the person and work of Jesus Christ, there is the twofold movement of ‘God becoming human’ and ‘humanity being invited to become like God’ (Chimhanda).

Respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	One of the ways of addressing	10	100.0	100.0	100.0

	and resolving the differences and ambivalence is Inculturation.				
	TOTAL	10	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 6: 9 (b): The Church versus traditional values such as *Ikpu-ala*: Which way?

Christianity as a religion made an impact on Igbo people and their traditional values. There is no gainsaying it. Each year, thousands of people come to church; many availing themselves of the Sacraments. It is my opinion in this thesis that the positive values in Igbo traditional culture should be reinterpreted so as to suit the present day Igbo Christian mind and conscience. The local Church, in the spirit of Vatican II, should openly encourage Igbo theologians to study and reinterpret Igbo religious symbols as a way of dialogue and of enriching the Igbo Christianity.

The local Church should also admit to the double standard in Igbo Christian practices. The fact remains that a large population of Igbo is Catholic or non-denominational may have caused the discontinuation of several aspects of the traditional religious culture of the people. Of course, one can claim that there is religious plurality in sub-Sahara Africa and at the same time it is equally true that the background in which indigenous religions undergirded all aspects of life, including the social, political, and economic aspects, has more or less disappeared. According to Ejizu, huge cathedrals, churches, schools, even mosques and public buildings, now rise on the former sites of sacred groves and shrines dedicated to powerful traditional deities. Further, certain brutal rituals like human sacrifice, traditional customs and taboos that discriminated against individuals and groups such as women, outcastes, and people suffering from various kinds of sickness and diseases, as well as the killing of twins among the Igbo have been eradicated. In Igbo land for instance, most traditional communities had, prior to the advent of Christian missionaries, reserved dreaded places, Ajo Ohia/Ofia, 'bad forests' as such places were called, where people who committed abominations and died before they could be reconciled with the victim and community were dumped, and anyone who had seriously infringed the approved norms of behaviour was allowed to die a miserable death (Ejizu 1984). Other categories of

people who were dumped in these evil forests to die miserably on their own included lepers, sorcerers, witches, and notorious persons. Today, these sacred places and shrines have been cleared. They are now the location of many churches, schools, and public institutions. Again, some important traditional institutions, including the priesthood of some prominent deities, initiations and festivals, have all been abandoned since the people left the traditional religions and institutions and embraced the missionary religions including Islam and Mormonism.

Consequently, 70% of respondents agreed that most Igbo Christians have lost the concept and meaning of the sacred or holiness. While there are astonishing stories of phenomenal achievements of the missionary religions and of heroic lives of faith by numerous converts to Christianity, these ought to be taken together with the constant complaints against the shallowness of faith, nominal membership, and syncretic practices among a large segment of the population of Igbo Christians. The respondents were quick to point out that the traditional worldview, including a strong belief in the dynamic presence and activities of spirit beings and cosmic forces in people's lives and belief in re-incarnation persist among the population. There are innumerable stories of Igbo Christians worshipping "idols", or false gods. They swear on idols. They erect shrines in their homes and compounds. They hide fetishes in their shades in the market places and in their workshops. The respondents agree that the traditional religions and institutional and cultural values remain very much the living faith of many rural dwellers in Igbo society as in other traditional African communities. Both in urban and rural areas, the religions continue to adapt to the changing circumstances of people's lives. They believe that the tremendous resilience and adaptability of the indigenous religious to changing needs is responsible for Christianity's failure and the shallowness of most Igbo Christians. Meanwhile, one cannot deny that there have been efforts, call it, adaptation, assimilation or inculturation of some of the traditional religious and cultural values going on in recent times. For example, in many contemporary religious systems such as Godianism, Ogboni Fraternity (Yorubaland) and Eruosa (Edo), there have been efforts to marry traditional religious/cultural values with Christianity and in some cases with Islam. In addition, the *African Independent* and *Aladura* Churches, and Cherubim

and Seraphim, have all contributed to keeping alive certain aspects of the traditional religious culture and the belief systems in the dynamic presence and influence of ancestral and other spirit beings in people's lives, divination, belief in magic, and the practice of traditional rituals.

The other 30% of respondents believe that the constant conflicts between Church doctrines and Igbo *Omenala* can be resolved easily if the Church could take the necessary steps to re-evaluate her stands on some cultural issues like *Ikpu-ala*, to consider how Christian doctrines can work for the promotion of Igbo values. This is inculturation in the concrete. This is what Onyima (1992:229) meant when he advised that we need to update our culture and marry those harmless beliefs of our forefathers in our present thinking, ideas, and religion. We should not break with our rich past if we are to understand our present and plan for our future.

The local Church must reintroduce its doctrines and dogma to include and reflect the facts in Igbo traditional and cultural values which see religion as a way of life and a conviviality of the community.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 10: Does the Church have a method of addressing *Ikpu-ala* and/or traditional values and institutions?**

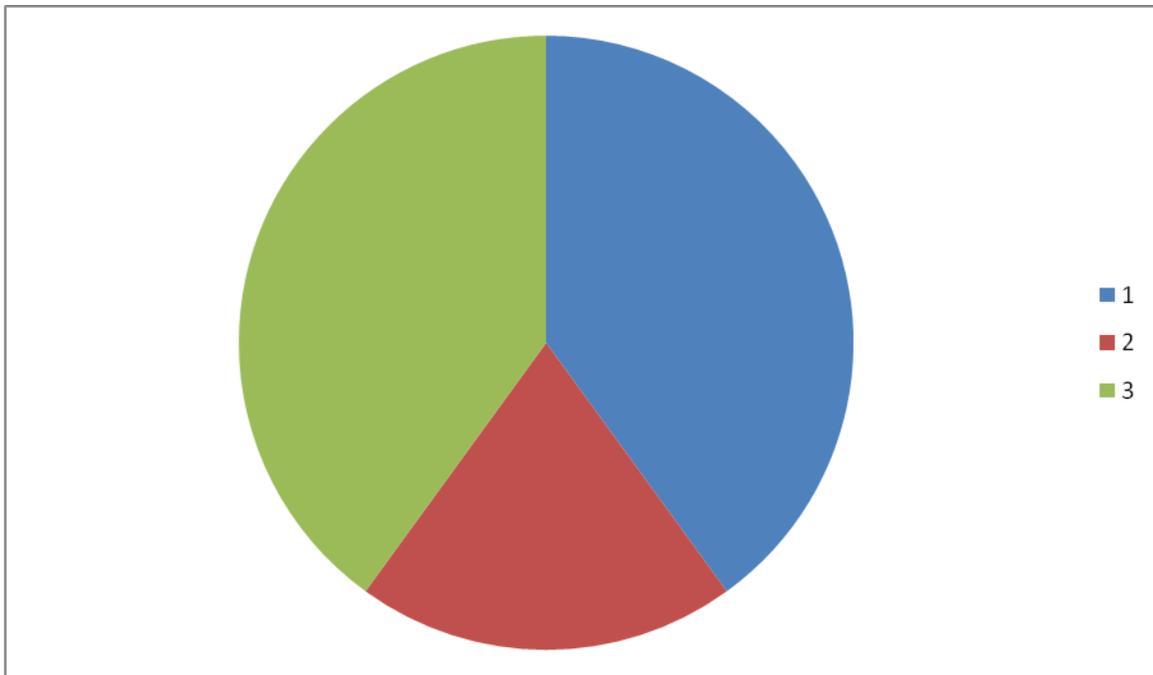


Fig.6.10: The Church methods of addressing *Ikpu-ala* and traditional values

1. Igbo socio-cultural values are dynamic and never static
2. A new way of education that includes the cultural value systems of the people that reflects the global respect for people and their cultural values
3. There is need for serious Dialogue between Christianity and Igbo traditional religion and social value components

Respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Igbo socio-cultural values are dynamic and never static	4	40.0	40.0	40.0
	A new way education that includes the cultural value systems of the people that reflects the global respect for people and their cultural values	2	20.0	20.0	60.0
	There is need for serious Dialogue between Christianity and Igbo traditional religion and social value components	4	40.0	40.0	100.0

	TOTAL	10	100.0	100.0	
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Fig. 6.10: Does the Church have a method of addressing *Ikpu-ala* and/or traditional values and institutions?

It has been the explicit teaching of the Church over the years that the preachers of the gospel should be careful and sympathetic in dealing with the traditional religious heritage of non-Christians when they are preaching the gospel among them. They must make sure that they not only do not destroy or look down on whatever the people hold that is naturally good, just, or beautiful but that they are ready to utilize those elements in making the faith intelligible and appreciable. As far back as 1659, the Church warned missionaries from Europe working in the Far East not to use their missionary zeal to convince those people to change their rites, customs, or habits unless these things are evidently contrary to religion and good morals (Ezeanya 1994:19).

However, we know that this has not been the case with African traditional religion and cultural institutions and values like *Ikpu-ala*. What the early missionaries did was to condemn these rich cultural institutions outright. Instead of studying and appreciating them, they embarked on burning traditional artefacts and symbols, often obtained by force or through deceit. There was not a meaningful dialogue, respectful approach, persuasion or consideration of the people's perspective and understanding before they were forced to give up cultural values transmitted to them from their ancestors who had preserved and held the society in harmony and peace. In the case of *Ikpu-ala*, the Christian missionaries collaborated with colonial government officials to stop a number of related cultural traditions such as *Ozo* title, second-burial (anniversary), *mmanwu*, *Ekpe*, *okonko*, *et cetera*, as evil and perversionsof individual justice. The researcher believes that the Church's missionary activities brought message of liberation, justice and freedom and that these ideals properly inculturated would have enhanced the cultural and religious identity of Igbo society. The problem of Christianity among the Igbo people was that the missionaries, who felt that the Igbo culture had been conquered and having brought their own religious beliefs with them, did not entirely succeed in eradicating the old traditional beliefs and practices. For the missionaries,

anything they did not understand according to their western religious and cultural values was evil and therefore was destroyed.

Most respondents, 80% of them, believe that the way the Church went about the adaption and inculturation process of Christianity in Africa in general and particularly in Igbo land resulted in “hollow religiosity” whereby many converts were merely attending religious functions without any inner spiritual consequences. The process of incarnating Christianity in Igbo land is only recent, as part of the changes of Second Vatican Council. Mazi Okezie Enendu pointed that there is an inherent contradiction in the process because there is a tendency for a negative usage of this process. The local Church has prided itself as inculturating most of the traditional values. The title awards of *Ezinne* and *Nna-nwere-ugwu* in Orlu are a typical example. These are meant to replace the *Ozo* title-taking among the Igbo, but according to him there is a total misunderstanding of the meaning of title-taking among the Igbo people and misinterpretation of the function of such titles as *Ozo* title in traditional Igbo society. Mazi Okezie believes that the way the local Catholic Church has been going about this process has led to a total misunderstanding of what *ozo* title-taking means and why it is taken in the Igbo traditional socio-religious and political setup.

Other respondents, 20%, agreed strongly that the local Church in carrying out this process of inculturation did not and are not permeating the culture of our people well enough. Consequently, there are confusions among the Churches and even among the individual Christians regarding the strange mixture of different practices of Christianity. Rev. Okechukwu Udegbu, an Anglican minister, agrees strongly with other respondents, and went further to say that the Western missionaries succeeded in baptizing our people but did not succeed in making them Christians through and through. According to him, the Catholic experience is not different from the Anglican Church. However, he added that the Anglican Church in Igbo land is far ahead of the Catholic in when it comes to the inculturation process, such as in marriage, title-taking, and the Sacraments.

The local Church has preferred individual rights to the detriment of the social and cultural relationships in the society that guarantee these rights. Most of the respondents

believed that the Church failed to uphold some of the advantages of *Ikpu-ala*. The loss of its thoroughness in restorative justice, reconciliation, peace and harmony for both the victim and perpetrator and for the social relationships in the community, left both the Igbo Christians and their communities without social cohesion and trust. Furthermore, while the Igbos professed their credo in Churches, they took along with them their charms and amulets. Yes, they became converted but they never truly became Christians. The effect of this is most evident in private and public life styles and belief systems, particularly in difficult moments and borderline situations that require determinative faith decisions. Of course, the Church has always used the process of inculturation without interactive engagement. Consequent upon this is the alienation of the people from true conversion and introduction of religious relativism as a way to make sense their worldview and maintain their social conviviality and coherence.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 11: Historically how did the Catholic Church address traditional, cultural and religious issues similar to *Ikpu-ala*?**

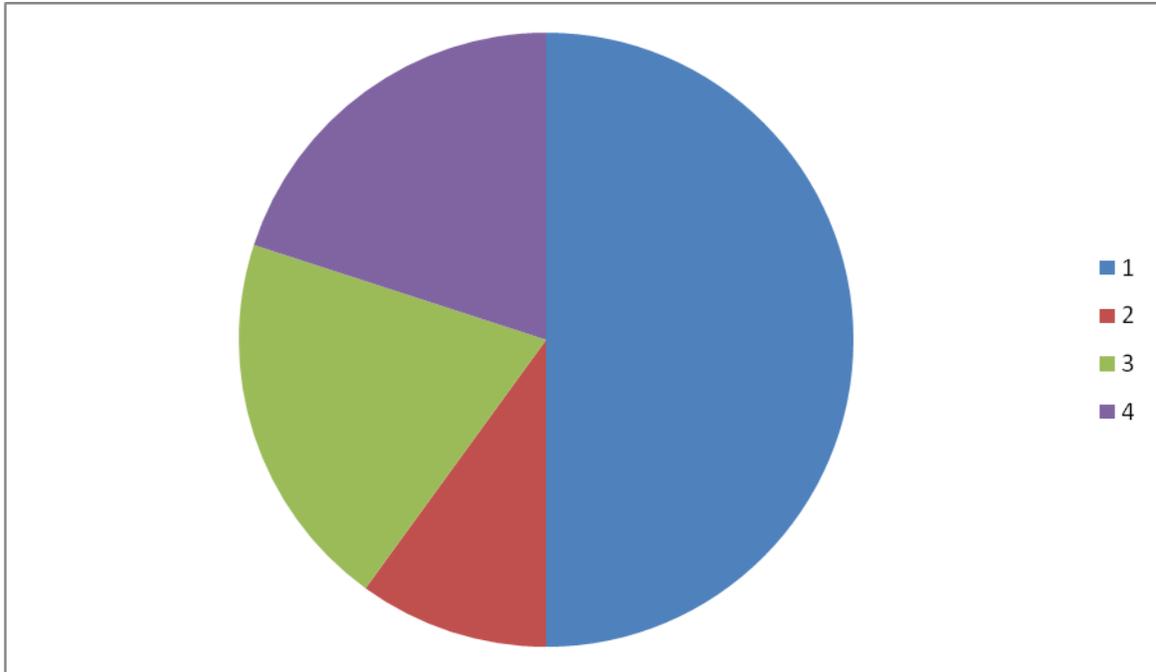


Fig. 6.11: Catholic Church and *Ikpu-ala*

1. The Church condemned anything that was done by the traditionalists as paganism and evil.
2. About sin/crimes, the Church preached repentance and confession to the priests and expiations as given by the priests.
3. The Church also preached co-existence through forgiveness.
4. Encouraged the faithful to use Church doctrines and not to resort to *Ikpu-ala*.

Respondents	Frequency	Percent	Valid	Cumulative
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				percent	percent
Valid	The Church condemned anything that was done by the traditionalists as paganism and evil	5	50.0	50.0	50.0
	About sin/crimes, the Church preached repentance and confession to the priests and expirations as the ones given by the priests	1	10.0	10.0	60.0
	The Church also preached co-existence through forgiveness	2	20.0	20.0	80.0
	Encouraged the faithful to use Church doctrines and not to resort to Ikpu-ala	2	20.0	20.0	100.0
	TOTAL	15	100.0	100.0	

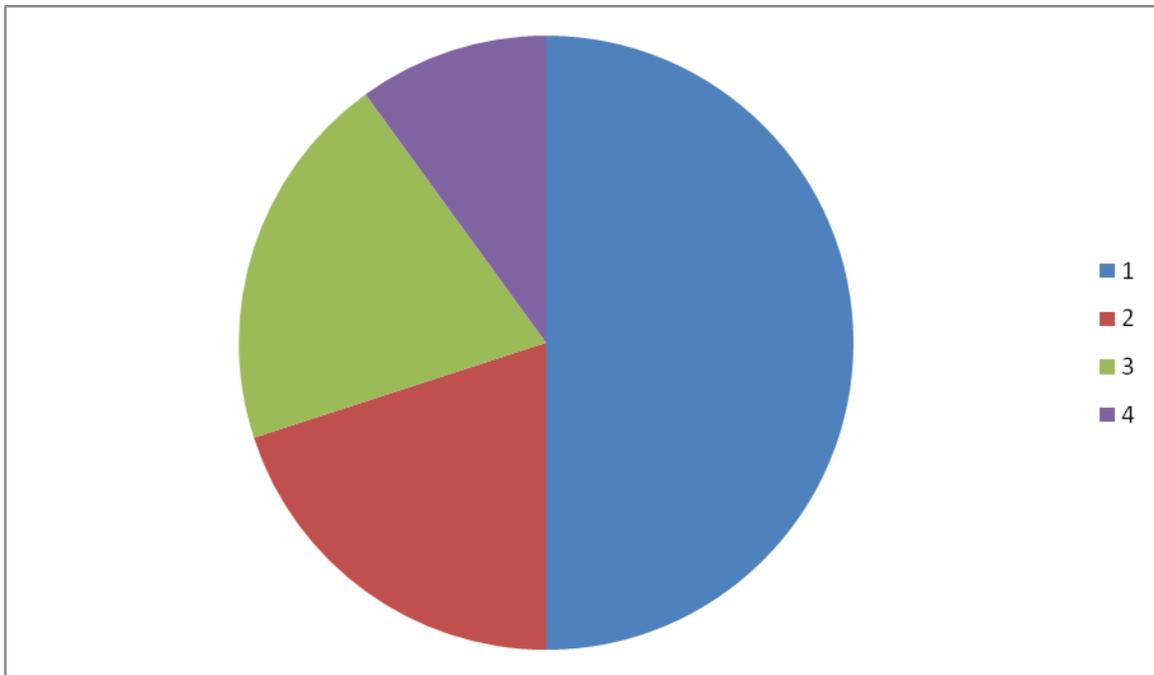
Fig. 6.11: Historically, how did the Catholic Church address traditional, cultural and religious issues similar to *Ikpu-ala*?

Among the respondents, 70% believe that the outright condemnation of Igbo traditional cultural values as marriage, burial, naming ceremony, title-taking and a host of others, contributed immensely to the dysfunctional Igbo ways of life and the double standard in matters of faith. The other respondents, 20%, believe that the Church does not understand Igbo social justice and morality or how justice is prized in Igbo morality. The same thing is true of the Church's understanding of Igbo concrete symbols and abstract symbols which do not depend on their concrete material substance.

Guided by the Church's principle of respecting and making use of, wherever possible, what is good in any people's way of life to preach the gospel, the researcher has carefully shown the many precious elements of the traditional religion of the Igbo people by which the gospel can be made more intelligible to the people. As a matter of fact, so much good can be discerned in the Igbo traditional religion and culture that some observers have noted that the Igbo people seemed to have been prepared by Providence in a special way to receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For the Igbo were so religious that all modes of social control were clothed in religious garb.

There are in our culture values that are in consonance with the Christian faith, such as *Iri Ji Ohuru*, New Yam Festival. The missionaries who came to Igbo land in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century encountered this annual festival with mixed feelings. The respondents all agreed that this annual festival was held by the Igbo at the middle of the rainy season as a thanksgiving to *Ahiajoku (Ifejioku)*, guarantor and custodian of soil fertility and good harvest. In the words of Francis Arinze (1978): “The yam spirit receives his special cult before and after the planting season. The New Yam Festival is one of the most widespread in Igboland”. They also believe that the Church today in Igbo land has continued the practice of the missionaries, rather than applying cultural incarnation, when the people are asked to bring the new yams to the Church for blessing. This practice alienates the people from their Igbo way of life and also makes the Christian faith artificial as most of those who brought their new yams to the Church go home for the traditional celebration of New Yam according to Igbo traditional custom which includes ancestral worship. The celebration is a very culturally based occasion, tying individual Igbo communities together as essentially agrarian and dependent on yams. Yams are the first crop to be harvested, and are the most important crop in Igbo society. New Yam is a celebration that reveals the Igbo race as a religious people, a people who annually acknowledge their duty to return gratitude to *Chukwu*, the Supreme Being, for providing them with such a gift as yam, a major food that satisfies the people’s nutritional requirements, ensuring their physical and material well-being. It is a celebration that is directly linked with ancestral worship and the Earth goddess, *Ala (Ani)*.

**QUESTION 12: Are there ways and means by which Christians can participate in full traditional or Christian modified *Ikpu-ala*?**



**Fig. 6.12: Christians and modified *Ikpu-ala***

1. Inculturation
2. Dialogue between Christianity and the Igbo traditional religion
3. More studies of Igbo terminologies, concepts, and symbols
4. By affirmative Action in social, religious ideas and political institutions

Respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Inculturation	5	50.0	50.0	50.0
	Dialogue between Christianity and the Igbo traditional religion	2	20.0	20.0	70.0
	More studies of Igbo terminologies, concept and symbols	2	20.0	20.0	90.0
	By affirmative Action in social, religious ideas and political institutions	1	10.0	10.0	100.0
	TOTAL	10	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 6.12: Are there ways and means by which Christians can participate in full traditional or Christian modified *Ikpu-ala*?

The advent of Christianity in Igbo land in 1857 brought some changes in the practice of *Ikpu-ala*. It is interesting that 80% of the respondents believed that the Church has not paid adequate attention to the integration of traditional *ikpu-ala* ceremonies or showing understanding of the role of such ceremonies in present day Igbo society. The other respondents, 20%, advocated for the Church to be committed in her inculturation efforts. Furthermore, these respondents including Ezinne Margaret Ogoeto Enendu, Mazi Lewis Enendu, Prince Ejike Nwankwo (Obi Akeme), and others from the Anglican Communion, Assemblies of God, Shabbat Adonai, and independent groups, in a general interview believed that Catholic Church and the other mainstream Churches have not adequately invested in making the Church local in meaning and outlook. There are so many Roman residuals in her doctrines and celebration without any attention to the local sensibilities. They believed that the Catholic Church is more Roman than the Romans. They urged that the Church may be more open to dialogue and called for more studies of Igbo concepts and symbols, not from the western perspective, but utilizing the education already existing in the Church, to understand what the Igbo people mean and understand in their way of life. They also advocated for carrying out some experiments in Igbo life issues such as *ikpu-ala*, Igbo burial ceremonies, *ozo* title-taking, and a host of others. In this way, the Church can see how much Christianity needed to be introduced to the Igbo way of life, rather than trying to introduce Igbo values into Christianity.

These respondents believed that there is more in *Ikpu-ala* than the Church recognizes or is prepared to admit. *Ikpu-ala* is not an abstract poetic concept but a down-to-earth and practical concept. There is a general agreement that *ikpu-ala* is conceived not in relation to conflict or war, but in relation to order, harmony, and equilibrium. *Ikpu-ala* is a religious value because the order, harmony, and equilibrium in the universe and society are believed to be divinely established, and the obligation to maintain them is religious. It is also a moral value since good conduct is required of human beings if order, harmony, and equilibrium are to be maintained. As noted by Chief Okwaranobi Okwaranyia, *ikpu-ala* focuses on establishing truth, acknowledging harm, and providing appropriate forms of justice, restitution, punishment, and

forgiveness, elements without which there can be no reconciliation. Rev. Barth Ofoegbu, in his support of the traditional *ikpu-ala* values believes that justice becomes a balancing of rights of victims and offenders who have broken trust with the community. Among the respondents, 90% believed that *ikpu-ala* is the first part of justice and is a pre-requisite for reconciliation and peace-building. Fr. Clement Aagengnuo (2009) in the First Annual Rev. Bill Dyer Lecture believes that in traditional African justice, there can be no forgiveness and reconciliation without justice. Justice in this context is the retributive system in which the state takes up the responsibility of carrying out justice (Aagengnuo 2009). Again, justice, according to Aagengnuo, satisfies our sense of what is right but it does not heal us. It brings us peace as an absence of war but not peace as a harmonious ordering of differences.

On the other hand, forgiveness after justice is not much different from forgiveness outside of justice. In both cases the perpetrator is treated as if the crime did not happen. In one case you ignore the crime; in the other you abandon vengeance. In *Ikpu-ala*, the chief priest/priestess presents the obligation to forgive and reconcile as natural demands of the Earth-goddess, ancestors, and *Umunna* for the wellbeing of the individual and the community. In other words, forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation are about communion, for the conviviality of the community.

Thus, *Ikpu-ala* as a justice value is all about peace, harmony, and reconciliation. The respondents were in agreement that there can be no *ikpu-ala* without *igba oriko (igba ndu)* (reconciliation). *Ikpu-ala* and *igba ndu* is equal to reconciliation, and reconciliation fully understood is about walking together again, the integration of the wounded selves. The emphasis is on the will to embrace the other, even the offender. This “will” to embrace precedes any “truth” about the other. For any reconciliation to take place, this willingness to embrace must be unconditional. It is one thing to want to embrace; it is another to embrace (Aagengnuo 2009). As it were, placing justice as a precondition is not only an impossible condition, it contradicts the very essence of reconciling which is the *will* to walk together again.

Furthermore, without this will to embrace, each party will stick to their “truth” and this destroys the spirit of *Igba ndu*. It is the willingness to embrace that leads to

attending to justice. Embracing the other is a way of creating community, balancing the equilibrium, and brings about the harmonious life of the community. The act of embracing becomes the horizon for the struggle for justice (Aagengnuo 2009).

From the foregoing view point, *Ikpu-ala* then becomes a process whose goal is the creation of a community in which each one recognizes and is recognized by all, and in which all mutually give themselves to each other in love. Reconciliation stands in opposition to exclusion and not in contrast to justice. Justice, therefore, is an integral part of reconciliation and reconciliation attends to justice.

In this context, there are many ways in which Christians can participate in at least in a modified form of *Ikpu-ala*. These ways include:

1. *Ikpu-ala* as an alternative view of justice, reconciliation, and peace-building. The promotion and enhancement of life is the central principle of African traditional morality, the goal of all moral conduct is therefore the fullness of life. This is because in Igbo traditional society, human life is considered full when it is marked by spiritual, material, and social relations which are present in harmonious living in the community. In other words, justice, reconciliation, and peace-building relationship are based on a holistic view of life and a commitment to community and how that influences human relationships and interactions. The focus here is on the future and the willingness not to be paralyzed by the past or present abuse. "Once a skin-bag is torn it becomes a mat. When your foot steps on something fowl you do not cut it off. You wash the dirt off. Let us cover shit and eat *dawada*." These are some of the wise sayings which underlie the African philosophy of reconciliation (Aagengnuo 2009). The emphasis is on moving away from accusations and counter-accusations to soothing the hurt feelings and reaching a compromise that may help to improve future relations. Priority is given to restoration when social relations are disturbed ensuring that any form of settlement has improving future relations as its focus. It is not about problem solving or repairing an injustice, it is about a durable peace, a genuine reconciliation, and where necessary restitution and rehabilitation, but that is not the main focus.

2. In the Concept of the Universe: The advent of Christianity in Igbo land had meant the introduction of a Christian worldview. As is evident, Christianity made tremendous achievements by abolishing the slave trade and slavery, human sacrifices, and killing of twins; in their place, they introduced education, built hospitals and orphanages. To some extent, the missionaries also destroyed some level of superstition, increased human knowledge that brought about improved human welfare. The Igbo worldview was incapable of achieving these because it was static, looking downwards (Onwu 2002). However, both the Christians and the traditionalists believe that the universe is one integral system. Human beings are to maintain the balance for their own survival and that of the community.

More often than not, the emphasis is not on the individual but on the community (dead, living, and yet unborn) and the universe. Human actions influence the balance. According to Godfrey Onah (1989), the goal of interaction of beings in African world views is the maintenance of integration and balance of the beings in the world. Harmonious interaction of being leads to the mutual strengthening of the beings involved, and enhances the growth of life. A pernicious influence from one being weakens other beings and threatens the harmony and integration of the whole.

When a person causes a breach on the harmonious co-existence of the members of the community, it is made up through just reparation or restitution, depending on the offence committed. In traditional Igbo society, peace cannot be separated from justice. Peter Sarpong (1989) underlines this inseparable relationship between justice and peace within the context of Ashanti culture: "Justice produces peace... there can be no peace without justice ... Peace is honourable... peace can never be achieved when you are disgraced or when you disgrace another person. People must relate to one another on equal terms (Onah 1989). However, the unwritten moral code of the Africans contains not only things that are forbidden but also things that must be done as compensation and in reparation for the injury which immoral conduct inflicts on individuals and

on the society at large. In this case, the harmonious balancing of the universe is about survival of the community and the individual because the individual's value derives from the community. The individual has value or is a true human being if he/she is humanity-oriented. The choice is between surviving and perishing.

Nevertheless, 20% of the respondents believed that through education and Christian doctrine the missionaries were able to re-shape the Christian faith and world view. At the same time, syncretistic practices among many Igbo Christians show that the Igbo traditional religion and worldview are still alive. However, this encounter with Christianity means it will never be the same again. The missionaries may have achieved their goal by their education but in their conversion of the Igbo people to Christianity, their approach and attitude did not produce a wholesome result. They thought by condemning the Igbo religious beliefs and practices, social and political means of control, that they would produce "a new man" born in a new faith; but instead this "new man" became a split personality who could neither totally return to the old nor firmly be rooted in the new, thus creating a split allegiance.

