Intercultural Theology and Study of Religions 2

Chibueze Udeani

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Chibueze Udeani

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgement

Just as tree, it is said, does not make a forest, an effort of this nature is not, honestly speaking, the fruit of a single person's endeavour.

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Human being and being human is not the same thing. The difference it makes is found, among other things, in dialogue. Being human is a process, a journey made possible through encounter which is dialogue. Dialogue is encounter and encounter is dialogue. Both open doors to something new. Through them the formerly unrelated realities come to be parts of one another. They give birth to a unity that not only tolerates but consists essentially of diversity. Such unity is one of the pillars of peace and progress. Hence I believe that whatever effort to promote dialogue, no matter how insignificant, is a worthwhile venture. Such efforts, by their nature, usually are joint efforts.

Foreword

Ever since that day, lost in the shadows of the poorly recorded history of Christianity in Africa, when concerned Africans first began honestly and critically to contemplate themselves and their situation as "Christianised" Africans, many questions have arisen. For instance, can Africans take themselves as full members of Christendom?

If this question receives an affirmative answer, then another question calls for serious attention – Why has the Christian faith not taken root in African culture and among the Africans themselves? Or one could ask, why has the Christian faith – as it is brought to, and practised by, Africans – not transformed the Africans and their culture just as it did cultures?

Though Africa today, with her large number of Christians, is often seen as the future hope of the Church, a closer examination of Christianity shows that the Christian faith has not taken root in Africa. Many Africans today declare themselves Christians, but as before, they remain followers of the African traditional religions in matters concerning the inner dimensions of their life. It is evident that in strictly personal matters relating to such issues as passage and crises of life, most Africans turn to the African traditional religions. Hence, one of the central problems of the Church in Africa today is the divided allegiance of most of the Church members between the Christian faith enveloped in Western frameworks and practices, on one hand, and African traditional religion, on the other. Even practising Christians and non-professional African theologians raise pertinent questions as regards the relationship between African traditional religion and Western Christianity. From their personal experience they pose practical questions which cannot be answered by ordinary catechism.

Thus the central question of this work is why has Christian faith not taken root in Africa? Christianity as an incarnational faith, whose central tenet affirms the incarnation of God in the particular individual Jesus of Nazareth, has its history part of which is the encounter of the Christian faith with other cultures. The expression of Christian faith, for instance, was shaped in a very significant way by European

culture, while Christian ideals influenced European culture. The Christian faith, in its capacity to transform cultures seems to have overcome paganism in Europe, so that it can be maintained that Christian faith has taken root in European culture. Similarly, many use its incarnation as model for Christian faith taking root in Africa, but they do not identify this with the incarnation as reported in the Bible.

In other ways the same question has been considered by different theologians both Africans and non-Africans. Such efforts date as far back as the time of the early Christian missionaries. Some of them tried to translate Christian faith into African concepts. But in this century, it has become one of the major questions for theologians in Africa.

Tshishiku Tshibangu – Catholic bishop and the rector of the national university of Zaire contends that the Christian faith has not taken root in Africa. Hence, in some of his works ((“Théologie positive et théologie spéculative. Position traditionelle et nouvelle problématique" (Paris: Beatrice Nauwelaerts, 1965) and “La thélogie comme science au Xxéme siècle. ” (Kinshasa: Presses de l’Úniversité de Zaire, 1980) – he tries to introduce a sociological perspective in African theology. He uses the history of theological method, in order to develop a relevant methodology for Africa so that theology can relate to human beings and their society. This is intended to help the Africans understand revelation in an African way.

Charles Nyamiti, a Tanzanian professor of theology argues for the use of African concepts and categories in the explanation of Christian doctrines. Hence in his works, The Way to Christian Theology for Africa (Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba Publications, 1978.); African Tradition and the Christian God (Eldoret: Gaba, 1977.) and Christ the Ancestor. (Harare: Mamba Press, 1984.) – he employs African philosophy to generate new insight into the Christian doctrines. This is an approach of adaptation.

Ngindu Mushete, publisher of African Theology Bulletin and professor of fundamental theology, represents the view that African life and thought patterns in their entirety must be confronted with the Christian message. Hence his work is based not so much on African philosophical concepts, as on the entirety of African life and thought pattern. Although he is similar to Nyamiti in his approach, his method resembles that of Tshibangu. His publications include among others:

Le probleme de la connaissance religieuse d´après L. Laberthonnière. (Kinshasa : Theological Faculty 1977); Courants actuels de la théologie en Afrique. (Bulletin of African Theology 6 (1984)); and Die Auffassung von Wahrheit in der afrikanischen Theologie. (CONCILIUM, 23 (1987/4)).

Bolaji Idowu, – former professor of religious sciences at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and the former primate of Nigerian Methodist Church – holds that an African theology should give answers to the social, political, mental, spiritual and emotional needs of the Africans in order for the Christian faith to take root in Africa. This is developed in his works Towards an Indigenous Church. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); African Traditional Religion – A Definition. (London: SCM Press, 1973) etc.; These broaden the base of the discussion.

Late Emefie Ikenga Metuh, a Nigerian Catholic priest and professor of religious sciences at the University of Jos, emphasizes that African religious thought can be explained only with the help of African rather than Western conceptual frameworks. His publications include: God and Man in African Religion. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981); African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation. (Ibadan: Pastoral Institute Bodija, 1985), etc. His views, that the African religious thought can only be understood with the help of African conceptual frameworks, shows he differs from the other African theologians mentioned above.

Eboussi Boulaga, a Camerounian professor of philosophy unlike those who take either African cultural values or the biblical text as their point of departure, begins from a critical assessment of the Christian missionary activities in Africa. Boulaga's is a narrative method. His main work: An African Critique and Recapture of Christianity. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), sees the reason for Christianity failing to take root in Africa not so much in the non adaptation of the Christian message, but rather in the non participation of Africans in ecclesiastical "power".

These examples point to the need for healthy and balanced encounter between African culture and religion and the Message of Christ. From the history of Christianity, it is clear that its faith could take root only in cultures where there was a balanced, two way encounter between the Message of Christ and such cultures as it took place in the

encounter between the Message of Christ and the Jewish culture. Elements of Jewish cultural influence are found today in the Christian faith, which the Christian faith transformed the Jewish culture. Jesus himself set up a stiff and strong opposition to incorrect practices within the Jewish culture.

A balanced encounter in the case of Africa would maintain a proper balance between the exigencies of African culture and the demands of the Message of Christ. Even in the views of Boulaga, who could be seen as having shifted the emphasis, he did not crystallise as answer to the central question of how Christian faith can take root in Africa, but concentrated on the sharing of ecclesiastical powers between the local African churches and the central official church in Rome. Though this may be part of a healthy and balanced encounter, the encounter is more than an issue of power. A detailed treatment of some of these and other lines of thought will be given later in this work.

The proposed solution in this work to the central question – why has the Christian faith not taken root in Africa tries to take into consideration some additional aspects inadequately treated thus by the theologians working on this issue. It would not look at Christianity as it is preached and practiced today in different parts of the world. Rather it would concentrate on the encounter between the nucleus of the Christian message and African culture, both of which need to be redefined. For Christian message has received many cultural, political and historical colourings. By the time the message reached Africa these had mixed so well with the nucleus of the Christian message that they were most often mistaken for it. However as African culture is not static, it must be constantly re-examined and continuously redefined.

The African inculturation movement for the Christian faith to take deep root in Africa is an effort towards the balanced encounter of the Message of Christ with African culture. Inculturation should be understood as the honest, serious and critical attempt to enable the Message of Christ be understood by peoples of every culture, locality and age. Stretched further, this means understanding the Message of Christ within the very world and thought patterns of the many peoples. It is the continuous endeavour at making the Message of Christ at home in the cultures of each people.

If this be understood as inculturation, then one of the main points of departure should be what is specifically Christian in Christianity, i.e. the Message as found in Jesus Christ? But one should bear in mind that many cultural, political and historical influences shaped this Message before it was brought to the Africans. Hence an effort will be made here to provide criteria for distinguishing the nucleus from these historical and cultural influences.

Any inculturation movement should thoroughly analyse the Christian message with regard to its relevance to the life and predicament of the people in question. In the African context this will concern itself with African life questions in all cultural realms. This method, i.e. the analysis of the Christian message with regard to its relevance to the life and predicament of the people in question and its encounter with all realms of culture presupposes, among other things, that the theologian is at home with the African cultures and their history and all phases their of their history.

Many authors of theological literature (both Africans and non-Africans) have tried to tackle these problems of how the Christian faith could take root in Africa. They do not agree and at times serious divergences can be traced among them. But no matter how widely such theologies spread there can be no simple or universal solution to these problems for the problems themselves are not simple.

In considering possible ways for the Christian faith to take root in Africa, some borrow from other theologies such as African black theology; South African Black Theology, e.g. B. Moore; African liberation theology e.g. Z. Nthamburi, African Theology as a Theology of Liberation.; and African feminist theology, e.g. Mary Oduyeye, The Roots of African Christian Feminism. They will be excluded from this work for such problems are not solved through borrowing, no matter how old, popular, highly transcendental they may be. None of these should be the criterion for determining what is to be done. Where the need does arise for a borrowing these theologies may not provide the standard for determining which theology is to be preferred

The above mentioned efforts notwithstanding, the religious world of the African has remained an ongoing challenge to the Christian message. How can one experience the Message of Christ as the Good News in a milieu in which the human search for concrete happiness in

a culture which lives in relationship with the invisible, through such special forms of mediation as family-customs, marriage-customs and ancestor worship? In short how can the Message of Christ take deep root in a milieu filled with questions and aspirations that are so often misunderstood, not only in the first era of evangelisation, but today?

Despite reforms in the liturgy, e.g. introduction of indigenous languages, musical instruments and songs composed in native style, a critical analysis will show that the Message of Christ has not yet taken root in a practically relevant sense of the word. The question remains: why and how this can be achieved?

Africa's success in trying to answer this central question will be more the natural consequence of an honest and critical approach to African problems in all their peculiarities. This is one of the factors which makes it possible for theologies – which are answers to similar questions asked in various periods and places – to play vital and relevant roles wherever they rightly and fruitfully operate. This is an essential aspect of their success – such theologies are theologically relevant to the problems of life; they are answers to the questions of human beings in these times and places; they are always characterised by a constructive discontentment with the situation as it is and a striving to seek for, and to offer solutions. Constructive discontentment here means that there is an honest awareness of the unsatisfying situation of things. But, instead of resigning to passivity in the face of such a situation, which would be destructive, a step is made forward toward correction. The discontentment is then experienced constructively when it pushes those concerned to look for ways of improving their lot. These theologies, try to help people in their search for adequate and satisfying answers to their different questions.

Such theologies seek to understand and explain the relevance of God to all phases and situations in people's lives. They do not try to paint false and unrealistic pictures of the human being in his/her relationship with God. Rather they try to help and let the human being be human before God. Through such theologies humans are helped to become fully human in their relationship with God. The human being is considered with one's strengths and weaknesses, not as being so complete not to need God anymore. On the other hand, the human being is not considered to be so congenitally and miserably weak that

he/she cannot do anything towards helping himself/herself in this relationship with God. Being fully human and fully alive entails accepting all these aspects of human nature – strength as well as weakness, independence as well as the need for God. Saint Irenaeus said that the Glory of God is a human being fully human and fully alive? In other words such theologies try to help everyone concerned to become a human being, fully human and fully alive, and thus to face the Christian message.

One of the peculiarities in the history of Christianity in Africa is that of all the groups or cultures that have come in contact with Christianity, Africa occupies an unfortunately unique position, the African culture was not at its best form at the point in history when it came into contact with Christianity.

Africa has been systematically humiliated in terms of her culture. She was still being raped and vandalised for the second time (the first being through the slave trade) by the Europeans through colonialism when Christianity was brought to Africa. Just as there were different political and economic colonialists, there were equally different religions and missionary groups in Africa. These different groups in most cases were in enmity with one another before and while they entered Africa and equally remained so thereafter. Hence, these partitioned the already pluralistic religious world of the Africans. This added extra causes of division to those already existing among the Africans. The missionary groups applied the same principle of divide and rule as was used by the colonialists.

It is presupposed that it is necessary that the Christian message take root in Africa because the Message of Christ is the message of salvation as salvation means healing, it is appropriate to African situation. The African Christian should be helped to feel that the Message of Christ is not primarily a set of doctrinal, ritual or moral laws, but rather the Good News of overcoming the estrangement of the state of sin through the appearance of Jesus the Christ as the new healing reality. They should be made to feel that Christian symbols are not absurdities, unacceptable for the questioning mind of the African, but point to that which alone is of ultimate concern, the basis and meaning of their existence and of existence in general.

Africans, on the other hand, must allow themselves to be dominated by an “inspirational unrest“. This is a creative disposition in which

those involved allow themselves to be confronted with, and inspired by, their difficult situation. They do not just fold their hands waiting for the situation to change of itself. The inspiration which comes from their perception of the difficult situation as a challenge, moves them towards improving upon their predicament. This inspirational unrest should urge Africans to rise above themselves and their present circumstances by reaching for the Message of Christ. They should develop and harbour a constructive discontent with the present situation of Christianity in Africa and strive towards an honest encounter with the Message of Christ. Africans must stop complaining and start correcting; stop lamenting and start acting and trying to find a way to make the Message of Christ take deep roots in Africa, within African culture and among Africans.

Introduction

The reason for the mission and missionary activities of Christianity is often traced to the injunction of Jesus to his disciples: “go and make disciple of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:18-20, Mk 16:15; Lk 24:27; Acts 1:8). It is easily assumed that obedience to this great command to go into all the parts of the earth making disciples and baptising was the greatest motivation for the missionary enterprise. However, in practice, the motives were more complex and the goals were enunciated differently.

The history of missions throughout the centuries provokes many thorny questions. This history, in its different phases, is interwoven with the other histories of Christians during their respective epochs. These depended to a great extent on the addressees, on their understanding of Christ’s injunction in their own human circumstances (such as their history and culture,) and their understanding of those to whom they had to bring the Christian message. This last aspect is especially very important.

In the African circumstance these aspects are essential in trying to understand Christianity; its introduction, history, development and future in Africa, which we shall try to present and analyse concretely with the Igbo people in Nigeria. As an example they will provide a concrete frame of reference. They are large enough – not less than 40 million people – for this type of examination and majority are Christians and Igbo traditional religionists.

Chapter one illustrates an example of African culture as represented by the Igbo people in Nigeria. This is a presentation of an indigenous African society, prior to its contact with foreign (European) culture.

Chapter two presents the initial contact between the African and the European worlds. The case study continues to take practical examples from the Igbos in Nigeria. On the European religious side the principal example is Christianity with its European background. In general, attention will be focused more on the Roman Catholic European Christianity. Particular reference is made to its missionary activities in Africa, specifically among the Igbo people in Nigeria.

Chapters three, four and five deal with the Message of Christ taking root in Africa. In this light they examine the origin, history and some models of this within different cultures in the history of Christianity. Inculturation will be treated as one of these models. Our suggested model is inculturation as dialogue between the Message of Christ and African culture. We shall have to justify this model of inculturation as dialogue and point out the obstacles and problems confronting this model. Beyond these, however, we shall consider the challenges they pose to Christianity and to the African world, respectively.

Source Materials

As the title and contents indicate, this work considers both theological and sociological issues. It is especially a theological examination of Christian activities in Africa in general and especially among the Igbo people in Nigeria. The term "sociological" is an umbrella concept covering what could equally be social, anthropological, ethnological or even historical features.

It must be noted that there are weaknesses typical of this type of combination, i.e. sociological insight applied to theological problems. One of the reasons is that neither the methods nor the demands of these two areas or disciplines can possibly be fully developed within the scope of such a work as this. The empirical observation methods and subsequent theoretical analysis belonging to a sociological study cannot be easily transferred to theology. Theology attempts to reflect and describe „revealed" beliefs, values and the embodiments, and the nature of human-divine relationships.

Both the traditional Igbo society and the Christianity developed here embrace beliefs and values. They encompass equally social structures and institutions which condition, or influence one another. In Igbo society, as in any other African society, there is a very thin membrane standing between social life and belief and thought patterns. The religious prohibitions, for example, prescribe the structure or nature of social interactions and patterns of behaviour.

All this notwithstanding, the approach of this work would seem to be justified for insofar as the interaction of Christianity and the traditional Igbo religion (like in any group of religions of any given society) involves the Igbo community in social or cultural change, the combination of a theological with a sociological approach seems not

to be out of place. Furthermore, this work tries to be of some practical relevance to Igbo society and to the Church, at least in the part of the Church in Igbo land. A purely theological approach, to a Church in an area of increasing social transformation, limits the Church. The Church would loose not only relevance, but also insight into the social and practical realities of the people's existence and the influences upon it from the Igbo community in which it exists.

The facts used in this work were collected from sources that are principally documentary-scientific books, magazines, published reports, historical records, etc. A good number of these sources comes from indigenous authors. References are made in footnotes and in the text to many of the authors whose works were made use of. Scientific discussions with different people – Africans as well as non-Africans, theologians as well as non-theologians, sociologists as well as non-sociologists – are another of the sources also in this work.

Nevertheless the limitations imposed upon data collected through these avenues are recognised. As regards the historical part of this work, cognisance was taken of the problems of historiography. Of special note are the poorly documented history of the Igbos and the propagandistic purpose of the documented history of Christianity which was designed, among other things, to boost morale and material aid. Some of the early converts and writers imbibed this habit of uncritically praising and cataloguing the "triumphs" of Western Christianity over African religion and culture. Hence caution and control were applied in the application of such materials. The presentation of history requires not just the naked facts on events that took place but must examine also, what is going on behind the events. A historian is not a chronicler or an antiquarian, but also an interpreter.

Scope

The Scope of this work, as can be seen from the title, concerns the contact between the Christian faith and Igbo traditional culture and society. This will be seen against the general background of contact between religions and cultures. It will be applied in terms of the effect of Christian religion in its contact with the African traditional religion and culture extant in Igbo land. It is not within the scope of this work to treat culture as such in its complex and far-reaching ramifications.

It treats culture insofar as it is closely related to religion. Although religion is one of the basic pillars of culture, there are other basic institutions like economics, politics, education and family. This notwithstanding, it could be maintained that it is religion that gives an all-embracing orientation and direction to culture.

Thus the central concern is the contact between Christianity and Igbo traditional culture and religious life. It does not include detailed enquiries into the individual treatment of the various sects or denominations of Christians with the Igbo people. In general, attention will be focused on the Roman Catholic Church; while at times mention is made also of the Protestant Church. An unlimited treatment of all sects and denominations is beyond the scope of this work. The same limitations apply to the treatment of Igbo culture and history.

At any rate, it is hoped that more restricted approach will render more detailed and fruitful treatment of the main question posed in this work. It is also hoped that this leads to a deeper understanding of the social and religious changes brought about by contact with Christianity in this part of Africa. Hence it underscores the need for inculturation through dialogue between African cultures and the Message of Christ.

Chapter One

Igbo Traditional Religious Understanding of the World, Human Beings and God

1.1 Preamble

The purpose of this preamble is to present a summary of the arguments which justify the direction taken in this work. The intention is to address a number of central questions like, why has the Christian faith not taken deep root in Africa and how can it then deepen its root in Africa? This preamble contains also a summary of some salient elements of African traditional religion. This is considered necessary in order to help the reader locate Igbo traditional religion, the case study of this work, within the larger forum of African traditional religion. Lastly, it should introduce especially those not acquainted with the African traditional religions to the first chapter of this work – Igbo traditional religious 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 African traditional religion. One can understand the Westerners who raise such questions because for them religion is dead or of less interest and is treated with indifference by many people.

For those people, to whom Africa has become a synonym for poverty and under-development, it would make sense that Africa channels all her resources primarily into solving her economic, political and development problems. This overlooks the fact that politics, economy, development and religion are but the different interwoven and interdependent parts of a culture. 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 human-being, also poses questions to life. There is a sort of bilateral movement in the posing of questions here; it is not a one-sided venture. 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. They at times succeed in finding meaning in, as well as of, life. All these ways, answers and meaning are examined, practised 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 questions cannot be ignored even in our working definition of culture.

The questions are of different types, with different contents and directions. This does not abolish their interdependence and interwovenness, but some of these questions are religious in nature or have religious content and orientation. Religion 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 the meaning and purpose in and of life. These questions are not restricted to the religious sphere, but religion concretises themselves in their development. What would it mean, if one were to try to put the African traditional religion aside; in his/her bid to solve the problems he/she deems necessary, it would turn out that even if all the other problems were solved there would still be some pertinent problems which would remain unsolved; such like that of the meaning in and of life.

It is a fact that black Africa has never produced a great form of religion, which could bring an all-encomprising unity to her widespread areas. The concept “African Traditional Religion” is a sort of umbrella-concept for all forms of religions which originate from black Africa. The word “traditional” demarcates these from other religions in Africa, which today are referred to as African religions because of some elements of the African traditional religions they imbibe. There are examples where Islam and Christianity are referred to as African religions. This results from the fact that these two (especially Islam) have been perceived so by some of their African

members in terms of the fundamental underlying concepts of traditional African religion.

Considering black Africa, it is possible to talk of a religious world-view and also of different religious world-views or perspectives. In real life differences abound, which do not, on the other hand, negate the strong similarities that exist between the basic tenets of these forms of religion so that one could talk of either "African Traditional Religions" or of "African Traditional Religion". Religion in the grammatical plural points to the plurality of the religious world-views, while the singular refers to the common or similar underlying tenets of these forms of religion.

Generally, African traditional religions are characterised by their pragmatic orientation. This has led many non-members of these religions to deny them that they have philosophical reflection or mystical contemplation. It is unfortunate that many people are ill at ease with other forms of religion and find it difficult to observe these with an open mind or without prejudice for it is important to see the logic and depth of such religions.

Many are of the opinion that some standard criteria are indispensable for religion and its spread. Such criteria include, among others, written sources, mythologies, well-defined and systematised patterns of theologies and philosophies. Further demands are made of social and moral prescriptions, which will bring forth structures that are not time-bound. But these criteria are not applicable to the African traditional religions. Even though these criteria did bring benefits, their absence in the African traditional religions has not diminished the wealth and depth of the religious world-view of the Africans. Although in the past they had big municipalities with complex political, economic and religious structures, there was no need that formalised written laws to be laid down or ideologies and political institutions legalised. The political and religious leaders of black Africa were not chosen from an intellectual elite; their role and position depended, among other things, on age, experience and common sense.

Furthermore, the depth and wealth of the African religious world-view is based on the complex and subtle symbolic structures which give human life practical meaning and relevance. The religious views of the African world concentrate on life within the community, which

encompasses space and time. The living include also the ancestors who are regarded as the „living dead“. A mystical understanding of this time- and space-encompassing community is necessary for the unity of the different African communities with which meaning and human fulfilment have strong connections. They have no connection with an existence after death, which has to do with participation in any transcendental reality. The consciousness of a lively unity with the community gives the African his inner stability and constitutes his religious foundation.

The religious world-view of black Africa is characterised in the different parts of the continent by emphasis on the optimum success of the relationships within the community. The religious world-view of black Africa stresses more the importance of the human community, the family as a community, than the individual person. The constitutive factor which binds individual persons together is the unity of the community. This entails that within black Africa the religious world-view differs from community to community, depending on how each community is structured. Hence some reason that there is no such thing as “African Traditional Religion”, but instead “African Traditional Religions”, due to the plurality of such religions and communities, and the problems entailed in encompassing all that it is deemed necessary to proceed by a case study of specific community – the Igbo community of West Africa, any valid approach to African traditional religion must begin with a careful study of specific African communities.

The central position given to the human community in black Africa’s religious world-view should not be interpreted as indicative of the lack of other important elements. For the religious elements or symbols receive their importance as elements of a structured unity, and hence contextually and in interdependence with the human community which appears at the centre of a more encompassing world-view. It is believed to be continuously under the influence of cosmic forces operating within and around it, examples of which include the gods, spirits (benevolent as well as evil), the ancestors, etc.

The myths explain the cosmos and the mode of action of the cosmic forces. They have an aetiological character and help to explain the phenomena of human experience.

To understand the African as religious, one has to bear in mind that the African traditional religions are not primarily a collection of doctrines and rites, but more a way of life and world interpretation. African traditional religion expresses itself in every aspect of the life of the African, and can in no way be separated from his/her daily life. The way the African eats, plants grain in the field, celebrates feasts and festivals, manages social contact etc., all these are influenced by the African traditional religion. Every action of the African is executed principally from this background.

The elements of being human are found in many of the creation-myths among the different African societies. A short review of some of these myths shows that the creation of the human being is not first on the list, but the origin of the community. Examples are found among the Yorubas and the Igbo people in Nigeria. This primacy of the creation of the cultural world before that of the human being, points to the fact that the individual person is defined through his position within the network of relationships he/she possesses in the community.

Three elements, which are in complementarity, constitute the human being. These 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 second is a spiritual element which comes from the ancestors.

The different cultures of black Africa see in the human community a reality, which does not allow the time-space continuous existence to perish in chaos. This conviction strengthens the relationship of the individual to his/her community. It does not pertain only to the community of the living now or in the space of three to four generations. This is why the community which occupies a central position in the religious world-view of the Africans includes equally the ancestors. They are gone, but continue to sustain and protect the community of the living. The yet-unborn offspring of the living are already recognised as present and guarantee the continuous existence of the community beyond death.

There is a very close relationship between the responsible living elders of the community and the ancestors who protect the community. Of course, not every dead member of the community automatically reaches the status of an ancestor for which one must be an adult with

legitimate offspring. The moral aspects of his/her life should be positively convincing. Some categories of illnesses e.g. madness, chronic, diseases, death through such natural forces as thunder, etc) should not be suffered or a cause of death. At death he/she should be accorded a befitting burial with all the necessary attendant rites and ceremonies. The dead, who for one reason or the other did not reach the status of an ancestor, is cut off finally from the community and the continuity of the forthcoming generations. They are condemned to roam restlessly as evil spirits.

It might appear surprising that we are just beginning to talk of God. For the Africans, God is, on the one hand distant and withdrawn, who directs the universe and with whom the human beings do not strive for direct contact; but on the other hand, God is so immanent that his presence is felt everywhere. In the classical Western sense he could be seen as "deus remotus" a quality which is often described as "deus otiosus". This is the supreme God who created the human community and sustains creation with his life-force. The knowledge of the mystery of the origin of creation, the life-force in the human beings and in the universe is attributed to him alone.

The world of the African traditional religions presents vividly the fact that the human being as a religious being always understands reality as a whole and with a deep dimension. The world and life receive their quality/value and content from their finitude, but their meaning is interpreted and realised from the limitedness and transitoriness of the universe and human life.

The direct relation between God and the human being is that he/she has received the breath of life from God. Consequently, the human being participates in the cosmic forces which manifest themselves in nature and through other divinities. This goes a long way to explain the behaviour of the Africans towards nature.

Especially for Westerners, it is difficult to understand, that the sacred, for the Africans, can manifest itself in such objects as stones, trees, rivers, seas, mountains, animals etc. The Africans do not worship the stone or the tree as such; the sacred stones, trees, rivers, seas, mountains, animals etc. are not worshipped as such but revered because they manifest something else, namely, the sacred or "wholly other". These objects are hierophanies or the manifestation of the sacred. It cannot be stressed enough that such objects present the

paradox that in manifesting the sacred, they become something else, without ceasing to be themselves because of their continuous participation in their cosmic sacrality. The whole cosmos is herewith the manifestation of the sacred or a hierophany.