3. On the Concept of truth as an Igbo principle of life: Truth is an important value in all human cultures including the Igbo. Though an important religious and philosophical idea, it has received little attention from scholars. Quoting C.Nze (1994.4), Onwu used two Igbo words descriptive of truth: *eziokwu* and *ezigbo*. *Eziokwu* is used to represent utterances while *ezigbo* is used ontologically or materially for substance and entity to mean good, true, or genuine. In addition, he subscribed to another expression: *ihe mere emere*, meaning "what truly happened", as a way to emphasize the meaning of truth. The Igbo words signifying falsehood or untruth or lie are: *okwu asi* and *asi*.

In the Igbo community *onye okwu asi* or *onye asi* are used judgmentally for someone who cannot be trusted, believed, or relied upon. Other related Igbo words are used, for instance *asiri* or *onye ogba asiri* refer to gossip, rumour mongering, or someone who goes about spreading rumours, saying what is true or untrue. Such a person is dangerous and that is why Mike Ejeagha's minstrel maintains that ***asiri*** brings

misunderstanding among friends and causes instability in family and community thereby causing breaches of harmonious living in the community.

The study of Chidi Osuagwu on truth in Igbo land is very illuminating. According to him, **Ezi** means correct, order, positive, proper, rectitude, genuine, upright, or valid. When *ezi* is used to qualify *okwu* which is the Igbo word for "word" or statement, then the word *eziokwu* becomes what is valid, positive, genuine, and truthful. Truth is paramount in Igbo life. *Ezi* is from the root word **zi**. From this root, the Igbo language generates such words as *izi*, to show; *imezi*, to rectify or correct; *ikozi*, to explain correctly, to teach; *igbazi*, to strengthen; or *ikpazi ala*, to mend, to cleanse. . This word-study is significant and it is deliberately done to emphasize that in Igbo "truth" is order.

Furthermore, in Igbo *igha* means to scatter. This word links up all chaotic process as the Igbo see it. Such include *aghara*, commotion and disorder. *Agha* means "war", *ighasa*, to scatter, to spread out; *ghaghagha*, chaotically bad; *igha*, to scatter, spread, to lie; *onye aghara*, troublemaker, madman. Thus *igha* means "to lie". To lie in the Igbo mind is to cause a thought scattering, a mental disorder. From the above it can be deduced that falsehood is disorder; a disorientation. The traditional Igbo pictured falsehood as simulated disorder, disarray, or chaos-generating expressions. A liar in Igbo is basically a chaos-generator. Thus the Igbo picture of *ezi* system allows for prediction. Truth is synonymous with order, hence its predictability. Falsehood is disorder, amplifying unpredictability. For the Igbo, the notion of truth is central and important (Onwu 2002).

Understood in this sense, the traditional Igbo society is built on truth and the basis of this is trust, which is primarily dependent on the ability of the individual members to tell the truth to one another. It is the basis of our faith in God and in people. Truth is the foundation of any Igbo community. The greater the tendency to lie in a society, the greater will be the social disorder which no doubt increases the tendency to lie. Onwu rightly asserts: A truth-telling society would be a highly ordered society; a better ordering of society would enhance the tendency of its members to tell the truth (Onwu 2002). This explains the trouble with Christianity in Igbo land because of the level of

hypocrisy, double-standard, deceit, syncretistic practices, and the consequent chaos among the Christians in particular and in Igbo society at large.

In addition, the Igbo use the **ofo** symbol to designate truth and justice as a principle of life. The Igbo say: **Ofo ka ide ji awa ala**, truth and justice are the content of life. **Oji ofo anaghi ato n'ije**, the man of truth is never stranded in a journey. In these sayings, the Igbo are emphasizing the centrality of truth in human relationship, organization, and morality. This is further made obvious in the Igbo saying: **Ezi okwu bu ndu**, truth is life. The commitment to truth is a fundamental Igbo philosophy without which there would be no respect for human life and dignity.

**QUESTION 13: In your personal view, what do you think should be done to ensure harmony in the conflicts between the Church and the traditional values?**

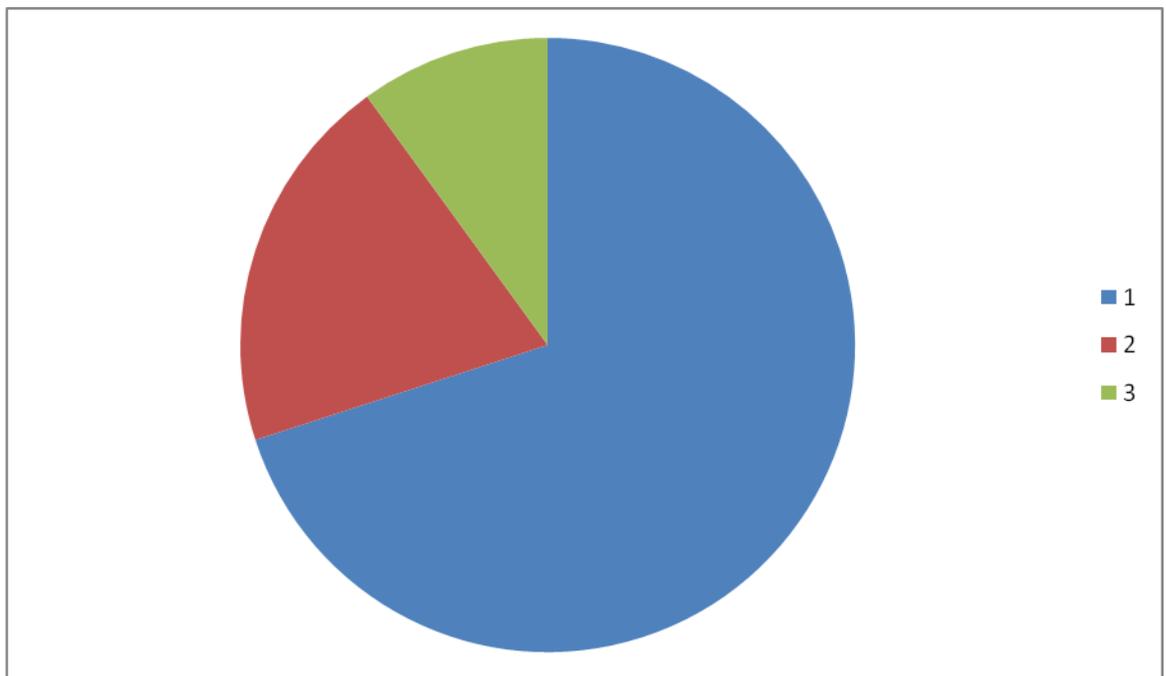


Fig. 6.13: Respondents' Personal Views.

1. The traditional method of education for example, story-telling.
2. Unshakable Faith in God (Chi-Ukwu).

3. Mutual respect and co-existence between African traditional religion and Christianity.

Respondents		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	The traditional method of education for example, story- telling	7	70.0	70.0	70.0
	Unshakable Faith in God (Chi-Ukwu)	2	20.0	20.0	90.0
	Mutual respect and co-existence between African traditional religion and Christianity	1	10.0	10.0	100.0
	TOTAL	10	100.0	100.0	

Fig. 6.13: In your personal view, what do you think should be done to ensure harmony in the conflicts between the Church and the traditional values?

In trying to formulate what one thinks should be done to ensure harmony in the conflicts between the Church and traditional values, one must take cognizance of the recent shift in the official attitude of the Catholic Church towards non-Christian religions including the African traditional ones, which is both historic and revolutionary. The Second Vatican Council remains both the culminating point as well as the point of departure for bold and positive developments that we witness currently in inter-religious relations. Right up to the Vatican II, the official policy of the Church in relation to other religions and values was, to put it mildly, unchristian: ***extra ecclesiam nulla salus***, outside the Church there is no salvation. Undoubtedly, the negative attitude reflected the dominant mind-set and extreme ethnocentrism of the scholars and missionaries from the West. Hence, the cultures and religions of the people in the Sub-Sahara and so-called “savages” were “barbaric” and in dire need of civilisation and conversion.

The negative policy of the Church was further complicated in the mission-field by the bitter competition that characterised Christian evangelical enterprises by rival groups.

As a result, we are now living in an age of transition in which pluralism dictates relations and interactions with others' worldviews. Thus modernity, industrialization, urbanization, and social economy are some of the factors that enforce changes in every facet of the social fabric in an endemic proportion. To this end, 20% of the respondents agreed that Catholic Church in Africa, in general, and in Igbo land in particular, is undergoing a painful transition as well as a radical transformation, an inculturation. It endeavours to become relevant and viable to the African context and at the same time to reshape its own relevancy and identity, particularly in Igbo land.

However, it is clear that Africans have always found ways of dealing with their environment and the problems of human existence and interactions. In this case, if our Africa, and in particular the Igbo, wisdom and experience are to be of any benefit to present day Igbo society, we must resist the temptation to romanticize the traditional social justice system, including peace-making processes. We must interrogate and re-conceptualize some of our African concepts in the light of our existential experiences. Concepts such as African culture and African philosophy must be redefined.

In other words, there are two mistakes to avoid: a common one being to treat African culture, traditional wisdom, and practices as fossilized eternal truths, frozen in time and space and independent of existential realities. In this case, for some nostalgic dreamers, all Igbo problems can be solved if only we would return to the good old ways of our ancestors. The other extreme is the naïve portrayal of anything African and traditional as backward, impeding human development and detrimental to human existence. Therefore, a clear understanding of culture, its nature, dynamics, and complexities is a starting point.

Among the ways to ensure harmony in the conflict between the Church and traditional values, 70% of the respondents outlined the following areas:

- a) **Education:** The traditional method of education, story-telling, though relevant, can no longer bring about the much needed transformation of our

modern Igbo society. As Arinze (1974:75) once remarked, we want an education that guarantees our future. If we train our children well, we have made the greatest investment for ourselves, our families, our nation and Church. We can do so only when we give sound physical, moral, religious, and professional education to our children. The challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is marked by a transition from a resource-driven economy, society, and culture to the new and emerging economy and culture which is knowledge-based, technology-driven, and responsive to environmental concerns. Igbo Christianity and spirituality must respond to this new demand. We must not allow our culture to retard our development as a people. We must let our culture be judged and transformed by the word of God as contained in the Bible. In other words, our culture must enter the world arena where it must make its presence known and capable of defining the socio-economic and political values of Igbo people. For the Bible makes it clear that people perish for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). This we can avoid by engaging in aggressive education of ourselves and our people. This education can emphasize knowledge and character formation that comes through changing our general orientation in terms of values and attitudes, and acquiring skills and ideas that can change the mind. On the same vein, ignorance is one of the destructive hindering forces in our society. With sound knowledge of God, man, and society, we will appreciate the danger of superstition, idolatry, the caste system, and sacrifices to their idols. With good character formation, whereby we imbibe Christian values, we become a major resource for economic and spiritual growth which will minimize corruption, improve human relations, and increase our productive capacity for personal growth and social development. The 21<sup>st</sup> century demands risk, choice, and commitment. Risk because once you put your hand on the plough, there is no more looking backwards. Choice because it is a matter of life or death. Commitment because it involves vision and mission. The dominant Igbo

religious and philosophical ideas require those three dimensions, which constitute Igbo man's identity, vision, and mission rooted in our faith in *Chukwu* (Supreme Being), who not only creates but sustains and protects. Christianity and education which act as sources of empowerment will equip us with character and knowledge that can transform us into agents of change in our time (Onwu 2002).

- b) About 20% of the respondents advocated for the Unshakable Faith in God (*Chi-Ukwu*): In the traditional Igbo society as in many African societies, there is a great sense of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinoum*, or in every day parlance, the sacred which represents integrity and order beyond humanity's control, and challenges humanity to the pursuit of development and perfection. Emphatically speaking, all African groups seem to refuse to draw a sharp distinction between the spiritual (mystery) and the secular which represents integrity and order within the comprehensive control of human beings. This in no way means that African cultures are sacralist, so preoccupied with the sacred as to prejudice the material well-being of the community and to impede humanity's control over their environment. Rather African cultures do not treat the sacred and the secular as alternatives, but as complementary ways of looking at reality. Consequently, the sphere of the supernatural is much broader in African cultures than in any European context.

The Igbo traditionalist and Igbo Christian have a common denominator, namely that their world is a world of two interacting realities – the material and the spiritual, each impinging on the other. In this world, the material mirrors the spiritual in different degrees. The Igbo believe in a life hereafter like many other Africans and also that the status achieved in this life can be carried over to the next world. Both traditional and Christian Igbo people also believe in the transcendence of God as the last port of call. They therefore see existence as future-oriented. *I makwa no Chukwu*

*no* – don't you know there is God? Hence the word, '*Nkiruka*' – future is greater.

This is a saying referring to people who think they can do anything and that God will not see them or they believe they will go free. Both traditional and Christian Igbo believe in the justice of God. Their concept of God in terms of his creative power and absoluteness, as the source of man's origin, dependence, and protection when all others have failed is original in Igbo thought. The first locus for justice, reconciliation, and peace-building, however, is the family or neighbourhood, negotiated through a process facilitated by elders. This is the focal point of *Ikpu-ala* – restoring the broken link when there is a breach in the laws of the community. The process is unique and unprecedented. In the twin ceremonies of *Ikpu-ala* and *igba oriko*, it is the people in the conflict themselves who are the best resources for peace. They may need some assistance, but the task of building peace is local (Aagengnuo 2002). This explains why one of the main means of restoring peace in society is to find out what has gone wrong spiritually, and through special rituals to restore the state of equilibrium (Sarpong 1989:360). Furthermore, reincarnation is the central Igbo concept which captures this Igbo sense of the future. This is related to the idea of death. It is a common belief among the Igbo that death is a necessity. When one has lived a good life and died at a ripe old age, one rejoins the ancestors.

This is why Africans have been castigated as being given to superstition (Pobee 1992:65). This point should be considered basic in the catechesis of our people especially when we are dealing with adults who have been influenced by the traditional mentality about God.

- c) The remaining 10% of respondents believe that the Church has not done enough about justice issues and Igbo morality. The Igbo conceive justice in terms of Justice-As-Co-Existence. It was Ilegbune (2007) who once remarked that an Igbo man is not just a human being but essentially a

“being-with”. It is the very basis of his claim to the title, “Igbo man”. For Ilegbune, the essence of Igbo man “being-with” is that of man’s co-existence with his fellow men and women within the communal setting. Thus, to live in the community is one thing, but to “co-exist” is another. In other words, co-existence here implies not just living in the community but participating actively in its life and activities, rights and obligations, mutual respect and dignity. Co-existence gives one the right of self-assertion, self-claims, and other expectations, even in misfortunes. As it were, man is not truly man, according to Ilegbune, except where he lives and acts as a recognized citizen of the community. Among the Igbo, an inability to co-exist with others can be a source of denial of rights and respect. It often betrays a sign of moral irresponsibility. This is the core value of *ikpu-ala* as social justice.

Temples (1969:103) observed a similar characterization of communal relationship in Bantu is like Igbo philosophy. According to him:

Just as Bantu ontology is opposed to the European concept of individuated things existing in themselves, isolated from others, so Bantu psychology cannot conceive of man as an individual, as a force existing by itself and apart from its ontological relationship with other living beings and from its connection with animate or inanimate forces around it.

Temples identifies “ontological relationship” as an essential predicate of the communal African as opposed to the European concept of individuated things. In other words, just as “individualism” is often used to back a claim in justice issues by Europeans, “co-existence” or belongingness gives an African person the grounds for just claims, for complaints against interference, for denial of attention or rights, for marginalization, especially in communal settings. In the same stretch of thought, co-existence, like legitimacy, gives one the right to perform a certain type of action without exposing oneself to criticism of a practice-based kind: being a capacity to exercise a

certain choice with institutional impunity (Ilegbune 2007). Thus in any given institution, co-existence or belongingness serves as a moral standard of judgement.

In addition, co-existence offers an instrument for value judgements, for moral evaluations, and decisions. In the same vein, justice issues like legitimacy or illegitimacy, co-existence often constitutes the yardstick for the assertion of “right” as opposed to “wrong”, “good” as opposed to “bad”, “proper” as opposed to “improper”, “just” as opposed to “unjust” – all within a communal setup where *ikpu-ala* serves as justice. It is in the same way, a basis of claims, of settling of disputes, of self affirmation, and actualization. Hence *ikpu-ala* like co-existence is the basis of moral justice.

#### **6.4 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, the researcher analyzed the oral interviews, and completed questionnaires and surveys that were used for this dissertation. The researcher was able to critically look at the peculiar and broad representations and responses made by those who were interviewed or completed the questionnaire/survey. The qualitative and quantitative approaches were very handy to find the analysis of the different opinions, views, and arguments that were espoused by the respondents. The analysis of the interviews and questionnaires conclusively supports the findings of the literature review of this dissertation. Most of the respondents clearly identified the need for a mechanism to marry the ideas/beliefs of African traditional religion with the ideas/beliefs of Christianity. The majority of the respondents also believed that the Christian faith, especially the Catholic Church, is losing a lot of ground in Igbo land because of what most of them termed insensitivity and disrespect for the African way of life and social justice. The interviews and the combined data collections support the researcher’s analysis that the Igbos had developed an effective way to maintain social cohesion and social justice long before the advent of Christianity. All the respondents unanimously agreed that inculturation employed in interactive engagement will be an effective way to harness the synergies in the two religions for the benefit of all the parties involved.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF IGBO NORMATIVE/ VALUE SYSTEMS

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

The essence of this chapter is to analyze the Igbo cultural value of *Ikpu-ala* not only as a religious value, but also as a value that goes beyond what is merely visible to the eye. *Ikpu-ala/aru* is a central pillar in the social fabric of which the Igbo society was built. One cannot take a part of it away without tearing down and destroying the foundation of the society culturally, socially, religiously, economically, and politically. The Igbo Church must find a way to make Christianity attractive to the Igbo person, to produce an Igbo who is truly an Igbo and truly a Christian. To achieve the balance between Christianity and Igbo cultural values, the interactive approach must be adopted whereby the condemnatory and prescriptive approach of Christianity is put in check. It is obvious that the missionary approach does not allow for a constructive reflection on the contextual and formative factors of theology, neither do they seem to recognize them, let alone appreciate their significance. Thus, in this regard they lack the contextual sensitivity which characterizes sound theology.

This study so far has shown that the Igbo society today is faced with a serious value orientation, struggling for primacy among Christian ethics and morality. The pursuit of reality by humans has always been a Herculean task, and a mandate. It is tasking because of the fragility and limitations of the human being. It is mandatory because the pursuit of truth makes life worth living. The relevance of our discussion on reconciliation via *Ikpu-ala/aru* is that its influence was very deep in the original Igbo traditional society, which knew no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, since everything about the Igbo life and culture was under the influence and control of religion and morals. However, in our modern times, this traditionally religious society is witnessing a rapid growth in the tendency towards secularism by the efforts being made (consciously or unconsciously) to rid the society of religion, with its moral standards, religious principles and norms, in order to make the society conducive for “any form” of achievement

strategy. This movement places most traditional values in jeopardy, especially those that tend to preach the same gospel as Christian value systems.

Again, the human person can only realize its usefulness when engaged in the effort to unravel the mysteries bedevilling human existence to be in a better position to conquer the challenges surrounding his/her personality. A Christian way of life that may be regarded as one replacing the other or one standing as an alternative for the other appears very timely today.

Every society or cultural setting has a basic moral standard operative within the community that serves to guide the actions and way of life of the people. To allow stability, justice, and the defence of the rights of the people in this community, some heinous human acts are frowned on and attract punishments as corrective measures. Among the Igbo, these acts are generally called abomination. Such acts which are degrading to human nature and pose serious threats to human peaceful coexistence are condemned and declared forbidden just to ensure order, stability and cordial relationship in the society. Taboos are there to check the animal instincts in man and to serve as a call to man to `always be considerate in his judgement and actions.

This is very relevant especially today when the Catholic faith in Igbo land seems to be outgrowing the culture-faith conflict, and intercultural assimilation, or inculturation, is becoming a household word. A better treatment of this issue may clear the air on whether *Ikpu-aru* could become an old custom that has acquired a new name, and vice versa.

In this study, the researcher has tried to portray *ikpu-ala* as a way that Igbo society tries to cope with its value systems at various levels of the society. It includes people's way of relating to their fellow beings, whether in family life, religious life, attitudes, customs or traditions. *Ikpu-aru* as a cultural value of Igbo society contains elements that are naturally good, just, beautiful, and can promote the general welfare of humanity as God's creatures. There are also to be found, side by side with the good, elements that are evil and ultimately opposed to the temporal and spiritual well-being of humans.

In this study, the aim was to investigate the Igbo concept of abomination and its application in Igbo society in the light of the present age. The intention is to provide an evaluation of some of the positive and negative aspects of *Ikpu-aru/ala* and confront them with aspects of the Biblical-Christian notion of reconciliation for mutual enrichment. Justice demands that we admire and praise whatever merits praise. As regards what is not praiseworthy, we shall be prudent enough not to pass judgement or condemn excessively, but for customs which are downright evil, they should be condemned by a shake of the head and by silence rather than by too many words.

## **7.2 THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF IKPU-ALA (RECONCILIATION)**

I must admit that this research was motivated by a philosophical curiosity and moral ambivalence about the Igbo concept of reconciliation, *Ikpu-ala*, which theologically is also linked to their religious concept of God. In essence, the concept of *Ikpu-ala* for the Igbo people is literally “life itself”, which they call *Ndu*. In the Igbo consciousness, *ndu* is manifested in the material earth or land known as *ala*, *aja*, or *uro*. In the Igbo religion, *Ala* or land is the source of life, rather than being valued for its economic or material importance. In this way, the Igbo traditional religious belief in God has a necessary connection with their concept of the earth or land, *Ala*. According to Njoku (2002), this belief is derived from the concept of the universe, *Uwa* (world) or *Ndu* (life), upon which everything in the world rests. *Ala*, in this case, becomes a phenomenological concept through which God, the Supreme Being, supplies the important needs of the people who live in it. These phenomenological functions also include the protection and control of the beings in it, humans, animals, plants, as well as other animate and inanimate things.

Furthermore, *ala*, for the Igbo people, effects and reflects life and death. Human beings are said to originate from it and go back to it after death through burial. Consequently, the Igbo regard *Ala* (earth/land) as a goddess. Inferring from the above

discussion, *ala* in the traditional religious point of view, assumes the title of the giver of the life and all the things surrounding it. From this, emerged the ethical, moral, religious, and social norms as a result of the respect accorded to the earth/land, according to traditional Igbo religious thought. Thus, the concept of *ikpu-ala* has evolved, which literally means, “purifying/cleansing the land and restoring life”.

The *Omenala*, the Igbo moral code, is the compendium of traditional laws, moral, social, or cultural. *Omenala* contained all normative laws that fostered respect and appreciation for the natural gifts from the land and also, in a deep religious sense, served to eradicate evil in the community. Consequently, to violate these cultural norms means to offend the goddess *Ala* (life itself), which must be appeased in order for the offender to be accepted back into the community. In the Igbo cultural vein, sin can also be seen as disobedience and disrespect for the giver of life. Evil or sin is not only a social problem of man; it is also a fundamental religious issue since committing it affects not only the community but also the giver of life and creator of human beings.

### **7.3 IGBO MAN AS AN EPITOME OF RELIGION**

Aristotle once said that man is a religious being and as such he feels remorse of conscience and pain when he commits sins or breaks any law. The Igbo worldview is one of oneness and inseparability. He feels guilty, and guilt has much to do with both morality and spirituality. Like the Jews of the Bible, the Igbo people take sin seriously because it defiles the Land, which is seen as disrespect of God in general. Sin, in Igbo culture and religion, is something which affects the wellbeing of the entire community since it has to do with the breach of certain norms of the community. By reason of logic, this is where one can see the relationship between social and religious lives as a useful connection of human beings who live together. In the same stretch of thought, every member of the community reacts against the sinner, who can be severely punished and even be ostracized, depending on the gravity of his or her offence. Sin, therefore, has consequences and the only thing that can bring the sinner back to his people, physically and spiritually, is the sacrifice of purification and atonement for the abominable sin that has been committed. This is the goal and objective of *Ikpu-ala* through the rituals of

*ikpu-ala* and *oriko*. After the abomination has been purified and Christianized in the process of inculturation, it can enrich the Sacramental Reconciliation and Eucharist.

However, it is important to point out, following the analyses of the interviews in the previous chapter six that the dichotomy between religion and morality is foreign to the Igbo, and therefore it should not be allowed to erode the Igbo's sense of religion, which acts as an incentive to good conduct and a deterrent against abhorrent behaviour. The Igbo, says Onyeidu (1977:8), lives in a religious world and carries his/her beliefs and practices to the farm, the market, the village meetings, and even during his/her sleep. Hence, one can correctly say that traditional Igbo religion has a "prophetic mission" because it pervades all aspects of life. Thus, sin, as already pointed out, is an act which affects the whole moral order of things, and since it is a violation of this order, it belongs to the province of religion. The expectation of fatal consequence mysteriously meted out by sacred forces because a taboo is broken or the agonizing pain expected from an offended minor divinity has a religious tone. In the same stretch of mind, a religious idea is involved when common sufferings of a village are attributed to the hostility of a spirit or when one's misfortune is said to have been brought about by a neglected ancestor. Critics of Igbo traditional religion may attribute this kind of confession to fear, but is it not fear of going to hell that persuades Christians to go to confession?

Consequently, the traditional Igbo have been brought up to see sin as having a communal dimension as well as that of individual responsibility. It is a notion that sin goes with punishment that is the basis of confession and reconciliation in Igbo traditional religion and, hence their way of life.

In the Igbo community, all sins whether they are those of omission or commission are recognized and subject to confession. Sin involves either neglecting what the eternal law of God ordained, or doing what the same law prohibited. Both are written in the minds of the Igbo as natural law. St. Paul understood human conscience when he says in his letter to the Romans:

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who

hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them (Rom. 2:12-15 NIV).

In the above passage, St. Paul clearly shows that we are all born with a built-in alarm that alerts us when we do wrong. God holds everyone accountable: "They demonstrate that God's law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell them they are doing right" (Romans 2:15 NLT).

Granted the Igbo has neither a well developed theology of sin as in the western education nor a well written one like that of Saint Augustine, but a study of Igbo religion reveals that the Igbo is a sinner who longs for forgiveness and reconciliation and these come after confession. The traditional Igbo have a keen sense of guilt, sin remorse, repentance, confession, and reconciliation. He knows that whenever he falls short in his relationship with God and other invisible forces that are in action around him, that it is up to him to propitiate them, and to treat them with courtesy and deference (Jordan 1971:126). Hence, we see the whole of Igbo sacrificial system as more or less "evangelical sacrament of forgiveness and deliverance and these are entirely God's and never man's work, as a result, sacrifice in his/her mind becomes an indication and a symbol of repentance and renewal of faith in God" (Jordan 1971).

Inferring from the above discussion, morality is objective and does not depend on ethical relativism or situationism. The merit or demerit of a human action does not depend on where such an action is found, but upon its goodness or badness. In each Igbo mind, as we have pointed out, is the consciousness that every human action must be judged sooner or later. The punishment may come from the corporate community of the living and the dead, the minor divinities, and finally and most important, from the Supreme Being who is the highest judge. It is also in Igbo belief that not even

reincarnation can free a sinner from the offences committed in his/her past life. There is always that belief in nemesis. Thus it is the idea of sin, judgement, and punishment that gave rise to the rite of confession and reconciliation in the Igbo traditional religion. However, one may ask, what is the nature of confession as found in the religious beliefs and practices of the Igbo?

#### **7.4 CONFESSION, ITS NATURE AND PRACTICE IN IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGION**

Confession, according to Chambers 20<sup>th</sup> century dictionary, is defined as acknowledgement of a crime or fault, a statement of religious belief, acknowledgement of sin to a priest, a religious body of belief (Davidson & Schwarz 1984:272). The first and third definitions are more important for our purposes. For the Igbo confession is not carried out as a declaration of faith, rather it is an admission of what one has done. It is a *sine qua non conditio* for forgiveness and reconciliation. It brings more reconciliation than sacrifices. Hence, we can say that the Igbo people anticipated Christ's injunction prior to the advent of Christianity in Igbo land. Matthew, the evangelist puts it aptly when he says: "So then if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering" (Matt. 5:23-24).

Public (horizontal) and private (vertical) confessions are features of Igbo traditional religion. This fact is demonstrated in Basden's Niger Ibos. Thus we see in the "*isa ifi*" ceremony public confession by a woman who committed marital infidelity with men other than her husband (Basden 1938:54-66; Achebe 1965:120; 1966:146). A close study of this rite shows it to be native in origin. With the advent of Christianity, this procedure could not be adopted probably because of the missionaries' failure to understand the Igbo way of life, and again because of their failure to study the meaning and essence of horizontal (public) confessions. The missionaries' quick and fast track conversion by abolition of the traditional symbols made their evangelization tools improper and contrary to the people's culture and religious beliefs. In this way, they

excluded God from the public forum and the result is the double standard in the way of life of the people.

The nature of sin committed determines the mode of its confession whether it would be private or public. Private confession must be made to the *Dibia* who must know exactly what taboo has been broken and quickly suggest remedies to avert the wrath of the gods and ancestors and to prevent the evil or misfortune that has been brought by committing such acts. For the sin of the individual is capable of holding the village to ransom by sending deaths, drought, an epidemic, etc. On the other hand, public confession is more popular than private declaration. The nature of the deity, and kind of person offended, must be taken into account as these determine where and when a confession should be made. Thus we see a very close relationship between the practice of confession in Igbo traditional religion and in the Christian religion.

Confession generally can be addressed to a supreme being, minor divinities, spirits, ancestors, or living beings. It can also be addressed to any member of the community irrespective of age or position who has been injured in mind or body. However, it is important to point out here that declaration of sins committed to the Supreme Being is more or less a private confession in Igbo traditional religion. It is a transaction between the minor with his/her master.

Public confession is common throughout Igbo land. This can be done by an individual offender, a family of offenders, or a whole community. Offence once committed against the death deity, *Ala*, or *Ani*, must be proclaimed publicly when it is grave in nature; they are called *Aru*, an abomination which needs appropriate expiation. Thus it is the idea of sin, guilt, compulsory repentance, and forgiveness that gave rise to confession and reconciliation in Igbo religious beliefs and practices.

## **7.5 THE RITES AND RITUALS OF RECONCILIATION**

It is important to point out that the method adopted here is part of the findings based on the investigations and interviews. One must note also the difficulty involved in obtaining the information as there is so little documented information in this area of

study and because people's opinions vary in the information they give. Thus we shall restrict the discussion to which sins are subject to confession, which by their nature demand expiation and reconciliation, the materials required and their significance, and the procedures to be followed. Having classified these terms in an earlier chapter, we shall deal here with a selected few, in the treatment of which we shall discuss the various aspects mentioned above. A brief definition of the word reconciliation may be of immense help to our understanding of this part of our study. Reconciliation according to the dictionary means to restore or bring back to friendship or union, to bring to agreement, to pacify, or to admit or restore to membership of a church (Davidson & Schwarz 1984:1128; cf Mekenzie 1978:722-723).

The Igbo after committing any offence loses either the friendship of the Supreme Being, *Chukwu*, or of the earth goddess, ancestors, or spirits of the living. He thus becomes afraid of them and keeps away from them. He now becomes aware of the invisible forces operating around him. With the idea that his term of life is short, he feels that it is up to him to propitiate the offended beings and be reconciled to them, and hence we see him act with such a penchant for sacrifice in all its many forms. Through sacrifice, he expresses his mind and intentions to the spirits as cogently and unmistakably as he expresses it through the gift of speech to his fellow men (Jordan 1971:128f). Here the Igbo, unlike the Christian who seeks reconciliation with God and his fellow men out of love, is seen making reconciliation out of fear. Hence sacrifice and reconciliation for him becomes a necessary step towards keeping away adversity and towards propitiating the spirits for some evil committed.

#### **7.5.1 Expiatory Sacrifice – *Ikpu alu/ala***

After some extensive discussions on *alu*, its various types and punishment, we now come to the most important section in this work, namely the removal of the *alu* or abomination. It is only when an expiatory sacrifice has been carried out that one can rightly say that an *alu* has been removed and the reconciliation effected as well.

An *alu* once committed immediately calls for a series of expiatory sacrifices so as not to incur the anger of the gods and ancestors. No *alu* however small is exempted and

hidden is not atoned for. These purificatory rites are a means to get rid of the *alu* so committed and thereby restore the relationship between the Supreme Being, Chukwu, the spirits, and the ancestors. Arinze writing on the importance of expiatory sacrifice has this to say: the Ibo man believes that when he sins, he makes the higher powers frown. He wishes to regain the favour of the higher powers (Arinze 1970:34). By means of expiatory sacrifice he also regains communication with the members of his community.

According to Jordan, in his book (1949:118), Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria once wrote: “to the Ibo, sacrifice was a necessary step towards keeping away adversity and towards propitiating the spirits for some evil committed”. It follows therefore that all rites of purification are attempts to redress the evil that has been done and get the sinner reconciled with the deities and the community. They are external manifestations of the penitent’s desire for reconciliation.

So far, one can establish from the interviews with various people and groups that the pollution of the land caused by committing an *alu* is only removed by means of expiatory sacrifice. However, it is also clear that sometimes an individual or community may, as a result of some calamity or disaster, offer an expiatory sacrifice to the gods. This they do on the presumption that the adversity must have been a result of a hidden *alu* committed by either the previous generation of ancestors or the living members of the clan.

### **7.5.2. The Ministers of Expiation**

In Umuobom, the main person responsible for the removal of abomination is the Nri priest. Other ministers may also be involved. Their roles are as follows:

- a) The priest of *Ala*: this is the priest charged with worship of the Earth goddess. He is sometimes called *eze-alusi* and his main duty includes interceding for the people whenever there is any abomination committed by either an individual or the community. The earth spirit has her own separate priests, wrote Ugwu (1978:18-19), who minister to her villages. It is understandable that the priest of

*Ala* has responsible functions in his community. It is *eze-alusi's* duty to disclose abominable actions of his subjects and also demand things required to carry out expiatory sacrifice.

- b) The *Dibia-afa'*: The *dibia-afa* or diviner is the person who tells fortune and is consulted before any sacrifices (Arinze 1970:63). It is his duty to consult the spirits and find out their will and directions regarding a sacrifice and also the appropriate victim to be used for the sacrifice.
- c) The Nri Priest: It is generally the prerogative of Nri priests to perform the *ikpu ala* ceremony. Most serious violation of taboos, for example *Igbu ochu* (murder), *ikwu-udo*, (suicide), *imu ejima* (giving birth to twins) and a host of others, must be expiated by the help of the Nri priest. They are believed to be the oldest of all traditional priesthoods. They are specially set apart for performing the expiatory sacrifice necessary for the removal of an abomination (*ikpu aru*) (Ogbalu 1963:63). This type of sacrifice is not done by the *Eze Alusi* or by a family priest (Arinze 1970:74-75). Instead, they work in conjunction with the *dibia* who either diagnoses the cause of the illness or disaster or he recommends the items for the sacrifice. However, whereas in some parts of Igbo land, the Nri priests have the duty to carry out the ceremony of *Ikpu-ala*, in other communities, other priests other than the Nri priests can offer expiatory sacrifice.

### 7.5.3 The Requirements

There are items are considered important for any meaningful expiatory sacrifices. These include the following: rams, sheep, goats, fowl, chickens, or even human beings. Others are eggs, yams, *omu-nkwu* (tender palm frond), kola nuts, and *nzu*. However, all of these are not used in expiating one *alu*. Rather, two or more of these may be required depending on the gravity of the offence committed. The use of some these items are symbolic. For example, the *omu-nkwu* symbolizes the sacredness of the place, since a deity is believed to be present there. Sometimes the animal for the sacrifice is tied with an *omu* or the person who committed the *aru* may be touched with it. The Staff of office of the Nri priest has an *omu* tied around it. It is with this staff that

he goes around the compound of the offender with the following or similar incantation, *aru pua*, "abomination depart".

The *nzu'* (traditional chalk) and the *oji* (kola nut) are two important symbolic items used for sacrifices. Both symbolize goodwill, purity, and sacredness. Kola is a symbol of love, unity, peace, and sacredness. It is during the breaking of the kola nut that the worshipper invites the deities and ancestors to come and intercede for the offender who wishes to reconcile with them and his people. With this, a friendly relationship is maintained such that when the *alu* is removed, the reconciliation with the offended family or community is demonstrated by the sharing of kola nut.

The kola nut is therefore one of the items used to appease and cleanse the defiled earth and also to restore the broken relationship due to the *alu* committed against the community. Parrinder (1968:88) put it aptly when he says: the kola nut is a sign of friendship, if it split into two and a part handed to a friend, that binds him in a union, "we have eaten kola together".

The other important item used in the expiatory sacrifice is the blood of the animal and it is highly valuable. Here the blood, which the Igbo regard as life, is given to the deity in exchange for the culprit's own life which he could have used to pay for the *alu* he committed. The blood is normally poured on the earth for the gods to drink. Sometimes, it is poured onto sticks like *ogirisi* trees, representing the gods. Consequently, Jordan (1949:119) has this to say: if the sacrifice was for the removal of sin, it was always accompanied by the shedding of blood. The blood represented life and was therefore of special value to the spirits. The carcass could be eaten or thrown away as valueless as far as the spirits were concerned. The blood was poured on various objects (images) of the *alusi* in which the spirits were presumed to dwell, and they were then regarded as placated. After such purificatory or expiatory sacrifice, the people are assured that the blood has become a sure and effective ransom since the pollution has been removed. The blood of animals was used in most cases but sometimes in some places and in the olden days, human beings were used for the sacrifice of atonement.

Igbo traditional religion regarded human sacrifice as the highest and most important form of sacrifice to a deity. It was the final appeal which they could not exceed. According to Jordan (1949), from time to time humans were offered as propitiation to angry gods, but in general human sacrifice was unusual and was reserved for very special occasions such as warding off of an epidemic or widespread disaster. It was done either to satisfy the demand of a divinity for a human victim so that the whole town might not perish or because it was necessary to give a respected reigning Chief and/or a renowned dead hero some retinue to accompany him to the land of his forefathers.

Basden (1966:73) also commented on this issue when he said: it was only when the offering of animals failed to bring about a cessation of the trouble that the people felt that the only course left to them was to offer a human being. This means that when an extreme abomination had been committed against the land, a human victim was chosen as a "scape-goat" to remove or drive out the abomination or great evil from the community. By so doing, the polluted land was purified and the offended spirits of the land were pacified.

Generally, the human being to be used for the expiratory sacrifice was not from the community, but from a neighbouring town or village. According to Basden (1966:23), such a victim had to be sought from outside; it was a taboo to make use of a fellow villager. Normally it was a slave purchased from another town. Those kidnapped during the inter-tribal wars may also be used, and where there was no available victim, some people may be delegated to hunt for fellow human beings in a neighbouring town to be used as a scape-goat for the sacrifice.

The Igbo sacrificed human beings on rare occasions and the victim was never eaten. The confirmation of this is given by Jordan when he writes: generally a human being was not sacrificed except for very serious reason such as removing a plague or epidemic, e.g., the 1918 influenza (Jordan 1947).

However, after the advent of Christianity and the abolition of slavery in Igbo land, animals like ram, goat, sheep, etc. were used as substitutes for human beings. This means that even the nagging spirits which in the olden days were used to demanding a

human victim are now forced, except in a few remote areas, to accept the lower animals for their sacrifices irrespective of the type of abomination or disaster.

#### **7.5.4 The Ritual Procedure**

So far, we have seen both the ministers and the requirements for the expiatory sacrifice. Let us now consider the procedure to be followed in order to remove the pollution and effect the reconciliation.

The ritual procedure takes different forms depending on the locality or on the nature of the *aru*. There is the scape-goat type whereby the offender makes a public confession of his/her abomination and heaps it on the animal to be sacrificed. The offender then drags the animal about the town with great travail. His whole body is smeared with ashes as a visible sign of repentance. After going around the town, the culprit hands over the animal to the Nri priest who kills it before a shrine.

As the blood of the animal gushes out, the evil committed by the culprit is thought to come out with the blood and soaked into the earth. The Nri priest takes a greater part of the sacrificed animal, and a few participants may also, but the culprit is never allowed to eat any of it. In some cases, the meat is not eaten by anyone, but is burnt to ashes. After this expiatory sacrifice, the offender is said to have been reconciled with the earth goddess and to regain full association with the community.

There are also instances whereby the animal scape-goat is left alive after the transference of the offender's sin to it and after the animal had been dragged around the town. The animal is then designated with a mark and allowed to roam about in the community. It is now dedicated to the gods. Whoever kills it or inflicts injury on it commits an abomination which must undergo its own expiatory rites. Commenting on this issue, Shorter (1973:151) writes: in this case, the animal victim used in sacrifice desacralised the sin or calamity being imputed to the victim. The evil state of the sacrifice thus passes unto the victim not the sacred state of the victim into the sacrifice. This is symbolized in some way by laying hands on the victim who is then immolated or driven out into the wilderness with the sins of the sacrifice upon it.

Similarly, where the victim is a human being, he/she becomes the scape-goat who takes away the sins not only of the individual but also of the community. Again, human sacrifice is only used as a last resort when the community is believed to have committed an abomination or when there is an epidemic or other calamity plaguing the community. In this sacrifice of a human scape-goat, as well as that of the animal, the victim is substituted for the community.

In the case where a human victim is used, the whole community gathered at the place of the sacrifice on the appointed day. The victim is tied hand and foot and fastened to the sacred trees in the community shrine. The leader of the community was the first to transfer his own sin to the victim by confessing his sins and giving a blow to the victim. It was believed that by this beating the sin was transferred; the other members of the community did likewise. After this, the victim was unfastened and dragged around the town with a rope. The people followed behind insulting, spitting, and torturing the victim to death. If the victim died of the torture, his body was either thrown into the evil forest (*ajo-ofia*) or tied to a tree in the *ajo-ofia*, where it was left to decay.

In certain communities, the human scape-goat was left alive but was dedicated to the shrine. He thereby becomes an *osu* and lost all the rights of a free citizen. Where the victim was tortured to death, it was believed that his death removed the suffering of the community by cleansing it of its sins. Arinze (1970:93) commenting on this said, "The victim is thus cleansed, liberated, and freed." The sheep is killed in place of the malefactor who would surely die if he did not call the Nri priest to perform this rite. When the sheep is sacrificed, he regards himself as cleansed and the community once more associates with him.

In a minor case where an individual commits an *aru*, the *dibia-afa* is consulted to find out whether the offence was truly an *aru* and to recommend, if so, the necessary items for the expiatory sacrifice. The offender is expected to gather these items which may include an *nzu* (white chalk), kola nuts, some eggs, and a sizable ram or he-goat as the case may be. If he has no money for these, he may be forced to borrow even from his reluctant relatives.

When these items are gathered, the Nri priest is invited to perform the sacrifice. On the fixed day, the Nri priest, the elders of the community where the pollution took place, as well as the person who committed the *aru*, gather together in front of the house of the offender. Meanwhile, the compound is fenced with an *omu* so as to demarcate the area which is to be cleansed. The sacrifice takes place without any image burnt on the bare earth since the offering is to the earth goddess against whom the *aru* was committed.

The Nri priest starts with the offering of the kola nut. In his prayers, he calls on the benign mother earth to pardon the offence of the culprit and also not to punish the community because of the *aru* committed by one person. The animal for the sacrifice is killed and the blood offered to the earth goddess by pouring it on the earth. It is then dissected and the inner parts of it are buried in the ground. The culprit is told when to confess his offence, mentioning all the circumstances and his goodwill to live in harmony with his people. The offender's name is also mentioned. When he has finished, the Nri priest takes over. He walks round the compound using various incantations like *aru pua* – “abomination please depart”; or “*Ala* I seek to appease your wrath. Do not punish many for the sins of one...” After the absolution has been pronounced, the assembled folk declare that they are satisfied. Now that the sacrifice is over, those who participated in it leave for their various homes while the Nri priest collects the sacrificed animal and other items including the “stole fee” and departs. This “stole fee” is normally a small amount since the Nri priests do not demand much for performing expiatory sacrifices.

The researcher does not intend to mention all the procedures for the different abominations, but the above indicate how the Igbo meticulously undertake the expiation of every *aru* committed in the community. In addition, here is a clear case of perception. Turika (2007) was apt to comment while distinguishing African traditional religious worldview from the Christian worldview stated clearly that definitions of concepts in African worldview are spectral rather than being reduced to a thin veneer as in western worldview. Acts of the Creator and the humans can be integrated by an act of a ritual.

The old and the new can be accommodated without assuming any conflict. All of these go to prove the penitent's willingness to free him/herself of pollution and reconcile with the offended spirits, ancestors, and the community. In other words, the ritual of purification or cleansing involves horizontal and vertical approaches.

It appears that in all these sacrifices to remove abomination, the following features stand out clearly:

- a) There is always a confession of the *aru* committed as well as the expression of the intention not to commit such again.
- b) The items for the sacrifice are always symbolic.
- c) In cases which involve the use of eggs, the breaking of the egg signifies the removal of the anger caused by the offence committed.
- d) Since blood is life for the Igbo, most expiatory sacrifices involve the use of animals. The animal is normally killed and the blood stands for the exchange – the dying in the place of the culprit.
- e) In some of the expiatory sacrifices, there is a communal meal where the spirits, the ancestors, and the living take part and intermingled. The spirits and the ancestors are the first to be fed by the priest who threw some part of the kola nut and food to them.

In conclusion, the Igbo hold that when the expiatory sacrifice has been well performed and the meal is over, the *aru* is said to have been removed and the erstwhile wrongdoer is regarded as cleansed and any ensuing death is given another interpretation (Arinze 1970:35).

#### **7.5.5 The Effects of Expiatory Sacrifices**

The above considerations of ritual and expiatory sacrifices shed light on the meaning and practice of *ikpu-ala* in Igbo land. In this section, we shall concern ourselves with the consequences of the expiation and also with the evil repercussions if one fails to perform the sacrifice, and their relationship with the physical suffering and disaster that befalls a community.

Although it has been mentioned sparingly in previous chapters, the primary purpose of every expiatory sacrifice is to regain the friendship existing between the living and the dead, which was lost as a result of an *aru* committed by any member of the community. According to Osuji (1977:54), reconciliation with the deities, ancestors, and our neighbours is a sign of friendship, harmony, and peace. This means that there is always an atmosphere of peace and order in a community where all observed the taboos and customs of the land. But once any member of the clan commits an *aru*, social interaction ceases. The culprit is avoided as much as possible. In some places, he/she is regarded as unclean and an outcast. He/She is forbidden to eat and drink with other members of the clan. This is because it is believed that any person who shares a meal with the culprit incurs the same guilt and this may result in his/her death.

However, as soon as the expiatory sacrifices take place, the offender is reconciled with the members of the community. He is then allowed to communicate freely, to eat and drink freely, and to take part in any of their meetings. He also qualifies to offer other thanksgiving and petition sacrifices to the ancestors. Arinze (1970:35) holds that to hide one's crime or to refuse to sacrifice is to lead a dangerous life, to walk a tightrope, to play with fire. Some young people who died prematurely were later found out to have committed an unexpiated crime which they thought they could hide and get away with. For the Igbo, no evil goes unpunished even if secretly committed. In other words, there is necessity to confess one's sins and have them expiated during one's lifetime. If one who committed an *aru* dies before the expiatory sacrifice, his corpse is thrown into the *ajo ofia* (evil forest) while his relatives undertake to offer the expiatory sacrifice lest they be implicated in the impending calamity.

It is in line with the views of the Igbo to associate physical suffering and calamities with an *aru* committed earlier either by the sufferer or his relatives. Ilogu (1974:154) shares the same opinion when he writes: "the Ibos believe that such suffering and pain or abnormalities in nature like a child born blind, the lame, the dumb and the deaf, chronic diseases or death by drowning – that all these forms of suffering proceed from divinities as punishment for crimes (*aru*) committed either by the person suffering them

or by his parents or by someone in the lineage”. People did not just die without reason. Invariably they died because they had done something wrong and therefore had incurred the anger of the gods. Hence the Igbo insist on the sacrifice of expiation in order to atone for the evil that has been done and save the community from the visitation of untold calamities consequent on the defilement of the land.

It is also interesting that sometimes the *dibia-afa* attributes an inexplicable cause of an illness to the spirits whom, according to him, demanded propitiatory sacrifices. If it happens that the offender died, purificatory sacrifice is also made in order to dissociate the living from the deceased’s blemishness and maintain a good relationship with the ancestors and the spirit world. Summarizing this section, we can say that the primary aim of expiatory sacrifice is to re-establish the harmony destroyed by individual’s or community’s breach of the *aru*.

Jordan (1974:119) observed that Father Shanahan made three points of great importance about sacrifices:

1. The Igbo felt the need of it on account of evil or sin or impending disaster;
2. It was offered by someone especially set apart for that work;
3. After the sacrifice has been offered, the people generally showed their belief in its reconciliatory effects by inviting the spirits to join them in a common feast.

In other words, the Igbo believe that when the pollution is removed thus, harmony is immediately achieved between the erstwhile offender and the supernatural powers and also peace is established in the community. It is the attempt to live at peace with the supernatural powers that sustain his existence that generally causes the Igbo to live according to the prescribed norms (*omenala*) of the community. The observance of these norms, the researcher discovered, is characterized by fear. This consists of fear of the spirits and of the punishment of the earth goddess for committing an *aru*, and also fear of the strictness of the community.

In the wake of this thought, there is the concept of reward and punishment attached to the observance of the norms. All of these incline the Igbo to avoid *aru* as much as

they could. They are aware that sin is not condoned, but is condemned outright with a shake of the head because it diminishes human nature and endangers the society (Onyeidu: 1970:8). As we have seen, the practice of confession whether private or public is part and parcel of Igbo religious practices, with great emphasis on both horizontal and vertical levels. Confession is believed to be necessary for the removal of the *aru* committed by the individual offender and the community at large.

The Igbo attribute human suffering to the anger of the gods against humanity for an offence which must have been committed and not atoned for. Sometimes a whole village offers sacrifice to the gods to appease them for an inexplicable misfortune such as meager harvest, drought or excessive rain, and untimely or premature deaths. Actually for the Igbo, people die as a result of the *aru* committed by them or by any member of the clan or by the clan itself. This means that they believe that physical sickness and death have individual and social dimensions.

This same sociological dimension of *aru* was seen from the research and interviews of the respondents during field work. The ancestors are also included in this sociological consideration since the “Ibos believe that their lives are profoundly influenced by their ancestors, and this belief has far reaching sociological consequences. Any breach from custom, for example, is likely to incur the displeasure and vengeance of the ancestors. The ancestors, under the presidency of *Ala*, the Earth Goddess, are “the guardian of morality and the owners of the soil” (Meek 1937:61; Ugwu 1978:24-25). In the same vein, morality of the Igbos also has an eschatological dimension. In this case, the living has the hope of joining their ancestors to enjoy the better world of the spirits after they had lived successful good lives through the observances of *Omenala* (Ugwu 1978:248).

The traditional concept of *aru* has its own shortcomings. A lot of things done to the Igbo’s discredit were as a result of their time-honoured tradition (*Omenala*). They were merely following their tradition without anyone doing any kind of critique or effort to update the moral codes. These customs had existed for so long, and the generation to which it was handed had no option other than to obey, especially since it was couched in religious sanctions, myths, and fables. As a result, no generation would like the

tradition handed down to it to be destroyed, since it is the *omenala* that has kept the society together.

Furthermore, some of these customs are not only obnoxious but a total violation of human rights, for example, the killing of twins and the denial of ground burial of those who died as a result of some illnesses, such as dropsy, *ito afo*, and small pox. Osuji (1977), in a mockery of the Igbo customs writes: "In Igbo society irrational animals are guilty of abomination when they misbehave, and have to pay with their lives. For example a cock crowing in the night, is guilty of abomination and has to be killed. It also extends to innocent people and makes them suffer for what they are not responsible for. For example, a child cutting the upper tooth first is guilty of abomination". In other cases human beings were to be used as expiatory sacrifices to gods, and some had to be consecrated to a god just for ritual purposes. Worse still, some of these victims were kidnapped, were slaves or captives taken in tribal wars and communal disputes, and they had no chance of defending themselves. Their rights as human beings were violated and they were executed as if they are not human beings.

It is also clear that the punishments meted out those who committed an abomination were in some cases extremely severe. For example, in cases of adultery, the offender is always the woman, and is not only shamed and disgraced, but she is forced to confess publicly her adultery without mentioning the name of the man involved except when she is pregnant. The personal disgrace, humiliation, and shame not only violates personal rights but also makes the elders position themselves as part of the retributive justice demanded for the offence committed against the Earth goddess or the ancestors. The Igbo see capital punishment and strict penalties as a means of ridding the society of evil men and women and as a way of meeting the demands of *Chukwu's* (Supreme Being) law (Osuji 1977).

Relatedly, the Igbo sense of justice is summarized in the proverb: *Egbe bere ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebena nku kwaa ya* (let the kite perch and let the eagle perch also, whichever refuses the other to perch, let its wings break off). This leaves much to be desired. It resembles the Mosaic "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth", and when

applied arbitrarily, one may die for an offence committed inadvertently. It also demands that the offender pay with his/her own blood, or present another victim in his/her stead (Osuji 1977:47). All these atrocities are being done under the umbrella of *imejuputa omenala*, fulfilling the demands of justice.

The early missionaries had a lot of these problems to solve during their first encounter with the Igbo people. The early missionaries, writes Onyeidu (1970:12), did a great work in Africa by saving the lives of mothers and children who were left to die in the bad bush because they had committed an abomination to the *Ala/Ani* because the women had given birth to twins or to disabled children.

In the same stretch of thought, the coming of Christianity and Western Culture caused most of the customs as well as some of the taboos and abominations to undergo some changes or lose their binding force. With advancements in the use of medicine, some of the diseases formerly regarded as abomination, for instance, leprosy, small pox, etc., can now be cured. Twins are now regarded as God-given gifts and miracles of God while those who cut the upper teeth first no longer deserve death.

There have also been many social and political changes which have affected Igbo social life. People now migrate from the villages where customs are cherished to cities with a different social structure. In these cities, the society became pluralistic and materialism and individualism became the new code of conduct. The individual who has left his village finds himself cut off from the traditional solidarity of his clan. He is separated from the corporate morality which he used to share with the members of his *umunna*. With these great changes, new problems have been created. These include divorce, rape, abortion, armed robbery, bribery, and corruption in all its forms and ramifications. Prostitution which is abhorred and which, according to written documents, was unknown to the Igbos before the advent of the modern way of life is now practiced by a few Igbo female folk (Ugwu 1978:209). These and other societal evils prevalent in modern society were not as pronounced in the traditional society.

## **7.6 THE EFFECTS OF RECONCILIATION ON THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COMMUNITY**

Part of what we discovered in the course of this research is the emphasis the respondents placed on the social dimension of sin, and so far we have been dealing with its effects and consequences. Ogu (1983), an eminent theologian, once wrote that offence in Igboland temporarily destroys the ideal relationship between the living, the dead kin, and *A/la*. It is on account of this that punishments and suffering are inflicted on both the culprit and the entire community.

However, with reconciliation the ontological balance that was upset by the offence is restored and the wrath of the gods is avoided. In the same vein, reconciliation keeps interpersonal relationships and the relationship of the group to their supernatural masters intact. The individual regains his social status by liberating himself from alienation with the community. This is ceremonially demonstrated by the sharing of food which normally concludes reconciliatory rites.

On the other hand, reconciliation cancels the punishment which would have befallen the culprit, or his descendants, or the entire community, due to his offence. For example, reconciliation of a woman guilty of adultery will save the life of her husband and baby. In the case of adultery committed on a farm, the good harvest of the community is ensured after reconciliation. The woman would regain all her matrimonial rights which were denied on account of her offence. The child born of adultery may be legitimized after reconciliation. In cases of lies and false witnessing, confession and reconciliation restore mutual trust and confidence between the parties concerned.

The punishments meted for culprits and the rigorous process of reconciliation serve as deterrents to future offenders. In fact, the punishments are medicinal in character. No sensible Igbo man or woman, who had undergone the process of *ikpu-ala* before, would want to experience it a second time. Reconciliation within *ikpu-ala* in Igbo land is therefore very significant in the morality of the people. It has much to contribute towards a better understanding of the sacrament of reconciliation in the Church.

## **7.7 SIN AND RECONCILIATION IN THE CHURCH**

No human being can by himself and of himself define what sin is, precisely because he is in sin, all his talk about sin is basically a sinful covering up... revelation is needed from God in order to show man what sin is (Heggen 1967:50)

The above quotation is trying to expose the difficulties involved in the attempt to define sin. In Greek understanding, the word sin, has lurid, titillating, and tempting overtones. It suggests sensuality, and cultural repressions thinly coated with pictures of Adam and Eve and a superbly phallic serpent (Cox 1969:39). To understand what sin means, I shall take recourse to the concept of sin in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

### **7.7.1 Concept of Sin in Old Testament**

The Old Testament can be aptly described as the history of man's persistent efforts to respond to God's invitation of love and friendship. Here God is presented as loving father who is ever near to his children. Unfortunately, man did not respond positively to God's love. This non-acceptance of God's love is viewed from many angles. In his own contribution Harvey Cox (1969:37) observed thus:

Man has done things he ought not to have done, but even more importantly he has not done those things he ought to have done. He has refused to live up to the full stature of his manhood, and has abdicated his crucial place in the scheme of things. This is what the biblical tradition has called sin.

A critical study of the Old Testament shows that sin is discussed most often in reference to the covenant between God and Israel (Is. 1:2-3; Hos. 7:13; Jer. 3:25). However, the Israelites had various words that express their understanding of sin. The key, repeatedly interchangeable, terms which expressed their concept of sin included:

חַטָּאת (*Hatta't*), עֲוֹן (*'awon*), and פְּשָׁע (*peshah*) (Von Rad 1962:263). The analysis of each of these terms will give us a clearer understanding of the concept of sin in the Old Testament.

Etymologically, *hatta't* means “missing the mark”. Its verb ‘*hata*’ means missing, for instance a target (Judges 20:16) or a way (Proverbs 3:36; 19:2). In its transferred sense, it signifies all kinds of failures which occur in the relationships of men with one another, as exemplified in Gen. 4:22; Judges 11:27; Is. 24:12; 2Kings 18:14. However, it is used first and foremost for all human failures against God (Von Rad 1962).

Baver (1970:50) gives a wider concept of *hata* by maintaining that it means, “to miss a goal, to blunder, commit a moral error”. He also applied it to the sin which is committed externally and which is apprehensible and visible to others. In this context, a sinner is one who has fallen short of what he is expected to do, but with particular reference to the forms of the covenant (Jer. 3:25).

‘*Awon*, on the other hand, connotes “to be distorted”, “to act perversely”, or “to go astray”. It can also mean trespass or sin and always involves the guilty party’s consciousness (Von Rad 1962:263). It describes more the state of the sinner which has its roots in the evil disposition of the heart, a state of being in the wrong track and under the yoke of sin and its consequences (Baver 1970).

*Pesha* is a political term which means revolt or rebellion. This can be testified in 1 Kings 12:19 and 2 Kings 8:20. The key word used to express sin in the Old Testament seems to be *pesha* because it expresses most strongly the complex reality of sin, conceived as a rupture with God. Von Rad (1963:263) affirms this fact and regards *pasha* as unquestionably the gravest word for sin, especially upon the lips of the prophets. In the religious sense, *pasha* as a designation for sin usually emphasizes the aspect of rebellion, opposition to God (Baver 1970).