A Remark on Orthography

There are two alternative spellings in Igbo studies: "Ibo" and "Igbo". This can be traced back to the colonial era. In this work the technically more correct "Igbo" is chosen for an overwhelming majority of the Igbos prefer this form, in contradistinction to the inaccurate "Ibo" of the colonial era. People should be addressed by the name they prefer. The same path will be followed in the transcription of Igbo phrases and texts, where the orthography of sources will be respected and followed. In some other cases the familiar names will be opted for, concentrating more on intelligibility than pedantic correctness. All italicisations of Igbo words even in citations are from the author of this work.

1.2 Origin and History of the Igbos

If one were to ask the question "what does the word 'Igbo' mean and where does it come from?" there are many answers for the origin of this word is not very clear. According to M. A. Onwuejeogwu, "the word Igbo means 'The community of people'"[1]. He tries to support this view through several linguistic uses of the word Igbo. Due to the pejorative use of the word Igbo by European slave dealers in referring to slaves from the interior, it became a practice among some sections of the Igbos to speak of the rest as Igbo people. This practice is still to be found in some parts of Igbo even though it no longer has the same pejorative connotation. As A. E. 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

[1] T.U. Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy*. (Lagos: Lantern Books, 1985), 19f.

Onitsha as Igbo while the *Aro* refer to others including *Nri* and Onitsha as Igbo."[2]

The word refers not only to the people, but also to the language of this group. It falls in the Kwa group of languages found in west and central Africa with various local dialects. An outstanding characteristic of this language is that it is tonal; both grammar and speech tones play an essential role. The tone of a word, whether high, intermediate or low, determines meaning.[3] Hence, though many words have the same orthography, they do not have the same tone and hence have different meaning. Typical examples of these words have identical spelling, but different tones:

Ózò: gorilla

Ózó: title

Òzó: again

Oké: rat

Óké: male

Ókè: boundary

Òkè: share

Ézè: king

Ézé: tooth

Ókwà: warning

Ókwá: small wooden mortar

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[2] Ibid., 19.

[3] E.M.P. Edeh, *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics.* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985), 45. In this work E.M.P. Edeh presents something of the Igbo metaphysics and culture. He tries to investigate the fundamental reality of things from an Igbo perspective. This work provides a clear case of what serious philosophising in Igbo culture could be. It has the advantage of providing a starting point for further rational and systematic reflection on the conception of reality etc.

Òkwà: partidge.[4]

Despite the various dialects found in the Igbo language and the tendency among some to refer to the rest (apart from themselves) as Igbo, the name Igbo has become a symbol of unity among the Igbos, especially when they find themselves among non-Igbos.

1.2.1 The Geographical Location of the Igbos

The Igbos are located principally in south-eastern Nigeria and occupy a continuous geographical delineation of areas known as Igbo land. This territory "lies between 5° and 7° north of the Equator and between the 6° and 8° east of the Greenwich meridian, spanning the river Niger approximately midway between the Niger-Benue confluence to the North and the Atlantic to the south. It embraces an area of some 15,800 square miles."[5]

The Igbos constitute about 27% of the total population of Nigeria which is estimated to be 140 Million. Igbo land is one of the areas in Nigeria with a high population density, even though the Igbo population is unevenly distributed.

Igbo land is low lying with the exception of some areas. Vegetationally surveyed the land could be categorised into four major belts, viz. the mangrove forest in the delta area, barely touching the southern Igbo land: the fresh water swamp forest; the rain forest region and the derived savannah covering most of the rest of the land running from the north-west to the north-east.[6]

1.2.2 The Origin of the Igbos

The issue of origin of the Igbos is similar to the history of the other groups in Nigeria. It presents several problems – a picture of which is presented by A. E. Afigbo as follows:

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[4] M.N. Okonkwo, *A Complete Course in Igbo Grammar*. (Nigeria: Macmillan, 1977), 101.
[5] C.O. Obiego. *African Image of the Ultimate Reality Analysis of Igbo Ideas of Life and Death in Relation to Chukwu*. (Bern/Berlin: Peter Lang, 1984), 32.
[6] E.M.P. Edeh, *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics*, 9.

> The writing of Igbo history is still at a very rudimentary stage. Not only are we still to work out the main stages in the evolution of Igbo culture and society, but what is more the raw materials – archaeological, ethnographic, linguistic etc. – from which the historian can distil Igbo history are yet to be adequately uncovered, collected, collated and interpreted.[7]

Many and varied opinions are advanced by Igbo ethnologists and historians. These opinions could be categorised into two main hypotheses – migration (outside or eastern origin) and creation (ancient origin) hypothesis.

These hypotheses are rational guesses regarding the place of origin of the Igbos. One cannot be categorical as to their accuracy and interpretation, but they are useful in two ways: on the one hand, they tend to show the similarity of the cosmological views and historical experience of the Igbo with those of their Nigerian neighbours. On the other hand, the primitive form of these legends tends to suggest that the Igbo, like their Nigerian neighbours, have been settled in what is now known as Nigeria for a very long time.[8]

1.2.3 The History of the Igbos

Ethnologically the Igbos are seen as an ancient race. Many accounts attest to the fact that the Igbo had settled in what is today known as Nigeria by the third millennium BC (3000 BC).[9] The early history of the Igbos shows some similarities to those of their Nigerian neighbours including that of their dispersal:

> Just as the Yoruba have Ife as their spiritual and ideological metropolis, the centre from which

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[7] A.E. Afigbo, *An Outline of Igbo History*. (Owerri, Nigeria: RADA, 1986), 1.
Prof. A.E. Afigbo, Professor of History in some Nigerian universities including the University of Nigeria, Nsukka is a prominent Nigerian historian. His various works concentrate on the history of the eastern part of Nigeria, especially Igbo history. He is among those who do the onerous task of collecting, ordering, analysing and documenting systematically the different pieces of oral Igbo History and tradition.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

> various branches of them spread out to occupy their present positions, so do the Igbo have in Nri-Awka and Amaigbo in Orlu their own spiritual and ideological metropolis, the centres from which different branches of them moved out to their present locations.[10]

Reports on the Igbo heartland suggest a number of problems. The view that Nri-Awka is the spiritual and ideological dispersal centre of the Igbo is primarily based on the claims of the clans in this area. They maintain "that founding ancestors at first resided in the Nri-Awka area but subsequently moved out with their followers and families either in search of unoccupied land or to escape uncongenial obligations or even punishments. For most of this area the ritual primacy of Nri is attested to by the fact that it was believed by the Western and Northern Igbo that the souls of their dead invariably walked the streets of Nri on their way to the realm populated by the revered ancestors."[11]

For Igbo groups, such as the Ohuhu, Ngwa, Mbaise or even the Cross River Igbo people, the role of Nri is occupied by Amaigbo in Orlu. The name Amaigbo means the street or meeting centre (ama) of the Igbo. In the oral history of the Igbo groups mentioned it was from Amaigbo that their founding ancestors dispersed.[12]

Relying partially on such legend as cited above and oral tradition and partly on numerous other ethnographic and ecological evidence some scholars, like A. E. Afigbo, have come to the conclusion that the Nri-Awka-Orlu axis probably represents the earliest zone of Igbo settlement from which other parts of Igbo land came to be populated over the centuries.[13]

> However, considering the existence of other dispersal-accounts from some scholars one cannot but proceed on basis of probability. According to E. Isichei, the first cradles of human habitation in

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[10] Ibid., 3.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

> the Igbo area were probably the Cross River and the Anambra Valley-Nsukka escarpment. In each of these areas, later Stone Age sites have been excavated. A rock shelter at Afikpo was first inhabited about five thousand years ago, by people who made rough red pottery and a variety of stone tools. ... Excavations at the University of (Nigeria) Nsukka (Nigeria) uncovered the pottery, 4500 years old, i.e. above mentioned, and Ibagwa, a town in the Nsukka area, has a rock shelter which yielded both ancient pottery and tools of stone.[14]

A. E. Afigbo tries to present the sequence of events in brief as follows: On leaving the general area of the Niger-Benue confluence the early Igbo people would appear to have spread along the Nsukka-Okigwe highlands which at the time constituted the most habitable parts of what later became Eastern Nigeria. The southward movement of this early Igbo people along this cuesta continued for centuries as more and more people came in from the north and as the first migrants multiplied. This led to the vanguard of the movement being pushed beyond the southern tip of the Nsukka-Udi cuesta into the rolling plains to the south where they multiplied. These groups became the Uratta, Ikwere, Etche, Asa and Ndoki Igbo of present times.[15]

Parallel to the afore-mentioned incidents "important developments were taking place on the Awka-Orlu upland section of the Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta leading to some increase in population and the search for more land for settlement.

> The result was first that from the Nri-Awka area some Igbo started moving westwards across the

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[14] E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People.* (London: Macmillan Press 1976), 3f.
Prof. E. Isichei is Professor of History at the University of Jos, Nigeria. She wrote her early books on the social and intellectual history of the Christian religion, turned to African history in 1967 and has taught in African universities since 1969. She has published a number of books and numerous articles in a wide variety of learned journals on African history and religion. A History of the Igbo People, is a work of great breadth which begins from the Stone Ages to the 1970s. It covers a wide variety of themes in the social, economic, political, religious and military history of the Igbo people. It is based on wide range of printed sources, and archival sources in several languages and fieldwork.

[15] A.E. Afigbo, *An Outline of Igbo History*, 3.

> relatively narrow low-lying Anambra-Niger flood plains to the uplands on the right bank of the Niger ... This counter migration which led to the settlement of the southern Ika area and the southern riverine areas survives most vividly in the traditions of the Umu Eze Chima group of villages (prominent among which is Onitsha) in the form of an original migration from the domains of the Oba of Benin.[16]

In any case it is evident that the primary areas of Igbo settlement and their ecological environment could not cope with the increasing population pressure. The natural result of this became the frequent migrations to other parts of Igbo land, or what then became Igbo land. This also could be seen as a plausible reason for the migration towards the eastern direction, for the same impulses which had culminated in the westward migration from Nri-Awka area had brought similar results in the Orlu area, only that in this case those Igbo, who felt compelled to move, moved eastwards.[17]

The Journal of the African Society, X (1919-11) views the whole development thus; the antiquity of these movements is mirrored in the high population densities obtaining throughout Igbo land, and the remarkable extent to which the original vegetation has been modified by the human presence. Igbo land is in the rain forest belt of Nigeria where it is difficult to find any rain forest. The whole countryside is covered with farms or secondary vegetation where farms lie fallow.[18]

The historian of Igbo land or those who would like to present a lineal, continuous history of the Igbos are confronted with some problems. One of the problems is that while some sources are the oral traditions of the Igbos themselves, the other source is the evidence of European colonial masters and missionaries who never visited the interior parts of Igbo land. This means that the pieces of information they present are not very reliable and much of the data is ambiguous. Attention will not be focused in tracing the process through which the Igbos came to be what they were at about 1900. Rather the factors that are believed

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[16] Ibid., 4.
[17] Ibid.
[18] E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, 7.

to have shaped the Igbo culture and world-view will be examined. The sources here (as in other cases) will be primarily legends, myths; archaeological, linguistic and ecological data. The main factors that played a dominant role in the social evolution of the Igbo include among others, agricultural, economic and technological factors. Judging from this perspective, "the Igbo would appear to periodise their culture history into three great eras – the pre-agricultural, the agricultural and the agricultural-cum-commercial periods (sic)."[19]

One important point is that myths and legends played a very important role in the Igbo cultural history and still play the same role in the present traditional Igbo society. The importance of myths and legends generally, but more especially among the Igbo people, could be seen also from the fact that the myths proclaim the appearance of a new cosmic "situation" or that of a primordial occurrence. It is, in short, a report of a "creation": one narrates how something was carried out or came to be, that is how it began to be. From this point, myth stands in close relationship with ontology. Myths in general explain the cosmos and the mode of action of the cosmic forces. These myths have aetiological character and help to explain the phenomena of human experience. The main function of the myths consists in fixing the exemplary models for all rituals and all essential activities of the human beings.[20]

The Salient Periods of Igbo History

The First Period

Coming back to the three great areas of Igbo history, one notices that the first period – the pre-agricultural period – is the most obscure of all these areas. In this period existence was as precarious as that of wild animals and that, coming by food, was regarded as signifying divine intervention. For the Igbos ..., this was the age of innocence, that golden age in the history of man's relationship with his maker when the two could communicate directly.[21]

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[19] A.E. Afigbo, 4f.
[20] M. Eliade, *Das Heilige und das Profane: Vom Wesen des Religiösen*. (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1990), 88ff.
[21] A.E. Afigbo, 5.

The Second Period

This is an important period of Igbo history – the agricultural era. The development here shows that the wanderer has come to settle and know rest. Myth, archaeology, linguistics, ethnography, etc. play an important role here as in the other preceding and subsequent periods. The advent of agriculture led to the growth of the Igbo society in complexity. Not only did the population of the Igbo expand, but as the hitherto little communities among them started pressing on one another, some started coalescing to form larger social units while those that could not reach such a solution warred with one another, with the weak being expelled or forcibly absorbed.

The role of agriculture in bringing about social and political cohesion in Igbo history is probably underlined by the fact that the village-group, the largest political grouping known to the Igbo, is first and foremost a union of those villages which had reconciled their land-using rights among other things and thus usually occupied the same stretch of territory and co-operated in defence of such territory. These villages worshipped at the same Ala (earth goddess) shrine and accepted the right of the same Okpara (village-group head) to regulate land use and enforce the observance of the same taboos dictated by the earth goddess.[22]

The relevant point here is that the Igbo people associate the coming of agriculture with the elaboration of a number of the social institutions and cosmological ideas. Agriculture played a role not only in the social and political aspects of the life of the Igbos of this era; it also touched the religious dimensions of Igbo cultural society. This important religious role of agriculture could be seen in the fact that it has become so important in Igbo life that the worship of Ala (on whose benevolence agriculture directly depended) came to over-shadow the worship of Chukwu who, to some extent, was displaced

[22] Ibid., 5f.

into an otiose existence, as Igbo society grew in complexity under the impact of cultivation.[23]

The Third Period

The final and last of the three great periods of Igbo history is the period of agriculture and commerce. The creative act of Chukwu is mentioned here: the institution of markets and marketing counts as the last creative act of Chukwu. His final withdrawal was after this act; there is no more mention of his dealing with the origin and evolution of the Igbo world and society.

The Igbo society booked further developments more especially in and through regional trade under the impact of commerce.

> It is in fact most likely that Igbo cosmological ideas could have evolved only in such a state of society in which the Igbo had come to achieve a comfortable (sic) level of economic, social and political stability to engage in speculation on the nature and origin of the world and of their society.[24]

Besides the attribution of the institution of marketing and regional trade to the supreme God, it could be seen that such developments arise due to the increasing ecological differentiation between the several parts of Igbo land. At this point an important point is the role of external factors in the development of the Igbo society of this time. This is important because the Igbos had their neighbours and did not live in isolation.

The aim of this short review of the origin of the pre-colonial history of the Igbos has been among other things, that of helping the reader to situate this group of Africans within the history of Africa and to demonstrate that Igbo traditional religion is as old as the Igbo society and underwent the same transformations as that of the traditional society. This is also a positive indication for Christian faith taking deep root in Igbo cultural world. The many local differences in Igbo

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[23] Ibid., 6.
[24] Ibid.

culture make it quite difficult to describe them in detail. Each statement would have to be qualified so as to avoid the mistake "of describing the average of all Igbo societies which does not correspond with any actual Igbo society.… One's description of Igbo land should be rooted in a particular moment in time, because the society was constantly changing."[25] The later part of the history of the Igbos will be continued in the later section where the Igbo contact with the missionaries – a period which historians call Igbo land under colonial rule.

1.3 Igbo World-View

In this section it is necessary to mention a problem with which one is often confronted with namely that of terminology. "This is the problem of trying to convey ... The exact meaning of religious words or actions as understood with the structure of that religion."[26] We may ask what has this problem to do with the Igbo world-view; for it is a problem pertaining to religion. But 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."[27] This Igbo social set-up, which is characterised 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 other units. Although these units are distinct in principle, they are very closely interwoven. There exists an interdependence within them indicative of the fact that the respective traditional Igbo societies have a unified picture of the universe with ideas about its origin, its structure and the nature of the various forces that occupy and operate within it.[28] Hence it will involve efforts to convey the worldview in a language that has neither the cultural background nor linguistic categories of the Igbo world-

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[25] E. Isichei, 20.
[26] A.N.O. Ekwunife, *Consecration in Igbo Traditional Religion.* (Nigeria: JET, 1990), 17.
[27] E.M.P. Edeh, 61.
[28] T.U. Nwala, 27.

view. There is danger of distorting the original meanings of the world-view. Many Igbo scholars have consciously or unconsciously tried to express in Western categories, patterns and concepts for which there are no equivalents. In some cases they ended up either giving these concepts western colours or dropping those which they could not squeeze in. Bearing this in mind effort will be made in trying to involve the technique of presentation, description, interpretation and evaluation of the facts.

> Effort will be made to use world-view 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, etc.[29]

For the Igbos, this world-view is in the practical life of the people; particularly in the political, social, artistic, economic and religious life. Generally speaking, traditional Igbo people hold a unified picture of the universe. This also pertains to the 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. In the question of the origin of the universe like other peoples of Africa the Igbos do not consider it a serious problem, for though they believe that the universe was created just like it is they have their different versions of the creation account. By thinking of the universe as created, the Igbos see this universe from a religious perspective.

1.3.1 Igbo Dualistic Vision of the Universe

"In many African societies it is believed that the universe is divisible into two. These are the visible and the invisible parts, of the heavens ... and the earth. Some peoples, however, hold that the universe is in the form of a three-tier creation, namely: the heavens, the earth and

[29] Ibid., 26.

the underworld, which lies below it. African peoples do not think of these divisions as separate but see them as linked together."[30]

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 supper (sic) human potentates they constituted a third force."[31] 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 like 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, for there is 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 inter-related parts – visible and the invisible.

> For the Africans (Igbos included) 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. It permeates the former through and through; it is

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[30] J.S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion.* (London: Heinemann, 1975), 32. Prof. J.S. Mbiti was formerly Professor of Religious Studies, Makerere University Uganda. He has published many books and articles in the area of religion and theology. He opposes Temple's concept of "Life force" and proposes a phenomenological approach to the development of African theology.

[31] J.O. Ukaegbu, *Igbo Identity and Personality vis-à-vis Igbo Cultural Symbols*, (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1991), 70.

> simultaneously within and outside of the earth and the seas.[32]

For the Igbo traditional cosmology this division of this 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 initiated. This is the reason why the Igbos distinguish between these two realms of the universe and hold to their reality in religion. Most religions talk of the existence of another world; as the Igbos are understood as a deeply religious group, whose religious sentiments and beliefs are part and parcel of their daily life it can be assumed that this view originates from their religious view of life and reality. Moreover, like many Africans the Igbos have a world view of extraordinary harmony and coherence of 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 (sic) one item from the whole is to paralyse the structure of the whole."[33]

The Igbo people seek the point from which creation flows with hope of finding a simple formula for human beings, animals, and the elements of life all at once. For the Igbos there is interconnectedness between these different elements of reality. The distinction between two worlds could be seen from two standpoints, viz.: the idea of reincarnation and the Igbo concept of death.

> 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 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

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[32] E.M.P. Edeh, 75.
[33] M. Okoye, *Embattled Men: Profiles in Social Adjustment*. (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension, 1977), 9.

> material world in terms of imperceptibility to the senses and, as such ..."[34]

There are some weaknesses in this argument: one is that the reality of reincarnation is not a proven fact. This notwithstanding, should it be assumed that reincarnation is 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 second argument supporting Igbo distinction between two worlds is based on the Igbo ancestor 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."[35] One could maintain that the same argument posed against the first standpoint could also be valid here. Again it could be argued that both realms of the universe in the Igbo world-view are merely convenient ways of grouping events.

For T.U. Nwala, who argues for the duality theory, "this (the visible order) is the realm with which ordinarily we are in physical contact. ..., it is not spatially different from the spiritual realm. The main difference between them lies mainly in the mode of apprehending or knowing them.... Much of what the Igbo know about the natural world can be proved scientifically, but much of what they believe about it cannot (as yet) be proved."[36]

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 Igbos have terms and categories that bring out the two realities clearly:

> Uwa (world) is the Igbo term for the visible world. The term used for the invisible world is Ani Muo

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[34] E.M.P. Edeh, 74f.
[35] Ibid., 75.
[36] T.U. Nwala, 33f.

> (land of the unseen). ... an Igbo term that is equivalent to the English idea of universe, that is the totality of what is, we have to combine the two terms uwa and ani muo.[37]

The theory of duality would appear widespread among the Igbos with 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 Igbos express the spiritual concepts linked with the invisible realm in a material mode.

1.3.2 Igbo View of the Material World

This view manifests itself in the Igbo attitude to reality and their pattern of life. "In the mind of the Igbos the invisible element in any material object is equally as real as the visible aspect of the same object. ... Because they consider both the visible and the invisible aspects of a thing as real, the Igbos usually tend to give some degree of respect to material objects, especially those in daily use ..., for the Igbo the invisible nature as well as the visible are metaphysically real, a fact evidenced in their language."[38] The metaphysical reality of these realms comes more to light when we consider the Igbo understanding of the human being.

Another important point is the purpose of matter for the Igbos. Matter is grouped as the fourth element of the four elements that constitute a thing or cause it to be. For the traditional Igbo people, the purpose of a thing determines its being. This means that whatever has no immediate, specific purpose here is regarded as worthless and it's being questionable and purpose here being understood by these traditional Igbo people as the use for which a thing is made.[39]

The Igbos, it could be said, reason pragmatically when they bring the being of a thing together with its use. They reason back from the use for which a thing is made to the validity of its being. That which is of any use is worth being. It means that in their consideration objects are

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[37] E.M.P. Edeh, 73.
[38] Ibid., 78f.
[39] Ibid., 87.

very pragmatic. This utilitarian outlook on things may be seen in the fact that "... the (Igbo) traditional world-view ... implies a mystical utilitarian outlook on nature instead of an externalised appreciation of it in forms like fine landscapes, beautiful flowers, cascading waters or the colours of the rainbow."[40]

In consideration of the Igbo idea of purpose as the justification of the existence of material objects, it will be helpful to highlight the Igbo understanding of the nature (essence) of an object. In Igbo language and thought the word, as meaning the essence of a thing, is rendered in a general or wider scope with the term "*údî*".

> Uodi (sic) is universal in scope in the sense that it is usually prefixed to a noun, for example: Udi mmadu (sic): man's nature ...to mean the essence of, the genus and the specific difference of, something. In this sense everything comes within the meaning of udi (sic) because everything: ... has its own genus and specific difference. Here there is no difficulty in seeing how the concept of nature can be fundamental to the Igbo notion of purpose as the justification of the material things. If the nature of a material thing means its essence, its existence can only be justified by it's fulfilling the purpose of its existence, which is being true to its essence.[41]

From all these it is evident that the Igbos have a value-oriented idea of nature. Their understanding of the concept of nature (essence) could be traced back to the fact that the traditional Igbo people make their daily living and carry on their daily activities in a natural environment. Like all traditional peoples of Africa, they are 'akin' to nature.[42]

The Igbo world-view reveals a belief in the unity of all things and an ordered relationship among all beings in the universe. Though they have an utilitarian disposition to things they interpret and explain things in personalising terms: they ascribe purpose to both animate

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[40] Ibid., 89.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 90f.

and inanimate objects as well as to elements and ordinary events in nature.

"Since the traditional Igbo, like all traditional people, have a personal approach towards things, these natural qualities are personal and spiritual. They are addressed in personal terms ..., some are regarded as the abode of certain spirits and gods and so held in awe and sacredness; others are either pets or agents of the spirits. Certain elements ... are deified and their spirits worshipped."[43]

This relation to objects is what is often misunderstood by non-members not only of Igbo traditional religion but also of African traditional religions in general. It is a point which M. 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 of 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 at the same time. In his view, ontophany and hierophany meet one another because the cosmos reveals the modalities of being and sacredness as the supernatural for the religious person is indissolubly connected with the natural, nature is always an expression of that which transcends it.[44]

This entails that for the Igbos as for other Africans a sacred object is worshipped because it is sacred, not just because it is an object. The in-the-objectness of this object's self-revealing 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 because the Africans in general, and the Igbos in particular, as religious people comprehend the supernatural through the natural aspects of the cosmos.

As it was mentioned in the preamble, the sacred, for the African can manifests itself in objects. The Africans do not worship them. The Africans do not worship the stone or the tree as such; the sacred stones, trees, rivers, seas, mountains, forests, animals, etc. They are revered because they manifest "something" which is no longer an

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[43] T.U. Nwala, 49.
[44] M. Eliade, 103.

object, but the sacred, the "wholly other". These objects are hierophanies. This presents a paradox. In the sense that they manifest the sacred, they become something else, but do not cease being themselves due to their cosmic sacredness. "Their activities, their 'coming into being' and 'passing away' bear some stamp of mystery and so are thought to possess some mysterious or occult attributes."[45] In the Igbo ontological hierarchy objects stand below the spirits and human beings. They are subdivided into animals, plants and inanimate objects and elements.

Generally, the relationship that exists between human beings and the animals or the position of the animals in the whole scheme of events has always been one of deep interest. Legends attesting to this abound in different epochs and parts of the world. The difference lies most often in the form and depth of such relationship. For the Igbos, these creatures do not serve only material utilitarian purposes.

> Animals occupy an important place in Igbo traditional thought. Traditional Igbo myth and folklore abound with belief that animals have souls and spirits like men, although theirs may be somewhat lower ontologically. But with regard to certain things, animals are accorded a special respect, for it is believed that they may know things that human beings do not know and they see things that are not seen with ordinary human eyes.[46]

Put in another form, this shows the strategic position of animals in the Igbo world-view. It is a role that extends to their religion and socio-cultural life. These animals play an important role in maintaining a cosmic balance and in explaining some mysterious and unusual occurrences.

Plants receive similar attention from the Igbos. Some are sacred as abode of spirit and deities. Besides their religious importance, some of their parts – roots, herbs and leaves – have vital medicinal importance.

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[45] T.U. Nwala, 49.
[46] Ibid., 51.

Most inanimate objects and elements serve as residence of deities and spirits. Mountains, hills, valleys, caves, rivers and streams are usual scenes for sacrifices and the accomplishment of religious rites and rituals. Equally some of these objects and elements are sacred.

What has already been discussed portrays the Igbo belief in 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.

1.3.3 Time and Space among the Igbo People

Concept of Time among the Igbos

Another important aspect of the Igbo world is to Igbo concepts of time and space which among others, are the Igbo symbolic machinery for conceptualising the universe. In the same minor way as space for the Igbos, as for other religious people, time is homogeneous and constant.

For M. Eliade, in considering the concept of time among religious people in general, especially the early religious groups, there are intervals of holy time in which feasts are celebrated and, on the other hand, the profane time which is the usual temporal duration of events of no religious significance. He sees a breach of continuity between these two forms of time, which religious people (as in the case of the traditional Igbo communities) bridge through religious rites and rituals.[47]

Opinions are divided as to the Igbo idea of time. On one side it is argued to be cyclic, while on the other it is held to be linear. The former base their argument on the fact that the idea of recurrence is fundamental in Igbo thought patterns. They buttress their argument with the idea of reincarnation and the cyclical agricultural seasons. For them, not only do Igbos have a cyclical view of time, but other indigenous African groups as well.

[47] M. Eliade, 63.

The group that holds that the Igbos have a linear view of time, base their argument on some Igbo traditions such as the "Age Grade System"[48] which they see as an indirect way of immortalising the linear notion of time. They also call upon the idea of sequence and order, which is present at base of Igbo thought patterns.

We need not think here in terms of either or because there are elements in the Igbo world-view that support both the cyclical and the linear view. Clarity can be found in M. Eliade's presentation of the understanding of holy time as in its essence reversible: mythical ancient time, which is made present again.