It is not, therefore, surprising that the prophets spoke of sin in relation to breaking the terms of the covenant between God and Israel. God chose Israel and sealed this commitment to them with a covenant. Thus any act of pride or disobedience on the part of Israel was considered a rupture of this covenant. This is, therefore, the constitutive element of the real tragedy of sin, as it revealed ingratitude to the God of so many mercies and covenants. To buttress this concept of sin as rebellion, B. Onwumere

(1982:13-14) says: sin is basically a rebellion against God; the basic rebellion manifests itself through various internal and external attitudes (Jeremiah: 3:19-20).

Often times this rebellion is analogous to adultery, since the covenant had established a marriage type of relationship between God and Israel. The marriage of Hosea perforce bears moving witness to this reality of sin as rebellion (Bauer 1970:851Com). The first three chapters of the book of Hosea relates how the prophet, at the command of the Lord, takes a wife, who proves unfaithful, and who is invited to return to Yahweh her husband (Ps. 45:21; Ezek. 16; Is. 5; 54:5ff). God loves his people as a wife, with a perfect and boundless love. Every time she is unfaithful and separates herself from him, he follows her to convert her ways and return home. It is against this background that the divine jealousy is to be understood (Baver 1970:851).

In Israel, the concept of sin is not only seen in relation to a breach of divine law or unwritten laws; it is also located in diverse spheres like political life (Joshua 8), the family, as in breach of the regulations concerning sexual matters (Deut. 27:20ff; Von Rad 1962:264). As we can see, the Israelites like the Igbo people, conceived sin as a social issue. Through ties of blood and common lot the individual was regarded as being so deeply embedded in the community. Consequently, an offence on the part of any individual was not just a private matter affecting only himself and his own relationship to God. But whenever there had been a grave offence against the divine law, what loomed largest was the incrimination which the community experienced in consequence. Comparable to the Igbo, the whole community had a vital interest in the restoration of order. Thus sin in the O.T. can be summarized as a voluntary alienation from God and hence a disruption and destruction of the Divine order.

### **7.7.2 Sin in the New Testament**

Like the O.T., the New Testament often speaks of sin as unbelief which is manifested in not allowing oneself to be helped or loved. It is a refusal to entrust oneself to God who reveals himself in Jesus. It is disobedience to God (Luke 15:21) and shamelessness (Matt 7:23; 13:41). Consequently, unbelief in this context means

rebellion, revolt against him who manifests himself as the Lord of my life (Heggen 1967:63).

The gospels often describe sin as basically the sin of the unbelieving Jews. This consisted in the voluntary self-satisfied refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah. The drama between Jesus and the Pharisees over the cure of the man who was born blind is a typical example of how the N.T. conceives sin (John 9:1ff). Jesus accused them of pretending to see while they are blind. Hence, they have refused to accept the Truth. He says: "if you were blind, you would have no guilt, but now that you say, 'We see', your guilt remains" (John 9:41). In this context, sin can be said to mean alienation from Truth.

The synoptic regarded sin as something even stronger than bondage under the devil. Baver calls it enslavement to Satan. The sinner is a son of Satan: you are of your father, the devil (John 8:44). In every sin the sinner manifests the works of the devil (1 Jn 3:8-11). In another place, Jesus gives the conditions which make man's action sinful. It must come from within the person concerned. Thus personal freedom and choice are necessary before the action can be considered morally good or evil. Hence Jesus said: "for from the heart come evil intentions: murder, adultery, fornication, theft, perjury slander. These are the things that make a man unclean..." (Matt 15:19-20).

The gospel of John considers sin as a refusal to accept Christ as God's revelation (Jn 16:9). Perhaps this view caused (B. Haring 1974:55) to describe sin as "alienation from the history of Salvation and from the created Universe, which sin rejects the voice of the created universe as it longs for redemption".

St. Paul in the epistle to the Romans sees sin as the refusal of men to acknowledge and honour God, whose greatness and work can be perceived through natural things (Rom 1:18-20). In the N.T., mention is made of sins which are forgivable (Matt 12:31-32) and those that lead unto death (1 John 15:16). In the first context, Jesus himself said: "every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever says a word against the Son of man will be forgiven but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come" (Matt 12:31-32; Heb 6:4-6; 10:26-29). Here Jesus was referring to

a deliberate closing of the eyes and a hardening of the heart to the ultimate advances of God through the miraculous intervention of the Spirit.

John the evangelist was the person who spoke about the sin that lead unto death. Hence we read: "... for there is a sin that leads to death. Every kind of wrongdoing is sin, but not all sin is deadly" (1 John 5:16-17). Perhaps the context referred to as deadly sin is the conscious rejection of Christ in whom alone there is life. This classification of sin could be the basis for classifying sin in the Church as mortal and venial sins. Mortal sin is considered as a decision at the centre of the person. It is a break with the vital orientation to salvation, gambling away of the life of grace. Peschke (1979:231) says, we commit a mortal sin when we decide to involve ourselves to a way of life that contradicts God's will and which is usually the case if we transgress God's law in the important matter.

Venial sin, on the other hand, is committed when we are merely negligent in the fulfillment on God's will, which is the case under these conditions (Peschke 1979:232). If we transgress God's law in unimportant matters or in important matters but with imperfect knowledge or consent of the will. B. Haring says this could be considered as venial sin (Haring 1974:13). Mortal sin, he argues, banishes sanctifying grace from the soul, while venial sin reduces God's grace in us. However, venial sin can be reconciled either through the sacrament of reconciliation or receiving the Eucharist. Unlike mortal sin, venial sin allows charity to live even though it wounds it. It is reparable from a source of healing within the person (Nwagbala 2002:304). Accounting for this difference, Nwagbala 2002:304) quoting St. Thomas Aquinas writes:

Now the difference between venial and mortal sin is consequent upon the diversity of that lack of order which constitutes the nature of sin. For lack of order is twofold, one that destroys the principle of order and another which without destroying the principle of order causes lack of order in the things which follow the principle.... In practical

matters, he who by sinning turns away from his end, if we consider, the nature of this sin, falls irreparably, and therefore is said to sin mortally and to deserve eternal punishment. But when a man sins without turning away from God, by the very nature of his sin his disorder can be repaired, because the principle of the order is not destroyed, and therefore he is said to sin venially, because namely, he does not sin so as to deserve to be punished eternally.

In general, the teaching of the early Church has always distinguished between grave offences against God, the Church community, and smaller faults. They described idolatry, apostasy, murder, abortion, and publicly known adulterous relationship as crimes, grave sins, or capital sins, not so much because of the degree of personal guilt, but rather because they cause scandal and serious injury to the Church. So mortal sin is viewed as one's deep personal transgression, a profound choice of selfishness, or as many theologians would say, a fundamental option for evil. It is a deliberate, a willful and with full knowledge, turning away from God. For Peschke (2001:300), mortal sin is a moral decision which is so intensive that it gives a wrong orientation to a man's entire life. It is the adoption of a spurious, perverted blueprint of a person's life.

Both mortal and venial sins have a dual nature of punishment because they incur both guilt for the sin, yielding eternal punishment, and temporal punishment for the sin. Both of these stem from a distortion of our love for God and for fellow human beings. Thus bringing inevitably a gap and thwarting of our relationship with God that severs us from the community of the Body of Christ, the Church. Pope John Paul II (1984:26) repeats the same teaching when he wrote: "When a person knowingly and willingly, for whatever reason chooses something gravely disordered ..., the person turns away from God and loses charity".

Thus the Catholic doctrine sees sin as being twofold: sin is, at once, any evil or immoral action which infracts God's law and the inevitable consequences of committing

the sinful action. Hence, sin can and does alienate a person both from God and the community. Understood as such, forgiveness and reconciliation are urgently needed to atone and expiate our iniquity. The importance of reconciliation in this case is that it is seen as an act of God's mercy and addresses the guilt and eternal punishment for sin. However, the question that comes to mind is how does sin affect interpersonal relationships? This brings us to the issue of the social dimension of sin and therefore we shall take up the issue of reconciliation in the Church, its similarities and differences with *ikpu-ala* in Igbo society.

## **7.8 THE CHURCH AND THE MAGISTERIUM**

The Church from early times, from Jesus down through the apostles to the present age, has always stated clearly the effects of sin on individuals and the society. It is true that every sin that an individual commits is in a certain sense personal. He makes up his mind, often for his own selfish motive, to go contrary to God's law. He is answerable for this sin before God. However, over and above this, there are the social effects of sin. This means the effects which a person's sins may have on his neighbor and on society at large. *A Catechism of Christian Doctrine* teaches that one must always bear in mind that one's actions affect one's neighbours in one way or another, for good or evil. This means that these actions do harm to our neighbours when they are direct or indirect offences against them. Neighbours by definition, could include individuals, families, society, a whole village or ethnic group or race or religion, et cetera.

Another integral component of the Catechism clearly reveals the joy and demands of the way of Christ which is a "catechesis of sin". This is because unless man acknowledges that he is a sinner he cannot know the truth about himself, which is a condition for acting justly (John Paul 1997 para. 1697; Ragazzi 2004).

Limiting the scope of our research in the light of both recent pronouncements by the Magisterium and selected passages from theological works, it suffices to say that the Church teaches, if a person wants to go to Confession to be reconciled with God and his neighbours, it is not enough to kneel down and count one's sins and go to the priest

and confess them. One must also carefully examine oneself to see how one has offended one's neighbor and decide what measures to take to make a lasting peace. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in order to obtain God's forgiveness for the offence one has committed against one's neighbour, one must seek first of all to get reconciled to the offended neighbour. For Jesus himself gave the rule when he said:

...if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first and then come back and present your offering (Matt. 5:23-24).

In this connection, Ezeanya (1998:156), quoting Rev. David Kinght, has this to say:

... our sins, our shortfalls, cry out not only for forgiveness from God but for reconciliation among ourselves. Sin doesn't just create a need in the individuals for forgiveness; sin creates a need in the body of Christ itself, in the Church as a whole, for reconciliation and a restoration of relationships. It is not just a matter of restoring the sinner to God's friendship, but of restoring the wholeness of the Body of Christ. Wounds have to be healed, lines of communication repaired, confidence re-established, bonds of understanding and love strengthened... What we have taken away from the Body by our sin, we have to restore to the Body through our repentance – and through the expression of that repentance to the community of believers.

In the same train of thought, His Grace S.N. Ezeanya pinpoints the dangers of any individual (vertical) sins, but also brings to the fore the communal (horizontal) aspect of confession for an effective expiation of sin. Consequently, he highlighted evil attitudes and unchristian practices such as discrimination, and oppression based on colour of

skin, religion, language, and the like, as was seen in societies in the developed world in America, Europe, Australia, and other places. However, it is important to note that discrimination is not limited to America and the Western world. African countries are also guilty of discrimination. Igbo society discriminated against the *Osu* before the advent of Christianity. In Nigeria, discrimination based on ethnic origins has become so unbearable a burden, hindering the country politically, economically, socially, and ultimately technologically, that it is endangering the survival as a nation. Such examples abound everywhere in the continent of Africa, leading to endless wars, human trafficking, slavery, reckless stealing of public property, unemployment, and ethnic cleansing as in Rwanda in 1983/84, Sudan, and Central African Republic, to name but a few. The ethnic wars and autocratic rule as in Uganda, Rwanda, Gabon, Mauritania, etc, are making Africa the most unstable continent in the world. Through these discriminations, people are denied their God-given human rights. These unchristian attitudes and practices among individuals, groups of individuals, and societies constitute a grievous offence as social sins against one's neighbours in society. Ezeanya (1994:158) together with David Knight reminds us the teaching of the Church concerning the Sacrament of Confession and Penance when they say:

What drives us to confession is not primarily fear of God's anger and punishment but, rather, love of the Body of Christ and concern for the community we have damaged... We should approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation with less concern about being forgiven and with much more concern about repairing the damage we have done to the community of believers. We must focus on restoring the bonds of unity, much confidence and love that have been weakened by our conduct. And to make this real, we should look to what our sins have done – and even more to what they have said – to those who are closest to us: our family, our friends,

associates at work, fellow parishioners, other Christians and non-believers.

Ezeanya thus believes that for good reception of the Sacrament of Penance, it must address both the vertical (God) and horizontal (the offended individual, groups and community), an important element that has been neglected among Christians and demeans the essence of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as instituted by Christ and his Church.

## **7.9 THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL**

The Council Fathers gave extensive treatment to the social dimension of sin. This appears confirmed in several documents of the Second Vatican Council such as the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* (para. 36): “institutions and conditions of the world which are customarily an inducement to sin”, the constitution *Sacrosanctum concilium* (para. 109): “it is important to impress on the minds of the faithful... the social consequences of sin”; the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (para. 25): “when the structure of affairs is flawed by the consequences of sin, man, already born with a bent toward evil, finds there new inducements to sin, which cannot be overcome without strenuous efforts and the assistance of grace” (Ragazzi 2004). As such, the Second Vatican Council made enormous contributions towards the clarification and development of the concept of “social sin”. The principal one is the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Reconciliation and Penance* (para. 16), which Pope John Paul II issued on December 2, 1984. According to the encyclical on *Reconciliation and Penance*, some sins, by their very matter, constitute a direct attack on one’s neighbour, and are therefore social sins in the strict sense of the expression. This is because there is a generic sense in which all human sins are social sins by virtue of the social nature of man. Consequently, a social sin may be a sin against love of neighbour, against justice in interpersonal relations (either by the individual against the community or by the community against the individual), against human rights (particularly the right to life, from conception to natural death), against freedom especially religious freedom, against the dignity and honour of every human being, or against the common good and its

manifold requirements. In other words, social sins may consist in acts of commission or omission and, of course, a basic category of social sin is scandal (whether active or passive) which is the mutual causing of evil or the social action of attracting to sin (Ragazzi 2004).

### **7.10 POPE JOHN PAUL II (1920-2005)**

Pope John Paul II like most of his predecessors carried the awareness of social sin to its logical conclusions. During his general audience of August 25, 1999, while reflecting on the meaning of sin, he observed that certain fundamental moral values are today often neglected because of a “loss of the sense of sin.” In responding to this tragic situation, he promulgated the new Evangelization to defend personal freedom, resisting the tendency to lose it in anonymous “structures of social condition.” To this effect, John Paul II acknowledged that personal sin has always a social impact in the sense that the sinner, in offending God and harming himself, is also “responsible for the bad example and negative influences linked to his behaviour”. In addition, the individual sins “strengthen those forms of social sin which are actually the fruit of an accumulation of many personal sins.” For him, therefore, the real responsibility lies with the individual. He affirms that the interdependence of social, economic, and political systems ends up creating “multiple structures of sin,” whereby evil exerts a “frightening power of attraction”, causing many types of behaviour to be wrongly judged as normal or inevitable.

In general, the researcher has tried to briefly discuss the Igbo values such as the sacredness of life, community life, and the notion of the Supreme Being, sacredness of the Earth, ancestral spirits, and morality. These values, like culture, must be complemented and improved in the light of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. In all, these values find their deepest justification in African traditional religions and particularly in Igbo religion, which determines the identity of particular people and plays a crucial role in their life. In other words, the religious attitudes of Africans dominate in their world of notions, experience, and attitudes to life. The study of the social justice and the spiritual/religious values of the Igbo and African peoples, the researcher

believes, is the basis of a fruitful dialogue with their cultures and religions. Their inculturation into the Catholic Church in Igbo land will better serve the proclaiming of the Good news of Jesus Christ and yield better-integrated Igbo Christians.

## **7.11 VARIOUS TYPES OF RECONCILIATION IN THE CHURCH**

Before I can give a general conclusion to this research topic, it is necessary to examine briefly reconciliation in the Church. To get a full view of the subject, it is preferable to look at it from both the Old and New Testaments.

### **7.11.1 Reconciliation in the Old Testament**

The concept of sin and its consequences in this period necessitated its peculiar understanding of reconciliation. Because sin has a social dimension with regard to its effects, in Israel, it was something much broader. The evil which an action had brought into existence inevitably had effects which destroyed the individual and community alike, unless the latter solemnly and clearly cancelled its solidarity with the offender. Thus in an utterly realistic and direct sense, an offender was a danger to the whole people (Von Rad 1962:264).

Reconciliation in the O.T. is therefore understood as an expression of repentance with external actions, not only in the mind. It involves repairing the damage caused by the bad deed, to turn from the old path to the road acceptable to God and to be converted (Ogu 1981:57). What does reconciliation mean? It is a term indicating the changed relationship for the better between persons or groups who formerly were at enmity with each other.

The Jewish people of the O.T. had great faith in God to forgive their sins (Dan. 9:19) especially if one repents. No wonder then, that there are liturgies of repentance in the OT. These include fast assembly of the people, public lamentation and petition, loud cries and wails, cutting of oneself, the wearing of sackcloth and ashes, the public confession of sins, the recital of the sins of Israel in its history (Mekenzie 1978:728).

Furthermore, there was even stipulation of animal sacrifices for sins of an individual, of priests, of leaders, and for unintentional sins of a community. For example Leviticus,

chapters 4 & 5, enumerates the different victims to be offered by various classes of the people. A priest and the whole community must offer a bull (Lev. 4:3-4). In this vein, a ruler offers a male goat (Lev. 4:23), the ordinary citizen a female goat (vs. 4:28), the poor, two turtle doves or two pigeons (Lev. 5:7), and the destitute, a very small amount of flour (Lev.5:11). However, for a sin committed with high hand (defiantly) there could be no atonement by a sin offering (Heraty & Associates, Vols. 1-1VI 1981:248).

The place for expiatory sacrifice was the forecourt of the Tent of Meeting on the North side of the altar. The slaughtering was performed by the priest or any one designated to perform the ritual, except for national offering (2 Chron. 29:24). The priest's action of placing his hands on the head of the victim was not intended to signify the transfer of the sin to the victim, for this would only have made the victim impure and therefore unsuitable for the sacrifice. The action signified rather that the priest initiated the sacrificial rite and thus confessed his guilt and sorrow. The manipulation of the sacrificial blood formed the most important part of the sin offering, since Yahweh himself had designated it as a proper means for cleansing a person, place, or thing made unclean even by inadvertent sin, thus re-establishing communion with God (Lev. 17:11). On the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur – in Hebrew) the Holy of Holies was entered and the sacrificial blood of the national sin offering was sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant where Yahweh was invisibly enthroned in order to have it come as close to him as possible in its cleansing power (Heraty& Associates, Vols.1-IV 1981:240).

Summarizing, one can say that the dominant practice in the O.T. was organized community penitential liturgies celebrated at certain fixed periods. This usually took the form of public penance. One of their most significant days of penance was Yom Kippur. Ogu gives a vivid description of the liturgy of this day, noting that it is set apart to ask for pardon from God for all the sins committed during the year. The rite consisted of the liturgy of prayer with which the people entrusted themselves into God's protection so that he might deliver them from danger and calamity, which they considered a punishment for sin (Ogu 1981:59). In addition, they expressed this by fasting, wearing sackcloth, prostrating and weeping before Yahweh. As a rule, there was a collective

confession of sin made by the people or their representatives to acknowledge their guilty state and implore divine pardon (Lev. 16:21; Ez. 9:5-15).

The significance of public penance was that it helped to incite the people to conversion of heart which they manifested through external acts. The people are assured that God has heard their prayers by the oracle of salvation. This is similar to the announcement of pardon and absolution by *onye-isi-ala* (the chief) or *eze-arusi* (the priest of the deity) during a propitiatory ritual sacrifices in Igbo land. Of course, there is this danger of mere external ritualism as a condition for attaining conversion. The prophets persistently condemned this act of mere externalism but underlined the need for conversion and breaking away from sin as essential conditions for obtaining pardon (Amos 5:21; Hosea 5:15).

Capital punishment was also one of the ways sinners were reconciled to God. The most common practice was stoning a sinner to death for such serious sins as blasphemy (Lev. 24:10-16), idolatry (Ex. 32:17), adultery (Deut. 22:22), human sacrifice to moloch, sins against nature, and murder.

Consequently, the theological basis for capital punishment is the Jewish belief that such sins were inseparable from those guilty of them. Hence, the only way to expiate them was by the death of the sinner. This belief lingered in the time of the N.T. as we can see in the case of the adulterous woman (John 8:1-11) and the alleged blasphemy of St. Stephen (Acts 7:54-60).

### **7.11.2 Reconciliation in the New Testament**

In the N.T., reconciliation is introduced in a new dimension in the understanding of Penance. The Jewish culture and all the cultures around it strongly upheld honour and shame. This means that a wrong-doing (Matt. 18:15) or "sin" was seen as breaking interpersonal relations by shaming the sinner and offending the one wronged. Consequently, forgiveness assumes the social role of restoring the offender to the community. In other words, in the NT, sin is analogous to debt, as shown in the Our Father (Matt. 6:12) and the parable of the unforgiving debtor (Matt. 18:23-35). This was the prevalent experience of peasant societies in the Middle East, Asia, and elsewhere

(Igboland) in which manifest debt was a threat to one's land, life, and family. It is, however, actually the consequence of poverty and incapacity to maintain one's social position in society. Thus a person forgiven is restored to dignity and social status in the community.

In the N.T., emphasis was always laid on Christ, the mediator between God and Man. Hence, Schillebeckx (1975:15) described Christ as the sacrament of the encounter with God. By sacrament he means a divine bestowal of salvation in an outwardly perceptible form which makes the bestowal manifest; a bestowal of salvation in historical visibility. The N.T. writings maintain that the death and resurrection of Jesus constitute the sign that God and man have been finally and truly reconciled (Rom. 5:10-11; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Eph. 2:16:18; Col. 1:20).

B. Haring buttresses this view when he says: "we stand before Christ, the great sacrament of the covenant and of the fidelity that expresses itself above all in his readiness to reconcile humanity with himself" (Haring 1976:2). To this end, God the Father has sent Jesus as the great Sacrament of salvation, liberation, forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation. This message formed the basic teaching of the N.T. writings. St. Paul expresses this view thus: "God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not holding men's faults against them and he has entrusted to us the news that they are reconciled" (2 Cor. 5:19-21).

Furthermore, the N.T. gives us various episodes where Jesus demonstrated the plenitude of divine forgiveness, such as the great joy in heaven even with one repentant sinner (Lk 15:4-7; 15:8-10). Another example is his proclamation that the son of man has come to seek out and save what was lost, in the controversy over his company with Zaccheus (Lk 19:1-10). Others include Christ's prayer for his executioners (Lk 23:34), and the forgiveness of Peter's triple denial of him (John 18:17; 25, 27). We see again the teaching on brotherly love and mutual forgiveness contained in the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:12), the reply he gave to Peter on how one should forgive an erring brother (Matt. 18:21-22), and the parables of the unforgiving debtor or the wicked servant (Matt. 14:23-35). All these have their practical foundation in Christ's own life, which he

concretely lived as a testimony to the reconciliation between God and man and between man and his neighbour.

St. Paul, for his own part, sees the subject of reconciling activity as God through Christ reconciling us to him (2 Cor. 5:18). There is no need for God to be reconciled to humanity as appears in 2 Maccabees 1:5; 7:33 & 8:39; it is humanity who needs reconciliation with God. In other words, the human condition prior to reconciliation was weak, ungodly, and sinful (Rom. 5:6-8). It was precisely when we were enemies that God reconciled us to himself (Rom. 5:10). This reconciliation was effected through the death of Christ, Son of God, upon the cross, by the shedding of his blood (Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:19; Eph. 2:13; Col. 1:20).

However, it is important to observe that even Jesus did not spell out the mode of reconciling sinners; he laid down the guiding principles. Mutual love and fraternal correction formed his basic teaching on reconciliation. Haring (1976:222) describes fraternal correction as the most significant expression of “the law of Christ”. It emphasizes above all, the solidarity of salvation and is impossible without self-denial, suffering, and risk.

Jesus was quite aware that in his conflict-prone or agonistic society, conflicts appear common since people’s honour could be violated wittingly or otherwise. Various strategies were employed to prevent conflict from escalating to violence, warfare, and bloodshed. For instance, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exhorts “turning the other cheek” (Matt. 5:38f) rather than resorting to “tit for tat”. In Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus gave several strategies for resolving conflict. These include confronting the wrong-doer (verse 15) in private with no implication the wrong is done to the one correcting. Pastoral charity refers to this approach as mutual correction of a brother or sister in the community for any wrong noted. Alternatively, he encourages negotiation (verse 16) in the presence of one witness to restore the relationship, or two or more witnesses in the event that the decision would be legally binding as in litigation (cf. Deut.19:15). Finally, when the above approaches fail, the matter is brought to the community to adjudicate.

The judgement in public is final with the offender given the option to accept the judgement or be excommunicated.

Consequently, the social dimension of sin and of debt implicates the significance of the community in Matthew's gospel. Just as Peter is given the authority to "bind and loose" (Matt. 16:19), the community is so authorized to judge in resolving conflicts and disputes (Matt. 18:18). That is, the weight of the decision arrived at by two disciples in agreement over some dispute is highlighted by the concurrence accorded by the Father in heaven (Matt. 18:19-20). Certainly, in today's context the co-responsibility of Christ's faithful takes on crucial significance in matters of consultation and collaboration. According to this work, the researcher found out that *ikpu-ala* in Igbo society was designed to achieve this end exactly as in the Jewish society. Interestingly, both societies were very conscious of individual sins as they affect the community.

In spite of all these insinuations on reconciliation in the N.T., it is problematic to know exactly how the Church of the apostolic period obeyed this injunction of Christ. However, it is certain that fraternal correction prevailed at this period, although serious and grave sins attracted stricter processes of reconciliation. Ogu described this issue of reconciliation as a matter of principle. Personal conversion alone, though indispensable, was not sufficient to take away the obstacle of sin. The Christian who sinned gravely had to be a penitent in the midst of the community in order to receive reconciliation (Ogu 1981:64). However, at this period in time, all sins were subjected to forgiveness if the sinner was repentant. Prayers, good works, intercession of the faithful, and confession obtained forgiveness. In grave sins and scandalous sins such as adultery, theft, and the like, the leader of the community admonished the guilty. If he persisted in his sin, he was excluded from his community, but forgiven and received back after penance (I Cor. 5:1-3 & 2 Cor. 2:5-7).

Again, even though some sins were considered unforgiveable in the N.T., for example, sin against the Holy Spirit, and apostasy, there is hope of pardon for all who repented. Thus John writes: "if we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all iniquity" (1 John 1:9).

### **7.11.3 The Code of the Canon Law**

The Code of the Canon Law of 1984 states categorically that the salvation of souls is the supreme law of the Church. Canon 1752 states: the salvation of souls, which must always be the supreme law in the Church, is to be kept before one's eyes. The Conciliar Fathers therefore conclude that when interpreting liturgical law, the first and most important of the General Principles is the salvation of souls. Also Canon 959 says, "in the sacrament of penance the faithful who confess their sins to a legitimate minister, are sorry for them, and intend to reform themselves, obtain from God through the absolution imparted by the same minister forgiveness for the sins they have committed after baptism, and at the same time are reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by sinning". This canon defines the sacrament in four parts, consisting of: confession, contrition, purpose of amendment, and absolution. What is particularly interesting is that this canon speaks of the sacrament of reconciliation "with the Church which they have wounded by sinning". The theology of the ecclesial and social aspect of sin and reconciliation are new to the code. However, Canon 916 prescribes that:

Anyone who is conscious of grave sin may not celebrate the Mass or receive the Body of the Lord without previously having been to sacramental confession, unless there is a grave reason and there is no opportunity to confess; in this case the person is to remember the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, which includes the resolve to go to confession as soon as possible (John Paul II 1984).

What is interesting about the code of canon law is that it recognizes the same elements that are present in traditional African societies, namely, (1) an offence can be ordinary or grave (2) each offence requires different expiatory sacrifice (3) offences have both individual and social dimensions and (4) the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. This last part will be investigated in the next segment of this study.

## **7.12 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF RECONCILIATION IN THE CHURCH**

### **7.12.1 The Early Church: Public Penance**

To have an accurate picture of the practice of the sacrament of penance in the early Church, we must keep in mind the high expectations demanded of Christians in those days. We get some idea of what this meant from the letters of St. Paul and the Acts of the Apostles, where believers were subjected, from Pentecost on, to persecution for their faith, and among whom we are told the Spirit of God was miraculously active in producing heroic virtue that converted thousands to Jesus Christ.

Those who sinned grievously were at first not numerous. And when they sinned they could be reconciled with God and with the Church through what has come to be known as solemn penance. Its liturgical form was not unlike that of baptism, and was designed only for those who had committed the gravest sins. Most of the extant literature on the subject describes this type of sacramental reconciliation and has naturally received most attention.

However, it is difficult to find the exact procedure of reconciling Christians at that time. The brotherly love that existed among Christians of that time must have incited the community to be disposed towards the sinner by prayers, thus drawing him back to the community. One of the earliest writings on this issue is from Didache which speaks of confessing one's sins, and Clement of Rome in his epistle spoke about asking God to have and be reconciled to us. In the early Church, Christians were able to distinguish between lesser, daily sins, and greater and death-dealing sins. For instance, St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians 5:1-9, referred to the Christians who received the Eucharist unworthily and to those indulging in immoral cohabitation.

Early accounts of penance in the Christian communities show that all sins were subject to forgiveness if the sinner was repentant. On the one hand, lesser sins could be forgiven through prayer, fasting, works of mercy, and the Eucharistic celebration. On the other hand, the Christian who sinned gravely had to be a penitent in the midst of the community in order to receive forgiveness and be reconciled. Such grave and scandalous sins required a process of lengthy reconciliation. In some cases, such as adultery and murder, the leader of the community admonished the guilty. If he persisted

in his sin, he was excluded from his community. Even Tertulian, in his *De Poenitentia*, called it the “second penitence” (baptism being the first), and said it could be received only once. B. Haring (1976:213) called the early Church the “primordial Sacrament of reconciliation”.