Every religious feast, every liturgical time is the re-actualisation of a sacred incident, which took place "in the beginning" in a mythical past. All participations in such a feast imply an exit from the "usual" time and reintegration in mythical time, which is re-actualised in this feast. This means that the holy time is often endlessly repeatable. It neither expires nor is of irreversible duration, but is an ontological time which remains itself the same, never changing and is never being exhausted.

Religious people live in two forms of time, sacred and profane; of which the more important form is sacred time. This entails the paradoxical aspects of a circular, reversible time which could be re-enacted or re-lived. It presents a mythical form of the eternal now, in which the religious people immerse themselves through periodic rites.

As regards profane time, the religious person sees a connection between this and sacred time. The profane time, in which the human existence and historical events take place, is made possible through the sacred time, the eternal now of mythical events. It is holy, mythical time which justifies as an exemplary model existential

[48] "Age Grade System" is a system among the Igbos by which people are grouped into age brackets i.e. people between particular ages are taken as a group. This comprises of men and women who are of about the same age. Each grade is a separate entity. Its members discuss issues and act in conformity together. The different age grades have a recognised status in the social and political economy of their community. The influence of an age grade is determined by its seniority, hence the purpose of the interpretation age-grade.

historical time. For religious people profane time is sustained through turning to holy, non-historical time by means of rites.[49]

The Igbo cyclic view of time could be understood as sacred time, profane refers to Igbo linear time. The Igbos do not see the world as coming to an end because as a totality the world (cosmos) falls in the group of objects that exist in the sacred endless reversible time.

Through feasts or rites and rituals there is a re-actualisation of events as was mentioned, through a re-actualisation of that time, a reality equally manifested itself, this is implicit in all sacred calendars. A feast is not the commemoration of a mythical or equally religious event, but re-actualisation of the event.[50]

> The Igbos have a calendar consisting of a week or izu made up of four days; a lunar month or onwa, of 28 days comprising seven native weeks or izu; ... a year or afo(sic) made up of 91 weeks or izus, or 13 lunar month. ... The priests of each community are time keepers ... The lunar months dictate major feasts and celebrations in Igbo land as it is in most African ethnic groups.[51]

In considering the origin of the Igbo calendar we have to rely on legends and theories, in all of which legends and theories God is seen as the author of time and the calendar. In the section where the history and origin of the Igbos were considered, there is a legend which narrates how God sent down four heavenly fishmongers whose names were subsequently found to be Eke, Orie, Afo and Nkwo. They travelled through Igbo land selling fish and establishing markets and also gave their names to the four days of the Igbo week.

The number four is very sacred in Igbo rituals. Not only 4 but also 7 is specially symbolic because of its position and relation in Igbo calendar 13-lunar-month year calendar. This is a religious-cultural calendar which regulates their traditional life, activities and feasts. The Igbo days, weeks or months play different roles in the different parts of Igbo land. Some days are observed as holy days e.g. Eke and

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[49] Ibid., 63ff.
[50] Ibid., 73.
[51] J.O. Ukaegbu, 57.

Afo in some parts of Igbo land. On such days many religious activities are executed and in some parts there is abstinence from work.

There are days in which certain activities, more especially religious ones, are not undertaken. Such is applicable to the Igbo-weeks and months. Igbos have a personal relationship to these periods so that in some parts of Igbo land, a child receives a name which points to the day of Igbo-week in which he/she was born as for example Nweke, (Eke-child), Nworie (Orie-child), Nwankwo (Nkwo-child), Nwafo (Afo-child).

Concept of Space among the Igbos

"Space in traditional Igbo language and culture is an ambivalent concept. In one sense, it connotes the entire Igbo cosmos translated by the Igbo generic word 'Uwa'.... In another sense, space denotes a location which in the physical spheres of the Igbo world could be quantified and measured. ... Here space for the Igbo could be conceived as a three dimensional sphere – the upper plane inhabited by God and some created divinities, the visible sphere shared by men with the earth-spirit force, nature spirits, patrons spirits of human activities and ecology; and the world beneath the earth, the habitat of the ancestors and the guardian spirits of human beings."[52] The Igbo people clarify the contexts in which this term is used mainly through specification. These dual meanings of space will be borne in mind in subsequent efforts to understand the Igbo view of space.

As to space in the Igbo worldview, one can coincidently share the views of J. Mbiti on religious places in the African world view this is because his view on religious places with regards to Africans in general applies to the Igbos. The Igbo people like every African people, have their own religious places. These places are not for common or careless use, because they are considered sacred or holy. Some are taken over in their natural form others are man-made and others have been constructed or adapted for the purpose of religious usage or for inspiring specific religious feelings.

Natural places are set apart as religious place by common belief, practice and consent in the area concerned. In both cases these places

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[52] J.S. Mbiti, 144.

are used for such religious activities as praying, making offerings and sacrifices. Major ceremonies and rituals also are carried out here.[53] The observation above goes in the direction of M. Eliade who maintains that for the religious people space is not homogeneous, but has breaches and cracks. It contains parts which are qualitatively different from the others. There is also a holy space, that is, strong, meaningful space and there are other spaces or parts of space which are not holy and consequently formless and without firmness.

Religious people experience this lack of homogeneity as a contrast between the holy that exclusively real and the rest. This is not a matter of speculation, but primarily of religious experience which precedes every reflection about the universe. This religious experience of the lack of homogeneity of space presents an ancient experience which may be compared with the foundation of the world. Through the manifestation of the holy the world is founded ontologically.

The hierophany reveals an absolute "fixed point", a centre, in a hitherto boundless homogeneous space which was without a mark and orientation. For the religious people this revelation of the holy (religious) space has existential value. It gives them an orientation and every orientation presupposes a fixed point. The revelation of the holy (sacred) space gives these people a fixed point and consequently the possibility of self orientation. In this sense they have the possibility of founding the world.

Every sacred place (space) is connected with a hierophany, an invasion in a positive sense of the holy, through which a particular area is taken out of the cosmic environment and transformed qualitatively. The theophany sanctifies a place in that it "opens" upwards and connects it with heaven as a paradoxical point of transition from one state of being to another. In many cases, this needs not be a theophany or hierophany in the real sense: a sign is enough, in order to prove the sacredness of this place.[54]

The foregoing reveals the logic behind the Igbo religious and non-religious views of space in general and places in particular. One understands how and why some places are considered religious and the others not, and the purpose of space, especially of religious places.

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[53] A.N.O. Ekwunife, 117.
[54] M. Eliade, 23ff.

Following the division of the religious place into natural and man-made categories, the latter include such places as temples, altars, shrines and graves. Shrines count as the commonest of these religious places. Some are private and family shrines; others are public and communal. Like other religious places, these symbolise the meeting-point between the visible and the invisible world, the sacred and the profane.

Natural places include rivers, lakes, waterfalls, rocks, hills, mountains, groves, forests and trees. These are symbolically the meeting points between the heavens and the earth; the spiritual and non-spiritual; the visible and invisible worlds. Most of these natural places are public religious places: they are the focus of communal faith, values and religious sentiments. These serve as avenues leading to what may be called the world of the spirits or invisible beings.

Man-made religious places and even some natural places must fulfil certain conditions as noted by Eliade. Some must be consecrated and such rituals are performed on rare occasions these days. This is so because "most of the sacred places were consecrated from antiquity and have out-lived many generations."[55] It is interesting to note that the ritual for consecrating space among the Igbos is one of central ways through which the traditional Igbos express, communicate and unify the basic realities of the Igbo worldview – the visible and the invisible realms. Through this they are drawn towards the centre of the sacred world and the basic traditional ideas and values are expressionally communicated to those present.[56]

1.4 Igbo Understanding of the Human Being

I.E. Metuh, generally, has highlighted some salient points for this section. Until recently Western Scholars did not appreciate the extent to which African religions are founded upon a systematic anthropology and ethics. Now many Western writers are becoming increasingly aware that African religions are in fact anthropocentric:

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[55] A.N.O. Ekwunife, 119.
[56] Ibid., 132.

the human being is at the very centre of existence. African peoples see everything else in relation to this central position of the human being as if God exists for the sake of human being. African religion is centred more in man than in God or in nature.' Everything else in the African world-view therefore seems to get its bearing and significance from the position, meaning and end of man in African thought.[57]

In the above view I.E. Metuh has presented the views of different authors – Benjamin Ray, Mbiti and Booth. Though the Igbo understanding of human being is being considered reference will be made from time to time to the African understanding of human being in order to make some necessary comparisons between Igbo anthropology in particular and African anthropology in general. The points raised by these authors about African anthropology apply equally to the Igbos and have led some to the opinion that the Igbo ontology is basically centred on anthropology. For this group, the Igbo notion of being could be derived from the Igbo concept of human being.

> The Igbo word for man (the human) is '*madu*'. Etymologically '*madu*' is a short form of *mmadi* (*mma-di*) '*mma*' is the Igbo word for 'good', 'a good' or 'the good'. 'Di' is from '*idi*', which ... is the Igbo verb 'to be' ..., a combination of '*mma*' and '*di*' that is, '*mma-di*' means 'good that is'.[58]

Here we see that the Igbos are able to conceive the idea of "good that is". This must be understood in the context of creation, for the Igbo people derive the notion of "good" from divine creation. To conceive the human being as the "good that is" is not to say that man is "good in se" for no one according to their belief is "good in se" except God. Hence the Igbo expression "*onye di ka chi*" means: who is like God in the sense of God's godness.

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[57] E.I. Metuh, *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation.* (Onitsha, Nigeria: IMICO, 1991), 109.
E.I. Metuh was Professor of Religious Studies in the University of Jos, Nigeria. He emphasises in most of his numerous works that the African religious thinking must be interpreted and explained with the help of African conceptual frameworks instead of Western ones which are foreign, and unhelpful conceptual tools.
[58] E.M.P. Edeh, 100.

The Igbos share the religious idea common to many peoples that man's goodness is participated. Man is "good that is" in the sense that, having been created by God, he is a product of his maker whose being and goodness, the highest good he shares.[59] So far effort has been made to see the ontological aspect of the Igbo concept of human being. As with other African people, for Igbos ontologically the human being is a living force in active interaction and communion with other living forces in the world. Every human being is a network of interacting elements of his/her self and the surrounding world which determines and is determined by these actions or behaviours.[60]

Seen from the standpoint of his origin and final destiny, man is best understood in relationship to *Chukwu*, God, and his creator. Man comes from God. He has a definite mission to fulfil in God's plan. Ontologically; man is a force in the universe full of forces. There are also some other views of the human being, e.g. the social, religious and purely anthropological perspectives etc.

Socially, the Igbo doctrine of man strikes a balance between his personal identity as a unique individual person and his collective identity as a member of his society.[61] This point may be the reason why some authors share the view that for the Igbos the human being is a synthesis, as sum total, the climax and culmination of all that *Chukwu* (God) created. Some Igbo names like *Mmadubuife* (*Mmadu* is valuable), *Mmaduka-aku* (*Mmadu* is more valuable than all wealth), *Mmadukife* (*Mmadu* is more valuable than anything), point to the valuable and enviable position of the human being in the hierarchy of beings. They understand human beings primarily as creatures of God. God created not the human race as a whole, but each individual person. There is a special intervention of God with each individual person, the effect of which varies from person to person. God shows personal concern for each.

> The African doctrine of man does not admit the dualism which is characteristic of the graeco-

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[59] Ibid., 100f.
[60] E.I. Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions.* (Onitsha, Nigeria: IMICO, 1987), 182.
[61] E.I. Metuh, *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation*, 109.

> roman culture. Man is not split into two conflicting principles the body and the soul.... Rather, African anthropologies generally conceive man as one unit. Each principle links man to a different category of beings in the ontological order.[62]

There is no common way in which the different African communities conceive these principles. The understanding of the relationship of these principles to one another and their respective roles in helping the human being in life is equally divergent. Only the conception of man as a unit and a life-force in vital interaction with other life forces in the universe is a common characteristic here.

"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."[63] The mention of "selves" may give the impression that the Igbos in contrast to other Africans do not conceive the human being as a unit. This is not the case. There is a paradox here – for the Igbos the human being is a unit, but the self is multiple. While not subject to the body and soul dichotomy, the same human being exists in his/her physical body and is believed to be capable of existing out of it without being split from it. When out of this his/her physical body, the Igbo people refer to one as a spiritual (i.e. immaterial) body. Hence the dead are usually visualised in a bodily form, as a sort of unquantified entity.[64] I.E. Metuh gives the impression that he takes principles and self here as synonym. But before settling our minds on this, it is important that one sees what these constitutive principles in the Igbo understanding of the human being are. Some groups maintain there are four while others hold they are three principles. All agree on three principles, it is the existence of the fourth that is strongly doubted, for the pieces of evidence and arguments of the proponents of the fourth principles are not strong and convincing enough, for what is held to be the fourth principle is implied in one of the other three principles.

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[62] E.I. Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 183
[63] E.I. Metuh, *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation*, 110.
[64] Ibid.

> 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.[65]

One can see how it is possible for the human being, in the understanding of the Igbos, 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 die, 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 translations.[66]

The second principle is *Chi*, the spirit in charge of destiny, as an emanation of the creator in the human being, is seen by scholars like C.K. Meek as one of the most striking Igbo doctrines. Every human being is associated with a genius "spirit-double" – *Chi*. This life principle is comparable to the notion of "Ka" among the ancient Egyptians, which was conceived as the double or genius of a human being. 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.[67] For the Igbos it is believed that

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[65] Ibid., 110f.
[66] Ibid., 111.
[67] Ibid.

> at conception (i.e. at the moment of conception of the human being), God assigns a *Chi* to each person, and places before the *Chis* 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 the child will have. *Chi* has, therefore, two ambivalent conceptions – the parcel of destiny and the guardian spirit who chooses the destiny parcel.[68]

Numerous examples among the Igbos buttress this belief: a lucky fellow is called, '*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.[69] One has the dual meaning of chi as expressed above. 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. When a person reincarnates (as is believed by the Igbos), one receives another *Chi*. Generally a person's abilities, faults or misfortunes are at times ascribed to this *Chi*.

The idea of *Chi* as has been seen so far recalls to mind the issue of destiny and responsibility. Destiny as found in Igbo life and thought is assumed to be an ancient and basic concept which they situate in the Igbo religious system. Generally speaking, "African beliefs about the Destiny spirits (*Chi* for the Igbos) thus shed some 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."[70] For the Africans what one may hope to get out of life is only what has been predestined by God. But, on the other hand, what one actually gets is his/her responsibility. He/she only gets what he/she has worked for ...; where a person is not resourceful and particular fortune in his destiny

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] E.I. Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 191.

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

The Igbos, whose views are equally represented above, believe, as it is in one of their thoughts, that whoever says yes, his/her chi (destiny) will equally say yes. A kind of dialectic is expressed here. It is not that they believe that the human being has absolute freedom. They acknowledge the fact that resourcefulness may not always be rewarded. In one of the Igbo proverbs, it is said, "*Omelu ma chi ekweghi, onye-uta atakwana ya"* – One who has tried, but *Chi* (destiny) did not consent should not be blamed. The Igbo people try to emphasise the fact that human beings have chances of self-actualisation within the realms of the human finite freedom. The human being must do something in order to receive the favours of the gods. But on the other hand, it dare not be understood as meaning that the gods are obliged to reciprocate. In such a case where the gods do not reciprocate favourably, one is asked not to blame the person who has done his/her possible best.

The Igbo people see it as the goal of the human being to achieve his/her destiny.

> Their concept of predestination does not imply that what is predestined by God must come to pass irrespective of whatever the individual does. Rather, it is like an award by God to the individual and held in trust for him by the guardian Destiny-spirit. The responsibility of obtaining the ... benefits of the award rests on him. He can get all the award or may loose a good part of it. But try as he would, he cannot get anything that is not included in the award.[71]

Igbos understand the lines on the human palm as symbolic of this individual destiny. In some parts of Igbo land there is a saying: you can wash your palms with soap and sponge till the end of time but the lines remain as they are. This is the pre-destinative aspect. As every person's destiny is already given from the birth that is why some call it "m´bulu bia uwa" – "that which I took along with me into the

[71] Ibid.

world". Igbos leave nobody in doubt that each person has his/her own respective distinct destiny, even the identical twins. Hence the thought – "*Otu nne n´amu, ma otu chi adighi eke*" – "The same mother gives birth, but not the same God creates" should not be seen as indicative of polytheism among the Igbos. Rather it implies that God gives individuals their respective destinies. Not that one should think more of the meaning than of the literal translation.

Africans in general and Igbos in particular hold that the human being is both subject to fate and yet free. He/she is at the same time a victim of restriction imposed by destiny and the architect of his own future. He/she is both innocent and responsible. In other words, human destiny in African – Igbo thought is both unalterable and alterable. Perceived as a package sealed by God and given to human beings, it is unalterable and it is a resource which is alterable and to be exploited.[72]

It may be important to highlight briefly the relationship which exists between an Igbo person and his or her *Chi*.

> Although the *Chi* comes into association with a person immediately on conception, the person does not usually establish a formal Chi cult until he or she becomes a parent. Before this time, his *Chi* shares in the sacrifices which his father or uncle offers to his own *Chi*.... A woman also sets up her *Chi* shrine at her husband's house after the birth of first child. The shrine is set up with some relics ..., taken from her mother's shrine ... Sacrifices are usually made at planting and harvest seasons. Outsides (sic) these periods, offerings are made whenever the owner feels inclined.[73]

In a way this shows that this relationship between a person and his/her *Chi* entails some responsibilities. But because it is not expected that these responsibilities should be assumed before maturity, a next of kin (father or uncle) represents the person. The particular *Chi* in question shares in the sacrifices offered to the *Chi* of the next of kin whom he is representing.

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[72] Ibid., 191f.
[73] E.I. Metuh, *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation*, 112

The third among the three principles that constitute a human being for the Igbos has much to do with Igbo concept of reincarnation. This principle (*Eke* or *Aka*) and is believed to be "an ancestral shade incarnate in each newly born baby."[74] This principle links the individual with the life-force of one's clans. The Igbo people believe that this principle – *Eke* (the ancestral guardian) – makes it possible for the dead to reincarnate in the living from generation to generation.[75] For them the dead-ancestors reincarnate while the deities incarnate. This is conceived in terms of the third life-principle/force which is understood to be "an ancestral shade incarnate."

From the foregoing there emerges the Igbo view of the human being in the universe. They see the human being as a life-force in interaction with other life forces. One is endowed with the different principles which enable one to interact at a level in three forms. *Chi* – the Destiny-spirit – puts the human being to be in contact with God; *Eke* (Aka) – the Ancestral guardian – links one with the ancestors: *Obi* (Breath) connects one with the entire universe of life-forces.[76]

In the Igbo hierarchy of being,

> man is at the centre of this universe of forces. Above all beings or forces is Chukwu, God ... Creator ... After him come the deities, and then the founding ancestors of the different clans.... After them come the ancestors and other living-dead of the family and tribe. Then come the living in the order of primogeniture. Under man and subordinate to him are the physical forces in the universe – animals, plants, minerals.[77]

For the Igbos the universe is a unit, in which all beings are linked together through a network of interaction. This harmony brings a strengthening of beings. All life-forces can have either positive or negative influence on one another. Through rituals Igbos try to maintain this harmony and, where it is lost, to restore it.

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[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid., 113.

African thought (and equally Igbo thought) tends to define the person in terms of the group to which he belongs; i.e. in terms of the community. A person is thought of first of all as a constituent of a particular community to which he/she belongs. The community which defines who one is and who can become. In traditional African and Igbo societies 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 "what lineage or clan do you belong to?" Thus from birth an African learns to believe that "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 linking him/her to his/her family, and through the family to the clan. This is not only a physical and biological, but a spiritual element.[78]

In the above statement, which refers also to Africans in general, the human being is seen as the Igbos understand him/her as a part of a social network consisting of the individual, the family and the community. It is a network which is not only a socio-biological band, but some call it "ontologico-spiritual" network and others call it a "socio-religious" band. The latter base their view on the fact that both the social and religious units are intertwined with one another or rolled into one unit. In summary, the African individual is not an individual purely and exclusively in contrast to the 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.

1.5 The Igbo Concept of God

Speaking generally on the issue of the African Supreme Being, the following questions could be posed:

> is He a personal God, or rather an all-pervading abstract force or cosmic mana? What is his relationship with other beings in the African

[78] E.I. Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 193.

> world-views especially the deities and ancestors? ... Questions have also been raised about the nature of African Theism. Is it a monotheism, pantheism or polytheism? The relationship between the Supreme Being and man has also received a considerable attention. Is God involved in human affairs, or is He rather a 'withdrawn God', 'a *deus otiosus*' ..., how far is God immanent in human affairs? Conversely, how much worship of God is there in African Religion?[79]

This list of questions applies equally and totally to the Igbos. But what answers the different African groups give to these questions. One can talk "of a divergent concept of God in Africa. That is because in each locality, the concept of God usually takes its importance and complexion from the sociological structure and climate. It is therefore necessary to understand the variations in these sociological patterns in order to see clearly the reason for certain emphasis and tendencies.[80] We shall now in concentrate on the Igbo concept of God.

1.5.1. God in Himself:

The issue of God's existence is so obvious that there is not much concern among the Igbos about proving formally his existence. Preference is given to views asserting the obviousness of God's

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[79] Ibid., 85.

[80] B.E. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*. (London: SCM Press, 1973), 148.

B.E. Idowu is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Like J.S. Mbiti he Rejects Temple's concept of „Life force" and argues for a phenomenological approach to an African theology. He proposes an African theology to answer the social, political, mental, spiritual and emotional needs of the Africans. In this book, which is one of his various publications, he writes that some African scholars and faithful find the prefabricated theology imported into Africa inadequate for their spiritual and academic needs. There are now strong advocates of a theology which bears the stamp of the original thinking and meditation of Africans. Only if there is understanding of the way in which African spiritual values are apprehended by the African mind is discussion and communication with other religious beliefs possible.

existence, rather than to those which occupy themselves with whether or not God exists.[81] G.T. Basden noted the fact that among the Igbos there is "a distinct recognition of a Supreme Being – beneficent in character – who is above every other spirit good or evil."[82] It is obvious for the Igbos that God exists and there is a distinct recognition of this Supreme Being.

The question might then be why is it obvious to the Igbos that there is such a Supreme Being?

> Two reasons might explain this: the Igbo religious background, and man's sense of dependence. These are interconnected. An Igbo feels insecure when on his own, that is without reference to higher powers. This sense of insecurity naturally arouses in him a tendency to seek shelter from superhuman powers who, in his judgement, are strong enough to assure him maximum protection in every sphere of insufficiency.[83]

We have seen why it is obvious for the Igbos that there is God. Though the Igbos are not much concerned formally about proving or demonstrating God's existence, it is not just an arbitrary assumption. They have ways of arriving at the existence of God. Firstly, Igbos arrive at this point through the existence of things of nature. The fact that things/beings are, proves that God exists, because if there were no God - the fountain of existence and beings – there could be no being. Through their perception and experience of their environment it is obvious that there are beings, that is to say, there are things.

Secondly, the Igbos come to this conclusion through their concept of *Chi* (destiny spirit) as emanation of the creator in the human being. As seen in the previous section, this is a participation of the human being in God. They participate in *Chi* as the life of God; in his/her everyday life the Igbo experiences this participation. Hence they argue that if the parts exist, the whole must of necessity exist.[84]

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[81] E.M.P. Edeh, 118.
[82] G.T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*. (Lagos: University Publishing Co, 1983), 215.
[83] E.M.P. Edeh, 118.
[84] Ibid., 120.

The third way Igbos come to the existence of God is through the Igbo nomenclature. Generally in Africa, names are very significant. Among the Igbos, names express the reality of what is. The importance of a name among the Igbos is further expressed in the fact that,

> the Igbo names are not mere tags to distinguish one thing or person from another; but are expressions of the nature of that which they stand for; they contain memories of a human experience, every shade of human sentiments and emotions in the struggle for existence ... an everlasting and imperishable record of their life and death struggles and their attempts to live in harmony with other men...[85]

On this basis then the existence of "theophanic" names among the Igbos is indicative of their belief in God's existence.

Some may argue that it is superficial to argue just from the mere fact of such names among a group of people to their belief in God's existence. But, one must not forget the emphasis on names among the Igbos. Some, if not most, of these names are fruits of Igbo people's experience of the divine. Nothing is asserted of God among the Igbo people which is not first felt or experienced. These assertions came about by means of God's interventions, not in their history as a people chosen by him, but in individual and analogous situational experiences shared with other members of their group, and embedded in the Igbo common religious culture.[86]

Some of the names

> ... express the reality of the existence of *Chukwu* (an Igbo name for God, whose analysis and meaning we shall be coming to later). In *Chukwudi* (a typical Igbo name), the operative word is '*di*' which comes form the word '*odi*' (sic) the third person singular of the verb '*idi*' which ...

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[85] C.O. Obiego, 78.
[86] Ibid., 77.

> means to exist. The name *Chukwudi* therefore states unequivocally that *Chukwu* exists.[87]

Some other names are the emphatic forms of "*Chukwudi*" and some demonstrate the fact that God is present. For the Igbos, objects or persons have to be or exist in order to be present.

The fourth avenue through which the Igbos arrive at the existence of God is their concept of life and death. Here Igbos reason that nothing happens without a cause. This implies if things are coming to be and ceasing to be there must be a cause. It is not that they do not observe that there are immediate causes; there are things whose cause is simply there for the common mind. This notwithstanding, there are phenomena that are above material and human power. This means that their causes stand beyond this level and be ultimate. One arrives at this hierarchy of causes through the experience of different facets of reality. It is not only naked experience, but also contemplation of these phenomena and it is this that leads to the idea of the hierarchy of being among the Igbo people. An example in this matter is the fact of "coming to be" of the human being. The Igbos go about it by accepting the assumption that the human being is created. Going further, they ask the question who creates? "*Onyeneke*". Seeing the act of creation, as something beyond the power of the human being, they assert explicitly that the human being does not create "*Madueke*". The implicit assertion that the divinities or gods do not create and that only God creates is evident in the statement "*Chineke*" (God creates) which is also one of God's names among the Igbos. Even when such names or expressions like "*mmo n´eke*" (the spirit creates) are found, it should be understood that spirit here refers to the supreme/absolute spirit – God.

Considering the ways the Igbos view God in Himself it must be acknowledged that there are anthropomorphisms in Igbo conceptualisation of God. We could understand this from the fact that "the Igbo see man in some ways as the centre of the universe, a common denominator, an in-between. This ... (view) makes them interpret the world both anthropocentrically as well as anthropomorphically. They look at God and nature then from the point of man's relationship with them. Many expressions, therefore,

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[87] E.M.P. Edeh, 120.

attribute human nature to God: their conception of the nature of *Chukwu* is laden with anthropomorphisms."[88]

One has already seen that for the Igbo (just as for other Africans) God is real. In considering how the Igbos come to God's existence through the avenue of their nomenclature, it was clear that the names mean the real; or in other words, they try to see that names agree with reality. This is stressed by B.E. Idowu where he maintains that in Africa the name by which God is called, are descriptive of his character. They are emphatic that He is a reality and not an abstract concept. D. Westermann stresses the same point that He is a reality to the Africans and the names convey "the purest expression of" their "religious thinking" and "experience".[89]

Moving from the fact that names are descriptive of God's character, we shall at some salient Igbo names for God. The Supreme Being (which is God for the Igbo people)

> is the only Being which does not seem to come under the term 'nature god' ... This is a result of the fact that the Supreme Being is a personification of the absolute in human life and thought. The Supreme Being is conceived under two major principles – the principle of creation – okike (*Chineke*); the principle of Absoluteness – ukwu (*Chiukwu*).[90]

1.5.1.1. God as creator:

This theme has been mentioned in considering the ways through which the Igbos arrived at the existence of God. Bearing the principle of creation in mind, the Igbos name God – *"Chineke"* or *"Onye-Okike"* (a Being who creates). This principle is more deeply expressed in the name *Chineke* – which grammatically could be written as *"Chi-na-eke"* (*Chi* who creates). *"Okike"* and *„eke"* come from the verb *"ike"* which means "to create" or "to apportion". Analysing the word

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[88] C.O. Obiego, 93f.
[89] cf. D. Westermann, *Africa and Christianity*. Quoted in: B.E. Idowu, 149.
[90] T.U. Nwala, 115.