Later on, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the sacrament of penance as reconciliation was formalized and it emerged in a recognizable form. Throughout this period, penance involved the whole community. Penitents were made to confess their sins to the Bishop and the whole community. The penitent manifested his sorrow by various acts of humiliation which included prostration in sackcloth and ashes, neglect of cleanliness, severe fasting, weeping and praying, beseeching on bended knee the assistance of the presbyters, widows, and all the brethren as people dedicated to God. During this period of penance, the penitents were temporarily ex-communicated from the community worship for the length of their penance.

At the completion of penance, the penitent was reconciled by the Bishop before the community. The Bishop was the one who decided when the repentance of the penitents was adequate and restored them to full communion by the laying on of hands, and they would once more join the community at Mass, signifying their total restoration. However, it is interesting that the Christians suffered severe persecution during this time, the reign of Decius, who forced Christians to offer sacrifice to the Roman gods. The categories of sinners included those who denied their faith by publicly worshipping the Roman gods. There were those who produced false certifications they had offered sacrifice to the gods, and finally those who surrendered their sacred books to government agents. All those who provided false certification or surrendered their books were readmitted to communion after repentance and suitable penance, while those who had denied their faith had life-long penance and were only readmitted on their deathbed. The interesting aspect of this early rite is the social dimension and solidarity exhibited in the process of reconciliation. Ogu (1981:68) puts it aptly when he says:” the principal actor in this symbolic action was the assembly, the local Church who reacted to sin because of the injustice the sinner inflicted on her by sin”.

### 7.12.2 The Council of Nicaea (325 AD)

This Council of the Fathers became important because of its role in placing the forgiveness of sins on the shoulder of the Bishops. It was this Council that spelt out clearly the various categories of sinners who have “fallen without compulsion”. For to be reconciled to the community, the Council says, “as many as were communicants, [if] they heartily repent, shall pass three years among the hearers; for seven years they shall be prostrators [sic]; and for two years they shall communicate with the people in prayers, but without oblation” (Nicaea Canon XI).

Furthermore, during this period the penitential rite and the doctrine were developed and the fundamental elements attested since apostolic times received a fixed form. According to the Fathers, penance is necessary for satisfaction, propitiation and reconciliation with God. It requires a laborious work. It is accomplished not merely by interior sorrow and conversion but by means of an outward action called exomologies. The rite includes the following:

Confession was not so much by words as by deeds consisting of acts of humiliation. Either spontaneously or by dint of pressure from relatives, the sinner made his confession to the Bishop. As the head of the assembly, he determined the guilt and prescribed the penance:

- a) Prostration in sackcloth and ashes before the presbyters and community for their prayers and help;
- b) Self-accusation before the congregation seems to have formed part of the process. It was the hardest part of this rite causing people to run away from it.
- c) Exclusion: the rite included exclusion from participation in the Eucharist.
- d) Reconciliation: though the sinner is cut off from community, he was yet a member of it and he was disowned by it. The community prayed for him, listened to the liturgy of the word with him. At the completion of the penance, he was reconciled by the community (cf. De Penitentia 9:1-3).

During this time, the period of conversion was looked at as an opportunity to grow in renewed faith, not as a punishment. Sometimes, as with Leo I, Rome would recall the

“apostolic regulations” that did not require public exposure of one’s misdeeds. At other times, the heavy penalties exacted of sinners were lessened either as a condition for reconciliation with the Church or admission to full communion with the faithful.

Furthermore, in this rite, sinners under the age of 35 were not admitted into the order of penitents since it was possible they would relapse into sin again. Thus, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries laid a foundation of reconciliation that chattered for the spiritual and psychological needs of the individual and community at large, as such process kept Christian faith strong, social cohesion and values transparent. It also made peace and harmony viable and human rights were protected.

However, there was also a private administration of the sacrament of penance, from the beginning, as attested by a severe letter of Pope Leo 1 in 459 censuring those who presume to act “against the apostolic regulations” by demanding public manifestation of sins. According to the letter, it is sufficient that the guilt which people have on their consciences be made known to the priests alone in secret confession (Hardon 1974:482). The two traditions were not strictly parallel, since we know that well into the early Middle Ages the practice of solemn penance was so widespread we presume that this eclipsed the private form.

From the foregoing it will be seen that the social concept of sin in Christian repentance and forgiveness stands against any idea of personal repentance as we see in the present day practices. In the post apostolic period, forgiveness requires re-admission of a sinner into the Christian community and a certain amount of importance is attached to acknowledgement of one’s guilt before God in the community expressed by the readiness to do penance. In summary, the sacrament in the fourth century was a public, communal action of reconciliation that led to a lasting change of heart, involved the whole community, and was presided over by the bishop.

### **7.12.3 Private Penance – The Penitential Books**

Thus in the first 600 years the Church insisted on public confessions. When an individual committed a mortal sin, he came out and confessed his sins to the Christian

community. However, in the seventh century, Irish missionaries, inspired by the Eastern monastic tradition, took to continental Europe the “private” practice of penance, which does not require public and prolonged completion of penitential works before reconciliation with the Church. Thus the well-known Penitential Books belonging in this part of the history of the sacrament of penance were sets of books containing directions to confessors in the form of prayers, questions to be asked, and exhaustive lists of sins with the appropriate penance prescribed.

The origin of these books is traced to the Irish and Anglo-Saxon monks (probably not knowing the system of public penance) spread what came to be known as the “monastic” practice of penance through their missionary work. According to one account these books were composed over a period of three centuries and were written in Latin and Old Irish. Interestingly, the penance was adjusted according to the rank of the sinner, the rank of the person offended against, and the objective seriousness of the sin. By and large, these monks put an end to the practice of once-only reconciliation for grave sins and any penance connected to Lent and Easter. Here, penances become more punitive and less about the person’s renewal of faith. Indeed, it was more of an attitude of “the punishment fitting the crime”; not necessarily for conversion of the sinner.

Depending on the gravity of a particular sin, the works of satisfaction would be prescribed accordingly. For instance, for grave crimes such as parricide, perjury, and adultery, they prescribed such penances as exile, going on a distant pilgrimage, or seclusion in a monastery for life or for ten, seven, or three years. For lesser sins, the satisfaction might consist in fasting either for a long time or periodically, or again, in certain prayers, scourging oneself with knotted cords, or almsgiving. The wide use of the Penitential Books with the specified directives to priests indicates the corresponding regularity of private penance in the Church from patristic times. But this in turn tells us that we should distinguish the terms “private penance” and “public penance” very carefully. Thus there are two types of sacramental confession and absolution used

(private confession) in the Church in varying degrees in different places until the Middle Ages. These are as the following:

1. There was private confession of secret sins which the Church approved and which Rome insisted was of apostolic origin. As a result, in spite of abuses to the contrary, the Church's official position was that secret sins, no matter how grave, could and should be confessed privately and expiated privately. We may blame the development of this doctrine on the nature of penance in Catholic thought, and the introduction of indulgences, on the purpose of mitigating the need for extraordinary external acts of satisfaction.
2. There was also this private confession going back to the earliest days of sacramental liturgy that covered sins that were not mortal called by the Fathers of the Church as "daily" or "ordinary".

These represent two streams of tradition: one for the laity and the clergy in general and the other among men and women living a monastic or religious life. The laity was encouraged to believe that sins, other than grave sins, can be remitted by attendance at Mass, works of charity, earnest prayers, and the practice of virtues as a way to curb their sinful tendencies. On the other hand, the religious often became solitary or entered monasteries because they wished to practice a higher virtue.

From this time forward, the sacrament has been performed in secret between penitent and priest. This new practice envisioned the possibility of repetition and so opened the way to a regular frequenting of this sacrament. It allowed the forgiveness of grave sins and venial sins to be integrated into one sacramental celebration. In its main lines, this is the form of penance that the Church has practiced down to our day.

Up until then, however, strict penances were imposed on those who committed mortal sins and the sins that were uppermost in the mind of people. Such penances included fasting, going without sleep, wearing a special penitential costume which was hard on the body. Others included rubbing ashes on oneself, abstaining from marital relations, and even giving up one's trade, in which case the Christian community was

expected to help support the penitent with prayers and alms. Citing David Knight, Ezeanya (1994:161) writes:

The penance imposed might last for a period of months, or for anywhere from five to 20 years. Sometimes a man might be required to do penance for the rest of his life – to abstain from sexual relations with his spouse, for example, or give up his means of livelihood forever.

During the apostolic period, Christians were conscious of themselves as the community entrusted with bringing people to salvation. As they waited for the future fulfillment of salvation, they discovered sin and sinners in their midst. People received the Eucharist unworthily and there was immoral cohabitation such as that noticed in the community of Corinth referred to by St. Paul (1Cor. 5:1-9). Strict penance meant deterrent to others and absolution was given only after the person had completed his penance and was usually done by the Bishop. In terms of remedial value, strict penance not only disposed the community towards the sinner, it also assisted in restoring the sinner to full communion with the Christian community, after there was evidence of repentance. Personal conversion, though indispensable, was not sufficient to take away the obstacle of sin. The Christian who sinned gravely had to be a penitent in the midst of the community in order to receive forgiveness and be reconciled. In some instances, penitents who persisted in their sins were often excluded from the community. In other words, when the sinner confesses his/her sins to the community, he/she is shown brotherly love through admonitions from community. He or she then did penance and received forgiveness and was integrated into the community of the faithful (1 Cor. 5:1-3; 2 Cor.2:5-7). This was in obedience to Christ who taught Christians that a public sinner should first be corrected by his brother. If he failed to repent, a few of the brethren should speak to him and if that is not enough, then he is to be reported to the community. He was then expelled and treated as a pagan (Matt. 18:15-17).

#### **7.12.4 Council of Trent to Modern Times**

The Sacrament of Reconciliation as we have it today in the Church has gone through series of changes covering several centuries ago. In the course of history, the sacrament of confession has been challenged on many fronts by the Reformers. The council of Trent defended the Catholic tradition on every count. The resulting assembly of doctrine is among the most detailed in the history of conciliar teaching.

The Council of Trent declares that Christ instituted the sacrament of penance to reconcile the faithful with God as often as they fall into sin after baptism (Council of Trent 1215:can. 2&3). In the Council of Florence (1439) the sacrament of penance was defined as involving three elements: (a) **Contrition** of heart including sorrow for the sin committed and resolve not to sin again; (b) **Confession** – of all sins that the sinner can remember; (c) **Satisfaction** for sins assigned by the priest through prayers, fasting, and almsgiving. The last two acts, Confession and Satisfaction, identify the sacrament as either auricular confession or expiatory penance. Thus the minister of the sacrament is a priest with authority to absolve.

However, in 1551, the Council of Trent while responding to the Reformers claim that sinners should renew baptismal justification by interior conversion, advanced an extreme non-communal, individualistic approach to the sacramental rite of penance to effect reconciliation with God. Thereafter, the Council of Trent, and subsequent doctrinal development, insisted that all mortal sins of penitents after a diligent self-examination that are conscious must be specifically confessed. Again, venial sins do not always need to be confessed. Moreover, absolution was declared to have the pattern of a judicial act in which the priest pronounces sentence as a judge and satisfactions imposed and acted as a safeguard for the new life and as a remedy to weakness, but also as a vindictory punishment for former sins (Hardon 1974: 487-493).

By the closing of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the marks left by the Catholic Church's many centuries of ignoring the relevance of penance to the community have become apparent. During this time, the sacrament of penance was not known as confession and as a private event, but it has become also a way to personal grace. The validity of

private penance depends much on Contrition and thus many theologians teach that contrition can remit sins even without the sacrament (Halligan 1972:106).

### **7.12.5 The Second Vatican Council**

Against this backdrop however, contemporary theologians, since the Second Vatican Council, have been advocating for the personal aspect of sin. In the light of this new understanding, sin is compromising one's personal integrity. It is being untrue to self or dishonest and closed to others. Sin is treating self or the neighbour as a thing, not as a person. It is refusing to bring an attitude of love and commitment to the key situations of life.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, however, brought back some aspects of community penance. Thus, sin is understood in more human, personal terms (Taylor 1971:2). The document of *Lumen Gentium* emphasized that in addition to receiving pardon for their sins, penitents are reconciled with the Church which they have wounded by their sins. In this way, in a renewed sense, the sacramental penance reconciles sinners with God and with the Church community, but strips off much of the rigours association with the early Church community.

The post-Vatican II Council saw Pope Paul VI, in his *Ordo Paenitentiae* (Order of Penance), introduce the new name "Sacrament of Reconciliation". In this new rite of reconciliation, he still made the sacrament of penance private and individual when he laid out a celebration rite that includes reconciliation of individual penitents. Even though public confession of sins is done, grave sins still need to be confessed individually. In his critique of the new sacrament of reconciliation, Ogu (1981:81) was quick to observe that there is a complete loss of the presence of the Church in this rite, not even a symbolic representation of penance as a sacrament of the community, or sin as a social and ecclesial phenomenon and where it is done, the impacts are not as effective as they were in the early Church in discouraging and deterring people from apostasy and hypocrisy and double standards in their living.

The danger of reducing and limiting the rigours and stigma that accompany the reconciliatory process downplays the meaning and importance of the sacrament of

penance, is the objective of our research. Michael Taylor (1971:6) is apt when he cautions the penitents:

Sacrament of penance must not be used as a magical or automatic form of forgiveness. It must always be a genuine faith meeting with Christ in the Church. The sacrament is a sign for the Christian that Christ endures among men to forgive, to reconcile, and to save. The sinner goes to the sacrament to seek Christ's personal pardon; he sees his visible reconciliation with the Church as his spiritual reunion with the Lord. He exchanges sin and sorrow for the forgiving, healing love of Christ.

Theologically, reconciliation is not only the act of the repentant sinner, but also, and in a more profound way, the act of the mystical body of Christ, the Church, to which the sinner belongs by the virtue of his baptism. In summary, all reconciliation for the Catholic is with God and the Church, for having disrupted our friendship with him and our brothers and sisters. In this case, sin is a disrupting of the bond of supernatural solidarity and fraternal charity. The good intention of the Church in the new rite of the sacrament of reconciliation is evident in her emphasis on the celebration of the sacrament. In the new rite, the celebration of the word of God is a very important aspect of the rite. The Word of God calls men and women to repentance and leads them to a true conversion of heart. It recommended that the texts of the scripture must reflect the following themes: (a) the voice of God calling his people back to conversion and even closer conformity with Christ; (b) the mystery of our reconciliation through the death and resurrection of Christ and through the gift of the Holy Spirit; (c) the judgment of God about good and evil in human life as a help in the examination of conscience. The minister is also encouraged to give a homily to remind the people that sinful acts are against God, the community, and one's neighbours, as well as the sinner him-/herself. All community celebration of the sacrament must end in individual confession with

absolution. Collective absolution by a number of priests or a general absolution by one priest is not permitted in this rite (Ogu 1981:81).

In spite of the reform of Penance, individual confession still remains the only way of reconciling a penitent in the Church, with all its secrecy and privacy. The result is the total neglect of the consequences of the sinful act(s) for the victims and the community at large. Understood in this way, it becomes difficult to bring such perpetrators to understand the feelings of their victims, and reconciliation with their victim(s) becomes even much more untenable. The perpetrators are given license to continue their evil deeds without any thought to the effects of their actions. The results have had devastating effects on the whole Church worldwide. This point is well demonstrated by the scandal of the sexual abuses in the American and Irish Churches and the resulting shame and brokenness of these Churches. In these Churches there are problems of pedophilia and cover-ups, and many in the pews are demanding accountability and change. In the same vein, in these countries and many more, culprits are forced to face their victims in the court of law of the land, and many priests and bishops have been convicted with the dioceses paying heavy prices in compensation to the extent that many dioceses have declared bankruptcy. In these open forums, the Church is not only damaged spiritually, but also politically, economically, and socially. Again, the reason for such disgrace is that the Church, like the monastic missionaries of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, overlooked the injunction of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 18: 15-18 and 2 Cor. 2:5-8. In these passages, there is great emphasis on brotherly correction and community chastisement. In other words, in the early and apostolic Church, penance, forgiveness, and reconciliation followed two procedures namely, horizontal (community) and vertical (with God). It was always both ways.

### **7.13 COMPARISON OF UMUOBOM (IGBO) RECONCILIATION AND CHRISTIAN RECONCILIATION**

This chapter will not be well concluded without giving a short comparison between the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the Church and Igbo Reconciliation.

#### **7.13.1 Their concept of sin**

The most fundamental way to approach our subject is to compare their concepts of sin. Both agree that sin affects not only the individual who commits it, but also the community. For both Christianity and Igbo religion, a human is a social being who cannot live in isolation from his fellow human beings. Christians are bound together in Christ Jesus, hence St. Paul agreed to the fact that the life and death of each of us has effects on all. According to St. Paul: "For nine if ys kuves ti himself alone and one of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord" (Rom. 14:7-8).

Umuobom people and the Igbo in general base their argument on the homogeneity of their community. Each member has blood ties with others and believes that his morally evil actions can bring about disastrous consequences to all in the community. Peter K. Sarpong puts it aptly that while Descartes says, *Cogito ergo sum* (I think; therefore I am), representing the western approach, the African would say, *Cognatus sum ergo sum* (I am related; therefore I am). The Igbo man lives in community. For him, his father is not just the person biologically responsible for his conception. His mother is not necessarily the woman who physically gave to him birth. He may have as many as fifteen "fathers" and ten "mothers". In the ideal situation, each one of these would treat him as his biological father or mother would. Since he has several "mothers" and "fathers"; obviously, he has many more brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces. Consequently, in Umuobom, and in some other African languages, the words "cousin," "aunt," "uncle", do not exist. Therefore, the Umuobom, family is much extended, something Christianity is supposed to affect.

The major difference in the Church's and the Igbo's concepts of sin lie in the subject of offence. For Christians, sin is a direct offence against God and Christ, as well as against one's neighbours. But in Igbo land, offence first and foremost is against society. It is only indirectly against God or any deity. This view is supported by Ogu (1981:51) when he writes: sin is not seen directly and primarily as a rebellion against God or any other deity but a departure from norm, the prescribed laws, or falling foul of *Omenala* over which the earth goddess presides and is indirectly rebelled against. In both camps, sin alienates one from the community. This is manifested in the Church by exclusion

from Communion, while the Igbo express theirs in denial of commensality. We must note that the God of the Christian cannot be equated with the god in Igbo land.

Furthermore, in both the Jewish and Igbo religions, sin is intimately related to suffering. In the Jewish religion, unlike the Igbo traditional religion, this has its basis in the covenant and blessing and curses. With the covenant, the Israelites are bound together. The Igbo have a very strong sense of the *Umunna* community as we have pointed out. The biblical narratives of the fall, original sin, and the consequent sufferings (Genesis. 2:17 & 3:1ff) brings out the intimate relationship between sin and suffering. It also brings out the individual, communal, and social dimensions of sin and suffering (McKenzie 1976:817f). This is because the Jewish religion is founded on a very strong tribal solidarity which is reflected in her concept of sin and suffering (Ekechukwu 1977:398f). On the other hand, in the Igbo religion there is a close nexus between sin and suffering. The Igbo does not believe that one suffers without a cause. This belief is exemplified in such sayings as “*ihe anaghi mem na nkiti*”, literally, “nothing happens without a cause”. Suffering therefore is believed to be an affliction from some deity for some crime committed by one which either is hidden or has not been expiated. The Igbo does not fall back on myth, but on the *Chi*, to explain his sufferings. Achebe in his book: *Things Fall Apart*, points out that it was as a result of Unoka possessing a bad *Chi* or personal god that evil and misfortune followed him to his death, for he had no grace (Achebe 1965:13).

The Christian religion does not however admit the whole idea of *Chi*. Maurizio Flick and Zoltan Alszeghy speaking on this remarked that the evil which oppresses man does not derive from a wicked primordial principle, as a struggle with the good God, nor in the last analysis is it from the will of God, but it is the fruit of human sin (Ekechukwu 1977:392).

In this vein, both the Christian and Igbo religions believe that death is a result of sin. Both the individual and communal dimensions of sin are well depicted in both religions. The corporate personality involved in sin is striking. Romans 5:12 speaks of Adam sinning and in whom all have sinned. The Igbo proverb *ofu mkpuru aka ruta manu ozue ndi onu* means literally, “when one finger gets oil, it spreads to the rest of the fingers”,

emphasizing this corporate aspect of the individual's sin. However, there is some variation in the development of this doctrine in both religions. We shall go on to reflect on impurity or taboo briefly before we look at reconciliation in both religions.

### **7.13.2 The concept of Wholesomeness**

Unlike the Greeks, the Jews did not dichotomize the human into body and soul. This is perhaps because of their relationship with Yahweh. The physical integrity of the person and moral wholeness are seen as one totality. In Leviticus 11:1-5:33, for example, certain food items and animals were excluded from the Jewish menu. A classification is made by the priests concerning those who are seen as clean and those who are unclean. Leprosy and sexual uncleanness are regarded as serious bodily defilement and even one who interacts with people who are deemed socially polluted can cause one to be excluded from the community social interactions. Even the woman's vitality is linked with her blood and was diminished by childbirth, and by that token she was considered unclean and would not be allowed in ritual worships until her former integrity was restored. In other words, even women's menstruation would make them polluted. She incurs impurity which must be purified before she can be restored to wholeness.

Cognizance must be taken of the role played by priests in the purification rites. Von Rad is right when he remarks that the origin of these rites for purification lies in a basic presupposition: the idea that there was a close relationship between sin and physical disease (Von Rad 1962:275). In Igbo religion one finds similar practices. Close looks at various taboos (*nso*) reveal such a Jewish mentality among the Igbo. People suffering from leprosy, smallpox, and similar diseases were regarded as dead, they were dreaded and isolated. Such dreaded diseases were regarded as punishment for sins.

Therefore, for both religions, wholesomeness of body is affected by confession of guilt and the expiation rite. Also involved in these purification rituals is the place of the sanctuary in the lives of the Jewish, Igbo, and Christian religious worshippers. Every Israelite is a member of a house or clan and for them, as it was for the Igbo people, whoever incurred guilt tainted the whole community.

However, among the Igbo if it happened that the offender died before he/she could be purified and reconciled with the rest of the members of the community, purificatory sacrifice is also made in order to dissociate the living from the deceased's blemish and maintain a good relationship with the ancestors and the spirit world. J. P. Jordan (1949:119) in his book remarked that Father Shanaham noted three points of great importance about Igbo sacrifices: (1) that all Igbos felt the need of it on account of evil, sin, or impending disaster; (2) that it was offered by someone specially set apart for that work; and (3) that after it had been offered, the people generally showed their belief in its reconciliatory effects by inviting the spirits to join them in a common feast (*Oriku*). This brings us to meaning and place of Reconciliation in the Igbo and Christian religions.

#### **7.14 RECONCILIATION IN IGBO AND CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS**

The Christian concept of forgiveness of sin is an exclusive right of God, and this is affected in the Church by the sacramental mediation of a minister of the sacrament, the priest. But in Igbo society, the role of mediation is not the prerogative of any person. Rather it involves *ala*, (the Earth-goddess), ancestors, and members of the community in a process called *ikpu-ala/aru*. Among these three agents, the society or community plays a greater role in reconciliation.

A close study of the two positions reveals that mutual trust and faith are essential elements in reconciliation both in Christian and Igbo liturgy of penance. Just as a penitent confesses his/her sins to a priest in complete confidence, so does an Igbo culprit when he/she faces the *arusi* (shrine or local sanctuary) and carries out the prescribed rituals. The Christian and Igbo both believe that their sins have been forgiven. Reconciliation therefore restores harmony between the sinner and god as well as the community. In the Church, through sacramental reconciliation, the penitent is reconciled with God and the Church, through absolution, a Latin word, *absolvere* meaning to "make loose", "forgiven", or "to set free". The Christian once restored joins in sharing of the Eucharist, Communion, signifying "**Common Union**," with all the members of Christ's body.

Among the Igbo, this harmony is demonstrated in the meal of reconciliation known as *Igbaoriku*, a feast described by Jordan in which the reconciled offender, the victim, the members of the community, and the spirits are joined together in celebration. Consequently, for the Igbo, when the pollution is removed, harmony is immediately achieved between the erstwhile offender and the supernatural powers and also peace is established in the community, restoring wholesomeness to the conviviality of community relationships. The questions now are: Does the present process of reconciliation in the Church influence Igbo Catholics as much as they are influenced by Igbo reconciliatory rites? If not, how can we incarnate these Igbo values in order to make the Sacrament more meaningful and effective for Igbo penitents? I shall attempt the solution to these questions in the Evaluation of the whole problem at stake.

### **7.15 THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS**

Our expositions so far has shown that in Igbo traditional religion, reconciliation is part of the socio-moral heritage of the Igbo people. Any sinner who commits any crime struggles to obtain forgiveness and get reconciled with the community. Christian faith promises us the kingdom of God here on earth when we live at peace with one another and are reconciled to God. Thus forgiveness and reconciliation is at the heart of the Christian message. There is, however, one important question that remains, namely, what theological insights from *Ikpu-ala/aru* constitutes the Igbo Christian view of reconciliation? The theological insights which need to inform a synthesized contextual Igbo Christian view of penance and reconciliation should first of all acknowledge God as Creator and Redeemer. These two attributes of God are also the basis of two significant Christian doctrines, namely, the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of redemption. These doctrines, in turn, describe two theological approaches: the creation-centred and the redemption-centred. These approaches represent a theological tension.

In the creation-centred approach one sees the fact that culture and human experience are generally good. This is obviously in keeping with the doctrine of creation, and the words recorded in Genesis, where God is said to have created everything and saw it was very good (Gen. 1:31; 1Tim. 4:4). If humanity in their full variety were created by this God, it follows that their cultures are also God-given and therefore, good

(Sitshebo 2000:279). That is, they can be useful vehicles of relating with the Creator-God and being capable of being perfected

On the other hand, the theological approach sees the world as sacramental, that is, the place where God reveals himself. Consequently, culture, life experiences, even the tensions of the present, can thus be seen as sources of theology. For it is in the world of daily life that God reveals himself in diverse ways (Sitshebo 2000). It follows, therefore, that revelation can be seen here as part of this mundane engagement with reality; God is part of these real life activities and experiences (Wisdom. 8:1 & Heb. 4:13). As a result, the creation-centred approach to theology sees a very close relationship between humanity and the divine. Predictably, it is because of this that it is also seen as incarnational.

Winston Sitshebo (2000:281) believes that the climax of the incarnational nature of the creation-centred approach is better understood in the light of Jesus' incarnation, God taking on humanity. In other words, it is a full expression of God's love and appreciation of humanity. Inferring from the above discussion, one can see another quality of the approach, namely, the anthropological perspective because "it centres on the value and goodness of *anthropos*, the human person... and makes use of the insights of the social science of anthropology".

When we talk about the creation-centred approach to theology, it should not be construed as a statement of the sinlessness of the world and humanity. Part of the reason the incarnation took place was so that humanity and the world should be redeemed from the effects of sin inherited at the fall. Thus, to complete the picture of the incarnation it is necessary that this aspect should also be highlighted. The evangelist John brought this to the fore when he said: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Thus, he clearly spelt out the significance of redemption. Hence, the redemption-centred approach to theology is also incarnational and anthropological, but at the same time, it puts more emphasis on the Fall.

The redemption-centred approach is characterized by the conviction that culture and human experience are either in need of a radical transformation or in need of total

replacement. This approach basically denies the world and humanity an automatic right to godliness, since they are corrupt. They are not seen as vehicles of God's grace but as hindrances. By reason of logic, Christ must be brought into the culture for that culture to have any relevance for salvation. In agreement with the above, the redemption-centred approach takes seriously the fall of humanity (Genesis 3). Therefore, the argument would be that if culture is inherently good, how then did it not help humanity to avoid the fall? Having fallen, says Sitshebo (2000:282), it was not culture that redeemed humanity, but Jesus Christ, the incarnate God. Therefore, without Jesus, there is no way in which culture can save humanity.

From the above discussion, one can see the obvious tension that characterizes these two approaches to theology and it can be better summed up in these words, the Gospel is from "above", culture, from "below"; the gospel is "divine", culture, "human"; the gospel is "light", culture, "darkness", the gospel is "eternal", culture, "time-bound"; and so on (Sitshebo 2000:282). The words encapsulate aptly the reason why this tension should characterize theology.

On a stretch of thought, I dare to state categorically that this is a necessary and constructive tension because it allows the two approaches to illuminate and, in fact, challenge each other's excesses to yield a theologically balanced approach to theology in general, and to contextual formative factors in particular. In other words, the tension helps the creation-centred approach not to romanticize the world and culture, while it also challenges the outright condemnation of culture in the redemption-centred approach.

The tension between these two approaches challenges inculturation to be a dialogue rather than a token to be given to the local cultures and theologies which often are seen in terms of **superiority** (Christianity) versus **inferiority** (African traditional religion). This is because inculturation without a dialogue not only negates the historical background of religions, cultures, and their moral formations, but also creates confrontations and condemnation of the "inferior" by the so-called superior opponent, depending on who has the power of enforcement. For centuries, confrontation and condemnation have characterized the relationship between the Christianity and African

traditional religion, between the western and African ways of life. In contrast, the interactive dialogical approach to theology will be sensitive to both the creation-centred and redemption-centred approaches to theology, because it will acknowledge the fact that a balanced approach needs to recognize the importance of contextual realities. In this way, it allows them to articulate themselves without prejudice.

The dialogical approach is also liberation from the demeaning and oppressive demands of Igbo culture and its sub-cultures. It also highlights the existence of sub-cultures within the Igbo culture, and allows them expression and consideration, thereby highlighting the fact that culture is fluid, not fixed, and is always in need of redemption because no culture is without sin, including the Christian culture (Sitshebo 2000:283). In other words, the interaction and dialogue is multi-directional and more involved. Thus, it is capable of producing a sensitive theological synthesis of views of *Ikpu-ala* and reconciliation.

Understood in this way, the pressure from African scholars for the liberation of African theology from foreign theological ideas as represented by Catholic missionaries, which is the reason for this research on *Ikpu-ala/aru*, will be a goal that is achievable and tenable. The need for this liberative process arises because these missionaries have long seen the Igbo culture as sinful, to be eradicated, and, unfortunately, replaced by western dress presented as Christianity. There are also indigenous issues which call for liberation, including those cultural approaches that do not recognize women as fully human and capable of a meaningful relationship with God in their own right. Engaging in the interactive dialogical approach allows these shortcomings to be part of the dialogue, which feeds into the theological synthesis.

Furthermore, adopting an interactive dialogue in the *language* of the people will cause the incarnation of Jesus Christ and what it stands for in the Christian tradition to be taken seriously. In other words, the Church's affirmation of culture and its critical discernment or transformation of culture will be fully appreciated. It will also uphold the significance of humanity in God's plan. And it will be easy for the Igbo people to rationalize on the incarnation and its implications because in their re-incarnational

beliefs, there is an understanding that an honoured deceased person can re-enter life through one of his or her progeny and influence it. This is a contextual reality that is taken on board, tried, and tested in dialogue with several others for theological balance.

It becomes clear to me that if Jesus had been born an Igbo man, he would have spoken, dressed, behaved, and in fact, been as much an Igbo man as he was a Jew. He would have also maintained a critical distance from the culture, and called people to repentance and transformation. He would have equally been rooted in Igbo society, but judging it as he did the Judaism of his time. Thus, our chosen approach opens new ground on the Igbo Catholic theological scene because it proposes that the many approaches should be recognized and openly interact in dialogue.

In working towards a Christian understanding of the Igbo normative value of *Ikpu-ala/aru*, one must understand that Jesus' death and resurrection play a significant role in the construction of an Igbo Christian view. These are the basis of the Christian reconciliation and hope and that life continues after physical death. This concept of reconciliation is founded on two facts: (a) that Christ took our human flesh to reconcile man with God and (b) that people continue to experience the power of His risen life in the on-going life of the Church through the sacrament of reconciliation. St. Paul's doctrine of Salvation has become the mainstay of the Church's teaching on the Redemption. He took a cosmic view of humankind, from before the fall of Adam, through its condition under the Old Law (and outside the law among pagans), and now, after Christ, under the new dispensation of grace from the Redeemer.

Clearly, before the fall of our first parents, man was in a state of righteousness with God. According to Paul, sin entered the world through one man, and through sin, death. Thus man's original condition was sinless, and his privilege was not to die. The state of sinfulness affected not only Adam, who disobeyed God, but also Adam's descendants. For, according to St. Paul, no law is too holy or mandate, too binding not to be broken by one who is enslaved by the flesh (Rom. 1: 28-32). Thus, according to Paul, only Christ, the second Adam, can save mankind fallen from innocence and estranged from the Creator. Indeed, the redemptive work of Christ more than makes up for the disruptive work of Adam (Rom. 5:15-21). Consequently, Christ being the word of God

“through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3), identifies with the Creator-Redeemer God, and carries that work forward. He does so by breaking the connection between death and sin, he Himself having tasted its pangs. This is what makes Him the first-born of the death (Rev. 1:5, 8).

The other important thing in Paul’s writings reveals Jesus Christ, the Saviour as man’s Redeemer and the one hope of reaching his destiny. Christ is to remove what was, after all, a contingent element in human history, namely, sinfulness brought on by Adam and deepened by the disobedience of his posterity. Paul’s vision of Christ sees him as the keystone of the cosmos and the Lord of all creation. By natural right, as the Son of God, he is ruler of the universe, to whom all nations belong and under whom everything is subject. And by acquired right, through redemption, he enjoys dominion over the whole earth (Hardson 1974:119-121). Paul’s letters to Ephesus and Colossae put Jesus Christ on the top of the hierarchical order and tended to synthesize the world under one orderly whole, which they called the *pleroma* (Col. 1:15-17, 18-20). The whole universe, then, with Christ as ruler, is the true fullness of Christianity.

The above sequence illustrates that the resurrection of Christ is a reality and therefore not to be feared because he conquered death and “rose on the third day” (Nicene Creed; John 20:1-10). Again, the Nicene Creed nicely summarizes the importance of the discussions when it says: “we acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come” (Catholic Catechesism). Paraphrasing Paul: those who are associated with Jesus Christ through faith have His assurance that nothing shall separate them from the love of God that is found in Him, Jesus the Lord (Rom. 8:39). Indeed they have become new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). In reality, the dynamics of creation-centred and redemption-centred approaches to theology can be repeated; since both are traceable in the death and resurrection of Christ. In other words, understanding the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ must be central to developing a ***theology of penance and reconciliation***, *Ikpu-ala*, for the Igbo people, just as it is for Christianity.

## **7.16 PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE IGBO CHRISTIAN**

### **7.16.1 The Praxis of the Dialogical Approach**

The important question at this stage of our research is: why is the dialogical approach the convergence of all other approaches? There is strong evidence that the Igbo Catholic Church, in matters of inculturation, has been paying lip service to inculturation efforts. In many areas of doctrinal importance, such as burial ceremonies, marriage, *ozo* title taking, *ikpu-ala/aru*, and a lot of others, the Church has not made any serious efforts but has ended up creating “dual observance.” This means that in each of the examples cited, the church observes one style and Igbo Catholics observe both the Church’s rites and the traditional rituals. For example, after over 100 years of Catholicism in Igbo land, most Igbo Catholics still perform the second burial of their fathers and grand fathers. Evidence also exists that most of those who perform this ritual derive more satisfaction from the celebration of the second burial. In matters concerning morality, especially with regard to abominable acts such as murder, incest, disputes, and settlements, my field work shows that many respondents were bold enough to share that despite the confessions and advance absolutions, most Igbo Christians find the traditional *Ikpu-ala/aru* and *igbu oriko* as popular with both Christians and traditionalists as ever. Investigation has shown that people have more involvement in the traditional process of reconciliation and social justice than they have in the sacrament of confession and reconciliation. This means that people feel more connected with their traditional way of life, including religion and social order. That is to say, they have and profess more faith in a worldview, which is a unitary system, than in the Christian worldview, as they were taught it in Igbo land.

In addition, it is interesting that the traditional religion of our ancestors sees religion as an indispensable element in a person’s way of life. From conception until death an individual finds him-/herself in an atmosphere that is essentially religious. In other words, every moment of a person’s life is led in union with and under the special care of God, the good spirits, and the ancestors. Since the spirits and the ancestors, especially the earth deity, are watching the moral behaviour of human beings for reward or punishment, everyone tries to live his day to day life in a way pleasing to the spiritual powers.

Therefore, there is need to try another method or model rather than inculturation. This is because it is the model that makes inculturation possible. It holds in balance culture and the need to freely express oneself. It would create no dichotomy between culture and liberation theology. From the above examples, it is clear that inculturation has not been working because the discussions have been one-sided and the Igbo traditional religious rituals have not been treated with respect and accorded the dignity they deserve. The inculturation process in the Igbo Church has rather been a means of confrontation, condemnation, and intimidation. Every Igbo religious ritual has been condemned as evil and as paganism and a train therefore to hellfire. Consequently, the Igbo Christian is culturally and theologically handicapped by the present inculturation or adaptation approach. Therefore, every Igbo Christian needs liberation (Sitshebo 2000:286).

The most disturbing fact about the Catholic Church in Igbo land is that the Church hierarchy seems to be blind to the reality of the life of Christians in Igbo land. They do not believe that most of their followers are Catholic on Sundays and traditionalists during the week. For instance, one of the priests in Orlu Diocese has this to say about the Igbo Catholic Church:

...the Igbo Christians have come to accept the New Way just as the Romans, the Greeks and other Europeans, Americans, etc., have embraced the Faith. Wherever the Catholic Faith is embraced, there is the tendency to accept new customs and replace some that are not useful any longer. These changes are not done by any force but with fraternal charity and humane conviction. Today, one can graciously state that the Catholic Faith has become part and parcel of Igbo Worldview. Hence, one would state without fear of contradiction that due to systematic application of the principle of inculturation, especially since the Vatican Council II (1962-1965), most of the traditional/pagan practices

among the Igbo have either been abandoned or replaced with more useful, practicable and reasonable ones (Chinagorom 2012).

The above statement shows how ignorant the Church hierarchy in Igbo land is concerning the spiritual life of Igbo people. It is also true that the Catholic Church, since its inception in Igbo land, has been paternalistic in her approach to the local way of life and has shown such misunderstanding of the true facts on the ground that she has literally used confrontation and condemnation in her evangelization program among the Igbo people. As a result, the Church has directly or indirectly encouraged a life of deception, double standard, and hypocrisy and people do not know why they are and should be “Christians”. In the midst of this life of double standard, the Igbo Catholic appears triumphant and goes around proclaiming the “*theology of liberation as the good work of the gospel*” (Odenigbo Lecture 2011).

It is no surprise therefore that there is a multiplication of new generation Churches in Igbo land, simply because the Catholic Church believes that the best way to achieve reconciliation is:

...through the public act in the presence of a Catholic Priest and the community, using either Holy Communion or Holy Water to seal the reconciliation. It would also appear anachronistic and atavistic if some communities are found still holding tenaciously those pagan practices in the midst of the parishes sprouting from the villages and even kindred. Recently, an incident of incest was appeased by a Catholic prelate without laying credence to those “fetish” practices in that part of Igboland, using more of the sacraments of Reconciliation and some public acts that really substituted those archaic requirements of the victims in most parts of the

Igbo land that in the past were inhuman and animalistic (Chinagorom 2012).

The reality of dual observance as an expression of the Christian faith by the Igbo people negates the presence of the Church. I believe that through dialogue patterned on the traditional Igbo style (the consensus model), the undesirability of dual observance can be highlighted, with a view to addressing it. The use of culturally acceptable patterns of dialogue enables the Igbo people to engage with the mission of the Church, without suspicion. It also could clear the way for the full expression of the gospel in Igbo views of *Ikpu-ala/aru* and other values of social justice system. In other words, the liberty to express oneself culturally becomes a significant factor which informs the reading of the Bible and the subsequent dialogue between gospel and culture.

The other function of the dialogical approach is to conscientize the Igbo people to the need to rediscover their sense of religiosity. In reality, African theology is capable of rescuing the Igbo people and enabling them consciously and freely to participate in this search for liberation, at the same time allowing them to experience the goodness of the gospel for themselves. Through this approach the Christian faith is rooted into the culture by engaging language and idioms and categories of thought and action that speak clearly to the Igbo Christian. Thus, it empowers them to engage with the fundamental theological insights in relation to *Ikpu-ala/aru* and the values of their social justice system with seriousness. In addition, it will challenge them to manifest the essence of being of a Christian.

In the same trend of thought, this model or approach we are advocating provides for an acknowledged cultural expression of the gospel in a contextually relevant and sensitive manner. In truth, this expression, as the product of open interaction of traditional Igbo views, official Church teaching, and Catholicism could be translated into worship which projects an understanding of the significance of being a Christian. Given these conditions, this function of our approach will enable Igbo Christians to continue working to root the gospel in their own culture. Furthermore, it will continuously

challenge them to project what it means to be a Christian. Thus, it becomes a tool through which they engage with the different theological insights.

### **7.16.2 The Official Church Position: The Missionary Effects**

One of the familiar statements of Saint Pope John XXIII, and later the documents of the Vatican Council II, was “know the signs of the times,” summarized by the term *aggiornamento*. Indeed, the signs of the times in Igbo land today are that there is a misconception that Christianity is already becoming incarnated in the Igbo culture and that every Igbo man and woman is a Christian. This, no doubt, is the reason why, as we have seen above, a person like Chinagorom would think that reconciliation among the Igbo people is achieved “through the public act in the presence of a Catholic Priest and the community, using either Holy Communion or Holy Water to seal the reconciliation.” Fr. Chinagorom represents clearly what has been the general position and view of the Nigerian Catholic Church. According to Amadi-Azuogu, the Church in Nigeria is, at least, aware that a new “theological wind” is blowing across Africa. She is aware that this is a “wind of change”; that an “aggiornamento” (a renewal) is urgently needed in the African Church and an African renaissance will be the way forward (Amadi-Azuogu 2000:54).

However, he regretted that despite this awareness that something is wrong with our missionary past and that something urgent needs to be done, there is still a *slow movement* by the Catholic Church in Nigeria, the “theological go slow”. Consequently, in a study organized on inculturation on November 9-10, 1988 and in the proceedings published in 1989, it was highlighted not only that something is wrong with the present state of theology, but also that the Europeans cannot do the “theological diagnosis” because they may not appreciate the depth of what went wrong. They are the ones who inflicted the wound on African theology. To the Nigerian Church hierarchy, inculturation does not yet seem to be something urgent. The Church refused to recognize the fact that inculturation is first and foremost a matter for Africans, and that to bring in Europeans is to return to the mistake of the missionary past. Sadly, even after the

Synod on Africa of 1994, on the inculturation issue, the status quo has remained the same.

In general, the missionary model is the official Catholic model of doing theology in Orlu Diocese, and she has continued to adopt the extreme understanding of the redemption-centred approach to theology. The Nigerian Church has remained a toothless bulldog of Africa in terms of inculturation and has continued to brook no compromise with the local Igbo cultures. Instead, the Church has demanded that those who become Christians should become “cultureless” so as to enable the Church to write a “Christian” culture on them. For example, the reality of inculturation theology was demonstrated during one of the sessions, when one of the Bishops insisted that:

If the New Testament does not cease to be the NT because it is not written in the mother tongue of Jesus, so also will our theology not cease to be African because we are theologizing in a foreign language (Amadi-Azuogu 2000:65).

For this Bishop, there is no problem with the language of the Church, which is Latin, and if there is any, it is not acute, as it appears on the surface. Notwithstanding, it is a problem.

Consequently, the Nigerian Church, in its approach and position, has created excessive mistrust for Igbo religious values, and hence has ignored the creation-centred or incarnational models of doing theology. In addition, it has not actively sought to firmly root the gospel into its context. In other words, in spite of the fact that it uses local language to express the fundamentals of Christianity, there is no room to test the credibility of the gospel message, and Christianity comes across as a religion that merely demands the keeping of laws. The problem with this approach in the Igbo context is that the Igbo people are cultural people. They cannot but express themselves within a cultural framework. Igbo culture is full of symbolism and their way of life can be understood through symbols. Since the missionary approach condemns Igbo culture and symbols, it does not provide for full expression of the faith, resulting in dual

observance of rituals and making the Igbo people split their lives into Christian and Igbo traditional. This Western kind of thinking splits life into sacred and secular. This is not the Igbo notion of life.

I, therefore, contend that engaging the interactive dialogical approach or model can effectively break the wall of suspicion that exists between Christian and Igbo views of *Ikpu-ala/aru*. It will challenge the dual observance and provide for interaction and effective preparation of the ground for a sound synthesis, which in turn will lead to a contextual theology of *Ikpu-ala*, epitomizing community conviviality. Furthermore, in a Church which believes in the communion of saints and resurrection of the dead, the condemnatory approach of missionary Christianity is outdated. This kind of approach is further undermined by the fact that the Catholic Diocese of Orlu and, indeed, the whole Church in Igboland, is under indigenous Igbo Christian leadership.

Our situation demands a theological thinking that wrestles with contextual realities, and the theological application should be meaningful to the Igbo people in order to make them seek to demonstrate the effects of the Christian faith on their day to day lives. In other words, being Igbo, Christian, and indigenous, the leadership should be in a position to seriously enable Igbo Christians to engage with the rudiments of their faith in a manner which affirms their identity as Igbo people.

Thus, for the purpose of inculturation, engaging the interactive dialogical approach of doing theology will go a long way towards synthesizing Christian and Igbo views of *Ikpu-ala*, and *Oriko*, thereby empowering and recognizing Catholicism as a valid source of theology. It will give Igbo culture space to officially express itself: its beliefs, practices, and weaknesses. Thus, Christian belief in “the communion of saints and the resurrection of the dead,” will be openly authorized to contextually engage with the Igbo belief in “community-in-relationship with the ancestors” (Sitshebo 2000:293), and to critique it. In this way, the Church will provide the opportunity to challenge dual observance of rituals, while taking seriously the people’s everyday lives, faith, and personal response to Christ.

## **7.17 CONCLUSION**

From the foregoing discussion, *Ikpu-ala* can be inculturated with the Church's Sacrament of Reconciliation, possibly by giving a new name to an old custom. One thing, however, is clear: that before the advent of the missionaries, the Igbo society existed as a unique entity with established culture and customs (*Omenala*). They have also their own way of life and this includes religion (*ofufechi*), festivals, and social activities such as marriage (*alum dinanwunye*), burial rites (*akwam ozu*) and the like. The Igbo as a society has values concerning what is considered right or wrong. Any offence was viewed as grievous and was met with punishment or restitution.

On the other hand, the Catholic Church, as the Body of Christ with a long tradition and history of existence, has also established customs and doctrines; one of them being the Seven Sacraments that were instituted by Christ throughout His ministry on earth. The Church, as the visible sign of Christ's presence on earth, sees the Seven Sacraments not only just as mysterious presences that take place among the Faithful, but also as being at work every day in the lives of individuals and communities that accept her, and even as helping to build a worldview (Chinagorom 2012).

However, what is on ground today is that, since the contact with the missionaries in 1885 at Onitsha, the Igbo Christians have come to accept Christ and our "new way of life", but in only with their lips or heads and not with their hearts, and this has altered the Igbo man's relationship with the divine and the various organized systems of belief and worship in which these relations have been expressed. The result of this situation has been the emergence of an Igbo Christian who is both a "Christian" and a "traditionalist" all at the same time. Many Igbo Christians are better rooted in their traditional religious life than in their Christian life for the simple reason that they were born into it. This cultural way of life is all they have known from birth and they will die in it. The conflict of values between the two religions is a result of dual observance of rituals in the Igbo Church.

## CHAPTER EIGHT EVALUATION AND GENERAL CONCLUSION

### TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED PRACTICE OF *IKPU-ALA* BY IGBO CHRISTIANS

#### 8.1 INTRODUCTION: SEAMING THE FRAGMENTED IGBO VALUE SYSTEMS

I watched with keen interest my mother sew clothes during the Nigerian civil war. Every day I saw her converting old shirts, dresses, trousers, wrappers, and indeed any kind of old cloth into new, fitting ones. Because it was war, there were not new clothes of any kind coming into Biafra. I saw my mother making old and new kinds of clothes into brand new clothes, every day. People were wearing these transformed clothes, known as “patch-patch”, to church, meetings, markets, and farms with joy, contentment, and gratitude to God. As a 12 year-old, I remember asking mother why she liked patching old and new even when they do not match with each other? She spent a great deal of time explaining to me why it’s good not to discard old things or things that may not be useful today, but may be useful tomorrow. She would explain and emphasize the usefulness of each type in its own right. Above all, she would compare it with what every average person encounters in his or her everyday life.

The lessons of this suturing or patching of things dismembered or fragmented are handy at this point in our study. Any seamstress will tell you that suturing sometimes involves joining two different things that were never together, or to join both the dismembered parts with the new members to form a whole.

#### 8.2 THE EVALUATION

With the studies so far, it is clear to me that working towards a Christian understanding of Igbo normative/value systems depends on the strength and validity of the tools employed to formulate a contextual theology, using real contextual factors and giving them an opportunity to be in dialogue with the Bible, Christian traditions, and reason. The problem is still the researcher’s focus namely, how can *Ikpu-ala* as a social justice value be inculcated into the Igbo Catholic social values with special reference to the Sacrament of Reconciliation? It should be noted that the aim of the previous chapters has been to provide a platform for an interactive theological engagement

between the Catholic social values and the Igbo traditional cultural values so as to maximize the greatest theological and social impacts in the lives of Igbo Catholic Christians and this kind of encounter can possible if there is cultural humility and sensitive on the both sides of the party. Nonetheless, difficulties towards such an interactive engagement abound and it would have serious implications for pastoral care in Orlu Diocese and beyond. The implications for such pastoral care is what this our final chapter will endeavour to outline.

Consequently, the researcher can affirm that an Igbo man brought up in the Igbo traditional religion, but who later accepts Christianity, carries with him most of the traditional beliefs and practices. And there is no gain-saying the fact that a lot of our present day Christians belong to this category or are sons and daughters of this group even though the Church has celebrated the centenary of its beginning in this part of the world. The researcher does not intend to proclaim all the religious and moral values of the Igbo people to be perfect, but believes that they do have some merits.

This study therefore is an attempt to look closely at the religious and moral values of our traditional religion so as to bring out from them those elements which are authentically good, valid, just, beautiful, elevating, and essentially Christian. These elements, like a sutured garment, would then be properly utilized in the dissemination of the “good news” in such a way that it will sink deeply into the minds of Igbo Christians. Elaborating on this, Ugwu (1978:259) holds that the work of Igbo Christian moral teachers and pastors is not only to utilize the Igbo cultural background in educating the Igbos or in bringing out those good qualities which are contained in Igbo traditional cultural values, but also to see that some excellent customs, that the modern way of life is trying to damage, do not die away.

We can mention some of these elements, especially those we met in our work. The first and most outstanding of all is the relationship between religion and morality found in the traditional life of the Igbo. The modern debate on whether morality can be divorced from religion finds no ground as far as the Igbo are concerned. The lacuna found in the relationship between God and *aru* has to be filled while teaching Christians the commandments of God. The same applies to the sense of personal guilt or sin, or

the necessity to adjust one's position before God or to put one's conscience aright, which for the Igbo does not form the governing factor in their conception of *aru*. Igbo Christians are to be properly taught that their fear of God should not be out of fear of the punishment that he would send to any offender, but out of **Love**. *Aru*, as offences against the Earth goddess and the ancestors, can be used as a starting point to show Christians how they are to dread sin. As the ancestors influence the lives of the living, we can rightly utilize this for teaching about the role of the saints in the lives of Christians.

The communal dimension of sin and its consequences, the awareness that the effects of an offence affect a community, provides a good ground for teaching the Christian doctrine about the consequences of sin to other Christians as members of the mystical body of Christ. In the midst of mysterious powers (supernatural beings) personal and impersonal powers within the community, the religiousness of the Igbo is clearly manifested through multiple rituals. Here, the Church can introduce Christian concepts such as the power of the blood of Christ, the power of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of God, and the power of prayers in the name of Jesus (Turaki 2007) as being far more effective than any other power "in heaven, on earth and under earth" (Phil. 2:10). As one who understands the place and meaning of powers in African daily life, Turaki (2007) strongly recommends that:

Our theological approach must go beyond matching Biblical texts with specific traditional beliefs to addressing the theological, philosophical, moral and ethical bases and foundations of these beliefs. We must lay the axe at the root. Religious beliefs, feelings, practice and behaviour have roots and bases. The traditional conception of mystical and mysterious powers has deep theological roots.

The presence of these supernatural powers can be used by the Church to emphasize the necessity of the sacrament of reconciliation and the sacrifice of the Holy Mass. The need for proper catechetics is so important because the life of a traditional

African with this belief in the impersonal powers is at the mercy of wicked users, such as the medicine men/women who manipulate these powers to their own advantage. It is often difficult to define the religious mind of an Igbo or an African without mentioning the permeation of these powers into the daily life and behaviour of an average Igbo man.

Jordan (1946:119), demonstrating the place of cultural values in an integral Igbo Christian, believes that (writing about Bishop Shanahan):

He utilized his knowledge (about sacrifice) in bringing an understanding of the Mass before the people. He pointed out that the Mass was a sacrifice to propitiate God on account of sin; that a reputed priest was the right person to offer it, and that Holy Communion at the end was a spiritual feast partaken of only by those who had been fully reconciled to God through forgiveness (Osuji 1977:77).

Understood as such, C.Ubaka (1988:68) contends that public reconciliation of sinners is by no means foreign in the Igbo traditional religion, as a result, he argues that the new Christian rite of reconciling many penitents may prove to be valuable, because its communal dimension of sin and social relationships may appeal more to an Igbo traditionalist than maybe originally envisioned. For his part, Ugwu (1978:260) argues that:

There is no doubt that the Christian message will be understood better and that the people to whom it is preached will appreciate it and will even love it if it is imparted to them through their good inborn traditional customs, as then it will help them understand that Christianity is not a foreign or European religion. It is a religion of all those who have accepted the new call of God through His revelation in Christ who brought new light to the world.

Even in our own time, Pope John Paul, in a message to the African Bishops and missionaries, once remarked that the Church views with great respect the moral and religious values of African tradition; not only because of their meaning, but also because she sees them as providential, as the basis for spreading the Gospel message and beginning the establishment of the new society in Christ (Ezeanya 1977: 35).

At this point, I strongly affirm that the Igbo traditional beliefs and social and cultural values such as *Ikpu-ala* as a social justice value, undoubtedly prepared the ground for the advent and taking of root of Christianity among the Igbos. Thus, the research into *Ikpu-ala* was undertaken as a means of building social order, peace, and harmony, and using religious beliefs as valuable elements that can be integrated into the new Igbo Christian society. Pope Pius, very aware of the value of traditional values, once declared:

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. For the church when she calls people to higher culture and a better way of life, under the inspiration of the Christian religion, does not act like one who recklessly uproots and cuts down a thriving forest. No, she grafts a good scion upon the wild stock that it may bear a crop of more delicious fruit (1951:#56).

I couldn't agree more with what the magistrum have aptly expressed. Moreover, these good traditional values cannot be discovered except by a thorough and sincere pastoral engagement and inculturation of Igbo traditional values, or else we may run the risk of condemnation and rejection of these valuable cultural values "without trials" as was done by some of the missionaries.

In this sense, it is my intention to see the Church using the positive aspects of Igbo value systems such as *ikpu-ala* and the Igbo community consciousness to give symbolic meanings to community life. The Church also should rethink its evangelization strategies that focus on the need for Igbo people to rediscover who they are,

independent of their assimilated Western values and ways of thinking and behaving, since among the Igbo people: “a person is a person through other persons” (Shutte 1993:46). This is an Igbo aphorism articulating a basic respect and compassion for others. In other words, I intend for the Church to adopt an approach that protects and liberates Igbo Christians from the world of many supernatural powers (personal and impersonal) by theological contextualization and missiological/pastoral engagement, embracing some of the positive Igbo value systems without domination and condemnation.

### **8.3 IKPU-ALA AND SOCIAL ORDER AND STABILITY**

In this study, the researcher has tried to outline what *ikpu-ala* means in the eyes of the laity in Orlu Diocese and the community at large. It is an exposition that clearly shows people always live according to their worldview, which influences the way they think, act, and live their daily lives. Without any doubt, the Igbo try to cope with their value systems at various levels of their society. This includes a human’s way of relating to his/her fellow beings, whether in family life, religious life, attitudes, customs, and traditions. *Ikpu-ala* as a particular cultural value of Igbo society can be found to contain elements that are naturally good, just, and beautiful; elements that can promote the general welfare of humanity as God’s creatures. Udokang (2014:267) quoting Mbiti says:

There exist many laws, customs, set forms of behavior, regulations, rules, observances and taboos constituting the moral code and ethics of a given community or society. Any breach of this code of behavior is considered evil, wrong or bad, for it is an injury or destruction to the accepted social order and peace. As in all societies of the world, social order and peace are recognized by African people as essential and sacred, where the sense of life is so deep, it is inevitable that the solidarity (and stability) of the community must be maintained otherwise there is disintegration and destruction.

In the same stretch of thought, Mbiti also states that African peoples have a deep sense of right and wrong. This moral sense has produced customs, rules, laws, traditions and taboos which can be observed in each society (Mbiti 1969:175). Thus one can make a claim that Igbo traditional ethics predates the coming of Europeans to Igboland and indeed to Africa. In reality, ethics and the sense of morality in the Igbo were not the creations of Europeans and Christian missionaries as Basden and others wanted their readers to believe. Christianity has rather given it deeper perspective and challenges, since there are to be found, often side by side with the good, elements that are evil which are ultimately opposed to the temporal and spiritual wellbeing of humans (Turaki). In the preceding chapters, the analysis of *Ikpu-ala* served to show the wrong views expressed by some missionaries and European scholars. Some African scholars who understood their culture and language have shown in their studies that a well ordered and clearly defined system of ethics and morality exists in Africa. The Igbo and African ethical principles and moral codes regulated the lives of individuals in the community before the advent of colonialism and missionary activities in Igboland. In the same way, law and order, stability and social harmony, were maintained and preserved through a strict observance of the normative ethical principles.

Our study has also shown in the exposition of *Ikpu-ala* that every community, ward, and village in Igbo had a system of morals which are preserved in their customs and tradition. There is no society in the world, not only in Africa, which has no set of dos and don'ts. According to Udokang, any society that has no norms or ethically intelligible way of ascertaining and enforcing good conduct is bound to disappear in the short or long run (Ozumba 1995:55). In agreement with Opoku, Udokang believes that the solidarity of the community is maintained by laws, customs, taboos and set forms of behaviour which constitutes the moral code (Opoku 1978:166). Thus, Udokang stresses the inalienable importance of ethics and moral codes in the maintenance of social order and stability in African societies. That is, African societies were maintained in terms of social order, through the observance of traditional ethical principles and customs. Consequently, any violation or disregard of these principles resulted in disorder and social dislocation. This is made clearer when Tempels (1959:45) rightly observes that:

Africans have traditionally been very conscious of the social dimension of morality. Morality is always seen in the social context. Hence any serious violation of the moral order has a social aspect which involves serious social consequences. The whole society is affected, for every evil act is an anti-social act which has adverse effects on the whole community.