Chineke, the basic thought is the idea of "creation". Here God is portrayed as the one "who apportions" something to creatures. He "apportions" life to or puts it into creature, Hence becomes 'God-within' (*Chi*).[91] Going further, an analysis shows that

> the word, '*Chineke'* ... is made up of three syllables namely 'chi', 'na' and 'eke' – (*Chi na eke*). This has two possible translations: First, if we take 'na' as a conjunction, we have '*chi*' and '*eke*' ...; and we would have two beings, perhaps two authors of creation, namely '*chi*' and '*eke*'! ..., but the implication that there are two creative powers is yet to be proved; secondly if, however, we take 'na' to signify the copulative 'is', then our sentence would be '*Chi* is creating' or '*Chi* who creates' – i. e. the creating *chi (Deus creans)*. This is the popular and normal way of understanding the word in Igbo society.[92]

The first possible translation of the word *chi-na-eke* suggests two creative powers at play. This is not what the Igbos mean with the word. In their thought about creation Igbos raise the question of who creates (*Onye-na-eke*). They made it explicit that the human being does not create (*mmadu-eke*), and implicitly through "*Chi-na-eke*" that deities do not create. This implies that they recognise only one creative power – God. Without having to reject this translation one can interpret it according to this Being embodying two life principles – "*chi*" and "*eke*"-, "*chi*" – the destiny principle seen in reference to the human being this entails an emanation of the creator and "*eke*" – the ancestral guardian principle. Because these principles are seen also as life forces this translation of "chi-na-eke" points to the unity of these two life principles in a Being which is for the Igbos God.

Should one be led to think that these principles are also present in the human being? Yes, by way of his or her participation in the creative principle – God. But in God exist not just in a unity but in a union and constitutory among others the essence of the Being-God. This union

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[91] C.O. Obiego, 95.
[92] Ibid., 95f.

could be seen as one of the attributes that constitute the uniqueness of God, for in no other being are these principles in such a union.

Coming to the first part of the second translation of the word Chi-na-eke as meaning "*Chi*-is-creating", some authors like C.O. Obiego reason that this

> underlines the idea that creation is a continuous activity. Hence they (the Igbos) call the 'Creating *Chi*', *Osebuluwa* (he-who-is-carrying or supporting-the-world ...) and were the creating-chi to relax his hold, the world would relapse into 'nothingness' ... *Chi* is continually creating – i. e. his creative activity is believed to be constantly at work ... because for the Igbo every manifestation of the forces of nature proves to human experience that these forces are not static nor are they mechanical and they need continual and continuing activity of the creating-*chi*, a re-enactment of the drama of creation.[93]

One can see that the Igbos have a profound conviction of sustained divine providence. This also goes, in a way, to refute views which consider the God of the Igbos as a withdrawn God, a deus otiosus. More of this will be seen later when God's relationship to the universe and the human being is dealt with.

1.5.1.2. God as Supreme or Absolute:

This attribute of God is expressed among the Igbos through one of the basic and most commonly used names for God – '*Chukwu*'. "Ethymologically, *Chukwu* is made up of two words: 'chi' and 'ukwu'. The meaning of the latter word is 'great', 'big' or 'supreme'. But regarding the original meaning of the first term, '*chi*', our written sources are confusing."[94] This would then mean we have to give some attention to the meaning of the word "*Chi*". In retrospect one can see that one of the meanings of this word has already been presented in

[93] Ibid., 96.
[94] Ibid., 87.

discussing the Igbo understanding of the human being. *Chi* was used in presenting the Igbo concept of God as creator.

Many authors in treating the Igbo world-view, anthropology and traditional religion have considered this concept differently. These range "from those who take *Chi* to be a 'spirit' or 'monad' to those who say that it is a 'kind of group-self or multiplex-ego able to manifest itself in several individualities at the same moment'. Some have even taken this to be the individual's guardian angel."[95]

Should one then ask how *Chi* in this context is to be understood; there is no simple answer,

> to pinpoint the exact meaning or connotation of the Igbo concept of chi is not easy. This is due to the particularity and the universality of its dimensions. *Chi* in its particular connotation is reserved to the Supreme Being. But considered in its universality, it is found in all beings ... we are confronted with the question: If *chi*, which is reserved to the highest Being, is also found in all beings, does it mean that the Igbos have a pantheistic notion of God?[96]

The issue of pantheism and Igbo traditional religion will be addressed at a later stage. While the meaning of other words is clear that of the word (*chi*) is obscure. In a non-religious context it can mean 'day light'. But in religious context, it evokes three related concepts, namely, the 'Supreme Being Himself', the personal deity and the idea of fate or destiny. These concepts are closely connected in the belief of the Igbo. They believe that each individual's personal destiny '*chi*' is allotted to him by the Supreme Being also called *Chi*, and is entrusted to a personal deity also called chi. Hence the name *Chukwu* suggests the idea of the chief source and controller of destinies, and can be simply translated as the "Great Providence".[97]

Other views consider "*Chukwu*" as the head-source-life par excellence, the supreme *chi*. In such views it is found that

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[95] E.M.P. Edeh, 125.
[96] Ibid., 126.
[97] E.I. Metuh, 88.

> *Chi* (as the emanation of God) is equivalent to 'the apportioned-life-principle' 'a small-Big-life-in-everything'; a *Chukwu*-within everything; that position in everything which is derived from the 'Big-life', '*Chi-ukwu*' ... '*Chukwu*', or '*Chi-ukwu*' is the 'Big-life', the 'abundant life' the supreme-life or supreme *chi* ... *Chiukwu* is the superlative, most perfect life, the pure life par excellence, the great-head-source of life from which every other life is derived.[98]

The principle of absoluteness as we have tried to present here implies for the Igbos absoluteness in all good qualities, especially knowledge, strength, purity or goodness. No evil is attributed to him.[99]

1.5.1.3. God as the Omnipotent

For the traditional Igbo people, *Chukwu* is the omnipotent God. This concept is the fruit of existential experience, not so much of abstract speculation. It is articulated in the Igbo traditional names, proverbs and sayings; and in their understanding of *Chukwu*'s exercise of power over nature.[100] This attribute of God could be read from one of the Igbo basic names for God – *Osebuluwa*. Term originates from three words, *Olisa* (or *ose*), *bu* and *Uwa*. Ose is used among the Abuchi people to represent a deity carrying and supporting the world on its back. Igbos use *Olisa* for the Great God. *Bu* or bulu is a verb indicating a carrying, supporting hand. '*Uwa*' means the visible world. Hence '*Ose* (*Olisa*)-*buuwa*' indicates the great God carrying, supporting and hence providing for, the world. *Osebuluwa* as a name for God indicates that the Igbos recognize that God has a plan for the world, supports and directs his creatures towards the realization of his plan.[101]

Another Igbo name which brings the Igbo concept of God as omnipotent or his absolute power light is *Ifeanyichukwu* (Nothing is

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[98] C.O. Obiego, 93.
[99] T.U. Nwala. 117
[100] C.O. Obiego, 97.
[101] E.M.P. Edeh, 130.

beyond God's power). This name negatively confirms the Igbo affirmation of God's universal omnipotence. For the Igbos, God alone in Himself is the one who set the machinery of the universe in motion. In part, or as a whole he can bring the universe to a stand still and get it going again. Summarily God's supremacy is absolute.[102]

The Igbos are not alone here in conceiving God as omnipotent. This concept of God is found generally in African thought.

> The absolute control of the universe and all beings is due, in African thought, basically to the fact that all other beings exist in consequence of him; and that whatever power or authority there may be exists in consequence of him; because it derives from him and because he permits it. God is the ultimate fountain-head of all power and authority, of all sanctions for orderly relations between men.[103]

1.5.1.4. God as Unique

Among Africans this is a widespread belief and explains why there are no images – graven or in drawing or painted – of him on the continent. There are copious symbols, but no images. The fact of God's uniqueness implies his transcendence. Views which conceive him as King with absolute supremacy emphasise God's uniqueness.[104] The Igbos do not pre-occupy themselves with the assertion that there is only one God. Primarily they assert that there is no other being or thing like God. "*Onyedikachukwu*" (who is like God?) is one of the Igbo proper names expressing their understanding of God as unique. Among the Igbos God's status as unique is supreme; his supremacy is unique and absolute.[105] It is important to remark that for the Africans in general and the Igbos in particular, God is one, the only God of the

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[102] C.O. Obiego, 100.
[103] B.E. Idowu, 156.
[104] Ibid., 152.
[105] C.O. Obiego, 103f.

whole universe. For the Igbo he is God of the whole world or universe, conceived of in unrestricted universality.[106]

1.5.1.5. God as Transcendent

Generally for the Africans God is seen as all-powerful and transcendent. As creator and is omnipotent he surpasses all other beings, belonging to an entirely different realm or order of being. This transcendence is evident in his supreme power and authority over the entire creation and is experienced in his inscrutability. He is known but impossible to comprehend. Some call him "the unknown", "the mysterious one".[107]

"Ontologically viewed", the Igbos also conceive God as „the origin and sustenance of all things. He transcends all boundaries ... he is the chigbo, the aged, but not ageing chi... He is sublime in status, beyond all spiritual and non-spiritual beings. ... God's ways are inscrutable; his thoughts are impenetrable. He is '*Ama-ama-amacha-amacha*' ... – one you can know but never 'finish' comprehending ..."[108] One of the Igbo names for God indicating his transcendence is "*eze-bi n'elu-ogodo-ya-akpu-na ala*" (the king who lives above whose loin-cloth touches and rolls on the ground). This and other names summarise God's transcendence, sublimity and immensity.

1.5.1.6. God as Omnipresent and Omniscient

Among the Igbos, just as in other African societies, wisdom commands great respect. The Igbo saying "*Onwero ihe gbalu chukwu ghari*" (nothing puzzles God) expresses their belief in God's omnipresence and omniscience. His omniscience is absolute, unlimited and an intrinsic part of his nature and being. God is the discerner of hearts, no matter how much a person may try to conceal his deeds, being, hence such names like *Chukwuma* (God knows), *Chima-Obi* (God knows the hearts) etc.[109] This omniscience of God

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[106] B.E. Idowu, 161ff.
[107] E.I. Metuh, 111f.
[108] C.O. Obiego, 104f.
[109] Ibid., 100.

comes most often together with the inscrutability of God's ways. Even in a situation where an unfavourable thing, believed by the Igbo people to have come from God, happens, it is regretted but then accepted. They accept it with the understanding that the ways of God elude imperfect man. An Igbo in the face of a crisis situation, would indeed wonder why God has permitted it, but would say "God's will must happen, we cannot question it."[110]

1.5.1.7. God's Moral Attributes

"The moral attributes of God are corollaries of the belief about him as a personal creator ... As a creator ..., he is all-knowing. As the divine providence which directs everything to its ultimate goal, he can only will what is good, otherwise he will be going against his own plan. Goodness is believed to be an essential attribute of God."[111]

Among the Igbos, the justice of God is felt invoked in judicial situations – swearing and pronouncing formal curses. God is the ultimate judge, who executes judgement with justice and without partiality. For the Igbos God's judgement begins for every human being here on earth according to his/her character: both fortune and misfortune are indicative of God's judgement on a person's character. In short God is an impartial judge.[112] The impartiality of God's judgement is believed in strongly even when they observe human beings who suffer misfortunes or who enjoy fortunes when from all observable facts it should have been the reverse. They justify such belief by holding that God's standards of judgement are different and who is the human being to put it into question.

1.5.2. The Paradox of God's Transcendence and Immanence in the Igbo Concept of God

From the above it is expected that the presence of such concept of God among the Igbos should lead to a personal relationship between God and human beings. One talks of „should" because the Igbos are

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[110] E.I. Metuh, 115.
[111] Ibid.
[112] C.O. Obiego, 101f

aware of an estrangement between God and the human beings. Chinua Achebe presents in his book, Things Fall Apart, some aspects of the Igbo concept of God. He mentions God's relationship to the world, the deities and the human being. In this relationship it is easy to see the paradox of a personal relationship and estrangement between God and the human beings. Achebe went into details in a dialogue between Akunna – the Igbo man whom the English missionary Mr. Brown wanted to get converted to the Anglican Church. This passage illustrates the transcendent nature of God as understood by the Igbos.[113]

This dialogue and related issues lead to the Deus-otiosus-view of God in African traditional religion. Westermann argues that,

> the high-god is a rule, not the object of religious cult and is of small or almost no significance in practical religion. Igbo people acknowledge him, but neither fear nor love nor serve him, the feeling towards him being at the highest, that of a divine awe or reverence.... The African's God is in a sense a 'deus incertus' and a 'deus remotus', there is always an atmosphere of indefiniteness that surrounds him.[114]

The terms "deism", "withdrawn god", "Deus otiosus" used in reference to the African religion and God are generalisations that overlook the variations in beliefs among the different groups in Africa. It ignores the paradox which is typical of the God-human relationship in African beliefs. God is, for the Africans far away yet constantly on their lips and in their consciousness.[115] Such paradoxes, which are not peculiar to African religions, belong to what Evans-Pritchard calls

> the unresolved paradoxes and ambiguities which are found in different religious systems. It is a universal experience ... that Divinity to man is

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[113] C. Achebe, *The African Trilogy: Things Fall Apart; No longer at Ease; Arrow of God*. (London: Pan Books, 1988), 147f.
[114] E.I. Metuh, 125.
[115] Ibid., 140.

> both friend and foe, whom one summons for aid and asks to turn away seeking at the same time union and separation from him.[116]

One can trace the origin of this paradox in the Igbo religious view to the fact that the transcendence and immanence of God like other religious apprehensions and responses occur in history. Hence factors which determine them must be sought in the cultural histories of the societies in which they occur.[117] An example of this situation abounds in Igbo cultural history. Some of its aspects suggest that religious changes, affecting the belief in and cult of the supreme, are linked with major innovations in the socio-cultural and economic life of the Igbo people.

Contrary to the view that considers the Igbo God only as the "withdrawn God" it must be mentioned that God is present among the Igbo people, and his presence means life for them. This provides to correct the doctrine which maintains that the god of the Igbos is a "high God" a sky God that is often withdrawn, a *deus otiosus*.[118] God is for the Igbo people transcendent as well as immanent.

Scholars like A. Shelton, B.E. Idowu, E.M.P. Edeh, etc refute this idea of the "withdrawn God" as the African view in general and that of the Igbos in particular. This results from expressing only God's transcendence at the cost of his immanence.

1.5.3. God and the Deities

Thus far it could be presumed that the Igbos believe in the divinities. Professor Idowu explains "West Africa may be said to be the home of divinities; but even here, we have variations from a very crowded pantheon to a very thinly populated one, and even to a situation where they appear to be scarcely in existence."[119] The issue of "a pantheon implies pluralism and this brings up the question as to whether or not polytheism applies as an appropriate, descriptive term for African

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[116] E.I. Metuh, *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation*, 59.
[117] Ibid., 63.
[118] E.M.P. Edeh, 129.
[119] B.E. Idowu, 165.

traditional religion in consequence of the incidence of the divinities; and ... of the nature of the divinities and relationship to Deity."[120]

In addressing polytheism and the relationship between God and the Deities – as pertains to the Igbo religious world-view it must not go unmentioned that,

> the Igbos recognise some relationship between Chukwu and Deities. But their conception of this relationship is not very clear.... The Deities are sometimes referred to as the sons of *Chukwu*, or his messengers, and sometimes as his manifestations. Sacrifices visibly offered to the Deities are said by the Igbo to be ultimately received by *Chineke*, the former being only mediators.[121]

Though not general, certain Igbo religious beliefs and practices indicate a closer and more logical relationship between God and the deities.

Divergent opinions abound as to the exact nature of the relationship between God and deities. Contrary to the views that God created the deities, some maintain that, "from the point of view of the theology of African traditional religion, it will not be correct to say that the divinities were created. It will be correct to say that they were brought into being, or that they came into being in the nature of things with regard to the divine ordering of the universe."[122]

Maintaining that the deities were not created points to the fact in the Igbo hierarchy of beings, being a creature is attributed to all other beings (human beings included) but not to deities and God Himself. The Igbo people do not believe that the deities can create: they could not have created themselves. But since they stand above the other beings (except God) in the hierarchy of being, one cannot speak of them as being created. Hence to the question of how they came about the Igbo people answer that they were "brought into being." They

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[120] Ibid.
[121] E.I. Metuh, 40.
[122] B.E. Idowu, 169.

believe that God being almighty is capable of calling these deities into being without their having to be created.

All agree that these deities did not create themselves. The view of Professor Idowu could be an effort not to place the deities on the same scale as lower beings in the hierarchy of being. On the other hand, it should not be understood as meaning that Igbos believe that the deities are created, and are on the same level with lower beings in the hierarchy of being. For the Igbos the central point in conceiving the deities as being brought into being, is that God alone is not created and is the origin of all the rest of being. Their point of departure is the relationship between God and the deities and that between the deities and the rest of being (with the exception of God).

Coming back to the question whether this belief and worship of numerous deities means the Igbos are polytheistic? One can simply say that the answer could be found in the interpretation of the relationship between God and the deities. In this case, one can say that the Igbo concept of God and his relationship to the deities cannot be rightly seen as a polytheistic concept of God. These deities for E. I. Metuh "are created by God and are subordinate to Him. They are his messengers. Their intimate but subordinate relationship with God is conceptualised in terms of Father/son, Chief/messenger or Lord/servant relationships."[123]

1.5.4. Igbo Explanation of Evil

"Even though the Igbos regard being as the 'good that is', they are not so naive as to believe that there are no evils in the world. ... Hence the Igbos are also concerned with the perennial problem of moral and physical evil. The Igbo ontological position that all things are good because of creation presupposes ... first, that God is the absolute good who causes the good in all beings; second, that God's very act of creating is synonymous with his act of causing good in what he creates."[124] The question then follows – how do the Igbos understand evil, especially in relation to God whom they also believe to be all powerful, the supreme goodness, the cause of all things. How do they

[123] E.I. Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 120.
[124] E.M.P. Edeh, 102.

reconcile this with their belief that beings are basically good because of their participation in the divine goodness?

"In general, evils can be grouped under three categories, namely, physical evil in the universe, physical evil in man, and moral evil in man or any personal being."[125] In contrast to E.M.P. Edeh who talks of three categories of evil, T.U. Nwala has two main categories – metaphysical and moral. Under metaphysical evil are those attributed to the human being by inference and directly committed by the individuals in contravention of a known prohibition. He (Nwala) maintains that the distinction between the metaphysical and moral evils is artificial to the Igbos.[126]

The question is then where do the Igbos locate the cause of evil, regardless of the category. It could be said that, the Igbos locate evil's proximate cause or causes within the realm of evil spirits. Evil spirits were not originally created and designated as evil and were originally created by God as good, like other creatures. But during the course of their existence they turned evil.[127] Taking it that the proximate cause is known, the next question would be, who or what is then the remote cause or causes of evil?

In searching for the answer to this question, it will be necessary to bear in mind that

> the Igbos think of evil as something that is not what it should be, something that makes the whole, the unity of life in community, less that what it should be. ... for them evil as evil cannot be caused on its own, but can be caused only as part of the effort to preserve the unity of the whole. The Igbos express this in a widely used proverb: *Mmadu amaro uma eme* (*njo*). This is a way of saying that one does not go out of one´s way to cause an evil on its own. The implication is

[125] Ibid., 107.
[126] T.U. Nwala, 147.
[127] E.M.P. Edeh, 107ff.

> that the evil occurs as part of the struggle to preserve the whole.[128]

Be that as it may, this cannot be an overall explanation, for it cannot apply to all evils known in Igbo culture. Not only the evil spirits are the proximate cause of evil, but implied in the above quotation, human beings as well. Some authors count certain deities among the proximate causes of evil.

As to the issue of the proximate cause of evil, E.M.P. Edeh argues that,

> God, for the Igbo people, cannot be said to be responsible since he is not an evil spirit, an element god or a human being. But God could be seen as the remote cause of evil because he as God is for the Igbo people *Chi-na-eke*, the one-who-is-creating. Therefore as *Chi-na-eke* he is the cause of all beings. ... Since he is the cause of all beings, he must be the cause of the proximate causes of evil, namely, element gods, evil spirits and so on. Hence God can be said to be the remote cause of evil.[129]

This is logical, but in terms of the Igbo idea of the proximate causes of evil, one cannot conclude either that God remotely causes evil as evil or the contrary. The ambiguity here arises from the fact that in creating the remote causes of evil, God did create them not as evil but as good, then what of the evil spirits?

One needs to recall, that for the Igbos these evil spirits were not essentially created and designated as evil. They were originally created as good, but during the course of their existence they turned evil. It is a belief among the Igbos that if a person who in his/her life had pursued evil ways dies; he/she would join the company of the evil spirits. These spirits are, in the Igbo world-view, among the causes of evil on earth.[130]

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[128] Ibid., 109.
[129] Ibid., 110.
[130] Ibid.

E.M.P. Edeh suggests how the above ambiguity can be resolved in that, "God created all things as good, including the evil spirits. So if he is seen as remotely causing evil because He created the proximate causes of evil, it must not be in the sense that He causes evil as such but in the sense that out of the good (the whole) He causes, evil comes as a part of it."[131] This is not to hold that in this way God "causes evil" because Igbos, though emphasising strongly the dependence of the creatures on their creator (God), still leave room for freedom and freewill among created realities. Acts of freedom or freewill that turn out to be evil, may not even remotely be attributed to God. This could be a possible way of reconciling the presence of evil on earth with God's goodness.

One thing that is now clear is that in their search for the cause of evil Igbos remained at the level of creatures. Even when the origin of evil is not clearly thought out, "it is necessary to point out at once that dualism (the possibility of two sources of creation, one good and the other evil) does not exist in Igbo religion."[132] It is not only Metuh who maintains this view. For Ilogu E., "the idea of evil spirit having a separate existence and operating in conflict against the benevolent creator God never existed in Ibo religious thought."[133]

1.5.5. Divine-Human Relationship:

Some aspects of this divine-human relationship have been treated in consideration of the Igbo understanding of the human being. The human being can be viewed from different standpoints.

> Viewed from the standpoint of his origin and final destiny, man is best understood in relationship to God, his creator. Man comes from God; he has a definite mission to fulfil in God's plan, and he will eventually go back to God. ... Man in African Religion is seen primarily as a creature of God ... The creation of man is the central theme of

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[131] Ibid.
[132] E.I. Metuh, *God and Man in African Religion: A Case Study of the Igbo of Nigeria.* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1981), 76.
[133] E. Ilogu, 38f.

> African cosmogonic myths. These myths variously emphasise that man is created directly by God and holds a central position in the creative order.[134]

A handful of authors like Metuh, Mbiti etc, share this view. For them the human being is at the very centre of existence and African peoples see everything else in relation to this central position of the human being. It is as if God exists for the sake of the human being.[135] Further on this view N.S. Booth holds that African religions are centred more in man than in God or in nature. All other beings in the African world-view therefore seem to get their bearing and importance from the position, meaning and end of human being in African thought.[136]

The view of these authors about the human being in Africa in general applies equally to the Igbo view of human being in particular. For traditional Igbo people human beings are the centre of creation and are the main actors in the drama of existence and life. Their actions evoke reactions from the gods and have deep implications for the lower beings and forces. These gods may have to be manipulated to satisfy the needs of the human beings. In the drama of life human being is the actor while the pure spirits are the moderators and the lower forces and beings are the agents and hence victims as well.[137]

For Igbos, life is a communion not only with its created order, but with the creator himself, *Chukwu*. The human being is really bound to God by ties of creation and by God's divine providence over the universe of which the human being is a part. The human being is ontologically linked to God through the *Chi* 'the spark or emanation of God in each person'.[138]

On the relationship between God and the Igbos and the issue of divine transcendence and immanence opinions vary. For some authors like I.E. Metuh, "God looms very large in Igbo life and psychology even though there is an ever-present fear of the spirits. God is the ultimate source and end of morality but the spirits, especially *Ala* (earth-deity)

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[134] E. I. Metuh, *Comparative Studies of African Traditional Religions*, 181.
[135] E.I. Metuh, *African Religions in Western Conceptual Schemes: The Problem of Interpretation*, 109.
[136] Ibid.
[137] T.U. Nwala, 41.
[138] E.I. Metuh, 114.

and the ancestors are its immediate administrators. There are direct acts of worship of God including prayers and sacrifices."[139] Unlike Achebe and others who maintain that God is approached directly only in the last resource of extremity, when all other intermediaries have failed, W. Romaine (a CMS Missionary) wrote as far back as 1869, "this you always find among the Ibos. They never speak of futurity without admitting '*Ahonze Tschukwu*' i. e. if it pleases God."[140] Not only with reference to the future, the Igbo daily life is also equally filled with the sense of divine presence and the need of God's care and protection. According to Shelton, "among the Northern Igbo the daily prayers and regular sacrifices are offered to *Chukwu* by the family head (usually male) at the family shrines and by the *Onyisi* (the eldest) of the clan at the communal altars."[141]

Igbos approach God both directly and indirectly. Prayers addressed to God are mainly in the form of invocations. There are direct sacrifices to God but are not as rare as often suggested. It is very difficult to determine from the sources available how many types of direct sacrifice exist in Igbo traditional religion. Further, among the Igbos, God (*Chukwu*) has no priests like *Ala*/*Ani* (earth-deity) or other deities.[142]

One of the direct sacrifices to God among the Igbos is "*Aja Eze Enu*" (Sacrifice to King of Heaven – God). This sacrifice could be described summarily so,

> the objects required include a white chicken, eggs, yams, an eagle's feather and a long pole (*ofolo ngwo*). The minister, usually a dibia (medicine man), ties the chicken, the yams and the feather to the end of the pole with a white cloth, which he then plants in the ground, with the fowl (alive) and the objects suspended in the air. He then offers another chicken and an egg at the foot of the pole while saying the ... (appropriate) prayer...[143]

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[139] E.I. Metuh, 114.
[140] Ibid., 48.
[141] Ibid., 51.
[142] Ibid., 49ff.
[143] Ibid. 52.