Tempels is not alone in his view. He is supported by Nwosu and Kalu who observed that a given cultural group enjoys a high degree of stability to the extent that the members of the group allow their actions to be governed by the dominant values and norms (Udokang 2014:267).

Predictably, like other African societies, Igbo society depended largely on the strict application of the moral codes of ethics for smooth functioning. Therefore, Ilogu (1975:23) was right when he says:

*Omenala* (customs) is the means by which the traditional Ibo society enforces conformity. Culturally speaking, *omenala* is the means by which the social ethos is measured, the values of the society are continued from one generation to another and the process 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 neighbour and what to give to them, simply by observing the well known customary law of behaviour and moral code, that is, *omenala*.

#### **8.4 IGBO SOCIAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND IKPU-ALA**

From our previous discussion, it is obvious that the Igbo concept of justice and its implications in a social and religious context, if carefully evaluated, can be relevant to Christianity in Igbo land. As Vatican II rightly specifies the purpose of the Church:

To be able to offer all the mysteries of salvation and the life brought by God, the Church must implant itself in all these groups driven by the same impulse, which drove Christ through his incarnation to bind himself to the concrete social and cultural conditions of the people among whom he lived (Ad Gentes, 1965: no.10).

Key points to be noted are the attitude towards life, as demanding beneficial reciprocity and sustained through the exercise of justice. There is also the action system sanctioned by religion and thus constituting the *Omenala* (moral code), which in its operations regulates and prohibits ways of social interactions. It also lays unlimited emphasis on group morality rather than on individual cultivation of goodness as a way of ensuring that neither the individual nor the group be deprived of its proper function in the joint realization of the basic good to which they are committed, namely the fullness of life both in this life and beyond.

Also, it is obvious that the cultivation of this goodness cannot be possible where there are no ethical reflections that guide individuals and ultimately the community in clarifying the logic and adequacy of the values that shaped their lives and experiences. However, it is worth noting that *Ikpu-ala* as a value, and as used here, means the quality of a thing which makes it more or less desirable and useful (Ilogu 1968:119).

Thus in the administration of *ikpu-ala* (justice), law and order is a function of the Igbo people. It is as old as the society, and it kept them together in harmony and in peace. The Igbo justice system may have its limitations, but the Igbo religious and political structures used *Ikpu-ala* to create and determine the legal structure and forums used in administering justice, and to determine the relationship of other aspects of Igbo life.

The forums for handling disputes differ for each community and *ikpu-ala* may use varying combinations of family and community forums or traditional courts in its execution. Nevertheless, Igbo justice is not just for settling disputes but its end-goal is to restore relationships in the community through harmony and peace, to balance the

social equilibrium. For instance, family forums, such as family gatherings and talking circles, are facilitated by family elders or community leaders. Matters usually involving family problems, marital conflicts, juvenile misconduct, violent or abusive behaviour, parental misconduct, or property disputes can also be handled within the family forum, or are taken to the next level of justice system.

Other laws such as customary laws, sanctions, and practices are also used. In such cases, individuals are summoned to these gatherings following traditional protocols initiated by the chosen elder. For example, in the *Umunna* communities the gathering is convened by the *Okpara* (or his agent). Following the lodging of the complaint by the aggrieved person's family, he must personally notify the accused and his or her family of the time and place of the gathering. In such a gathering, elders are selected as spokespersons responsible for opening and closing the meetings with words or prayers. During the meeting, each side has an opportunity to speak out on his or her side of the case, and the family may assist in conveying the victim's issues. In other circumstances, extended family members often serve as spokespersons if the victim is very young or vulnerable. Similarly, a spokesperson may be designated to speak on behalf of the accused, especially if the accused is a juvenile, or if other circumstances prevent the accused from speaking. Where the family forum fails to resolve a conflict, the matter may be pursued elsewhere, namely before *oha n'eze*, the town assembly. Offender compliance is obligatory and monitored by the families involved.

When a case reaches the community forum, it requires more formal protocols than in family forums, and it draws on the families' willingness to discuss the issues, events, or accusations. These are mediated by tribal officials or representatives including the traditional religious priest (*eze-arusi*). In this case, the community *Umunna* representatives act as facilitators, and participate in the resolution process along with the offender, the victim, and their families. They are the peace makers; their settlement is final and appeals are rare. Again, offender compliance is obligatory and monitored by the families and community officials. In addition, there is also "traditional counseling" by the facilitator or presiding judge/elder. There is a general practice of "advising or giving" in the traditional resolution process where the community spokespersons or local

officials speak of community, reminding everyone present about the community values, mores, and the consequences of misbehavior or misconduct. Often times, these are conveyed in parables or creation narratives and beliefs. An advice is given about harboring vengeful feelings, and everyone is encouraged to renew relationships.

The cultural laws are based on the values, mores, and norms of Igbo society and expressed in its customs, traditions, beliefs, practices, and prohibitions. This is what is called *Omenala*, a set of unwritten laws; handed down from one generation to another and learnt from birth in the particular community. No wonder the *Oxford English Dictionary* (unabridged) defines justice as:

The quality of being morally just or righteous; the principle of just dealing; the exhibition of this quality of principle in action; just conduct; integrity; rectitude; conformity (of an action or thing) to moral right, or to reason, truth, or fact; rightfulness; fairness; correctness; propriety (Simpson & Weiner 2009).

The restorative aspect of the resolution process involves the use of rituals diligently crafted and intensely applied (holistically) for the offender to cleanse the spirit and soul of the bad forces that caused him/her to behave offensively. The reconciliation rituals include ceremonial sweat lodge, fasting, purifications, feasting (*Igba ndu and oriko*), and other methods that are used to begin the healing and cleansing process necessary for the victim, the offender, and their families to regain mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being, and to restore family and communal harmony. This is what *ikpu-ala* sets out to achieve in every community conflict resolution process, focusing on harmony, peace, and conviviality of the relationships in the Igbo community. However, there are some negative aspects of *ikpu-ala* that require Christian influence for purification.

## **8.5 THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF IKPU-ALA**

### **8.5.1. Double Standards of Justice**

As already noted, there are always some good and bad aspects of *Ikpu-ala* as a justice value in Igboland. One negative aspect of *Ikpu-ala* is the double standard. In

their business affairs, among other things, it was revealed to us that they have one standard for tribal members or members of the in-group, and another for outsiders. Also, restriction of sexual rights and punishment for sexual failures such as adultery are more severe for females than for males. To regard sexual failure as always the woman's fault is unjust, because in some cases the failure may be on the man's part. Many childless women suffered untold hardships in the hands of the husbands and in-laws as a result of the man's infertility, although most often nobody talks about this. The women are rather treated like criminals. Thus, the double standard can and does create constant tension and mistrust and more often than not, hostility.

In this case, hostility stems from fear and reflects inequality of common destiny, and lack of common destiny seems to be at the basis of the Igbo double standard. However, the double standard seems to be a universal phenomenon, and therefore not any more blameworthy among the Igbo than elsewhere. Predictably, practicing double standards can be seriously unjust and as such is not compatible with Christianity. In this respect, Christians have to overcome limitations in their practice of virtue by cultivating greater respect for each human being and learning to see all people as brothers and sisters in Christ. This is because Christ's love is a universal love, for the poor and the rich people, for Jews and Greeks, for sinners and saints, for those who keep the law and for the lawless, that the law of love may reign in them all alike.

Ultimately, the fundamental basis of all love is not the family relationship, the tribal belonging, not even baptism or the reception of Holy Eucharist, but the Image of God in every human being, which even sinners and non-Christians carry with them. What is imperative for Christians is to love as Christ loved us. Jesus does not forbid us ever to defend ourselves or to take action against injustice. He is rather pointing out that everyone has a right to be loved, and that our practice of justice stems from this understanding.

Furthermore, justice must not be limited to the members of one's family, tribe or nation, for in Christ all human beings are brothers and sisters and therefore equal. St. Paul made this point more than clear when he said: "there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in

Christ” (Gal. 3:28). Consequently, the authentic Christian is one who is passionate in calling for justice and peace for all human beings, with a special attention towards the poor, because Christ’s concern has always been to treat all peoples justly, regardless of their nationality, sex orientation, or social conditions. In addition, a sensible contextualization of theology of *Ikpu-ala* can be possible where everyone is seen as a child of God and capable of sharing in an evangelical engagement and process with others in the realities that define his/her life.

### **8.5.2 The End does not justify the Means**

The process of *Ikpu-ala* in Igbo can be cumbersome and the *means* of securing justice among the Igbo can mean great ordeals, divination, and oracles that are among the recognized means and are considered to be the highest human or divine courts of appeal. These means are based on a system of belief in the invocation of the gods to intervene on behalf of the innocent accused and to reveal the guilty. The operators of the courts do much to obtain information about the situation, yet it does not always satisfy the requirements of Igbo justice. Investigations have shown that no *Ikpu-ala* is possible without being supervised by the *eze-arusi* (the diviner or priest of the shrine of the locality). The Igbo believe that it is only through the medium or oracle, divination, and ordeal that the justice of the deities can be obtained, since they are witnesses to the crimes committed. Hence in complete trust, they make recourse to these agents, because the spirits, being part and parcel of the Igbo social system and religious beliefs, are considered capable of guaranteeing divine justice. In practical terms, such means of securing justice are not only incapable of guaranteeing divine justice, they are all too easily manipulated and therefore open to the most gross abuses of justice. They can also easily be used to perpetrate worse injustices than those they are meant to correct. Thus, a condition such as this has no place in Christianity or in Christian justice.

Again, *ikpu-ala* as a social justice value in Igbo religion has its purpose aimed at restoring broken links in relationships. However, one has to be careful not to take for granted that the means justifies the end, not in all cases. If it happens in political circles; it should not be the case in morality. Therefore, it is important to note that there are some cultic groups, such as the Masquerades, whose functions are inseparable from

the religion and justice system in Igboland. As often as the case is presented, there are animal sacrifices and sometimes human sacrifices which is unacceptable (to both Christian and Igbo moralities) as a means no matter what was achieved as an end (Cf *Things Fall Apart* of Chinua Achebe, 1965). The cultic groups in many cases cause destruction to life, including human life, and damage to people's property by confiscation, although not to the cult's members. Evidently, these groups sometimes use that opportunity to victimize those whom they regard as enemies and those they hate and are jealous of. They perpetrate all sorts of atrocities in the name of a deity or divinity. Thus, their conduct can turn them into obstacles to justice, evangelization, and the enculturation processes. They cannot claim to be acting for God while at the same time participating in any action that contradicts love, mercy, justice, and peace.

### **8.5.3 Excessive Punishment and Human Rights**

The nature and process of *Ikpu-ala* in the Igbo justice system is often connected with punishments, some of which are excessive and therefore, inhumane. As one would expect, every society or community has its own set and forms of punishments and restitution for various offenses, both legal and moral. We have already seen the forms of sanctions or punishments against crimes, especially with regard to crimes such as murder, adultery, incest, and theft. The crucial question is whether the punishments sanctioned against these crimes are just and in keeping with Christ's view on forgiveness and reconciliation.

From our study of Igbo crimes and sanctions, we have seen that the way the Igbo carry out punishment is criminal in itself, because it does not meet the requirements for just punishment or the Christian concept. The practice, for example, of dragging the thief around the village or town with the stolen article is definitely dehumanizing. Even in the case of murder, both the innocent and the guilty persons are punished, because close relatives are considered as sharing in the responsibility for the crime. The same is true of theft or robbery. The Igbo do not make any distinction between theft and robbery; for they both amount to stealing, which implies deprivation and hence must be punished without asking what was stolen, who stole it, from whom it has been stolen, and why did

he/she steal. In other words, the Igbo do not give real consideration of the circumstances surrounding the stealing, even when violence was involved.

In addition, accidental homicide is punished as severely as premeditated murder. Why so? Because according to the Igbo, life is lost. There is no sense of proportion in administering punishment. Another thing that is closely connected with *Ikpu-ala* is the doctrine of retribution. The eye-for-an-eye, *lex talionis* concept often results in forms of punishment such as *mutilation*. The hand of a thief, for example, could be cut off, the eye of a spy could be gouged out, the male sex offender could be castrated, and even the female too could be mutilated in some way. Occasionally, the female may be *disfigured* to make her physically undesirable to anyone. Such punishments were inflicted to deter offenders from repeating their acts, e.g., by making repetition impossible, and were thought to be a deterrent to other potential offenders. It was very *crude* and *rough*, because mutilation can result in death or incurring a chronic disease as a result of bleeding and infection. Above all, it is against human dignity and the order placed by the Creator.

However, there is a caveat to the Igbo system of punishment since the Igbo have no prisons where the criminals could be kept and trained for rehabilitation. Consequently, the Igbo used the only way available and known to them to rid or clean the society of the evils and criminals. In most circumstances, the people doing the punishing had to reckon with an attitude of emotional moral anger and automatic submission to custom rather than to reason, plus the fact that justice had to be seen to be done. In some cases, at least, they were also acting out of fear of what the spirits might do if they failed to mete out the customary punishment to the culprit. Again, it is also true that such actions were motivated by their religious faith, because they believed in maintaining the order established by the Supreme Being, of which the spirits and the living are the custodians.

Nevertheless, in the Christian vision of life, punishment must be tempered and not allowed to go beyond what is proportionate to guilt. Where there is no guilt, there should obviously be no punishment. In any case, those assessing the degree of guilt should

have in mind the promotion of good order, governance, and security in the community, and as far as possible the correction of the guilty.

In reality, Christianity is against a rigid or inflexible system of law or application of law, and in this case, has introduced the concept of *equity* into the application of laws, especially in penal law. Christianity has recognized that the ultimate purpose of law is the common good, the eternal glory of God, and the *supernatural destiny of man*. Every law has its own limitations and may with time operate as bondage and not as a bond required for harmonious human relationship. Equity is therefore the benign application of law; it is justice tempered by the sweetness of mercy, and in the administration of penal law in particular remains for Christians a sublime ideal and a precious rule of conduct. Law must concern itself not only with justice, and strict justice at that, but also with equity which is the fruit of the benignity and charity of Christ (Okure 1983:87). Hence with equity one rejoices to see justice done, but in a way and to a degree that is equitable and fair. Christianity can thus enrich the Igbo notion of justice and especially their administration of penal law with the golden rule of equity.

#### **8.6 A COMMON DENOMINATOR TO THE BIBLE AND IGBO WORLDVIEWS: THE IGBO PERSEVERES IN HIS/HER RELIGION UNTIL DEATH**

There is a need for biblical and Igbo worldviews to be examined if we are to appreciate the contribution of the Bible to pastoral care/implications. Such an undertaking enables their similarities to be upheld and differences to be noted and recognized in the inculturation process. Both biblical and Igbo worldviews acknowledge the presence and activity of spirits in the universe, but in the biblical world, God, the God of Israel has no equal; something the Igbo cosmos acknowledges, even in their own lives. In the sphere of crimes and the culprits they both acknowledge that crime is polluting and dangerous.

The paradoxical nature of *Ikpu-ala*, in this sense, as repentance (*metonia*) is also acknowledged in the biblical setting. Sin/Crime is referred to as the natural enemy, cutting off our relationship with God (2 Cor. 5:20). It is natural in that it marks the end of being in good relationship with the spirit world, and it is therefore an enemy in that when it strikes, normalcy is affected. According to Sitshebo, when sin or crime occurred in

traditional the milieu, it was treated with great urgency by one's family. It set in train a series of actions to be done quickly because of effects on all human relationships. Thus, crime, abomination/pollution is disruptive. People therefore, respond to pollutions with a degree of fear. This is witnessed in some of the symbolic rituals used in the reconciliation process both in the Bible and in Igbo tradition. This explains why King David went to repentance when he was confronted about his adultery with the wife of Uriah and with the subsequent death of Uriah (2 Sam). The same is also attested by the people of Nineveh when the Prophet Jonah announced that within the next forty days, the city of Nineveh would be destroyed unless they repented (Jonah 3). Here clearly, the fear of death was King David's reason for fasting so that God might have mercy on him and spare the life of the baby. Similarly, the King of Nineveh ordered everybody and every animal to forgo food and wear coarse material called sackcloth and ashes on their heads to prevent the dangerous calamities of evil and death among the population. Such practices as these were intended to obtain the mercy and forgiveness of God as happened with the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3). Without doubt, both biblical and Igbo traditional world views have a lot in common in terms of recognition of sin and its effects on human relationship.

The reason for this overview of biblical and Igbo traditional views of reconciliation is to highlight a closeness that has implications for pastoral care. This is with hope of challenging the Church to consider interactive engagement with the Igbo traditional cultural value of *ikpu-ala* and to give it a chance, as well as to see more areas of possible evangelization by the Church through Igbo values, for a possible opening up (incorporation) to these cultural values in the Igbo Church.

The advent of Christianity in Igbo land meant the introduction of a Christian worldview. As is evident throughout Igboland, Christianity made tremendous achievements. Through the missionary activities, the slave trade and slavery, human sacrifices and twin killings, were stopped. The missionaries also introduced education, built hospitals and orphanages. They also destroyed some level of superstition, and increased human knowledge that brought about improved human welfare. In this research, the achievement of the traditional religion also can never be underestimated,

and it remains, together with Igbo cultural values, a way of life of the Igbo people and a way they managed and maintained social order and political hegemony. According to Richard Niebuhr (1951:32), culture is the social life of a people, their environment created by them in the areas of language, habits, ideas, beliefs, customs, social organization, inherited artifacts, technical processes, and values. Clearly, the Igbo traditional religion was incapable of achieving the things Christianity did because it was static as well as looking downwards. Through education and Christian religion it was possible for the Igbo to re-shape their faith and world view. Nevertheless, syncretistic practices among many Igbo Christians show that Igbo traditional religion is still alive, though its encounter with Christianity means it will never be the same again. According to Niebuhr (1951:246),

To make our decisions in faith is to make them in view of the fact that no single man or group or historical time is the church; but that there is a church of faith in which we do our partial, relative work and on which we count. It is to make them (our decisions) in view of the fact that Christ is risen from the dead, and is not only the head of the church but the redeemer of the world. It is to make them in view of the fact that the world of culture – man’s achievement – exists within the world of grace- God’s kingdom.

In practice, this view means that we work within culture for its betterment, because God ultimately had some hand in human creativity, and it was good (and can be good). We also work for its transformation because while there is sin in culture, it is not all lost; there is hope, through Christ, for redemption of cultures. Furthermore, we would defeat sin not by escaping it or fighting it directly (like focusing on the devil), but rather with our eyes on Jesus, our desire to be positive and God-oriented, focusing on Christ and thinking whatever is excellent (Niebuhr 1951:194-196).

As it were, the early missionaries saw themselves as social and religious reformers, and they did their best to achieve their mission goal, namely the conversion of Africans

in general and the Igbo people in particular. Granted, their approach and attitude did not produce a wholesome result. They thought condemning the Igbo religious beliefs and social and political practices would mean the control of the Igbo way of life. They had hoped to produce “a new man” born in a new faith, but the “new man” they produced became a split personality who could neither totally return to the old nor firmly be rooted in the new faith. This was made worse by the fact that most of the missionaries were not only ignorant of the Igbo’s way of life but also lacked adequate knowledge of the content of the Christian message. For instance, one of the listeners in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* asked the missionary thus:

If we leave our gods and follow your god, who will protect us from the anger of our neglected gods and ancestors? In response, the missionary nastily said angrily: your gods are not alive and cannot do you any harm. They are pieces of wood and stone (1956).

The impatience and unwillingness of the missionaries to educate the traditional Igbo on “who Jesus is and what he can do” for them in relation to their “gods” marked the beginning of a false start in communicating the Christian message to the Igbo. Yet as Achebe noted, when the missionaries started their evangelization work, the outcasts and people with low social status were the first to embrace Christianity. Those who felt not connected with the mainstream social hierarchy also embraced the missionaries and their teachings. During this time, the people who embraced the missionaries suffered much at the hands of their fellow townsmen and women. They were called all sorts of names. As Niebuhr (1951:66) once described, the people who rejected the world “have not taken easy ways in professing their allegiance to Christ. They endured physical and mental sufferings in their willingness to abandon their homes, property, as well as the protection of their communities for the sake of the cause of the Gospel”. Above all, they believed that the Christian God was more powerful than the local deities. They maintained the distinction between Christ and Caesar, between revelation and reason, between God’s will and man’s.

It is therefore, important to note that the various ethnic groups in the world have their traditional religions as answers to the reality of their existence. The Philistines, the Babylonians, the Greeks, and the Romans, all indulged in idolatrous worship. The Arabs used to worship many spirits (Jinns). According to Onwu (2002), Stonehenge in southern England is a living evidence of Druidism, which was the heathen worship of the early inhabitants of the United Kingdom. In most of these places, human sacrifices were widely practiced, though it was later abolished in the Roman Empire (Kato 1985:33).

The message of Christ, the good news, was delivered but it was one that did not affect all facets of Igbo life. It was that failure that gave rise to ambivalent Christianity in Igboland, wherein most Igbo Christians resort to their local deities, ancestors, medicine men, divination, sacrifices, and use of charms or amulets to seek for solutions and protection in their crisis moments. Nevertheless, the Christian message has continued to challenge Igbo men and women and their environment, as this research has noted, advocating for theological engagement and enculturation.

Whatever rationalization we may try to make, the worship of God in traditional Igbo religion and the primitive nations of the world is idolatrous. Idolatry is worshipping god in pictures and statues. This was thought to be normal, not sin, since in their view God is always represented in visual symbols so that there must always be pictures, idols, and statues in their shrines or places of worship. True worship must be spiritual, not material and idolatrous. Thus it is impossible to capture God's power and majesty in a visual image, and all attempts to do so deteriorate into magic, superstition, and idolatry. The depravity evident in Igbo traditional religion is also evident among all peoples of the earth (Ps. 14:2-3).

Consequently, the traditional Igbo ancestors turned away from *Chukwu* and set up their gods, with *Ala* as the arch-divinity. The Igbo myth of origin as shown in the *Nri* myth reveals how *Nri* sacrificed his first son and first daughter. We don't know why *Nri* could not be patient to be fed by *Chukwu* as *Chukwu* fed his father *Eri* and his people. As with Adam, the Igbo man's ancestor, in seeking answers to make sense of his world (about his welfare), turned away from God and broke the link between him and *Chukwu*.

In the same vein, while it is true that idol worship was part of the religion of the peoples of the world, they could still change to other religions of their choice. In comparison, *Chukwu* was never associated with other deities. He is the Creator, *Chineke, Ama-ama Amasi-amasi*, the one known-and-yet-Unknown God; he has no altars nor is he worshiped directly throughout Igbo land. For the Igbos, any other deity is a servant of *Chi-ukwu*. It was the white missionaries who brought Christianity to Igbo people.

Failure to inculturate the good aspects of Igbo traditional worldview in the light of biblical evidence continues to create a serious dichotomy between Catholic religious practices *per se* and Igbo values, and ultimately leads to double standards in Igbo daily life. In addition, acts considered shameful to a person and his/her family are more often than not carried to the Church in the name of confession (vertical) but the culprit goes away without really reconciling with the community of believers (horizontal). This kind of forgiveness does not resonate with the local people who are aware of the person's criminality and how much it has affected the social relationships and conviviality of the community.

The matter is made worse nowadays when majority of people are losing the sense of sin are indifferene to religious matters. People no longer want to hear about sin, or they choose which evil acts are sins for them and which ones are not. Freedom, though in the absolute sense not possible, is sought for. Actions are carried out without consideration of the other person. Confession and reconciliation are losing worth and value among present-day Igbo Christians.

Maybe, the relaxing of the rules or penance involved in reconciliation in the course of the history of the Church has contributed to this quagmire. However, the church is right in the changes because they reduced the stigma that followed these processes leading many to die without reconciliation. These changes nevertheless, opened up the sacrament of reconciliation to whoever wants it, as it became private and open to some abuses.

In addition, when we recognize the fact that it is the traditional Igbo man or woman who becomes converted to the Christian faith, we look for a way to make the Christian

message relevant and fruitful in his or her life. Bearing in mind that for the Igbo people, reconciliation has a socio-moral dimensions where sin is seen as breaking the relationship between the ancestors, society, and fellow man, leading to denting the image of the person in the community. The Christian idea of sin as only disrupting the relationship with God will not easily go down with the Igbo Christian. This is perhaps why this study of *ikpu-ala/aru* has become inevitably important as it tries to explore and inculturate the Christian/Catholic reconciliation ideals more realistically than in the traditional approach among Igbo Catholics. That is why it makes sense when Nwagbala (2002:323)says that confession and reconciliation

...as a preparation for the reception of Holy Communion does not really show its true meaning. The link that was made between confession and Eucharist did not sufficiently bring to light the fact that the sacrament of reconciliation was a permanent necessity in life, a reality that restored harmony within the society that forms the Church and within the universe. Even the auricular confession emphasized only the relation between man and God (vertical) at the expense of the horizontal between man and man.

Thus confession should be seen as a means not only to ask for God's forgiveness but also as a resolve to live a better life in relating with our fellow men and women (the community).

### **8.7 INCULTURATION AND IKPU-ALA**

It is important to remember that the Magisterium's usage of inculturation seems to have popularized the term. For instance, Pope John Paul II was not only fond of inculturation, but he used the concept often and understood it as the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures. By inculturation, the faith is introduced into a local culture. Another term which is sometimes used as a synonym of inculturation is *indigenisation*. However, John Paul II stressed that inculturation is not a simple certification and

confirmation of local cultures. The Faith does not just consolidate culture: it criticises, purifies, converts. According to John Paul II (1985):

The Gospel Message does not come simply to consolidate human things, just as they are; it takes on a *prophetic and critical role*. Everywhere, in Europe as in Africa, it comes to overturn criteria of judgement and modes of life (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19). It is a call to conversion. It comes to regenerate. It passes through the crucible all that is ambiguous, mixed with weaknesses and sin. It carries out this function with regard to certain practices that have been brought by foreigners along with the faith; but also with regard to certain customs or institutions which it has found among you. The Gospel of Jesus comes always furthermore to purify and elevate, so that all that is good, noble, true, just, may be saved, cleansed, developed and may bear its best fruits (Meeting with intellectuals and university students, Yaounde, Cameroon).

It is worth noting that an important aspect of the work of inculturation is to avoid a rupture between the faith and local culture. Local cultural values should be integrated. Pope Paul VI in his encyclical noted that evangelization cannot but borrow elements from cultures (EN 1967:20). Remarking appropriately about culture and evangelization, John Paul II (1985) again says:

The positive elements, the spiritual values of African man need to be integrated, integrated even more. Christ has come to fulfill. We must therefore strive to make a *tireless effort of inculturation* to ensure that the faith does not end up superficial.

The Fathers of the Vatican II (LG 17) made it also clear that the effect of the Church's work is that "whatever good is found sewn in the minds and hearts of men or in the rites and customs of peoples, these are not only preserved from destruction, but are purified, raised up, and perfected for the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of man" (Vatican II, LG 17).

### **8.8 COVENANT LIFE: INCULTURATION AND EVANGELIZATION**

One thing learned from this study *Ikpu-ala* as normative value in Igbo society is that God's people, their culture, and the covenant with God are inextricably interwoven. Covenant in this case means the word-centred revelation of God in history, the ethical rather than metaphysical relationship of God. Covenant life is the opposite of emotional or self-willed individualism and is opposed to private pietism and mysticism. The covenant Lord is only one God; he requires an absolute allegiance.

For the rest of the world, culture and faith are also woven tight. Man is a creature designed to create and transmit culture. This is natural in some way since he is made in the image of God. When man walks in the name of his Creator, he labours in the suburbs of the New Jerusalem, the coming kingdom of God. His work has eternal significance. When a human being walks in the name of other gods, he abandons covenant life for self-deification. This is a culture of stagnation and eventually self-destruction.

Inculturation is therefore a good thing, and this is worthwhile stressing, since some people see it simply as necessary if conversion is to be possible and believe that it happens through evangelization of a people in a particular cultural context. According to Sybertz and Healey, inculturation becomes a process by which people of a particular culture become able to live, express, celebrate, formulate, and communicate their Christian faith and their experience of the Paschal Mystery in terms (linguistic, symbolic, social) that make the most sense to them and best convey life and truth in their social and cultural environment (King 2000). Consequently, in this circumstance, the Church in Igboland can have a theological engagement within its contextual setting with Igbo normative values, including *Ikpu-ala*. We may surmise the culture-wide significance of inculturation. If one remembers that God was speaking to Adam and Eve as two

individuals and one family. By virtue of their call, they were to bring all of creation under their authority: "God blessed them and said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth'" (which involves the whole earth). In any case, the means of cultural transmission has continued from one generation to another.

## **8.9 THE MISSIONARIES**

As already seen in the previous chapter about Igbo religion, and as Igbo scholars agree, the Igbo world is principally a world of two interacting realities, the material and the spiritual, each impinging on the other. Undoubtedly, it is the Igbo belief that in this world the material mirrors the spiritual in different degrees. It is also a strong belief among the Igbo that the status achieved in this life can be carried over to the next world in the life thereafter, like many other Africans, and they understood what it takes to join the ancestors. Thus, though homo-centric in practice, the Igbo find ultimate meaning in transcendence.