God as immanent looms large in the daily life of the Igbos and their psychology while the Igbos direct their prayers and sacrifices frequently to God as the transcendent absolute God. The relationship between God and the human being spreads over the human after-life. For the Igbos, "God plays a very important role in the after-life of every human being, just as he is involved in the process by which man comes into being and the various vicissitudes he passes through during his earthly sojourn."[144]

1.6 The Igbo View of Death and the Life Thereafter

For the Igbos life is a continuing cyclic process. Death is not the end station of human life. They believe in the survival of the human person after death, in ancestors as the "living dead", and in reincarnation. This points to their strong belief in the life after life.[145]

Generally, the after-life is viewed from the point of view of continuing relationship of the dead with the living, and not as the final end of man or of the world. There is very little speculation about 'the last things'. Eschatology either in the sense of the culmination of individual lives, or of human history in general, is of marginal interest in traditional religion.[146]

Not only for the Igbos, but also for the Africans more especially, life is a cyclic process of birth, death and rebirth. "The after-life is conceived in terms of the present life. The environment and social structure of each society are each projected into the invisible world and form the framework of its conception of the after-life."[147] With regard to environmental and social differences every religion has to face the question of man's relationship to the power that rules the universe. Wherever (sic) we find man and religion 'What is man?' and 'to what end was he made?' are questions that demand ... answers. Such answers depend upon man's conception of the ruler of the universe, while upon the answers themselves depends man's attitude

[144] Ibid., 118.
[145] Ibid., 116.
[146] Ibid.
[147] C.O. Obiego, 158.

to life; and even the pattern of life within any given society is an expression of a particular view of man held by that society.[148]

One needs to recall that society for the Igbos as well as other Africans comprises both the living and the dead. The Igbos like any other group seek in their religion answers to the religious questions of the human being. They believe that both the good and the bad continue to effect in the next life, where there is retribution the next life based on one's conduct in this life. Hence purificatory rites are seen as necessary so as to obtain forgiveness of sins and remission of punishment in the next life. However, there is an essential disagreement on what constitutes a reward or punishment when it comes to eschatology. Traditional religious belief emphasises integration or exclusion from one's community as constituting adequate reward or punishment.[149]

Coming closer to death Igbos believe that, "*Onwu*, death is the 'withdrawal' of the life-giving-principle, which is given to each being from above by the Big-life-principle ... In other words *Onwu* occurs when *Chukwu* takes back the *Chi-ukwu* – within-everything, ..."[150] As life is precious, death awakens a sense of loss among the Igbos. They do not go that far to ask why God withdraws this principle from human beings but rather invent explanations. They talk of a good death as belonging to those who lived a good life. They see it as natural death in ripe old age. These groups of people are accorded funeral rites appropriate to their status to enable them to reach the "Spirit-land", "*Ala Mmuo*", where it is believed they continue a life similar to their earthly life and eventually are allowed to reincarnate.

But not every death is a good death. The deaths of those who lived bad lives are termed "*onwu ojoo*" – bad death. Such include among others violent death or deaths by horrible diseases. The bodies of these people are in most cases unceremoniously dumped in the evil forests – *Ajo Ohia*. This symbolises total rejection and excommunication by both the living and the dead.[151] For the Igbos those who lived good lives and died good deaths and are accorded appropriate burial rites

[148] E.I. Metuh, 118.
[149] C.O. Obiego, 158f.
[150] E.I. Metuh, 116f.
[151] C.O. Obiego, 161.

and ceremonies are regarded as having gone home. The Igbos here speak of death as a "going home".

The Igbos believe in the universality of death. Empirically "*Onwuzuluigbo* (*onwu*), i. e. death extends the whole length and breath of Igbo land. This is Igbo concrete and picturesque way of expressing that death is universal to humanity. 'Igbo' here stands for the human race. ... This experience is both an abstract, conceptual as well as existential knowledge ..."[152] In a sense death is seen as a necessity, or experience which awaits everybody at an absolutely unknown moment.

Furthermore, "Death" for the Igbos,

> knows no king (*onwuamaeze*), respects no warrior, all become weak before onwu (*Onwuamadike*, *Onwuasoanya*, *Onyekaonwu*, *Onwuegbufor*). In the grave all men become equal even the rich and powerful will die (*Amadiaso-onwu*), because onwu is afraid of none (*Onwuatuegwu* or *Egwuakaonwu, Onwuasoanya*). In fact come what may, *onwu* must nevertheless be, it will never be lacking (*Onwuako*).[153]

Igbos think about these attributes of death. They have several myths through which they try to explain such phenomena as the mortality of human beings, the "impartiality of death", the uncertainty about the when, where and how of death etc.

As it has been seen, the Igbos believe in life-after death. Earlier we saw that Igbo world-view which purports a belief in the existence of two worlds is partly based on this belief. Authors like E.M.P. Edeh argue that,

> even though the Igbos mourn their dead with grief and extend sympathy, as do other people, they are well aware that death is not an end but a transition. If a person dies, he is born into another life completely different from the one he had. This is the case with the ancestors. This new life cannot

[152] Ibid., 161f.
[153] E.M.P. Edeh, 75.

> be without a place in which it is being lived ... a world other than this visible world where the ancestors are dwelling... [154]

But to maintain life after death is completely different from the present life, Edeh points out, entails problems in the understanding of Igbo view of life-after death. Others maintain that it is a copy of the life here in the visible world.

In trying to present this second world and life, there are Igbo views that,

> the abode of the good spirits of the dead, *ala mmuo*, is a carbon copy of the abode of the living. The two differ only in that one is visible and the other invisible. A geographical map of the land of the living would represent the spirit-land in every particular: ... However, the land of the spirit is imagined to be underneath the land of the living, probably because the bodies of the dead are buried in the ground.[155]

As to the social life which is an important aspect of Igbo world-view, it is believed that, the social life of the spirit-land is patterned on Igbo social life. The social organization of the spirit-land is also patterned on the Igbo social organisational pattern. The population is organized in lineages, clans and families and the community retains its class structure. Life is led as in this world.[156] One sees that Igbos conceive of the spirit-land in materialistic terms. Fulfilment in the next life is achieved when one reaches to occupy one's proper place among one's own in the next life. Damnation is viewed as an excommunication and a perpetual exclusion from one's clan life and from the cycle of life, and reincarnation.[157]

The Igbos believe in God as a just judge. This helps us to understand the role God plays in this after-life of human beings. God plays a very important role in the after-life of every human being, just as he is

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[154] E.I. Metuh, 116.
[155] Ibid., 117.
[156] Ibid., 118.
[157] Ibid., 118f.

involved in the process by which man comes into being and the various vicissitudes he passed through during his earthly sojourn. ... Death alone does not make a person an ancestor (even when a 'good death'). ... God determines who may or may not become an ancestor.[158] This means that God will judge and suitably reward or punish every deed. This is not only in this life or in the afterlife, but extends also to one's subsequent terms of life after reincarnation. God may even extend such a punishment or reward to one's family.

This summary of the Igbo view of death and the life thereafter can help to understand why „the final end of and the aspiration of every Igbo is to reach the spirit-land of his ancestors, to be venerated by his descendants as an ancestor, and eventually to reincarnate."[159] This is not only to be venerated but is the primary motive is the wish to belong as a member of the community, whose membership constitutes the identity of the individual. This sense of belonging and the fear of loosing one's membership is the underlying principle.

[158] Ibid., 119.
[159] Ibid., 120.

Chapter Two

Missionary Activities in Africa with particular Reference to the Igbos of Nigeria

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an example of African culture that of the Igbos of Nigeria, prior to its contact with foreign (European) culture. The present chapter concerns the initial contact between the African and the European worlds continuing with examples from the Igbos of Nigeria. On the European religious side the principal example is Christianity; its European background and, especially the Roman Catholic European Christianity. Particular reference is made to its missionary activities in Africa, specifically among the Igbos.

The reason for the mission and missionary activities of Christianity is often traced to the injunction of Jesus to his disciples: “go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:18-20, Mk. 16:15; Lk 24:47; Acts 1:8). This means that Christianity from the outset saw itself as a religion with a universal self understanding. Mission is the activity by which the Christian faith sought and still seeks to render itself universal. Mission and missionary activities are bound up with human nature; aspirations and circumstances for the injunction to universalism are not meant to be abstract or to remain a mere dream.

Its actualisation is meant to be within time and space not only as a milieu but characteristics of the agents themselves.

The immediate recipients of this injunction were the disciples of Jesus, who went out to fulfil this mandate. Understanding herself in her apostolic tradition as the legitimate successor of the disciples, the Church has understood herself as the addressee of this injunction. Hence, down through the centuries she has sought to release the universal potential of the gospel as contained in this mandate.

The history of the missions throughout the centuries is interwoven with the Church history during the respective epochs and provokes many thorny questions. It is easily assumed that obedience to the great command to go into all the parts of the earth making disciples and baptising was the greatest motivation for the enterprise. In practice, however, the motives were more complex and the goals were enunciated differently.[1] Developments depended to a great extent on the people who understood themselves as the addressees. Secondly, this peoples' understanding of this injunction is another important factor. A vital role is played by the human predicaments of these addressees their history, culture, world-view, their own experience of the Christian faith and of course their view of those people they perceive as the would-be recipients of this injunction. This influence of the human predicaments in the African circumstance is essential in trying to understand Christianity, its introduction, history, development and, equally important, its future in Africa especially among the Igbos of Nigeria. For those involved with the history, development and spread of Christianity, this is essential.

2.2 The Church and Mission

From the beginning, the Church understood herself as being obliged by the mandate of Christ to be missionary. Officially she argues that,

> the Church has an obligation to proclaim the faith and salvation which comes from Christ, both by

[1] O.U. Kalu, (Ed.) *The History of Christianity in West Africa.* (London: Longman, 1980), 11.

> reason of the express command which the order of bishops inherited with the successor of St. Peter ... and also by reason of the life which Christ infuses into his members ...[2]

This vocation to mission was demanded by her own essential universality. The expression "essential universality" implies that the Church is by her very nature missionary.

The global missionary activity of the Church after Christ could be said to have started on Pentecost Day when the spread of the gospel, the first step towards the accomplishment of the universal command, was begun. From this point the mission continued in the course of history. The task was seen as one and the same everywhere and in all circumstances, but it was not always exercised in the same way due to variations in the circumstances. Differences were present which do not flow from the inner or essential nature of the mission per se. These circumstances depend either on the Church herself in her different phases or on the peoples to whom this mission is directed. In each situation and circumstance "proper" lines of action and "adequate" means were adopted.[3] This will call for further attention. The following section addresses how the Church understood and tried to go about this missionary command in some salient phases of her history.

2.2.1 Mission and Missionary Activities in the History of the Church

The New Testament reports that the disciples started their missionary activity gradually after Pentecost. Philip baptised the Ethiopian eunuch while Peter converted Cornelius. The Council of Jerusalem took it upon itself to set aside things like the dietary prescriptions or circumcision (prescribed by the Jewish tradition) as prerequisites for admission into the Christian faith. Generally the apostles went out to the then-known world to preach directly to the people.

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[2] Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity – Ad Gentes Divinitus – 7. December, 1965. *Vatican II*, ch.1.2, 817f.
[3] Ibid.

The history of how the Church followed and executed its injunction can be divided into three central epochs: the Roman-Hellenistic era, the Germanic-Slavic (or European) epoch, and the era of the universal Church, though these epochs are not distinctly demarcated one from one another.[4] Like any religious-ideological movement which strives to expand, the Christian mission carries the burden of the history of these different epochs. This point is noteworthy because it enables one to understand the missionary activities of the Church throughout the different eras. In addition it helps one understand the context in which Christianity is considered in this work, i.e. in relation to the African cultures.

The Roman-Hellenistic Era

The foundation of this epoch was laid through the missionary activities of the apostles which started in Jerusalem. The post-apostolic missionary activities of the Church point to some sympathetic features or characteristics. According to the Didache, there were itinerant preachers of the gospel through the pre-Constantine era.

Geographically, the Mediterranean region was encompassed in this pre-Constantine era. The region consisted ethnographically of the Graeco-Roman world of mixed races. The principal instruments of evangelisation were the word and script, catechism and baptism, school and social charitable works.[5] In the course of the second century the Christian mission had already reached the people in the whole of the Mediterranean region.

An important trend at this time is the transition of the Christian faith from its Jewish, Old Testament environment into a new Graeco-Roman cultural world. This departure or extension of Christianity into the Greek world meant a second cultural encounter between the gospel and another culture. This was a transplantation of the gospel and Jewish cultural elements into Greek ideological world and thought pattern. This played a very important role in the subsequent history and development of the Christian faith. Later converts to Christianity, who were not conversant with the religious traditions of Judaism and

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[4] K. Müller, *Die Weltmission der Kirche.* (Aschaffenburg: Paul Pattloch Verlag, 2. Auflage, 1963), 15.
[5] Ibid., 16.

Hebrew thought, were confronted principally with the result of this process of hellenisation of the Christian faith. This process strongly influenced Western Christianity[6] that at times the view abounds that Christian dogma could be seen as the product of Greek thought, against the background of the gospel. Catholic doctrines of faith and the Church's sacraments are partially results of this Greek thought. In a sense the history of the different dogmas could be seen as the encounter between the gospel and the Greek culture.

The next decisive phase in this epoch begins from 313 AD, the year of the "Tolerance-document" from Emperor Constantine. Christianity then experienced a decisive change in its trend toward expansion as the document played a decisive role in the spread and consolidation of Christianity in the Graeco-Roman empire. The proclamation of the gospel leads to the foundation of numerous Christian communities not only within, but also outside, the outer boundaries of the Roman empire.

While the Christianisation in the empires of Constantine and his successors was carried out with the assistance of the political powers, the missionary activities in the non-Roman region at this time took place mainly through the influence of monks and hermits on the neighbouring nomads. The next sources of Christianisation were the scattered Christian refugees and prisoners along the commercial routes between east and west.[7] Unlike earlier the Christian faith then received, and made use of, political power in its spread.

The Germanic-Slavic Era

The migration movements of the Germanic, Slavic and Arabian tribes at the very end of the Graeco-Roman era led to a deep change in the political and social constellations. This situation presented the Church with a strong challenge. Having been imbedded up to this moment in the structures of the Roman empire, the Church now faced the danger of linking the future of Christianity with the sustained continued existence of the empire. Hence she was forced to distance herself from these continuous transformations in society.[8] The strong relationship

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[6] J. Lenzenweger, P. Stockmeier et al (Ed.), *Geschichte der Katholischen Kirche: Ein Grundkurs*. (Graz: Styria Verlag, 1986), 33.
[7] K. Müller, 17.
[8] J. Lenzenweger, P. Stockmeier et al, 142.

that had developed between the Church and the empire during the reign of Constantine brought advantages to the spread of Christianity. However, the price of this relationship showed itself in the danger which the Church confronted in the fall of this empire. Even in the later phases of evangelisation the relationship between the Church and the respective political powers was and will always remain a mixed blessing bringing advantages as well as disadvantages.

The Christianisation of the Germanic tribes began with their acceptance in large numbers into the Constantine empire. With the great mass migration the Germanic mission extended itself to Slavs.

In contrast to the tribes of the pre-Christian era, these tribes being confronted with Christianisation were of a lower level of culture in the eyes of the agents of Christianisation. These agents of Christianisation did not represent all of Christianity. They were partly Roman and partly Byzantine. Primarily they were professional missionaries; mainly members of different orders who were supported partly by the Church hierarchy, but who also received some essential assistance from the state.

The goal of this undertaking was the conversion not so much of individuals as of tribes. Not only the agents and the methods of Christianisation contributed to the success or extent of the mission, the addressees played a vital role. Here, it was more the obedience to, or compliance with, the feudal authority (sometime through coercion and use of force) that played a vital role. The emphasis here was not so much on the internalisation of the Christian faith as on annexation to, or admission into, the ecclesiastical organism.

The era could be subdivided into four periods or subdivisions. However, since history flows in an organic stream, without breaks attempts at a real division are questionable. As the phases reflect the historical development of the Western world in the Middle Ages, Church history shifts from the Mediterranean region to the north.

The first phase (500 – 700) witnessed a superficial contact in missionary activities. There were mass baptisms which were in no way a guarantee or sign of inner conversion. The lack of preparation before, and of guidance after, such baptisms gave people the impression that the acceptance of Christianity in no way meant a breach with their old forms of life.

Penetration came in the second phase (700 – 1050) after the Anglo-Saxon monks laid the foundation for the second missionary wave.[9] The systematic Saxon mission began with Charles the Great who with Pope Boniface developed a bond between the universal Roman Church and Franconian empires. This was a prerequisite for the origin of the Christian West. According to Schmidlin, it was in the kingdom of Charles the Great that the medieval missionary method found its typical expression.[10] Christianisation through Charles the Great balanced the Roman and Germanic elements in the Franconian empire.

The third phase (1050 – 1300) is marked by the stronger advance of the Church. The rivalries between the papacy and the empire which had arisen earlier now continued. The western Christian community was united under the leadership of the Church. Intellectual life reached admirable heights; Universities were founded; Scholastic canonical practices, mysticism and piety flourished. In this phase the European knighthood went off on the Crusades to fight for the Holy Land.

The fourth phase (1300 – 1500) was marked by the division of western society. Many forces contributed to this process, including among others the emergence of the nation states, increasing individualism in many areas of life, tension between papal primacy and the Episcopal College, Ockhamist philosophy and theology; the Renaissance and Humanism; and finally the Reformation. With the division in the Church in 16th century, things fell apart for the western Christian world. The cord that was holding the society together was severed.[11]

This section has addressed how Christianity developed up to this stage; the type of relationship it had with politics, and how the conversion of other people of perceived lower cultural level took place. Until now Christianity had restricted itself essentially to Europe. The next section focuses on the subsequent phase in the history of Christianity, where the Church moved to non-European parts of the world. In this case particular attention is directed towards

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[9] A. Franzen, *Kleine Kirchengeschichte.* (Freiburg: Herder Taschenbuch, 2. Auflage 1991), 116.
[10] K. Müller, 20.
[11] A. Franzen, 118f

Africa. First, attention is given to the traditional Church's understanding of mission, and to the specific goals of mission for the Church up to the point at which it entered into Africa. The prevalent mission theories of the time and the accompanying theologies of mission will be reviewed.

2.2.2 Church's Traditional Understanding of Mission

In general the Church understood mission to be its vocation in as much as it is a general sign or symbol of salvation. In the strict sense of the word this was seen as the proclamation of the gospel and the foundation of new communities of faith among people who hitherto had not been members of the Church. The goal of missionary activity is seen as based on the missionary commission of Christ to his disciples – the apostolic commissioning – (Mk 16:14-18; Mt 28:16-20; Lk 24:36-49; Jn 20:19-23; Acts 1:9-11).

It is important to establish how the Church understood herself, namely, the ecclesiology of the respective periods of the missionary activities, especially before the mission to Africa. The ultimate goal of the mission was seen as the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. According to G. Evers, this Kingdom of God on earth was identified by some with the visible organised Catholic Church. Hence the emphasis was laid on the Church as the sign of salvation, which had the divine mandate and authority to bring the gospel to the world through her agents.

It is often thought that the ecclesiology behind the missionary activities was not much inspired by salvation history, but was bound with a juridical apologetic understanding of the Church. This is characteristic of the Church at this phase.[12] This identification of the Kingdom of God with the institutional Catholic Church was typical of theology at that time. It is not just in an invisible, but rather embodied in a visible organised and hierarchically articulated Roman Catholic Church. This territorial conception of the Church explains why mission and missionary activities were understood in the sense of territory in which the mass of people were yet to be brought to the Christian faith.

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[12] G. Evers, *Mission Nicht-Christliche Religionen Westliche Welt*. (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 1974), 7.

This juridical ecclesiocentric understanding of the mission throws more light on how and why the missionary activities of the Church were carried on among people of other cultures and faiths. Conceived more in an ecclesiocentric manner conversion, according to G. Evers, was understood as a radical break with one's history in every area of life. The justification of missionary activity was based on the need to guarantee the salvation of the non-Christians and was hence a matter of do or die.[13] One needs to see this understanding of salvation in the light of the Church principle of "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*".

The model of the Church understood as the Kingdom of God on earth which was central in the ecclesiocentric understanding of mission was the pre-modern (medieval) Western (European) model of Christianity. This saw the constitution of the Church and the integration of the people as the goal of the mission in the different areas where missionary activities were to be carried out. It conceived the Church as an absolute unit and set the "Christianisation" of the races and cultures as its goal.[14] This understanding of the Church and its connection with mission points to a theory of mission suited to and influenced by this view, and which played a very important role in the understanding of the missionary activities.

The Plantation Theory of Pierre Charles

The strong connection between Church and mission, which affected the theology and practice of the mission in different ways, manifested itself strongly in the Plantation Theory of Pierre Charles.

This theory, presented in connection with the Louvain school, was one the theses meant to justify of the mission. The first proponent of these theses, R. Lange, was against the view that the justification of the mission was to be found in guaranteeing the salvation of non-Christians. He did not share the view of the proponents of the "*extra ecclesia nulla salus*" principle. Rather, he argued that since salvation could be reached outside the Church, that principle was not the one

[13] Ibid. 14.
[14] L. Rütti, *Zur Theologie der Mission: Kritische Analysen und neue Orientierungen*. (München: Kaiser Grünewald, 1972), 28.

and the only reason for the missionary activity among non-Christians and sought justification for the mission in the nature of the Church.[15]

Lange was not alone in questioning the Church's justification of the mission as based on guaranteeing the salvation of non-Christians. Th. Ohm argued that mission would have been right and a duty were the heathens congenitally not in the position to discover and actualise the relation to God available to them through nature and super nature. Furthermore this would be the case if Christianity truly has incomparable, excelling and absolute value which could proclaim really new and higher truths and bring peoples a nobler and more divine life force.[16]

Pierre Charles, the central proponent of the Plantation Thesis, saw the justification of the mission and missionary activity in the "implantation of Church" (*plantatio Ecclesiae*). He took it upon himself to define missionary activity in such a way that it could be distinguished from other activities of the Church. This distinction lies in the fact that mission consists of raising a visible Church among the races in places where it had been absent. This means the construction or setting up of the institutional hierarchical Church in places where it had not existed. Clear his conception is primarily that of an institutional hierarchical Church.[17] The principle of this theory is an ecclesiocentric vision of mission. The essence and goal of mission is then the implantation of the institutional Church to which the juridical institutional aspect is very central.

The historical situation of the Church may explain this theory and its acceptance within the Church. It was opposed to the Protestant concept of the Church as an invisible community of souls – a spiritual concept of the Church. In contrast to this concept, the Roman Catholic Church's concept was an earthly comprehensible reality.[18]

This theory found wide acceptance among many mission theologians. Irrespective of the nuances, it could be maintained that the majority of these theologians held the view that the goal of the missionary activity was the foundation of the Church (i. e. juridical institutional Church)

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[15] G. Evers, 11f.
[16] Ibid., 91f.
[17] Ibid., 12.
[18] L. Rütti, 26ff.

where she had not been founded. The confirmation of this theory through Church authority and its recognition in many papal encyclicals constitutes one of the central themes of mission theology. Vatican II´s document on missionary activity, irrespective of its modifications of the goal of the mission, still contains a central element of this theory. According to this decree (Ad Gentes),

> the special end of this missionary activity is the evangelization and the implanting of the Church among peoples or groups in which it has not yet taken root. All over the world indigenous particular Churches ought to grow from the seed of the word of God, Churches which would be adequately organized and would possess their own proper strength and maturity.[19]

Criticism of the Plantation Theory

Despite the wide acceptance of the Plantation Theory may have been enjoying, it placed too much emphasis on the juridical institutional aspect. The dangers of institutionalism and sacramentalism abounded, while individual conversion and guidance into a conscious accomplishment of the faith received too little attention. According to Rütti L. the whole horizon was filled with the Church under the tenet that "*extra ecclesia nulla vita*". The world in a sense stopped being the world and becomes only an ecclesial perimeter.

This ecclesiocentrism expressed itself in triumphalism whose essence lies in the tendency to judge everything from the standpoint of the Church. Here the institutional views or perspectives and interests of the Church stand at the forefront; hence its ambivalence in relation to the world and the lack of realism and effectiveness.

Institutionalism as a consequence of this ecclesiocentric understanding of the mission carries with it the danger which threatens missionary practice everywhere, namely the setting-up of indigenous communities and Churches according to the model of the home Church of the missionaries. This explains the transfer and imposition of institutions developed in the Western Christianity on non-western

[19] Ad Gentes Ch.1.2., 819.

peoples. It also shows why Christianity presented itself as and was seen as a foreign religion among many peoples. It also explains some of the problems encountered in the effort of the Church towards the actualisation of the principle of accommodation. The same is true to inculturation today. The non European races came to know Christianity almost entirely under the authority and in the cultural form of the Western world. They hardly found in the Christian message a reference to their own problems, world-view, history or art. Western Christianity with its fully-developed systems of doctrines and institutions based on eurocentric historical circumstances was imposed on these races.[20] Though the mandate for mission: "Go make disciples of all nations ..." came from Christ, injunction was understood to mean effectively "go make Europeans of all nations."

But before coming to the advent and spread of Christianity in Africa through the activities of the mission, it might be instructive to understand briefly the papal concept of mission. The importance of this is based on the fact that almost from the beginning, or at least before Christianity left the Western world, all missionary activity had been put under the control of the papacy. Even where this was not completely the case, the papacy played a very vital role, for example in the era of Spanish-Portuguese conquerors and through the work of Vatican propaganda fide.

2.2.3 The Papacy and Mission

The theology of the primacy of the papacy attributed to it the highest right and responsibility over all Church affairs (including mission). Consequently, the expansion of the Church (i.e. mission) comes under the auspices of the papacy and since, dogmatically there is only one Church, it then follows that mission is juridically under the leadership of the papacy.

Along with differences in the views of the popes, the influence of the papacy on the mission has varied over time. In the early periods as the organisation and leadership of the mission was less developed, it can be imagined that the papacy had little or no influence on the missionary movements of the time. The situation in the Middle Ages was different. The Church grew and the papacy made strong claims to

[20] L. Rütti, 32ff.

Church's leadership. In the circumstances it became clear to the different Church organs that it would be more fruitful to work together in a centralised way with the papacy as the head. This centralisation affected the mission as an organ of the Church. At the beginning of the modern age (when mission learnt reaching out the European cultural context, the Pope, according to K. Müller, ordered the kings of Portugal and Spain, "in sacred obedience", not only to colonise, but primarily to Christianise. They received privileges from the papacy and could despatch their own missionaries to their colonies. This would later redound to the Church's disadvantage when the papacy had to fight to win back its delegated authority.[21]

The succession of popes had different views of the mission, which are reflected in their respective encyclicals. These encyclicals, for example Sancta Dei Civitas (1880, Leo XIII), Maximum Illud (1919, Benedict XV), Rerum Ecclesiae (1926, Pius XI), Fidei Donum (1957, Pius XII), Princepis Pastorum (1959, John XXIII), especially as the mission left the European cultural world and entered other cultures, were conceived principally as answers and guideline for practical missionary activities and the problems being encountered. Some important aspects were not considered in these documents, including the social situation of the areas where the missionary activity was taking place and the political transformation taking place through colonialism.

Non-Christian religions were seen not as social units meriting theological consideration; they were just seen as heathen and/or idol worship.[22] Hence, it must be pointed out that most encyclicals were conceived as answers to the particular practical problems of the mission at different respective stages. Hence it may not be right to draw from these documents conclusions regarding the theology of the mission as practised by the Church principally. To do so would mean that the little theology of mission that could be found in them would then be equiparated to the whole theology of mission to be found in the Church. On the same note, it is a mistake on the part of some

[21] L. Rütti, 32ff.
[22] G. Evers, 20f.

mission theologians in view of the way they consider these encyclicals as the definitive opinion of Catholic authority.[23]

Vatican II – Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity („Ad Gentes Divinitus")

Missionary activity received considerable attention in Vatican II which therefore is often described as the first missionary Council of the Church. Missionary activities were considered also in other documents of the Council including, among others, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy ("Sacrosanctum Concilium") Nr. 37, 38, 40, 65, 67, and 119; the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church ("Lumen Gentium") Nr. 16; 17, 23, 24, 25, and 27; the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World ("Gaudium et Spes") Nr. 11; the Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People ("Apostolicam Actuositatem") Nr. 11 and 22; Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-christian Religions ("Nostra Aetate") and the Declaration on Religious Liberty ("Dignitatis Humanae"). One finds in these documents the Church's guidelines for missionary activities in modern time.