We have also seen that reincarnation is the central Igbo concept which captures this Igbo sense of the future. This is related to the idea of death. Every Igbo believes that death is a necessity. Therefore, it is the Igbo belief that when one lives well and dies well in a good old age, it becomes possible for the person at death to rejoin their ancestors whose abode is underneath the earth. Perhaps, it is important to reaffirm this fact that the Igbo do not worship the ancestors. Rather they venerate them. Recent studies have equally shown that the term "Ancestor worship" is a misnomer for it is to God and to God alone that the Africans make their sacrifices, even though they most often make these sacrifices through minor spirits and the ancestors. The African and Asian concept of death differs from that of the secularized Western world which, according to De Napoli, frequently considers death as simply an end which must be avoided at all cost. This research study agrees with him that the cult of the dead, as it is practiced in non-Christian cultures, can easily be purified and inculturated through a sound Christian doctrine (Onoyima 1992:99).

Mbiti (1969:79) also weighed in on this discussion about the ancestors when he noted that the living members

...may show their belief by building shrines for the departed and placing bits of food or drink there or on their graves, and sometimes mentioning their names in prayers. But these acts of respect for the departed do not amount to worshipping them, they show people's belief that the departed of up to four or five generations should not be forgotten.

Understandably, the use of the term, "ancestor worship" is wrong with respect to Igbo traditional attitude to their ancestors. Ozioma Onyima (1992:101), quoting De Napoli, warns

...great caution should be exercised in its use or, perhaps, better it should be dropped altogether, and a more neutral word such as ritual could be used. Not only are people offended when foreigners characterize their traditional rituals as magic or superstition, but one may also forfeit the possibility of understanding what these rituals mean to a community and so the possibility of inculturation.

I certainly agree with Onyima that the best thing to do is avoid situations that militate against inculturation and dialogue, which are the basis for any effective evangelization.

To the traditionalists, the world underneath is the abode of the ancestors and spirits, known among the Igbo as *ala mmuo*. On the other hand, the Christians look upwards to *elu-igwe* (sky/heaven), the abode of *Chukwu* (Supreme Being), as differentiated from the spirits (minor deities). The Christians believe that when they die they go to heaven, the sky. Assertively, *Chukwu* is the foundation of Igbo religious philosophy. Even, when they make sacrifices to the other gods who quite often fail them, the Igbo believe that *Chukwu, Chineke*, is the last resort. For instance, when someone does something unimaginably unexpected by the ordinary folk, one will hear: "*Imakwa na Chukwu no?*"

(do not you know there is God?). This refers to people who think they can do anything and that God will not see them, or they believe they will go free.

Furthermore, the Igbo concept of God in terms of his creative power and absoluteness, as the source of man's origin, dependence, and protection when all others have failed, is original in Igbo thought. Igbo folklore and myths held that originally Igbo ancestors had acknowledged that God created them and they had maintained contact with him. This contact was later broken when they moved away from God and focused on a created thing, the earth, as their god with elaborate sacrifices and worship (Comp. Exodus 32).

However, the coming of Christianity into Igbo land in 1841 was rightly perceived as a civilizing mission. It meant the introduction into the relatively stable Igbo traditional religious framework of an alternative view of the world, a rival cosmology and a different way of understanding the place of Igbo man in creation. This encounter marked the beginning of the restoration of the broken link that is implied in the Igbo man and his society either looking downwards to rejoining the ancestors or looking upwards to return to *Chukwu*.

Consequently, the advent of Christianity in Igboland had meant the introduction of a Christian worldview. Writing on the contribution of the missionaries in Africa, Ozioma Onyima had this to say:

The exposure of the Igbos and indeed Africans to these (Western education and civilization) obvious external influences has made them cultural hybrids. The present day Africans who have gone through Western education curriculum and speak Western European languages are Africans in a way different from our ancestors who were innocent of such influences. In the same vein, Africans of today are Westerners who have not experienced African influence. So present day Africans are products of two heritages the one foreign and the other indigenous (Mbefo 1981).

I believe the early missionaries saw themselves as social and religious reformers. The Superior General and co-founder of the Holy Ghost Congregation, Very Rev. Francis Libermann, once wrote to his missionaries to Africa thus:

Do not judge according to appearances or to what you have been accustomed in Europe. Forget Europe with its customs and its spirit. Become Negroes with the Negroes, and then you will regard them as they should be regarded. Become Negroes with the Negroes, to form them as they should be formed, not after the fashion of Europe, but by letting them keep what is proper to them. Act towards them as servants towards their masters. Adopt their customs and manner and habit, as servants to those of their master. Perfect them, sanctify them, show them their lowliness and make them, slowly but surely into a people of God. That is what St. Paul refers to as becoming all to all, to win all to Jesus Christ (Onyima 1992:269).

With the same stretch of thought, Luke Mbefo quoting Jordan writing to Bishop Shanahan noted that:

He never spoke in condemnation of paganism or anything pagan, whether as regards custom or law or ritual. He knew the people would not understand, and would only become suspicious and antagonistic. He preached therefore a new approach to God, on the assumption that if fundamentally correct ideas could be introduced into the native minds, incorrect ones would be put to flight as darkness before light. Many pagan ideas were not so much incorrect as incomplete and required only completion and sublimation (1981:8ff).

Most missionaries lived close to Igbo people and gradually came to know a great deal about them. Some mastered local languages which they made literate by translating them into parts of the Bible, hymns, and prayers. However, it was on the whole difficult for them to enter the Igbo mind completely. The fact that they assumed to have done so only compounded the problems (Isiche 1995:7).

In addition, despite their tremendous contribution to the welfare of the Igbo people and their undoubted devotion, often in the early years at great personal cost including high death rates, some missionaries were disdainful of the indigenous people and their institutions. For instance, traditional dances were condemned as sexually immoral; many rites and rituals were labeled retrogressive and contrary to the Christian faith and had thus to be given up (Muraya). Undoubtedly, these missionaries were guided by what Bevans (1992) calls the “counter cultural” or Niebuhr’s (1951) “Christ against culture/Christ and culture in paradox” models of Christian-culture interaction. This kind of thinking is based on the assumption that Christianity and African traditional Religion were diametrically opposed and the latter would have to give way. Shorter (1999:45) has this to say:

Traditional religion has been despised. Its adherents have been labeled ‘pagan,’ ‘heathen, and ‘idolatrous,’ primitive,’ ‘primal.’ Its beliefs and practices have been represented as an amorphous collection of ‘customs’ and ‘rituals’.

As a result, such attitudes made it difficult for the Africans to reconcile the Gospel message of love with missionary practices that amounted to racism, and also to their interdenominational strife (Muraya, 2011). Thus, despite the total devotion of many missionaries, their attitudes of superiority had a highly negative impact on how the Christian message was received. Therefore, their approach and attitude did not produce a wholesome result.

#### **8.10 THE IGBO RESPONSE TO MISSIONARY EVANGELIZATION**

One of the foundational missionary assumptions was that they were called by God to bring Him to a heathen people. Adrian Hastings (1967:6) described the situation thus:

What struck them, undoubtedly, was the darkness of the continent; its lack of religion and sound morals, its ignorance, its general pitiful condition made worse by the barbarity of the slave trade. Evangelization was seen as liberation from a state of absolute awfulness and the picture of unredeemed Africa was often painted in colours as gruesome as possible, the better to encourage missionary zeal at home.

One thing that is clear about African traditional religion as among the Igbo people is that religion encompassed all life dimensions and catered to the socio-psycho-spiritual needs of its adherents. Their interpretation of, and responses to, evangelization must be seen as largely deliberate choices in an attempt to make sense of and accommodate the changing horizon occasioned by colonization, including the entry of a monetary economy and, above all, Christianity and Western-style education and culture, which arrived on the scene concurrently. Later generations, descendants of the early players, have continued to be greatly affected by the responses, choices, attitudes, and values of their predecessors, even if not walking entirely in the earlier generation's footsteps.

However, two pertinent questions arise at this juncture: First, what attracted so many to the new faith after the initial impasses? Second, what did the reality of conversion mean for the Igbo Christians? Roland Oliver (1952:216) has suggested that perhaps the concept of an all-powerful God devoid of the many spirits and ancestors was attractive to some. Others may have been disappointed with the traditional god for failing to protect them against the ravages of the slave trade and of colonialism, thus making the traditional religion appear incapable of meeting the new external pressures.

From a theological perspective, however, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that conversion is an initiative from God who wants to reveal himself through Jesus, the visible image of the unseen God, and thus prepares people for that revelation (Acts 17:27). According to Gerald McCool, quoting Karl Rahner, a Catholic theologian, says that when people initially hear the message of the Gospel, they are not encountering something strange from outside of themselves. It is only the explication of what they

already have experienced. The expressly Christian revelation becomes the explicit statement of the revelation of grace which man always experiences implicitly in the depths of his being (McCool 1975:213). Kwame Bediako (1992:315-316& Mbiti 1970:36) puts it more succinctly:

In missiological jargon, these Traditional Religions will have been a real *preparatio evangelica* (preparation for the Gospel); and it is now up to African theologians to interpret the meaning of that preparation of the gospel in the African context of not only the past, but today and tomorrow.

Hence, for Muraya, what marks conversion to Christianity is the uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

His person is greater than can be contained in a religion or ideology... I consider traditional religion, Islam and the other religious systems to be preparatory and even essential ground in search for the Ultimate. But only Christianity has the terrible responsibility of pointing the way to that Ultimate Identity, foundation and Source of security (Mbiti 1969:277).

However conversion is understood theologically, it has had major social and psychological ramifications. Muraya identifies three types of responses that embody these effects:

- The uprooted
- The transitional
- Followers of independent churches

In addition to Western-style education and the competitiveness and individualism that go with it, current secularism has a plethora of other causes that have been gradually eroding traditional values, especially religiosity. These factors include shallow initial evangelization, urbanization and the break-up of family bonds, the explosion in

communication, technology, and globalization, Western-style education and its cultural packaging, as well as failure of Christian witness (Isichei 1995).

### **8.11 MISSIOLOGICAL/PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS:**

It is my contention that successful missiological enterprise in Igboland must recognize the three responses as realities of the African Church. Thus missionaries vis-à-vis those working in pastoral care need to rise to the occasion by becoming increasingly aware of, and acknowledge, the interactions and adaptations that have been taking place between Christianity and Igbo traditional religion. As dialogue continues at official church levels about the appropriate models of inculturation, pastoral workers could benefit from doing some critical work to re-orient their own thoughts and attitudes towards Igbo traditional religion and its impact on the experiences of their clients. On this basis, this study has tried to advocate a new understanding of traditional Igbo normative values. In addition, there are a few examples of issues that pastoral workers need to become more aware of.

First, in Igbo cosmology the world is one unbroken moral universe which has three components: (i) the spiritual, including God, (ii) the ancestors, and other spirits; and (iii) the material world. Life is given to lineages to safeguard, nurture, and propagate. There is a very close connectedness between the three worlds and the vital elements: the moral, the social, and the spiritual. For example, in this worldview, illness of whatever kind does not just happen but is “caused” by any of the three forces acting as the enemy of life. It causes “dis-ease” of the person and community in general. Most Igbo scholars have argued that disease and health are not merely the consequences of bacteria or an imprudent life-style but they reflect the delicate relationship between man/woman and the ancestral spirits (Gichinga 2007, Mbiti 2010).

The moral, physical, spiritual, and psychological parts must function together and, if any part is out of balance, the person becomes physically, spiritually, or mentally ill. Consequently, disease, as such, is a sign of moral disorder in relationships or the work of witchcraft: the cause, whether human or supra-human, is evil and has to be identified and countered. A diviner is consulted and whatever she/he prescribes is followed religiously. Such a prescription may involve appeasing an ancestor, exorcising some

malevolent spirit, consuming some herbal medicine(s), wearing some charm, making retribution to some person, dead or alive, or a combination of therapies (Magesa 1997, Lartey 2003, Gichinga 2007). By outlawing belief in the ancestral spirits and divination, and many of the associated ceremonies and rituals, the missionaries struck a major blow to a central Igbo traditional nerve and the psycho-spiritual wholeness associated with it, resulting in frequent disorder for those who have not found a new source of wholeness.

Secondly, pastoral workers or evangelizers need to be cognizant of the fact that the interaction between Igbo traditional religion and Christianity continues as new generations appropriate the heritage that has been handed down, and try to negotiate their personal identities in light of a fast-shifting landscape. It is to meet this need that Bevens talks of the possibility of inculturating the Christian message to produce "... a theology that makes sense at a certain place in a certain time" (Bevens 1991:5). That is, a contextual and hence more acceptable theology. The clarion call for inculturation of the gospel has been repeatedly made by various churches but it needs to be appropriated at the individual level as well. Evangelizers are perhaps uniquely placed to document the models of inculturation in people's lives and to propose creative ways forward in helping Igbos, and indeed Africans, incarnate the Gospel in ways that make sense for their place and time, and which theologians might usefully draw upon. The church, in order to offer them the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, must implant herself into these groups for the same motive that led Christ to bind himself, by virtue of His incarnation, to certain social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom He was born. Thus Pope Paul VI (1975) in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (para 20, 63) was apt to recognize:

Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed ... if it does not use their symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life.

For his part, John Wright (1973:111) suggests that through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus changes everything and leaves everything the same. Of his teaching he contends: "...it opposes no positive human insight, contradicts no adventure into the future that respects the personal worth of other human beings". Paul Kollman (2010) brought in another interesting insight arguing that self-conscious inculturation is not crucial because spontaneous contextualization takes place whenever people become Christian. That is an ideal situation, but my pastoral experience shows it does not always happen, hence the incongruence sometimes brought to counseling and spiritual direction.

### **8.12 TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED IGBO CHRISTIAN**

Proper inculturation is called for here. Inculturation here means the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation ever more understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time. It means the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought pattern of each people. It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity truly feel at home in the cultures of each people. There is need to re-adapt the Christian message of reconciliation to people of the contemporary age, so as to understand more deeply the personal aspect of sin, which also affects our life in society, and to see that in our bid to repent and reconcile we make up with God and live better with our fellow men and women. Confession, in the sacrament of reconciliation, will now assume its proper position. It will no longer be "magical" or automatic form of forgiveness, but the throne of mercy where we meet Christ who forgives and transforms us into better persons.

In the final analysis, we always bear in mind that the redemptive and salvific mission of Christ has been achieved objectively once and for all, for all humankind. It now behoves individuals to apply this result personally, subjectively, to themselves. In this way reconciliation becomes a personal renewal of loving relationship, and under the impulse of grace each person makes this renewal. The *Magisterium* of the Church recognizes and teaches that baptism is the initial sacrament of reconciliation. But there is weakness and susceptibility of the baptized Christian to fall into sin again and set him/herself against God, hence the second sacrament of reconciliation which is

penance. However, where these two sacraments are not immediately accessible to the individual, he/she by a supernatural act of contrition perfected by charity can still be reconciled to God, provided the act contains at least the implicit desire of the sacrament.

In this study, the researcher investigated the rites and rituals of *ikpu-ala/aru*, reconciliation. We were able to examine the notions of sin, guilt, punishment, confession, expiation, and the actual celebration of this rite. The items required and what they stand for was also examined. The roles played by the special priests were also brought out.

For this evaluation to be complete, the OT as a background helps us to see the similarities and dissimilarities in the Jewish and Igbo religions. Outstanding also was the similarity both in Jewish and Igbo religions and societies, namely, the practice of reconciliation in both individual and communal dimensions. However, the Igbo idea of a scapegoat differed from the Jewish concept of the same, though both agree on the vicarious power of this, whether animal or human being, to carry away men/women's iniquity. Why is this point important? I believe that Catholic Church in Igboland is both Christian and Igbo. The Christian and Igbo cultures are at play here and the goal of using both inculturation theology and *Ikpu-ala* is to achieve this feat.

In the New Testament we see Christ as our scapegoat transcending the blood of bulls, calves, fowls, goats, and cows. He makes the offering once and for all of humanity. In him all things were reconciled to God. In him the Jewish religion assumed newness while the Igbo traditional religion lacks this continuity since it is not a revealed religion, in the strict sense of the word.

In addition, in both the Christian and Igbo traditional religions, confessions are voluntary but required as a way of maintaining social relationships. The Igbo however believes that when one is hardened against confessing his/her sins, the earth deity *Ala* will one day force words out of his/her mouth and he or she thus confesses publicly. For the Igbo person, therefore, the community or group is a necessity for life and self-determination. This group, as it were, remains present in the isolated individual, keeps an eye on him/her, encourages or threatens him, demands, in a word, to be consulted

and obeyed. This is precisely what the society or community, confronted with the same issue of self-determination, depends on for its existence and for the fulfillment of their roles by its individual members. It is, of course, true that an individual can fail to perform some of the requirements of his or her role without destroying the social act (in the sense of law) and thereby, the society. But this is an exception and never the ideal. Consequently there is in every society a minimal level of role-fulfillment, varying with the society, which is essential if it is going to continue to be.

So far, this study has tried to establish some basic positive features of *ikpu-ala/aruas* a social value of justice in Igbo land prior to the advent of Christianity. These include:

- *Ikpu-ala* seeks to establish and maintain certain simple fundamental rules of living together.
- *Ikpu-ala* provides principles and processes for conflict resolution between individuals and groups within a society, at least insofar as those individuals and groups accept a version of a common social order that includes submission to the law of the society.
- It seeks to establish the rights and obligations in social relationships and structures without which freedom and self-respect of the individual as well as the community would be impossible.
- It also contributed to the building up of community life and gave meaning to the Igbo sense of sharing and co-operation between members of a family, village or community, and other social clubs.
- It gave the Igbo an ethico-cultural identity.
- To varying degrees at various times and in different places, *ikpu-ala* like justice guarantees and protects existing productive relationships and ways of distributing resources.
- It also provides the means for active intervention by socio-political institutions, for whatever reason, to actualize new principles and policies for resource allocation

and to enforce and supervise the carrying out of these in conformity with the laws of the community.

- It presents life to the Igbo as embodying the divine commands and provides the fundamental basis of mutual respect for individual rights in relation to the group. Life is one and whole without dichotomy.

In this sense, the Igbo interpretation of *ikpu-ala* as a social justice value, and all of the ritual avoidance that is evident in the Igbo traditional religion, may have been relevant and justified for the pre-Christian Igbo society. In addition, it helped the Igbo society to recognize and ensure the non-violability of individual rights and claims vis-à-vis the community. Hence Haughey (1977:220) writes:

...it (social justice) refers to the obligations of all citizens to aid in the creation of patterns of societal organization and activity which are essential both for the protection of minimal human rights and for the creation of mutuality and participation by all in social life.

Reflecting on what we have seen so far, one is left in no doubt about the value of *Ikpu-ala/aru* as a social justice value in Igbo society. However, when it comes to the question of how much of it is Christian; let alone what attitude should be adopted by the contemporary Igbo Christian towards these values, then difficulties arise. Many scholars (Niebuhr 1958) agree that every value carries within itself its opposite, at least in the bud. It is always accompanied by a counter-value. In other words, while we cannot deny the positive goodness of the value of *Ikpu-ala/aru*, let us not lose sight of how its values fall short of the Christian ideal of justice and love.

### **8.13 CONCLUSION: A WAY FORWARD**

As a recap, in Igbo traditional religion and cultural values, there was a strong sense of the direct and effective influence of *Chukwu* on man's daily life; The Igbo knows that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, merciful, and the final explanation of all phenomena. It is the Igbo person's belief that *Chukwu*, God, has a great sense of justice and therefore punishes evil and rewards good conduct. To the Igbo, God is very close to the poor and

broken-hearted. The Igbo is also aware of the existence of non-human spirits including the ancestral spirits and that they too are all interested in human behaviour. Life is one, and the sense of the divine permeates every aspect of Igbo life. Nevertheless, the Igbo traditional life laid ultimate emphasis on the passport to the spirit world and reincarnation as an ancestor.

In the same vein, respect for other people is obligatory for the Igbo, and its observance is the basis for reward or punishment, progress or lack of it, as sanctioned by the gods. Thus life is both a basic good and a value to be respected, as found in every culture, though for the Igbo this pertains only to those who are identified, by whatever criteria, as belonging to “us,” i.e., those within the kinship.

However, the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition contains the belief that God is the creator of all things. It also contains the belief that man is made in the image of God, and that man somehow possesses a freedom which resembles the freedom by which God creates. It becomes imperative that the individual should fulfil that which justice demands in the spirit of love and charity. Love does not fix its gaze constantly on the minimum required by the right or law, but, on the contrary, thinks only of the needs of one’s neighbor. It extends loving kindness even to those who have forfeited the right to it through their own fault, in imitation of the Heavenly Father who “makes His sun to rise on the good and on the evil” (Matt. 5:45). He also bestows upon us the gift of grace, even if we have squandered His bounty through our own neglect. Love is ever ready to surrender its own rights in favour of others, assuming always that the rights are such that they can be renounced without prejudice to the community and peril to one’s own salvation (Haring 1961:523). Love goes beyond justice in meeting the needs of others. God is love and he who lives in love lives in God and God lives in him (1 John 4:16).

In this stretch of thought, Pope Paul VI, quoting Pius XI, insists on this fact that belief in God is the one firm foundation of any social order (Paul VI 1968:8). Such belief, no doubt, is a spiritual force which motivates both the individual and the community to show respect for one another and respect for life as a moral responsibility in decision-making. It is rather true that in the offender there is a feeling of guilt and repentance, but he fears more the punishment which will unfailingly descend on him, his relatives, or

descendants unless he makes the necessary sacrifices. And since *Chukwu* does no harm to anyone, fear of the spirits and a narrow utilitarianism elbow Him into the background (Arinze 1970: 31).

However, one may look at the value of *Ikpu-ala/aru* in Igbo society, or whatever attitude one may adopt towards it; it is my view that a new approach is required to best bring Christian ideals to the present Igbo society. And for Christian ethics to be relevant, the Church in Igboland cannot claim to be local without serious theological engagement, inculcating some of the Igbo traditional ethico-religious values to make an integrated Igbo Christian. No one lives outside space and time; it follows, therefore, that the idea of God and the value of life will be more meaningful to the Igbo person if it is based on all that brings man to God in Christ in an atmosphere of justice and freedom as prerequisites for social order and community peace and harmony. Therein, the Igbo person will, him- or herself, be expressing the freedom of the children of God. St. Paul aptly puts it: the law of the spirit of Christ Jesus has set you free (Romans 8:2). Consequently, the Igbo Christian morality will be characterized by love, self-control, sacrifice, generosity, and courageousness in order to meet the need of all the members of the wider human race. For the justice of God knows no boundaries of tribe or region. Thus the essence of the social character of universal love is the call of man to the universal "brotherhood".

In other words, the view expressed in *Gaudium et Spes* of the possibility of achieving mutuality and reciprocal interdependence in society clearly calls for significant changes in both individual behaviour and institutional arrangements. Solidarity and concern for one's kin are also moral responsibilities to those beyond one's immediate group. According to Marie Gibbin (1976:148), quoting the Fathers of the Church (1972 Synod of Bishops):

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for redemption of the

human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.

Following John Paul II's dominant voice on the inculturation of other cultures in the evangelization process, I make the following suggestions on how *Ikpu-ala* could help in the making of an integrated Igbo Christian in our millennium:

- Belief in diffuse monotheism. (The Fall is the cause: Idowu 1973 and Steyne 1990). God for the Igbo is one; the other divinities are his created agents. This could effectively be used in the teaching of God and other spiritual beings such as angels, saints, and ancestors. These agents could work either for God or against God. On the other hand, humans could relate to God either directly or use these agents as intermediaries.
- Belief in the ancestors as the basis of cultural and religious social order. The influence of the ancestors on the living can serve as a good pedagogical basis for the role of the saints in heaven before God. In progressive revelation, just as Jesus Christ replaces the Mosaic Old Covenant with Christ's New Covenant, yet there are some elements that are enduring, so also the Christians Saints are to the ancestors. There are still some ancestral elements that have endured just as the Old in the New. The role of the ancestors could be used pedagogically by Christians just as law is to grace.
- On the liturgy, it is true that most of the liturgical books are now in the Igbo language, but most celebrations are still too intellectual for the common folk. Such celebrations do not appeal to the emotional engagement of the Igbo man or bring about spiritual excitement. *Ikpu-ala* ceremonial activities could assist in making the sacrament of reconciliation more intimate and emotionally fulfilling. The sacrament of reconciliation could be celebrated by the priest in such a manner that the penitent derives maximum satisfaction as he ought to. Real indigenization ought to be done. Nigerian liturgists, and especially the Igbo liturgists, should realize that ritual has a therapeutic power to heal depressions. Signs and symbols that are meaningful could be employed. Is not the purpose of

liturgy geared toward feeding of the people spiritually? The current Christian liturgies are the historical incorporations of the signs and symbols of the contexts of Christianity.

- The use of public penance. I believe the inculturation of *ikpu-ala* can help to deepen the meaning of reconciliation among Igbo Christians. The Church should read the signs of the time and understand people's social environment, social status, the psychological implications, and all other ramifications of this practice. The faithful should be educated on the value of this sacrament, and here our traditional religion excels. The Igbo knows that whenever he offends God, he becomes afraid of him and also afraid of the punishment that God metes out; hence, he immediately confesses privately or publicly and looks for a way to appease the anger of the offended God. The sacrament of reconciliation should not be horizontal only, but vertical as well.
- The *umunna* communitarian setup in our social structure should be employed in the celebration of the sacrament of reconciliation. Here the priests can effectively teach both the individual and communal dimensions of sin, hence the need for the communal celebration of the sacrament.

From the above mentioned suggestions, one can see the importance of this research. Efforts by other Churches, the so-called separated brethren, towards inculturation should not be castigated by Catholics, but rather we should try to emulate the good aspects of their work in inculturation. These Protestants and new generation Churches have been ahead of the Catholic Church when it comes to inculturation. With boldness and persistence, they have successfully integrated many elements of the traditional values into their brand of Christianity.

The General Superintendent of the Cherubim and Seraphim in the Western State of Nigeria, His Grace, A.A. Abiola, once remarked:

We Aladuras in Nigeria are a peculiar Church. We want to remain peculiar. We want to remain indigenous. We are a special gift from God to Christendom. We represent God's

own way of revealing Himself to Africa; this is why we are peculiar. Many people who do not understand us, ridicule us. They say we are not sophisticated; that we are not educated. We know these things but we are happy we are what we are – an indigenous Church practicing Christianity in the indigenous way, and worshipping God by this means. God does hear us in this indigenous way and has been doing marvelous work through our hands, Alleluia (Ekechukwu 1977:521).

Looking at the above statement, I would admit that we have been very slow in the direction of inculturation. It is therefore a challenge to the Catholic Church to study and find ways of inculturating Christianity into Igbo traditional normative values like *ikpu-ala/aru*. I believe that it is the duty of the Bishop of each diocese to observe their customs closely so as to find out some possible aspects of these values that can be Christianized.

The inculturation of customs and traditional values would help to diffuse the tension between Christianity and mission countries. Basically, the Igbo do appreciate the traditional values and love them. It is useful and proper for social and group identity and, therefore, should contribute immensely in the work of evangelization. In a similar view, John Paul II continues Paul VI's emphasis on the need to take culture seriously in the evangelization process; in his address to the National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement of Cultural Commitment, and reiterated in his letter establishing the Pontifical Council, he said:

“The synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith. A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been thoroughly received, not fully lived out” (Osservatore Romano 1982).

On its part, Vatican II, on the need for inculturation in *Gaudium et Spes* says:

...from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and learning, from their art and science, these

churches borrow all things which can contribute to the glory of their creator, the revelation of the saviour's grace or the proper management of Christian life (GS No. 22).

In the same train of thought, the relation of faith and culture had long been part of theological work and Roest Crolius says:

Inculturation of the Church is the integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the Church universal (Schreiter 1989:752).

From the above discussion, one must agree with what Vatican II insists in *Gaudium et Spes*, that theological investigation must necessarily be stirred up in each major socio-cultural area.

...it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith can seek understanding in the philosophy and wisdom of those people. A better view will be gained of how their customs, outlook of life and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation. As a result an avenue will be opened for a more profound adaptation in the whole area of Christian life (GS No.22).

At the same time, in carrying out this task, caution must be taken not to lose the essential doctrines of faith. Pope Paul VI (1967) also noted "... evangelization risks losing its power and disappearing altogether, if one empties or adulterates its content under the pretext of translating it; if in other words, one sacrifices this reality and

destroys the unity without which there is no universality, out of a wish to adapt a universal reality to a local situation” (EN, no.20). Nevertheless, the kingdom which the gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures (EN, no.29).

This study has tried to investigate and showcase possible ways of inculturating *ikpu-ala/aru* as a social justice value. However, the inculturation process not only contextualizes the Igbo life realities, it also abolishes syncretism, which renders Igbo Christianity ineffective. As it were, I took my cue from the words of the Sitshebo (2000) who said: “we reflect on the past not just for the past’s sake; rather, we look upon it as a compass – and who would use a compass only to ascertain from where he or she has come?” I believe that by this study, I am joining an ongoing theological debate from a specific perspective; emphasizing the need for contextual theological reflection ever before us. I hope and pray that this study despite its shortcomings will provoke some response and further investigations as a way of enriching Igbo spirituality and the making of an integrated Igbo Christian.

Thus, the Igbo Christians will be enabled to live out their faith authentically and creatively. The theological contextualization of *Ikpu-ala*, with all that goes with it, is totally defensible because it is popular, integrative, and practicable when engaged in missiological understanding. As a result, orthodoxy and ortho-praxis should complement each other, to produce an Igbo Christian theology of reconciliation.

There is an urgent need for proper utilization of traditional ethical norms and principles in the spiritual and integral development of a cultural-rich Igbo Church. The reality of modern changes and the role that traditional ethical principles can play cannot be ignored in the evangelization of the Igbo Church and formation of an integrated Igbo Christian in the global quest for peace, security, and progress. Traditional Igbo ethics and morality have an important role to play in the molding of good Christians and citizens and a humane society, where peace, solidarity, and brotherhood will thrive; a society where all men and women will live and interact happily without fear of perpetual

mistrust and continuous diminishing of the presence of God's unconditional love and grace.

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