In these statements the Church stresses the importance of the renewal of mission within and outside the Church itself. Effort was made to present a comprehensive theology of mission. The Church's understanding of mission and the concrete steps towards its actualisation is presented in the document – Ad Gentes Divinitus – in the following way: the mission is the "special undertaking in which preachers of the Gospel, sent by Church, and going into the whole world, carry out the work of preaching the Gospel and implanting the Church among the people who do not yet believe in Christ, ..."[24] The Church understands herself as participating in the Missio Dei. For her the continuation of the mission of Christ is a mandate and returns to her very essence, for it is only one and the same mission. "This task (mission) ... is one and the same everywhere and in all situations, although, because of circumstances, it may not always be exercised in the same way .... In each situation and circumstance a proper line of action and effective means should be adopted."[25] Clearly despite the

[23] Ibid. 21.
[24] Ad Gentes Nr. 6.
[25] Ibid.

strong emphasis on the unity of mission, the document recognises the diversities of the human predicament. This is a new accent on the issue of missionary activities, which can be understood as unity in diversity. Hence the Church stands ready to work towards dialogue with non-Christian religions and promotes efforts towards the inculturation of the Message of Christ in different cultures.

The agent of missionary activities, according to this document, is the whole Church, understood as consisting of different parts, the local churches and all communities. The mission constitutes a permanent assignment for every local Church, irrespective of which group of people and in which culture it finds herself.[26]

2.3 Africa and the Mission: Missionary Activities in and the Christianisation of Africa

2.3.1 Africa in the Eyes of the European

Along with Church's theory of the mission before the advent of the missionaries in Africa we shall briefly examine the European vision of Africa mainly from the religious point of view, for Africa must have been seen as an area where missionary activity was called for.

Africa, as noted by H. Rücker, was just another name for non-Europe. African traditional religions were consequently non-Christian and a priori anti-Christendom. Consequently, European culture was taken to be identical with Christianity and what was not European was seen as not Christian. African religiosity and cultural standards were judged then by Western theological standards. As a result Africans were seen as godless heathens. The Africans, in this sense, represented the antithesis of true humanity, for the standard of participation in humanity was determined by how near they stood to the European culture. Adjectives for Africans were mainly negative; the African life was seen as primitive and the Africans themselves, as H. Rücker continued, were seen as cannibals. Their religion was considered to be a superstition, idolatry, devil's mischief, magic, fetishism, animism,

[26] Ibid.

polytheism, ancestor worship, offspring/product of unenlightenment and blooming imagination. Their thought pattern was seen as "pre logical".[27]

Given this view of the African, the stage was set not only for the missionary onslaught, but also the justification for colonial imperialism. The fatal equation of Western Christianity with civilisation meant that Africans were uncivilised. However, efforts were made since the 18th century to find a biblical support for the inequality of the races in order to justify the oppression unleashed on the Africans. An anchor for this view was found in the book of Genesis, chapters 9 and 10 where Africans were depicted as the accursed progeny of Ham.

According to H. Rücker Africa was seen as characterised by the absence of all values. Hence the disposition of some of the missionaries (as will be seen later) to African cultures and religions was simply negative. This explains why very little effort was made towards understanding the African world so as to give dialogue a chance during the era of Christianisation. It is no exaggeration to maintain that the principal missionary attitude towards African cultures and religions has been one of negation. All in all, many missionaries acted on the "tabula rasa" principle, demolishing everything that appeared as, magic according to Western understanding, an obstacle to Christianity. This they saw as defending the biblical monotheism against idolatry.[28]

2.3.2 Advent of the Missionaries and Christianity in Africa

In addressing the history of the advent of Christianity in Africa the introduction of Christianity in North Africa is usually considered first. During the time between the second and fifth century, Christianity was at its peak and produced such great church fathers and thinkers as Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, etc. The evangelisation of North Africa was as result of colonial action of imperial Rome in the Africa of the Mediterranean region. The churches of North Africa were that of a poor imitation of the roman canon, which was valued as the

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[27] H. Rücker, *Afrikanische Theologie: Darstellung und Dialog*. (Innsbruck: Tirolia Verlag, 1985), 25.
[28] Ibid., 25f.

model of the Christian colonial power.[29] This first missionary epoch in Africa lasted between the first and seventh century. This first attempt was not able to show great missionary success because the Church was occupied more with internal problems, and could not gain proper access into the people of North Africa.

The second missionary attempt was made in the 15th and 16th centuries by Portuguese on the west and east coasts of Africa. This was mixture of colonialism and missionary activity which never implanted in African culture. This attempt failed as well. In Africa and Europe, the influence of Calvinistic expansion against the Catholic reform movement played a very central role.[30] Even the later efforts in the Congo and other areas in Central and West Africa between the 16th and 18th centuries were not successful.

The third wave of missionary activity in Africa began around 150 years ago. If Ethiopia, where there is evidence of the presence of the Church for more than fifteen centuries, is not to be counted, it could be said that Christianity has but recently been introduced to Africa. This began in the middle of 19th century

> must be seen against the background of the relationship between Europe and the peoples of Africa. The missionary endeavour was imbedded in a complex phenomenon of expansion, whose prime causes were economic, political and cultural ... The relationship of the missions with this expansion were complex and of indubitable importance for the expansion of the churches.[31]

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[29] S. Semporé, "Die Kirchen Afrikas zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft." in: *Concilium* 13 (1977), 346.

[30] H. Frohnes, "Die Mission in kritischer historischer Analyse." in: *Concilium* 14. (1978), 218.

[31] J.M. Ela, *African Cry* (Translated from French by R.R. Bar). (New York: Orbis Books, 1986), 16.

J.M Ela is a Camerounian theologian Working among the Kidis in north Cameroun. He believes that theologising in Africa must rise from the grassroots in the African society. He occupies himself with political and economic oppression as well as the oppressive structures within the church. In his view African church must be liberated from structures of dependence through which it has been reduced to a mere puppet of Western Christianity. He criticises the political dictatorship in Africa and prescribes in this context a prophetic role for the church in Africa.

Economic expansion, strongly aided by scientific and technological innovations, revitalised missionary activities. The development of seaports, and new marine and navigational technology helped Europeans in their quest of a spice route to circumnavigate other parts of the world, including Africa. This era was a crucial moment in the history of the Christian mission.

The relationship between Europe and Africa inherited the twofold weaknesses of their societies and churches. The society was involved in colonialism. Whether the missionaries liked it or not, being seen with colonial soldiers and merchants, falsified the meaning of their presence and the message they were trying to bring across to the Africans. Being captives of their times and citizens of their countries, they were often victims of the related prejudices. In a sense they were victims of their circumstances. "European exploration of Africa in the nineteenth century was indeed carried on only for the purpose of dividing up and colonizing the continent. The socioeconomic basis of the expansion of the churches during this era, then, is to be sought in the vast movement beginning with Europe's burgeoning trade with Africa and culminating with the formation of the great colonial empires in the nineteenth century."[32]

Another weakness was theology, especially at the beginning of the 20th century which was concerned with a renewal of scholasticism. Despite the endless goodwill, the theology was not best for its effective expression. Equipped with the absolute certainty that there is no salvation outside the Church, the missionary saw baptism as the saving ritual which catapults the individual from the state of damnation to that of possible salvation. This magical attitude towards the sacraments remains one of the problems of the Church today in Africa. Many African Christians – the lay people as well as the clergy – have a magical attitude and understanding of most of the central doctrines of the faith of the Church.

On the other hand, the non-christians were seen by the majority of the missionaries and believers not only as idolaters deceived about God, but also as possessed by the devil. Evangelisation then appeared as a crusade against the devil, the inspirer of heathen religions and

[32] Ibid., 15.

institutions.[33] The compromises, prejudices and simplifications of theology learning from the minor catechism were quite dominant at this stage and still constitute problems for the Church in Africa. Hence real theological discussions are not central in this treatment of the advent and activities of the missionaries in Africa.

2.3.3 Mission and Colonialism in Africa

The relationship between mission and colonialism in Africa has always occupied those who have busied themselves with the mission in Africa. Irrespective of the differences in the evaluation of this relationship, it did exist and it brought both advantages and disadvantages for the mission in Africa in general. Christianity in Africa today has not only profited, but also suffered and, in some way, still suffers under the influence of such a relationship. Questions such as how such a relationship came into existence; was it unavoidable, was it the same at all times and places, was it something that could have been avoided, etc., are very important.

Obviously many European missionaries, being part and parcel of their society, shared the reigning European view of Africa. The plantation theory of the mission (Pierre Charles) which was central in the mission-theology of the time could be seen as the religious form of general European expansionism and imperialism. The common denominator for the different forces of the 19th century, be it in politics or religion (Protestant and Catholic alike), was expansionism. It was not only in the 19th century that this relationship between religion and politics existed.

Christianity in its different confessions served, according to H. Gründer, the purposes of the ruling classes – princes, kings and emperors – up to the legitimisation of the "*monarchia universalis*" and even to the justification of expansionism and colonialism.[34] In a way the Christian mission, through the presence of the colonial mentality in Europe and the oppression of the peripheral states outside Europe, undertook some tasks which made it appear as an integral part of European political expansionism. St. Augustine's definition of

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[33] S. Semporé, 347f.

[34] H. Gründer, *Welteroberung und Christentum:Ein Handbuch zur Geschichte der Neuzeit.* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 1992), 14ff.

"bellum iustum" appears to have served in this context as a justification for the belligerent activities of the Church. The war for the spread of the faith against the heathens was, in the opinion of H. Gründer, covered and sanctioned under this formula and since Pope Gregory 1. (590 – 604) has been one means of spreading the Christian faith.[35] This could explain why Christianity – a religion of love, peace and reconciliation – became and was seen as a religion whose characteristics equally include aggressive fanaticism and bloody oppression. The helping God of the apostolic mission became the angry God of the "mission of the sword". Faith was at times forced upon the people and mission became an instrument of expansion for christianised Europe. "Be converted or be destroyed",[36] became a must, a principle. In most cases force was the last resort when the indigenous population did not voluntarily succumb to the missionaries' claim of authority. With no differences existing between Protestants and Catholics in denying the choice for free conversion to, or rejection of, the faith, the Church further suppressed the human identity of Africans.

Before colonialism Africa, among other areas, attracted the interest of Europe solely as source of slaves. The slave trade, which lasted for at least three centuries and costed Africa not less than 11 million lives, experienced only minimal opposition from the Church. The opinion of the Christian West towards the slave trade and slavery is not one of its glorious chapters. Only later did the Christian churches reverse their view towards slavery. From the Catholic side, slavery was theologically and socially justified up till the second half of the nineteenth century. The teachings of the Church and the apostolic constitutions, including the papal brief of Gregory XVI (3.12.1893) was against the execution and favouring of slave trade, did in not directly strive for the abolition of slavery itself. According to these documents slavery was not something that was generally against natural and divine law. For a long time the Church saw slavery as a part of divine order, the Church itself owned large numbers of slaves. The churches and monasteries could manage their large lands only with the forced labours of a great number of male and female slaves.

[35] Ibid., 23.
[36] Ibid.

The Church had her own slaves not only in the new world, but also in Africa and Asia.[37]

The situation of most of the missionaries found themselves in Africa contributed to their alliance with the colonialists. In many remote parts of Africa they were isolated far away from home and had little choice but to collaborate with their fellow foreign citizens. Such contacts were needed in order to obtain aid from the colonialists whom they often repaid with information about the areas in which they were active. In turn they used imperial colonial politics to enter the interior of Africa where they could not hitherto reach.

It must be mentioned that Europe did not colonise Africa in a unified way. The colonial policies and systems were as varied as the European colonial powers. Each European nation had its own colonial policies and systems. These differences in the colonial systems were key influences in the history and development of African Christianity because the missionary activities and methods reflected in many cases, the colonial policies of their respective nations: the assimilation policy of France and Portugal which aimed at making out of the indigenous African population French and Portuguese men and women; the association policy of the English imperialists whose practical form was "indirect rule"; and the patriarchal socio-conservative policy of the Germans which had the tendency of retaining and maintaining the existing traditional orders within the African societies for their (German) easy administration. All these had effects on African Christianity were intensified in situations where the exclusive rights of respective versions of Christianity were transferred through the schools or even enforced with the help of colonial laws. These effects are evident in the intolerance they all had towards African culture. This created difficulties of different sorts, social tensions destroyed the indigenous order of the society, and weakened family ties among the members of the inner as well as extended families.[38]

In some situations there were cases of antagonism between Africans instigated on the basis of religion. Such antagonisms still exist in parts of Africa. An example can be seen in the relationship between African Protestants and Catholics. Almost all the missionaries groups, even of

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[37] Ibid., 503ff.
[38] H. Frohnes, 218.

the same denomination, were involved in a scramble for African souls. One result was to make the Africans a divided people of God. This does not suggest that Africa was unified before this time; there were different groups in Africa and also different traditional religions. But these were to a great extent based on the natural phenomena of the African world. The new political and religious boundaries did not take these natural phenomena into consideration, but were drawn from the perspective of the intruders and hence were devastating to the cultural life and traditions of Africa.

Coupled with this exogenous transformation is the fact that the principle of substitution rather than of complementarity was in practice. There was no substantial communication between the African world and Christianity (not even European Christianity); there was only monologue. Even where some of the missionaries made efforts to understand the indigenous or native spirituality and the religion and culture of the people in question, no effort was made to establish a dialogue. According to J. Schmidlin this was done simply to wipe out the non-Christian religion. The second reason according to J. P. Steffes was to enable the missionaries to prove the superiority of Christianity over the non-Christian religions and to demonstrate this to their followers.[39] Little or no effort was made to reflect on the doctrines or the respective aspects of African traditional religion. A new concept of God which had no connection with the past experience and life of the African people was introduced. No proper foundation was laid for the Message of Christ in the hearts and lives of the African people. No bridge was built to link the past and present of the African people and their cultures.[40]

Concrete Cases and Situations

Co-operation between some of the missionaries and the colonialists did not stop at the forerunner function of the missionaries, but was incorporated into a kind of personal union in which the missionary acted not only as an agent of the Christian faith but simultaneously as agent of the colonial administration. To a great extent the presence of the missionary simplified the colonial occupation of these areas. They paved the way, even when they did not intend it, for the colonial

[39] G. Evers, 86f.
[40] Idowu, B. E., quoted in H. Rücker, 25f.

administration by usurping the right of rulership and through the spread of European influence in more subtle ways. It was easier for the colonialists to consolidate their authority more firmly than in areas where the missionaries had not been present. It is evident that the missionaries in Africa did not have any conquistador proclamation (as existed in South America). Their consistent encouragement of peaceful submission to and recognition of white domination and of absolute obedience towards these new authorities contributed immensely to the success of the colonial occupation of Africa. During military conquests some supplied information, became guides, served as negotiators, gave accommodation and placed their stations at the disposal of the colonial army as military bases. Irrespective of their often proclaimed political neutrality (mainly theoretically in writings about mission) some of the missionaries supported the colonialists either secretly or at times openly.

One mode of support was not organising, or supporting or tolerating any opposition against the colonialists. Such opposition was seen as an opposition against an authority ordained from God. Fear of opposition against their own leadership can be suggested as a reason why missionaries supported absolute obedience to authority. There were however disagreements between the colonials and the missionaries in some areas, especially where their priorities and interests clashed with one another. Co-operation was not uniform in its application.

Every intrusion of white occupants in Africa, every victorious war was welcomed by some missionaries as a success that would bring advantages to missionary activity. There are some cases where missionaries sometimes requested military assistance to remove obstacles to their advance. Often they interfered to achieve their own ends or their own benefits. In the face of African opposition stringent measures were often demanded against the opposing group, and in cases where such measures were not meted out they reprimanded the lax colonial authorities.[41] One point of which the missionaries almost unanimously criticised the colonial government was on its tolerance of Islam.

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[41] H. Gründer, 570ff.

There existed a cultural imperialism based on the unshakeable conviction of both an internal and external connection between the Western culture and Western Christianity. The absolute superiority of Western culture was for most missionaries certain. "Christian culture" as they tried to establish it among the completely „uncivilised" peoples is the direct descendant of the missionaries' biblical, historic and teleologically founded unilinear view of cultural development. "Christian culture" was seen as the destination of cultural development. Most of the missionaries took it upon themselves to work in a culture-founding ("Kulturbegründend") way. Hence the often repeated formula that they must first of all change the indigenous peoples into "human beings" before they could preach the gospel to them. There was no questioning about the validity and correctness of the substitution of indigenous norms and values systems by Western Christian culture.

Many missionaries experienced and testified to the African sense of hospitality, justice, team spirit, sense of community and even of their (African) intelligence. Negative judgements about Africa must be seen in light of African political and religious opposition. The hasty and one-sided attitude of most of the missionaries towards the indigenous African cultures led to their judgements on such issues as circumcision and other initiation rites. Even the strict and uncompromising stand of the Church on the issue of polygamy in Africa today is based, to some extent, on such unconsidered attitudes towards African culture. In Western Europe, polygamy was and is often associated only with sexual debauchery without consideration of it as a product of economic, social and political circumstances in African society.[42]

This is not to take a stand in favour of polygamy, but to illustrate the fact that little or no effort was made by most of the missionaries to understand the African culture per se. Such an understanding would have helped in treating such issues adequately. A problem is not solved by tracing it to an incorrect origin and then condemning it; a correct and adequate solution presupposes an understanding of the problem the consequences of introducing a proposed solution must be weighed. Although the introduction of monogamy and its spread is not the only cause, the springing up of prostitution, hitherto not known in

[42] Ibid., 574.

African society, is a social problem confronting African society. Without being a defect in monogamy per se, even Christians (and not only in Africa) who were officially monogamously married had extra marital affairs: officially monogamous and unofficially anti-monogamous. This may not even be termed polygamy since such extra-marital relationships do not fulfil some of its essential requirements.

Missionaries and the Indigenous Culture

At the peak of the European imperialism in Africa generally, most of the missionaries practised an intolerant cultural imperialism. Their deterministically-structured view of the world and culture, allowed for little or no restraint when it came to attacking old norms and practices, traditionalised forms of faith and rituals, as well as, traditional authorities. The total destruction of the indigenous culture would hinder once and for all falling back of the indigenous population on their old religions. This could explain the concession of some of the missionaries to the brutal ways of the colonialists and the defence of the stringent punishments dished out on the rebellious indigenes. Even the indigenous Weltanschauung and cults are lost in such a situation.[43]

The central issue can be ascribed to the fact that most of these Europeans intended, consciously or unconsciously, to destroy what was given in the African cultural world so as to implant that which is considered, in their view, human, civilised, worthy, and valuable. The same African culture which was belittled by the European had produced many objects and artefacts which both the colonialists and missionaries plundered and shipped to Europe. To date, these treasures remain in many museums and mission houses throughout Europe.

The missionary could not experience Africa per se. The mechanism kept the self-consciousness of the missionaries from being threatened both prospectively and prophylactically by new experiences that were not system bound. In a sense this could be seen as meaning a loss of a sense of relativity. It also led to the reduction of mission to a monologue contrary to the practice of Jesus who interacted with Jewish culture through dialogue. His teachings contain numerous

[43] Ibid., 575.

examples in support of this principle of dialogue. In contrast the missionary activity reduced itself in many cases to a system for casting human beings (here Africans) into a particular image which could not be accounted for. Most tragic was that the missionary activity, which should have been an expression of God's will and love to humanity (Africans included), lost the appeal of such an important goal or meaning due to its use of compulsion in lieu of offering the conviction of example.

Since the majority of the missionaries stuck to the European perspective (e.g. in the criterion for being Christian as an individual confession and made it an exclusive doctrine, they succeeded not only in disregarding the cultural tradition of Africa, but also preached a 'sedentary' God i.e. one that is supposed to have his seat in the ideological civil world of Europe.

In this false emphasis on individualism as regards christianisation, they failed to realise that basic to the African understanding of oneself was, and remains participation in the community of life, which further incorporates the continuity and solidarity with the ancestors and the yet-unborn members of the African society.[44] This incorrect emphasis led to a strong dissonance in African social life.

2.3.4 Mission and Education in Africa

If there is an area outside evangelisation where missionaries were active in Africa, it was in the school system. Here is also a point where both the proponents of the missionary activities in Africa as well as the critics find substance for their respective constructs. The fact that schools played a very important role for the missionaries is indubitable. The questions which remain are: was education a means or an end in itself for the missionaries; what type of education; what contents has education got for this missionaries; how did education or schools come to play such a vital role in the missionary activities in Africa?

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[44] W. Ustorf, "Christliche Mission im West Afrika des 19. Jahrhunderts: Vom Zwang der Identität zur Identität in Pluralität." in: *Neue Zeitschrift für Missions-wissenschaft*. 47 (1991), 184f.

"It is easily assumed that obedience to the great command to go into all the earth making disciples and baptising was the greatest motivation for the enterprise. In practice, motives were more complex and goals were enunciated differently."[45] This assumption led to the tendency by some historians to focus only on activities in the mission field to the utter neglect of the home base. However, the motives and goals

> are interwoven (so) with the histories of the metropolitan countries from which they came that the pattern of missionary enterprise in the field can only be explained by reference to where from, how and why the missionary came. Admittedly, the exigencies of the mission field sometimes forced changes on policies and strategies of missionaries.[46]

Education is one of the methods or strategies among the different missionary groups. It must also be said that it had different values for the different missionary bodies. "It has been argued ... that missionaries founded schools as a means of competition. In the race the number of adherents counted for more than the number of true converts. ... Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries fiercely competed with one another."[47]

One of the effects of the aims of both the colonial regimes and missionaries was the setting aside or the destruction of the traditional African society and the creation of a society of their own making or design. Following the destruction of their old traditional society, Africans were left without a cultural base and had to accept the new structure. Hence missionary and colonial "education" became the key to this new society. The goal was for Christianity to create the "rationalism" which would make it possible for the Africans to consume the material products of the Western civilisation rather than to form the African society into the image of industrialised Europe. More important was the ethical content which had priority over the economic incentive of the whole programme.

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[45] O. U. Kalu, 11.
[46] Ibid., 3.
[47] Ibid., 6.

The centrepiece was not "civilisation", but dissonance in physical and moral socio-individual life. For the different groups of missionaries, most of whom were the children of the Age of Enlightenment, the native who had been seen as a raw primitive was now seen as indigent and needy.[48] They aimed not only at a spiritual conquest of the colonies but simultaneously at changing these "indigent and needy" Africans into useful members of the colonial and Euro-christian society. Hence the missionaries took it as their central assignment to train Africans for work. The biblical theologically-founded Christian work ethos, which found its most pregnant formulation in the monastic motto ora et labora formed the basis of the pedagogical programmes.[49]

Regardless of how the different missionaries viewed themselves and whether or not it can be argued that a given colony was first established by the missionaries or the colonialist, the missionaries – mostly without being aware of it were agents of colonialism in practical terms. In the contents of the missionary education one discovers that both within and outside the churches and schools, the personnel of the churches were instrumental in establishing a new and foreign value system during the colonial era.

> They taught an ethic of human relations that in itself could appeal to the finer instincts of Africans ... Whatever the church taught in any capacity may be considered as a contribution to formal and informal education in colonial Africa, and its teachings must be placed within a social context. The church's role was primarily to preserve the social relations of colonialism, as an extension of the role it played in preserving the social relations of capitalism in Europe. Therefore, the Christian church stressed humility, docility, and acceptance.[50]

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[48] H. Frohnes, 219.
[49] H. Gründer, 572f
[50] W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1992), 252, f.

As indicated in the above discussion, the different missionary often assumed the position of arbiter of what was not only morally, but culturally right. The negative side of this development was that the African traditional beliefs were equated with evil. Some positive effects showed themselves in this situation. "However, in its hostility towards African cultural and religious manifestations, the Christian church did perform certain progressive tasks. Practices such as killing of twins and trials by ordeal were frowned upon by the European missionaries as reflections of superstitious ideas rooted in an early stage of African development ..."[51] They fought vehemently against such practices.

For many people, education has been one of the main contributions of the missionaries to the development of Africa. However, questions remain as to the benefits of missionary education. Education is meant to support a prop to a given group or society. The educated in the younger generation automatically carry over their values when their turn came to bear responsibilities and take decisions in their society. But is this what missionary education did in Africa?

In case of education in the pre-colonial Africa

> the most crucial aspect of pre-colonial African education was its relevance to Africans, in sharp contrast with what was later introduced.... There was no separation of education and productive activity or any division between manual and intellectual education. Altogether, through mainly informal means, pre-colonial African education matched the realities of pre-colonial African society and produced well-rounded personalities to fit into that society.[52]

In the light of this fact, the contribution of the various missions in education could be seen from the fact that they tried to create functioning units for the Euro-christian and colonial society in whose formation they (consciously or unconsciously) played a vital role.

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[51] Ibid., 253.
[52] Ibid., 239.

Examining the contents of the missionary education, the differences become clear between what had obtained in the pre-colonial Africa and what the missions could give by way of education.

> Naturally to all the missions, the main object of all education was religious instruction, especially of the young children who could be weaned easily from the 'pagan' ideas and prejudices of their unyielding parents. ... All the knowledge that was considered really essential to impart was the three R´s (reading, writing and arithmetic) with particular emphasis on the Bible and religious tracts translated into the vernacular. Great emphasis was placed on character training and spiritual development, rather than on the raising of the status and material standing of the pupils and converts spiritual and moral automatons, to live literally ... according to the tenets of the new faith.[53]

In a sense the education policy of the different missions reflected mainly a fanatical concept of schools, and education was looked at from a strictly evangelisation viewpoint.

Those who point to education as the achievement of the missions tend to forget that with the exception of only a few of them, there was no question of a wholehearted patronage of an educational policy or system that would emphasise the social and material needs of their

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[53] E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842 - 1914: A Political and Social Analysis*.m (London: Longman Ltd., 1966), 285.
Professor A. E. Ayandele is an eminent Nigerian historian. His book – The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria – studies the effects of the Christian missions. In this book, he concentrates on the political and social history of Nigeria from 1842 to 1914, through the mirror of missionary propaganda, as seen by the peoples themselves. This is why it analyses the key events in Nigeria's evolution in this period, and not the missionary enterprise in itself. It concentrates, among other things, on the resistance of the then Nigerian potentates to the political as well as social results of missionary activity, the inevitable conflict and mixture of indigenous and European cultures, the hopes of the unprivileged in traditional Nigerian society that missionary enterprise would usher in the millennium and the response of the Nigerian peoples to the moral and social programmes of missionaries. In other words, Professor Ayandele penetrates deeply into the social, psychological and political implications of intensely evangelical missionary activity.

African followers and equip them for the various walks of life. Those who point out the contribution of the missions in the introduction of formal education should bear in mind that pre-colonial Africa already had formal education.

> Some aspects of (pre-colonial) African education were formal ... there was a specific program and a conscious division between teachers and pupils. Formal education in pre-colonial Africa was also directly connected with the purposes of society, just like informal education. The programs of teaching were restricted to certain periods in the life of every individual, notably the period of initiation or 'coming of age' ... formal education was also available at later stages in life, such as on the occasion of passing from one age-grade to another or of joining a new brotherhood. Specialized functions such as hunting, organizing religious ritual, and the practice of medicine definitely involved formal education within the family or clan.[54]

It must be said for the sake of fairness that the missions made some efforts at providing Africans with industrial education. This education could not flourish with significant success given the remote location and circumstances of Africa. Indigenous products had very little or no chance in the face of superior imported foreign articles.

Some Africans regarded education as the greatest social blessing of missionary activity to Africa. They maintained this view despite the great deficiencies of the missionary educational system. In spite of its one-sidedness, they see its justification in their belief that secular education alone was a dangerous thing that would have destroyed the traditional morality without replacing it with any other kind of purposeful morality. They fail to see the abiding dangers of such fanatical religious education as was served by the mission. Even on the issue of morality, the missions did not preserve the traditional morality. What was introduced as an alternative was too foreign to be

[54] W. Rodney, 239.

efficiently acceptable to serve as an adequate substitute which could fulfil the moral demands of African society.

2.3.5 The Missionary Activities in Igboland

History

In much literature dealing with the history of the missionary activities among the Igbos of Nigeria, the 1850s are often cited as the beginning. It should be pointed out that "even though it might not have germinated, the seed of Christianity was sown in Iboland on the occasion of the Niger expedition of 1841 when a treaty was signed between the representatives of Queen Victoria and an Ibo chief, Obi Ossai of Aboh."[55] There are versions of how the first contact between Christianity and Igboland took place in that same year. One version maintains that "the history of the Christianisation of Igboland begins in 1841, when Simon Jonas, an Igbo who had been sold into slavery and rescued and resettled in Sierra Leone, spent three weeks at Aboh, and preached to the children who flocked around him."[56]

After the initial attempt which was not able to take off for different reasons, „the definitive date was 27th July, 1857 when an agreement was finally executed between a missionary group led by Samuel Crowther and Obi Akazua of Onitsha and his councillors to establish a Christian mission station at Onitsha, an Ibo town on the eastern bank of the river Niger."[57] Before this, however, missionary activities had been going on in the other parts of Nigeria as there were many

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[55] S. N. Nwabara, *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain, 1860 – 1960*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 47.

[56] E. A. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*. (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976), 160.

[57] E. Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo culture: A study of the Interaction of Christianity and Igbo Culture*. (New York: NOK Publishers Ltd., 1974), 56.

E. Ilogu is a well-known author. He has travelled extensively and lectured in many places throughout the world, including many American universities as a Fullbright-Hays fellow. In this book he is principally concerned with showing how the traditional life of the Igbo people has, over the past hundred years, been disorganised by Western commerce, by the impact of Christianity, and by the increasing secularising of life in the technological revolution that has been taking place in the Igbo society. He tries to consider the proper role of the Christian Church in this phase of Igbo history. His suggestions are based on a wide range of study, historical, sociological and equally theological.

missionary groups in Nigeria at that time, one of which the Church Missionary Society (CMS) was the first.

The second missionary effort towards the evangelisation of Igboland came from Roman Catholic missionaries. The first group started in 1885 under the leadership of Joseph Lutz – a French priest who had previously been involved in missionary activity in Sierra Leone. His group like those of the CMS was well received by the King and Chiefs of Onitsha. Though the Roman Catholic missionaries started later than the CMS group, they succeeded in penetrating into the interior parts of Igboland and establishing strong footholds. The Society of African Missions, headquartered at Lyon, France, was mainly involved in this work. The society worked through the Holy Ghost Fathers from Ireland whom they were directing. A third missionary effort undertaken began with the early Methodist society in 1892, altogether there were some six European-based missionary groups involved in the evangelisation of Igboland.[58]

The history of missionary activities in Igboland can be subdivided into three main periods. The first period was a fifty-seven year period from 1857 to 1914. This period witnessed the planting of and the contact of Christianity with the Igbo people, world, religion and culture. The second period, from 1914 was marked by competition among the various missions in their scramble for membership (African souls) and for areas of influence. The third period, from 1939 to 1964, witnessed the taking off and accelerated growth of national or indigenous churches.[59]

Influence of Colonialism

Throughout these periods, various factors played decisive (either negative or positive) roles in the evangelisation of Igboland. In the first period the new religion appealed to the Igbos for reasons to be discussed in later sections. Christianity's expansion was supported by the British colonial effort in Igboland. The primary factors were trade and political control. With regard to the situation of the Igbo society at this period, E.A. Ayandele maintains that the missionary groups had phenomenal success within the Igbo society. Igbo society was

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[58] Ibid., 57f.
[59] Ibid., 62.

> much less open than Yorubaland (an ethnic group in Nigeria) to direct outside influences like Islam and Christianity until the beginning of this century, when a series of military expeditions threw open their village communities ... The administrator and missionary intruded into the community about the same time. There was no question of the people accepting the one and rejecting the other.[60]

As to why the new religion appealed to this group irrespective of the situation presented above, it can be seen that "in their (Igbos) patronage of the Christian Church the Ibo manifested a characteristic that they have not lost ever since – that of zealous patronage of any institution that possessed the magic of success, in this case the magic wand of education in the hands of the Christian Church."[61]

The central factor influencing the second period of missionary activity in Igboland was the competition among the various missions. The situation must have made these missionaries intensify their efforts to achieve more success. On the other hand, this presented not just a divided picture of Christianity, but it also led to antagonism between the respective mission groups. This situation is still present in the Christianity of today among the Igbos of Nigeria. The line of demarcation was not only on religious confessional bases, but also on the nationality of the different groups. Some favoured groups were strongly attached to the colonial government, while others lacked the support of colonialism. Those who could not fit into any of these categories reckoned with and were even attacked by the colonial administration.

Although the Igbos were inclined to patronise institutions that bring success, they were selective; it was not always a question of success at all costs. Such questions as: what is at stake, whose interest is it going to serve, what does it demand and is it worth it, played a decisive role in their reactions to these institutions both as separate entities and again where they were seen to be working together. The institutions of Christianity appealed to them. But they were opposed to colonialism.

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[60] E.A. Ayandele, 157
[61] Ibid.

> Colonialism, throughout the world, has always been an essentially violent phenomenon. It was imposed by violence, and maintained by its potential capacity for violence. No Nigerian people resisted colonialism more tenaciously than the Igbo ... The conquest of Igboland took over twenty years of constant military action.[62]

The relationship between the colonial government and mission in Nigeria was characterised by strains and stresses, which in Igbo land were reduced to a minimum. Several factors led to this situation. Firstly, as the different missionary groups came into the interior after the colonialists, there was no pre-colonial relationship between these missionaries and traditional rulers, as had been the case in Yorubaland. Consequently, a demarcation line was drawn between the roles of the two groups in the community. The missionaries conceded law-making and the exercise of authority over the traditional rulers to the colonialists.

Another important factor was the structure of Igbo traditional political administration which was not centralised as it had been in Yorubaland. The head of the Igbo village could not override majority opinion in the village. The Igbos were democratic by tradition and the majority opinion favoured inviting missionaries as a means to gain the advantages of Western education. As previously discussed, education was the central instrument of evangelisation used by the missionary groups.

Inter-village rivalry played a significant role. Many village authorities sought to consolidate their own power and to gain the upper hand in existing inter-village disputes. These authorities therefore took the initiative to invite Christian teachers (mainly missionaries) into their villages and towns.[63]

This relationship was not always full of strains and stresses; there were cordial aspects. Each group had its own interests as well as strategies to realise them. However, regardless of these agreements or disagreements, central concern was not the best interests and self-definition of the Igbos, but the missionaries' respective interests.

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[62] Ibid., 158.
[63] E. A. Ayandele, 170f.

> The political and social changes which were brought about by the government and heartily welcomed by the Roman Catholics created the climate and opportunities for missionaries to embark on a policy of evangelisation through schools. The relations of the Holy Ghost Society with the government seemed to have been very cordial. The missionaries regarded it as one of their tasks to furnish the government with loyal subjects who would assist in the destruction of idolatry, superstition and slavery.[64]

The Igbos identified the missionaries with the colonial government and with the standards and values which this colonial government intended to inculcate. This identification was a result of their observation of the cordiality between the two groups. This understanding or perspective of the Igbos led to their movement towards Christianity based on the belief that the acceptance of Christianity would mean immunity from the colonial government's oppressive measures.

One of the points where the various groups of missionaries criticised the colonial government was on the latter's tolerance of Islam. It is clear that Islam was a rival or a threat to the missionary ideals. The missionaries saw the colonial policy as a material instrument of civilisation. This instrument was seen as necessary for it would open up the interior parts of Igboland for their missionary activities. There is much evidence of the close alliance between the Catholic missionaries and the colonial government in Igboland.

> The missionaries did not question the government's methods nor did they see any value in pagan and native customs. The customs and practices of the local people were regarded as being positively anti-Christian and the measures taken by the missionaries themselves to stamp out these habits are evidence of this ... This method of Christianising is indicative of the fact that the missionaries ... believed they had to 'root up and

[64] O. U. Kalu, 54.

> pull down' in order to build. It was not a question of perfecting something in itself of value but of imposing values where they were non-existing.[65]

The above explains why there was no criticism over the use of forced labour by the colonial administration. Not even the "rape of the indigenous political constitution of the people, the Popular Assembly" by the colonial government through the introduction and institution of the Warrant Chief system merited the critical attention of the missionaries.

> The missionaries, of course, would have argued that their role was purely spiritual, and that they were incompetent to make judgements on political matters. The facts suggest, however, that they did comment on and made judgements about political matters when it was in their own interests to do so, as was instanced in their attacks on the Royal Niger Company's economic and fiscal policies, and the British Government's tolerance of Islam.[66]

The Missions and Education in Igboland

The role of the schools in the evangelisation activities of the missionaries is very central. The respective groups had different approaches to evangelisation even when each group made use of the school as an organ of evangelisation. "The Roman Catholic Church's approach to evangelisation was sacramental, it was the administration of the sacraments, a ministerial function, which was all important. The Protestant approach ... was fundamentally scriptural: the preaching and understanding of the 'word' was all important."[67]

In coming closer to the methods of evangelisation, the concept and practice of the Christian village as were used by the Holy Ghost Roman Catholic missionaries in Igboland were the forerunner of the schools as a method of evangelisation. The prototype of this Christian Village was the "village de liberté" system used by the French in Western Sudan to "mop up the flotsam and jetsam uprooted" by the

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[65] Ibid., 55f.
[66] Ibid., 56.
[67] Ibid., 49.

jihads and also those displaced by the French conquest. In the Igbo context the Christian village just like the "village de liberté" served the purposes of a temporary compromise between European social institutions and Africa; the Christian Villagers served as pools of cheap labour and as a means used by the colonial government and the missionaries to become established without much expense. The Christian Village was indirectly a mock liberty. The major problem encountered by the missionaries in implementing this method of evangelisation was the problem of finance.[68] The reason was that one of the central aspects of this system was the buying of slaves in order to free them. Through this means the missionaries believed that besides providing them useful pools of cheap labour, they could fashion the African evangelists of Africa.

> The ex-slaves at the mission, however, were not used simply as a labour force or as household instruments ... Some of the ex-slaves did receive a rudimentary grounding in the three Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) and became, in their capacity as interpreters, clerks in government service and teacher, pioneers of Roman Catholic education and influence in Eastern Nigeria.[69]

This was indeed the beginning of the missionary education from the Roman Catholic missions in Igboland. Though this method was still considered ideologically adequate for evangelisation it was discarded by these missionaries mainly for practical reasons.

The missionaries in general realised the obvious need for communication in the work of evangelisation. This was one of the reasons why they embarked on mission schools. "It was in Iboland that an insatiable desire for education rose to fever pitch ..., the traditional intervillage and interclan warfare that had been the main feature of these ... people was transformed into rivalry for the white man's education ... The desire of the Ibo for education compelled the society of the Holy Ghost Fathers to revolutionise its evangelistic

[68] Ibid., 36.
[69] Ibid., 39.

strategy ... The society thus took the Christian faith to the Ibo people through the village school,...."[70]

> The missions had moral and spiritual expectations from the school system, which unfortunately it could not meet. Their converts could not accept the Bible in the simple manner the Christian missions expected. The examples of European officers, traders and educated Africans were a greater lesson that the precepts the missionaries were importing. The material wealth and social advantages of the new world in which the masses found themselves were of greater appeal than abstract Christian morality ..., Christian missions destroyed the high morality of indigenous religion without succeeding in replacing it with Christian morality.[71]

The above-mentioned problem of the people not showing interests in moral Christian principles might have been avoided had the missions strived for "a whole-hearted patronage of an educational system that would emphasize the social and material needs of their converts and prepare them adequately for various walks of life."[72] With the exception of the Presbyterian mission and the society of the Holy Ghost Fathers – who were restricted by the Igbo situation, – the other different missionary groups saw education a strictly evangelisation viewpoint. Hence their institutions of training principally served the purpose of producing schoolmasters who graduated as catechists, deacons and then priests. For the female converts the schools were there for the wives and fiancées of their male workers. All in all, „great emphasis was placed on character training and spiritual development, rather than on raising of the status and material standing of the pupils and converts in society ... To this end the children were overdosed with religious instruction and all their behaviour watched and frequently corrected."[73]

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[70] E. A. Ayandele, 290f.
[71] Ibid., 291.
[72] Ibid., 286.
[73] Ibid., 285.

It is clear that "secular" and technical education found no room in the whole education programme of the various mission groups. Having realised what goals their converts sought – primarily to improve themselves socially and materially – the missions were forced to review the need and role of schools in their work of evangelisation. This may explain why the missions themselves considered higher education as detrimental to the spread of Christianity.

The whole process of school as a means of evangelisation has to be seen against the background of inter-denominational rivalry among the various missionary groups. This is because even as problems were being discovered – although they were in a way clear from the beginning – the missions continued with the system. The rivalry and fear were not only inter-denominational and international, but they existed in the face of the colonial administration which had different goals for all.

> This rivalry in part occasioned and accelerated the growth of the school system of evangelisation used by the Holy Ghost Society in its work in the east. The missionaries themselves were French and often showed grave concern and fear at the possible intervention of a non Roman Catholic government in Roman Catholic schools. Things could go the same way as they did in France ..., and one could be faced with the horrible problem of the école laicque.[74]

This fear could be understood especially in the face of the fact that it was a foreign – British – colonial government with whom they had to work and the Anglican and not the Roman Catholic Church was the state/national Church of this colonial government.

The scramble between these different missionary groups produced an atmosphere of war. The situation of the Roman Catholic mission forced them to comply with the colonial government.

> It is, however, difficult to assess the reasons for the relatively successful bid made by the Roman Catholic missionaries to become the dominant

[74] O. U. Kalu, 51.

> influence in Igboland. It is clear, however, from evidence available that one factor did contribute a great deal to their success and that was their willingness to comply wholeheartedly with government schemes and policies ... It was, therefore, through the school system of evangelisation that the Roman Catholics succeeded in challenging the predominant influence of the Protestants in Igboland, though the latter had preceded them by thirty years.[75]

Before concluding this section on the missions and schools, it is necessary to note how the mission handled the vernacular language of the Igbos. The way the missionary activities interacted with indigenous languages in Nigeria – the Igbo language included – presents another side of the missionaries. From this standpoint it could be argued that they did not simply destroy but built and to some extent preserved some elements of the culture.

> Upon the Christian missions devolved the task of preserving the vernacular against the wishes of their converts and the indifference of the administrators who preferred the English language. By their efforts the main languages of Nigeria have been preserved as a lasting legacy to the Ibo, Yoruba, Efik, Nupe and Hausa. For the reduction of these languages into writing has resulted in a linguistic homogeneity that never existed in these tribes.[76]

"Union Ibo", for instance, which is the language into which the Bible was translated, is a synthesis of three almost indistinguishable dialects. It has become in a way the Esperanto of the Igbo people. It stands as a common vehicle of expression and the language of literature. Furthermore, it plays a role of a bond unifying the third largest tribe in West Africa.

The opposition of the colonial government towards giving an important role to vernacular in the school system can be understood in

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[75] Ibid., 52f.
[76] E. A. Ayandele, 283.

the light of the aims of colonialism. Leaving to vernacular such an important role would have meant an end to colonialism. The language of a people is after all, the expression of its soul, by which alone a key to their thoughts can be found. Colonialism was geared, among other things, towards destroying the vernacular as was emphasised by the missionaries in the school system. The vernacular as a language is no longer an expression of their soul. They reached a phase where all that mattered was to get away from anything that linked them with their old identity. What is vernacular worth if it will not bring them what they earnestly desired, namely, their social and material improvement?

Why were the missionaries so much interested in language? Was their interest prompted out of love for this language or the people speaking it? The British in India played a similar role in preserving language and dialects (British Orientalism). Some or most of the motivation was pure intellectual curiosity and the love of study for its own sake. This may not be the case in Igbo land, but rather for their missionary purpose. One missionary wrote pertaining to the vernacular, "what I want is a man or rather men who can read the scriptures in his own tongue and preach the gospel among the heathen as a brother; I don't want a youth confined by intellectual culture till he becomes an individual of superior caste and must carry with him wherever he goes the comforts and show of civilised life."[77]

2.3.6 Evaluation

In this evaluation it must be made clear that most of the information available today on the activities of the missionaries come from different sources, whose variation in the sources plays an important role.

> The history of Christianity (in Africa) was formerly written mostly by missionaries. The goal was to tell how God assisted them to bring light to benighted souls in far-away countries ... The histories written from this ... perspective were bound to be propagandist. They were designed to boost morale and material aid. Some of the earlier converts absorbed this habit of praising and

[77] Ibid., 286.

> cataloguing the triumphs of Christianity over paganism.[78]

The presumption here is that Africa has no history of its own outside the history of the European activity in Africa.

This chapter does not provide the reader with a concrete theological discussion based on the activities of the missionaries. The reasons for this absence of theological content are many. The activities of these missionaries result from their home background. A neglect of the European base of the different missionaries will make it all the more difficult to understand the situation of the missionaries in the field. The "stories of the various missions are so interwoven with the histories of the metropolitan countries from which they came that the pattern of missionary enterprises in the field can only be explained by reference to where from, how and why the missionaries came. Admittedly, the exigencies of the mission field sometimes forced changes on the policies and strategies of missionaries. But, the organisation, funding, recruitment and training methods of missionary bodies explain ... the dominant theology and attitude to indigenous cultures exhibited by missionaries in the field."[79] The general view of Europe on Africa did not allow the missionaries to occupy themselves with the African traditional religions. This would have been a point of departure for a theological discussion. In a sense, judgement had already been passed on African culture in general as primitive. Hence there was no justification for such a confrontation. The Africans were generally seen as primitive and were not ripe for theological discussion in the eyes of most these missionaries. They needed only to be taught the simple catechisms of Christianity.

In addition, it should be recalled that the central mission theology was the "plantation theory" of Pierre Charles. This meant that "in spite of a degree of autonomy" which the missionaries enjoyed away from home, such groups like "the Roman Catholic Orders were bound to the doctrine and hierarchy of the Holy See. Missionary bodies of this nature tended to aim to reproduce themselves in the mission field."[80] The central orientation of their policy, following the plantation theory,

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[78] O. U. Kalu, 1f.
[79] Ibid., 3.
[80] Ibid., 11.

was structural growth. This emphasis on structural growth gave birth to paternalism.

It was not easy to recruit men and women who were willing to go on a mission to Africa. Among other reasons, this was due to the fact that much of West Africa was still unknown to Europeans. This was the time when Africa, because of the high mortality rate among the first religious adventurers, won the image of the "white man's grave".

> Missionaries before the First World War were mostly from the artisan class ... Men such as these were selected for their spiritual qualities, not for their theological expertise, and this had a detrimental influence upon the quality of theology in the younger Churches (in Africa in general).[81]

Other reasons include the fact that the social class which was the supplier of the educated clergymen was not ready for the type of adventure called for by the missions. As a result it was not only that the different missions turned to local artisans and continental Europeans, Europeans in some areas were reluctant in forming missionary bodies. This shortage of manpower compelled the missions to turn to West Indians and indigenous agents.

Further important factor was the competition and rivalry that existed among the respective missionary groups. These employed different tricks and at times deceptive strategies in their undignified scrambling for spheres of influence. They were all involved in a race where the number of "adherents" was more important than the number of true "converts". This rivalry showed itself in the fierce competition between the Roman Catholic and Protestant missionary groups. This situation was not favourable for the quality of theology.

Another central point in this evaluation is the relationship between the missions and the colonial government. It might be asked whether the missionaries could have afforded to dispense with this relationship to the colonial government. This is an important question because this relationship has proved to be one of the heavy burdens the history of missionary activities that Christianity in Africa has to carry.

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[81] Ibid., 4.

In general, most of the missionaries depended, to a reasonable extent, on the merchants for transportation, supplies and gun-boat protection. The colonial government, on their own part needed these missionaries as civilising agents. Hence they offered them grants-in-aid and protection. But the two allies differed over attitudes towards 'pagan' cultures, the goals of education and the future of the colonies. The government aimed to use the traditional order as a basis for administrative restructuring, while missionaries, on the other hand, wanted to pull down everything.[82] This can be understood from the missionaries' viewpoint that all the traditional practices were automatically branded heathen and the work of the devil.

Majority of the missions knew how to draw advantages from the colonials, which got both them and Christianity a loss of credit. This relationship presented itself as very ambivalent. "The Roman Catholic missionaries consequently played a dual role as champions of government policies and protectors of the local population, who suffered as a consequence of some of these policies."[83]

Christianisation brought along with itself a dialectic. Here reference is made to the dialectic inherent in the missionary expansionism. A dialectic between cultural imperialism, on one hand – including destructive consequences for the cultural historical identity of the oppressed people – and then the revolutionary, modernising and emancipating effects of the Christian culture, on the other. While the missionaries, in consideration of the colonial situation, acted and reacted in a clearly conservative way, they did the opposite towards the indigenous political constellations and social structures as instruments of political and social changes. In Africa, where religion forms the fundament of the society and the basis of the indigenous authority, the actions of the missionaries against the traditional religious beliefs and views constituted an offensive against the political and social ties which held the respective African societies and cultures together.[84]

This dialectic, which caused social disruption, resulted from the fact that

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[82] Ibid., 7.
[83] Ibid., 56.
[84] H. Gründer, 577f.

> missionary activity was a disruptive force rocking traditional society to its very foundation ..., producing disrespectful, presumptuous and detribalised children through the mission schools, destroying the high moral principles and orderliness of indigenous society through denunciation of traditional religion, without an adequate substitute, and transforming the mental outlook ... in a way that made them imitate European values slavishly, whilst holding in irrational contempt valuable features of traditional culture.[85]

This can be understood in the light of the fact that one of the prerequisites of Christianisation as presented by the missionaries was a radical break by the Africans with their own history and historical cultural identity. The missionaries ignored, misconceived or misconstrued the salutary roles of some customs and institutions in traditional African society.

The sociological aspects of the missionary activities, was revolutionary on a large scale. "No society could be Christianized without its being upset to a considerable extent. Ideologically, in point of time and to a certain degree in actuality missionaries began the process of disintegration of ... society. In a 'pagan' society it was the missionary's task to overturn and, given a suitable environment, the missionary knew how to do it."[86]

The issue of every society getting upset in the process of Christianisation must be considered in the light of the question of pattern and rubric. 'Which standard' and 'according to what principle' are important questions. In Africa this transformation was not on the basis of the standards and principles of the "Message of Christ"[87], but

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[85] E. A. Ayandele, 329.
[86] Ibid. 330.
[87] The Christian message as we can see, received so many cultural, political and historical colourings or layerings that by the time it reached Africa these circumstantial colourings had mixed so well that they were often and are still mistakenly seen as the nucleus or centre piece of Christianity. The phrase „message of Christ" is an effort to make it clear that Christianity is more than these accidents of history. It should call attention to that which is "specifically Christian" in Christianity,

rather of a eurocentric Christianity. It was so presented that to be Christian meant to be European. As the Christian missions wanted to make Africa a veritable 'Christian' continent, they endeavoured to europeanise their converts. Even if the mandate for mission came from Jesus himself, some missionaries may not have reflected adequately on how Jesus himself propagated his message. Many indications, suggest that they propagated more or less a European cultural imperialism. Instead of striving towards making disciples of all nations, they consciously or unconsciously aimed at making Europeans of all nations. This was evident in conversion.

> More fundamental was the fact that the missions' basis of conversion emphasized and exalted the individual. For the missionary it was the relationship of the individual to God that mattered. But indigenous ... (African) society was communal ... When a missionary converted individuals in a community he removed units from an organic whole and thereby undermined the monolithic structure of the community. The converts not only imbibed a new set of religious beliefs but began to nurse alien ideas ... detrimental to the welfare and solidarity of the community.[88]

The doctrine of the missionaries was revolutionary as well as subversive. Even when it might be argued that the missionaries were occupied with the religious life of the people, one must not forget that in a society like traditional African society where "religion was the cement of the society, the guarantor of moral principles and the basis of secular authority, renunciation of the traditional religion implied renunciation of the moral, civil and political obligations to the community as well."[89] For Africans being Christian was seen as a complete disassociation of oneself from one's world, which consequently meant a loss of one's socio-cultural privileges and identity. This was an undesirable and unnecessary estrangement. It

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– hence the "message of Christ" – as has been revealed in, through and by Jesus Christ himself – who is the nucleus of the Christian faith.

[88] E. A. Ayandele, 330f.

[89] Ibid., 331.

would seem that there is a link between this point and the confusion and the lack of orientation that is strongly present today in Africa.

Finally, the question pertaining to the success of missionary activities in Africa in general, and in Igbo land in particular, could be answered with a yes and a no. “Yes” will be the answer when the goal of the mission – structural growth on the basis of the plantation theory of Pierre Charles is considered. They did succeed in setting up ecclesiastical structures with a meaningful number of adherents. On the other hand, the answer will be “no”, judging from the great command “... to go and make disciples of all nations ...” Can the situation of the Christian churches in Africa today not stand as testimony to this paradox of “yes” and “no” as the answer to the same question – why the Christian faith has not taken deep roots in Africa.

Hence the call on all concerned to see to it that the “Message of Christ” takes deep root in the African culture. If it is true that Africa has been “Christianised” then it is time to Africanise the Message of Christ, in order for the Christian faith to take deep roots in Africa.

Chapter Three

Short Historical Traces and Models of Inculturation

3.1 Introduction

So far we have presented an example of an African society before its contact with European culture and Christianity. We have also seen how the contact took place between this African culture (taking Igbo Culture as an example) and the European one. This point of contact was at the same time the point of contact between African traditional religions and the Euro-Christian practice of Christianity. Though this contact took place years ago its results are still of consequence in African society and is noticeable not only in the benefits for both sides, but equally in the side effects, problems or challenges posed by it. Noble ideals were set up, but from much that was accomplished and the methods applied it becomes clear that practice and theory were worlds apart.

Surveying the activities of the missionaries in Africa, one cannot but notice one missing, but important, element. There was no effort towards establishing dialogue between Euro-Christianity and the African's society, their culture and religion. What actually occurred was a monologue led by the different agents of Euro-Christianity to the utter neglect of healthy contact between the two sides. It was as a confrontation resulting in the devaluation, and almost an annihilation, of a non-European culture. The way in which this was done was nothing to be proud of and has been attracting criticism of different sorts for a long time. One such criticism is based on the fact that the

purported evangelisation of Africa was just a forceful and violently coerced transplantation of institutions, symbols, concepts and moral values of European Christian culture. It can be maintained that there was no real encounter between the Message of Christ and the indigenous African reality and culture. Coupled with the collaboration of the missionaries with the colonialists, this explains the reaction of some Africans towards the missionaries beginning in the period when some critical Africans started fighting colonialism. At the same time a movement began towards a better understanding of the Message of Christ in the African culture. Today more than ever before, this movement has reached a stage where it can no longer be ignored.

This work in general and this chapter in particular are occupied with this issue. Attention will be given to origin, history and some models of this effort towards a better understanding of the Message of Christ in Africa – Inculturation, which is one of the models, will be treated as well.

The particular model proposed in this work lays emphasis on dialogue and understands inculturation as a process. Hence there is the need for mapping out its guiding principles, goal and subject matter, spheres, prerequisites, and methods. In the conclusion, some thematic examples of this kind of inculturation shall be presented. These will include examples of outstanding contributions both of Christianity with its European background and of the African traditional religions and cultures.

3.2 Origin/Short Review and Models of Indigenisation of the Message of Christ

3.2.1 The Old Testament

From biblical history it can be maintained that „indigenisation" in terms of the relationship between God and his people has been present starting with the Old Testament. Examples found in the Old Testament are instances where the message of God tries to take root in the culture of the Israelites. This indigenisation occurred in the encounters between God and the people of Israel where God's loving care and the message of salvation found expression in indigenous

forms of people's lives irrespective of the circumstances in which they found themselves.

An example of this type of encounter is found in the history of Abraham in which God showed understanding for the situation of this ageing man. Hence the promise of offspring – a son made to Abraham – which meant changing a childless man to the father of a nation.

When the promise was fulfilled in the birth of the nation Israel and was the God of the people of Israel. Without loss of his identity as the God who encounters individuals, He presented Himself as the God of Abraham. He identified himself with the situation of the people of Israel when oppressed he was the liberator; throughout the period of wandering in the desert towards the Promised Land, He was their protector; on reaching the Promised Land His presence was not only in the mind but also in the life of the people who believed.

In all these stages, it could be said of Him that God was "indigenised" in the people and their life circumstances. God was always present not only as their guide but also as correcting them whenever they deviated from the course of righteousness.

At such moments of deviation the people encountered Him through judges, leaders and prophets, thus distancing Himself from such acts which do not conform to His will and plan. These various forms of encounter are found in the whole of Old Testament; in a sense the Old Testament may be seen as the history of the "indigenisation" of God among His people. This "indigenisation" of God did not stop with the Old Testament, but continued in the New. According to the letter to the Hebrews (Heb 1:1-4), this "indigenisation" then began in the person of Jesus Christ.

The event of incarnation is a unique example of the "indigenisation" of God among not only the people of Israel, but all of humanity. Though this was prepared in different encounters with the fathers, judges, leaders and prophets, from then onwards, God Himself would be encountered as a human being, no longer through a human being. He became human, by taking flesh; He "indigenised" in one human culture, namely the Jewish one. Here, as in the Old Testament, He could be identified in this culture without being identified with the culture. But more than in the Old Testament, He no longer "indigenised" through but in a human being – Jesus Christ.

3.2.2 Jesus Christ in the New Testament

The life of Jesus Christ among the Jews and the way he treated Jewish culture is a standard example of the encounter between God in Jesus Christ and a culture – the Jewish culture. Here God "indigenised" in a more concrete way in the person of Jesus Christ so that he was identified in this culture but not with it. As a human being Jesus belongs to the Jewish cultural world. But as God incarnate he transcends it.

This was vivid during controversial encounters with some elements of the Jewish culture. He sanctioned, explained and lived those aspects of the culture that are in accordance with the will of God, but rejected and modified those which were not. He did not reject everything but confirmed many things and helped to preserve them by giving them deeper meaning, through a new and correct interpretation. Nor were those who could not follow simply rejected without explanation; he always tried to explain from the knowledge of the life-circumstances of the people why these were against the will of God. With the dawn of the messianic era, he went further to explain the new situation of the life of the people. Hence, He was either for the total rejection of old practice that had always been against God's will or for its modification, as the case may be.

An appropriate example can be found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 4:23-7:29). A detailed interpretation of the whole episode will not be undertaken. Some aspects represent a fusion of several Old Testament genres and cover the main areas of ethical and religious life as understood in Israel. Jesus' teaching is neither purely arbitrary as regards Jewish cultural practices nor exhaustive, but a series of indicators illustrated by some "focal instances". Understood against its Jewish background the Sermon on the Mount presents a possible, but still high standard of ethical wisdom.[1] This provides an example of the way "indigenisation" of his message for the kingdom of God can take place in different cultures. In his teaching about morality and law, a clear radicalisation of the law is very evident.[2]

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[1] R.E. Brown, I.A. Fitzmyer and R. E. Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. (London: Student Edition, Geoffrey Chapmann, 1993), 640.

[2] Ibid. 1321 "…, Jesus specified how those who experienced conversion should live. Jesus the Jew basically affirmed the mosaic law as God's will, but he rejected any

Not only here but generally, Jesus showed a profound knowledge in his encounter with Jewish culture. This buttresses the fact that a deep knowledge of culture is very essential for any effort towards the indigenisation of the Message of Christ. Etymologically, theology, as the human reflection on God, consists of two aspects – the human and the divine – God's word (revelation) and human reflection thereupon. This human reflection always comes from a cultural background. Now the human being having been culturally formed is both the creator and as well as the creature of culture. If whatever is received is received according to the cultural mind of the receiver, this includes divine truths. As human reflection on divine truths comes from a certain cultural standpoint, culture must be conceived as an inseparable part of any theological system.[3]

3.2.3 The Early Christians and their Efforts towards "indigenisation" of the Message of Christ

The inseparable link between any theological system and culture was not unknown to the early Christians. The Jerusalem Council and the subsequent decision (Acts 15:1-35) recognized of the importance of culture. Here the apostles displayed their deep knowledge of the Jewish culture, which is evident in their being able to demonstrate that what was at stake was more a cultural issue than a central point in the Message of Christ. As Jews they showed their respect for other cultures.

> It is evident that from the Acts of the Apostles through the Apostolic times (Didache) through the first great missions of the church into the outer reaches of the Roman Empire (Gregory to Augustine), from the Church Fathers of both East and West there is unanimity on the legitimacy of inculturation, there is continuity in its practice.

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casuistic fragmentation of God's will into countless petty commandments and ritual observances …, Jesus sought to radicalize the law by reaching back to God's will in creation and his original purpose in giving the law. At the same time, Jesus sought to internalize the law by reaching into the human to purify the font of all action."

[3] J. Ukpong, "Current Theology: The Emergence of African Theologies", in: *Theological Studies* 45 (1984), 511.

> There is therefore no doubt that the church regards it as her traditional method of fulfilling her missionary vocation to the peoples and cultures of the world.[4]

The early church continued with "indigenisation" as a method of spreading the Good News. After the Council of Jerusalem, St. Paul – the great missionary – used this principle to a great extent in his extensive missionary activities as his epistles bear testimony. For the Romans, the issue of law dominated his apostolic activities among them. For the Greeks, Paul was confronted with and busied himself with philosophy of the passage on the unknown God (Acts 17:22-31) is a clear example. Here we see that "...two-Pronged kerygma to pagans in which the summons to monotheism, nourished by Hellenistic Jewish apologetics, formed the necessary premise of the proclamation of Christ."[5] Paul used the natural theology of the Athenians as a positive and useful key to the Gospel, in contrast with his use of natural theology to convict sinful humanity (Rom 1:18-32).

It is important to say that this differentiated use of natural theology indicates that the early Christians did not just generalise in their efforts towards "indigenisation" of the gospel. As seen above, natural theology was used by Paul in the case of the Athenians to explain the gospel. But on the other hand, Paul in his letter to the Romans (1:18-23) denies the possibility of a real, affective knowledge of God through natural theology. This is a sort of knowledge that includes love and reverence. The knowledge of the pagans about God, according to him, implies only an inceptive and speculative kind of information about God which could not help them. This inconsequential type of knowledge is hence the source of the sins of the pagans. Through such knowledge, in Paul's view, the pagans could not properly acknowledge God.

One can see, judging from this example of Paul and other similar ones that the early Christians did not shy away from making use of what is available in a culture in order to bring across the Message of Christ to their audience. This practice was present among the early Christian

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[4] O.A. Onwubiko, *Theory and Practice of Inculturation. An African Perspective. Christian Mission and Culture in Africa*. Vol. II. (Enugu, Nigeria: SNAAP Press Ltd. ,1992), No Page indicated.

[5] R. E. Brown, J.A. Fitzmyer and R. E. Murphy, 755.

missionaries and church fathers. As we have seen, "indigenisation" occurred in the Hebrew, Greek, Roman, German and other cultures. The obstacle grew up in the period when Christian faith was to be disseminated by European Christian missionaries who seemed to forget the principle of their own evangelisation despite the missionary Magna Carta of Propaganda Fidei in 1659, forbidding a transplantation of Europe into non-European areas. The basic reasons, as was noted in the previous chapter, were "racism, Eurocentrism, the European appropriation of Christianity as their own Kulturgut and the colonial mentality of exporting Christianity to other peoples as 'made in Europe'."[6]

As partly in the last chapter African culture suffered disdain at the hand of the colonialists during the colonial era. There was no substantial effort towards "indigenisation" of the Message of Christ in African culture, for the missionaries worked together with or in a way similar to colonialists as both treated African culture with disdain. The post-independence cultural revival did not leave Christian practice untouched. This socio-political factor contributed positively towards a new awareness among Africans coupled with a felt need for the realisation of independence in every aspect of African life. This also led to the opening of avenues for the birth and expression of revolutionary ideas and sentiments, including religions. A sense of value for whatever was African began to emerge.[7]

3.2.4 Second Vatican Council on Indigenisation

It is not only in the socio-political situation of Africa that the winds of change were blowing; other developments contributed in no small measure to supporting the quest of the Africans, especially Christians for the "indigenisation" of the Message of Christ in Africa.

> The first of these developments is the theological renaissance that had started to brew on the international theological scene early in the present century, coming to the fore in the post-Vatican II period. The main thrust of this movement ..., was that dogmatic theology was no longer being

[6] O.A. Onwubiko, No page indicated.
[7] J. Ukpong, 505.

> looked upon as a mere explanation of dogmas but as the actualization of the meaning of divine revelation in relation to the present situation of man and woman.[8]

This shifting or extension of emphasis is very important and helpful to the Church because one of the central challenges facing the Church is that of coming to terms with divergent world-views and the construction of interreligious relationships. Such relationships should be coupled with the achievement of credibility for the doctrinal truths in reference to the uniqueness of the divergent cultures.

In consideration of this fact, the major theological developments were efforts towards this goal.

> ... theology began to be understood more and more in terms of proclamation. It was now acquiring a hermeneutic orientation, and its task was being seen more in terms of answering the question posed by the hearer rather than being content with offering explanations following on a predetermined a priori.[9]

This may be understood as meaning that hearers are now seen as subjects with the chance to express themselves within their environment. There is an effort towards specifying the answers given to the questions of the hearers of the word, the principle that faith comes from hearing being the underlying one. Generalisation is not the main point, but hearers and implicitly their questions receive more attention.

The quest for the "indigenisation" of the Message of Christ has been strongly influenced by the theology of the Second Vatican Council. Central in the orientation of this Council is the theology of aggiornamento. This implies the renewal of the Christian life in all its ramifications. It also implies a „radical reappraisal of the whole bearing of the Church in the world of the twentieth century."[10]

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[8] Ibid., 507.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid., 508.

In reference to the "indigenisation" process some points are still worthy of mention. The role of the laity in the Church has been redefined as they have moved from the periphery to an important position in the Church. There is not only a theology of the laity now, but the liturgy has also received a theological facelift. Active participation of the faithful and a celebration that can be understood and has meaning for the faithful has been set as goal. Hence liturgy has come to be seen as an avenue through which the faithful demonstrate in their lives the nature of the Church.

An important ecclesiology was proposed by the Council which opened the way towards the "indigenisation" of the Message of Christ within the Church by numerous Christians from their different cultural backgrounds. "By presenting the Church in the model of people of God (Lumen Gentium 9-14), the council has de-emphasized the hierarchical in favour of the pastoral image of the Church."[11]

In these and other relevant documents it is evident that the Council took steps towards a universal „indigenised" church. Here the Church shows she understands her mission in a new light. From the point of cultural orientation the previous integralist evangelisation approach has been replaced by an orientation towards the "indigenisation" of the Message of Christ. It is an orientation that has recognised the fact that the good news is to be preached to the different people in their respective cultural circumstances. This movement of the Church can be seen as a movement from the Tower of Babel to the day of Pentecost – "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear each of us, in our own native language?" (Acts 2:7-8).

For the Church, it is no longer a question of „an Xenolalia, or intelligible speech in a foreign language, rather an issue of glossalalis. It is not an issue of hearing the Message of Christ in a 'foreign language', but the local churches have received the chance of hearing it in their respective languages."[12] Through these steps the universal Church is now present in the particular Church. In the particular there should be room for the development of autochthonous forms of expression of Christian faith.

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

As for the African Christians, these documents, coupled with the Council's declaration on non-Christian religions, has contributed towards a positive re-evangelisation of the African traditional religion and culture (Nostra Aetate 2). These developments are beneficial to the "indigenisation" of the Message of Christ in Africa. The Council was clear on this as it stated that for the faithful the Church „is not tied exclusively or indissolubly to any race or nation, to any one particular way of life, or to any customary practices, ancient or modern."[13] The Message of Christ and the substance of the doctrine of faith are one thing, while the way of presenting them is another.

Principally, the ongoing quest and movement for the "indigenisation" of the Christian faith in Africa can be seen as a theological descendant of the post-conciliar movements. These movements were understood as "frontline" theology and "indigenisation"-pastoral.[14]

Mention has often been made of the "indigenisation" of the Message of Christ in Africa, and there have been several approaches. After this general initial overview of the origin and development of the "indigenisation" movement, attention will now be focused on a more concrete treatment of the different concepts or models of the movement.

3.3 Models of „Indigenisation" of the Message of Christ

Up to this point the concept of „indigenisation" has been general. Basically "indigenisation" has been used as the encounter between the respective cultures which have come in contact with Christian faith and the Christian faith itself, through which the Message of Christ have succeeded in taking root in such cultures. Some examples are found in the Old Testament.

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[13] Gaudium et Spes No. 58.

[14] M. M´nteba, "Die Inculturation in den 'Dritten Kirchen'. Pfingsten Gottes oder Rache der Kulturen".(Aus dem Französischen übersetzt A. Himmelsbach), in: *Concilium* 28 (1992), 94.

The approaches towards "indigenisation" of the Message of Christ in Africa can be classified into two major groups: Adaptation and Inculturation.

3.3.1 Adaptation Approach

This model is often described with such expressions as "accommodation", „christianisation" etc.

> This approach is characterised by processes involving adjustment introduced in a given dominant pattern, structure, or format, the structure itself not being touched. ... These themes chosen for discussion and the way they are organised and presented follow the pattern of Western theology and reflect, with modifications the way traditional Western theological manuals are organized.[15]

As regards African theology, the theologians who choose this approach seem to feel obliged to use the format and procedure of Western theology more or less strictly. This can be seen in their general approach, the way they organise their themes, and their methodology. Examples of this adaptation approach are found in liturgy, where texts are translated into the vernaculars of the different African groups similarly the introduction of indigenous symbols into sacramental rites which retain their original format. Another example is the effort of some African theologians to use African philosophical principles to present Christian doctrine.

The position of the missionaries can be explained as follows. Adaptation consists of taking over the "nonessential" (the African cultural elements), while the "essential" (the Euro-Christian format) is not to be adapted, but simply imported and imposed. It is only an issue of tactics. The transmission of what is really essential – the Message of Christ – is rarely thought about. When a theme is not adaptable, it does not count among the essential truths. Should any of them prove

[15] J. Ukpong. 515.

to be essential in the judgement of the adaptation theologians, it cannot then be adapted, but only be imported.

For the Second Vatican Council

> the Church learned early in its history to express the Christian message in the concepts and language of different peoples and tried to clarify it in the light of the wisdom of their philosophies: it was an attempt to adapt the Gospel to the understanding of all men and the requirement of the learned, insofar as this could be done.[16]

By doing so it became possible to create in every culture the possibility of expressing the Message of Christ in suitable terms and to foster vital contact and exchange between the Church and different cultures.

Adaptation as referred to by the Vatican II shows little difference from the general adaptation approach though it is more positive in reference to African culture. Adaptation as generally used is rather "static" leaving the structure which is to be adapted unchanged. In most cases it applies the adoption of new habits without affecting the people concerned and in this sense, is superficial.

The Second Vatican Council talks of a „dynamic" form of adaptation. Preaching the Christian message takes into account the needs of the situation to which the people adapt themselves. In its "dynamic" adaptation they are changed. For it brings a kind of new way of life. This is not superficial but leads to an inner transformation in the people's way of life.

Looking at the history of the missionary activities in Africa and the practices of adaptation in Africa, the following facts emerge: what was spread was the European understanding of the Message of Christ; there was a destructive contact with African culture; with no exchange between the two sides involved. Where there were signs of exchange, one notices a peripheral or superficial approach. In most cases it was "static" adaptation which encoded Western cultural imperialism.

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[16] Gaudium et Spes No. 44.

Indigenisation "cannot just simply be a matter of a few African patches (as it is done in "static" adaptation) – drums instead of organs, native cloths and designs in the vestments – sewn onto otherwise Roman or Western tunic."[17] Both African and non-African theologians take the position of arbiter over the African culture. Their premise is that conceptual models with which the Christian message can be presented could be found within the African culture. They take it upon themselves to identify such models through a "rigorous criticism" of African culture. They are occupied with identification of themes in African culture which they consider appropriate for transmitting the Christian message. The very important point which causes problems here is that this group assumes that the Christian message as we have it today, already imbedded in Western cultural expression, constitutes no problem. Hence no explicit effort is made to identify the nucleus of the Christian message as imbedded in Western cultural expression. This nucleus is the Message of Christ. They see their job principally as that of "translation" the Christian message not only from but with its Western cultural form into the African cultural setting.[18]

Appraisal of the Adaptation Model

The adaptation approach may be regarded as an effort towards instrumentalisation of a whole culture. African culture is instrumentalised as a didactic medium for the teaching/transmission of an alleged transcultural content. In this functionalisation, African culture is valued only as long as it fulfils the expectations of these adaptation-theologians. It has no value in itself. It does not attract attention because of its pattern of thought, because of its religiosity, its liveliness, or its ability to master the future. Cultural value is only accorded to it to the extent it appears to be compatible with Western theology and culture. It has value only as a "praeparatio evangelii".[19]

The other problem of the adaptation approach is that Africa is seen as static. This approach attempts to treat the Christian message so as to make it compatible with the Africa these theologians have in mind – a

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[17] L. N. Mbefo, *Towards a Mature African Christianity*. (Enugu, Nigeria: Spiritian (sic) Publications, 1989), 21.
[18] J. Ukpong, 515.
[19] H. Rücker, *Afrikanische Theologie. Darstellung und Dialog*. (Innsbruck: Tyrolia Verlag ,1985), 65.

static Africa. None of them, judging from their adaptation approach, sees a dynamic Africa which could actively develop an African Christianity of its own. The logic of the adaptation approach can be recognised in the fact that a static Africa offers a better possibility for overview rather than a dynamic, active, evolutionary or revolutionary Africa.

The "static" adaptation approach to problems can often lead to slumber because it is easier for Christians to avoid problems from which human beings preferably withdraw through religious opiate into the longed-for or accustomed traditional security.

Theologians of this adaptation theology are characterised by a certain fossilisation in the religious sphere, a blissful conservatism, which enjoys and is satisfied with what is given. The problem here is not with their valuing of that which is given, but their insensibility to any prospect of change. Instead of encouraging such changes as are in accordance with the surroundings/circumstances, they prefer to stick adamantly to the old establishment even when such is no longer adequate. To solve new problems, they prescribe antiquated methods. In a sense, they try to put new wine into old wine skins. Such temporary solutions do not often reach or resolve the burning problems of African Christians but methods block new initiatives.

Even in such areas as liturgy, the adaptation already made in the cultic sphere shows a lack of understanding on the part of Western theology when it comes to African religiosity. As A. Shorter puts it, we could

> ... legitimately doubt whether the European missionary ... has any conception of the profundity of the difference between the Western and the African philosophies, and whether, if they realized it, they could accept the validity of the African system. At present no dialogue is possible, not because the African clergy have not understood their manuals of classical theology, but the practitioners of this theology, the missionaries, have given no sign that they consider thought

> patterns and traditional African belief worthy of serious notice, and capable of systematic study.[20]

As a result of this method, the categories of judgement and decision making (for example) in African culture have simply been reduced to means or avenues of unfounded spiritualism and escapism. A logical consequence is a disorientation among or alienation of African Christians from African culture and world. This has led to an identity crisis. In view of this situation it is often asked whether a human being can simultaneously be African and Christian. Can the Africans be Christian only by entirely giving up their culture? Africans, like other human beings, are the creators as well as products of their culture. Culture is an inseparable part of human life no matter where or under what circumstances.

This situation has produced in Africa, among the devout African Christians who believe they can be christian only through denying their being Africa, What Appiah Kubi describes as "Euro-semitic ..."[21] Africans with a divided personality that is neither one nor the other. A vast majority of African Christians live at two levels: "Amphibian-Christians" as it were. A good number today still hold the beliefs of their respective African traditional religions. Traditional Africa still lies very close "beneath the surface of the Church." Though it is not vocal, it has a strong influence.

The adaptation approach represents a new pedagogical coating on the old western or Semitic doctrines. It is a one-way movement which leads to a Westernisation of the Africans. This goal is a result of the fact that the adaptation approach simply takes over the European thought patterns. Any experiment is always judged according to Western theological standards, which assume consciously or unconsciously the role of judges of a "universal" hermeneutic. Though the stand of these theologians presupposes the existence of a "universal" category, since there is a clear lack of communication between a good number of them and the African culture this has in reality led to a syncretism which comes up necessarily when one side – generally the European considers itself as the absolute standard of judgement. Here it is often assumed that what applies to this particular

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[20] Ibid., 71.
[21] Ibid., 30.

side is "universalisable". This proves its inability or lack of readiness to participate in a dialogue with the other.[22]

The adaptation theory/approach is not completely devoid of positive aspects for it is a step towards finding a way in which the Message of Christ can take root in African culture. Adaptation in the sense of "dynamic" adaptation (as was explained earlier) is an essential part of the Message of Christ taking root in any culture, including African culture. Judging from the deficiencies of this approach, it has become clear that it cannot offer adequate answers to the theological questions of the Africans. This is all the more clear today since Africans have been developing a new self-consciousness with no room for movements that are not ready to cherish and support the development of this new African self-consciousness and identity.

In sum the adaptation approach is confronted with many problems as sort of neo-missionary paternalism, which tries to use the growing African consciousness to its own advantage, trying to coat Euro-Christendom with an "African" colour.

3.3.2 Inculturation Approach

This second type of approach towards the indigenisation of the Christian faith in Africa appears under several other names describe its central point: "acculturation", "incarnation" , "Africanisation", "inculturation", "enculturation", "transculturation". It seems reasonable to give each of these concepts a detailed treatment, but all reflect the observation and thematisation of the problem of faith and culture since the 1970s. The concept of inculturation indicates a new construction in contrast to the socio-psychological concept of enculturation and the ethnological concept of acculturation.

"Inculturation" was first introduced into the church-theological vocabulary at the 32nd. General Conference of the Jesuits in Rome and the subsequent petition to the Synod of Bishops in 1977. In all its usages the concept "inculturation" stands for the penetration and taking root of the Christian message and the springing up of a Christian life in a way that accepts the uniqueness of the particular culture. The Christian message helps this culture to continue

[22] Ibid., 69ff.

developing and hence also helps the people, who as Christians are living this particular culture. The Christian message should make it possible for them to live in the particular culture without developing cultural schizophrenia and to express their faith in forms familiar and indigenous to them.[23]

The term "inculturation" is in a way new. Opinions vary as to what is meant to be understood as "inculturation". H. de Lubac posed the question thus: does inculturation mean an ecclesial Copernican revolution or is it a rediscovery and renewal of what St. Augustine termed "Christian solecisms"?[24] There are principally two main tendencies.

For the first of these two main tendencies, inculturation has nothing to do with ecclesial "Copernican revolution." The concept only represents what is already known and has been practised in the Church. That which may be considered new is the keen interest in and affirmation of the cultural idiosyncrasies and the ever increasing attention of the pastoral ministers and theologians to anything that concerns the incarnation of the Church in various cultures.

The above view notwithstanding, it is maintained that inculturation points to a revolution in the Church. The novelty of this revolution may be seen in the fact that the "new Christianity" has made its own those activities and traditions, which were there at the beginning of Christianity but were not adequately considered by Christians. In such a way these have become the church's true work and authentic expression of evangelisation and its own existence as a church. Hence inculturation stands for a complex procedure which is very far away from a superficial "indigenisation" and equally far from just a naked imitative acceptance of forms of Christianity that have already existed somewhere. Inculturation implies a "re-entrance" of Christianity through the young churches and also a change of the present point of reference.[25]

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[23] K. Hilpert, „Inkulturation. Anspruch und Legimitation einer theologischen Kategorie." in: *Der eine Gott in vielen Kulturen. Inkulturation und christliche Gottesvorstellung*. Hg. K Hilpert and K. H. Ohlig, (Zürich: Benzinger, 1993), 16ff.
[24] Quoted in M. M´nteba, 93.
[25] M. M´nteba, 93.

Inculturation is ancient as well as modern. These two aspects of inculturation are explained with examples in the following pages. It is evident that this practice of inculturation is not completely new to the Church, though some of its elements are new. Hence the views above which maintain that inculturation is both ancient and modern do not contradict one another. For both indicate that inculturation is a move towards encounter between faith and culture. Is also entails the assimilation of the Christian faith in the various cultures. The views presented agree with one another in seeing inculturation as a dialectical process of taking root of Christianity in the different human cultures and the internal transformation of these cultures through their integration in the Christian faith. In a way they present a picture of Jesus' parable of the kingdom of God as a yeast that a woman takes and mixes in with measures of flour until all of it is leavened (Matt. 13:33).

Inculturation differs from adaptation as regards its goals and methods.[26] This point of difference is very important because it is here that they diverge and constitute models of inculturation.

Inculturation is not, as was already mentioned, in principle new to Christianity. "With regard to inculturation theology, the history of Christianity is full of milestones of inculturation ... The Council of Jerusalem affords us the first example of such milestones ... At Athens Paul carried the cause (sic) of inculturation much further than what was achieved in Jerusalem; ... (Acts 17:16-34)."[27]

Inculturation in the early church continued even as the Christian faith extended into Europe from the Mediterranean region and burgeoned in Europe which in turn mixed with the Christian faith and shaped its expression. On the other hand the Christian message and ideals equally influenced the European culture.

Inculturation as an element of the Christian faith dates as far back as the time of Jesus himself before it left the Jewish culture. At this time the method was more one of challenge and confrontation. Jesus' disposition towards the Jewish messianism, which laid emphasis on an earthly kingdom, is a case in point. He made no compromise with the Pharisees in their external observances and on their attitude of

[26] Ibid.
[27] J. Ukpong, 504.

segregation and discrimination against the "sinners" and the publicans.[28] The history of Christianity shows that the inculturation current ran through a recognisable or consistent practice of the church till its interruption in post-Reformation missionary activity as christian faith became European and reached other parts of the world through the Europeans.

Inculturation is also new. The new aspect of inculturation comes from its methods and goals, and the new dynamic definitions of culture. It is clear that the exigencies of culture and the demands of the gospel are always two sides of the scale. Changes on any side always call for a corresponding adjustment on the other. As regards culture, it must be realised that culture is dynamic and "every culture possesses sets of values and ideals', intangible elements, all which are specific to it and make one culture different from another."[29] This is then a point that contributes something new to inculturation. Such a set of values and ideals found in the various epochs and cultures forms new constellations in inculturation when it comes in contact with christian message.

Still on the subject of culture, the last century witnessed the introduction of a pluralistic concept of culture in contrast to the classicist monolithic concept. Culture then was defined more in terms of the differences in lieu of presenting one society as a paradigm. In other words, there has been a move from an "idealistic-inductive" definition to an "enumerative-deductive" definition of culture. The social sciences now look upon societies as "autonomous entities in the process of change." This is in contrast to the early view in which societies were seen as dependent entities that were expected to develop themselves according to a set pattern.[30]

The theological developments must be given attention as a contributing factor in the novelty of inculturation. "The first of these developments is the theological renaissance that had started a brew on the international theological scene early in the present century. … (it came) to the fore in the post-Vatican II period ... Another aspect of this movement is theological pluralism"[31] which is a logical

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., 511.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 507f.

consequence of modern theology with different human situations. This pluralism is obvious by virtue of the plurality of human life experience.

Another development is the theology of the second Vatican Council that there was something really new in inculturation. So, in a sense, it may not be correct to hold that "inculturation ... is a new vision of an old problem ... or a new approach to a solution of an old problem or still a new interpretation of an old solution of the Church and culture encounter."[32] The modern aspect of inculturation can also be seen in the fact that it is a result of the awareness of the need for the modern world and the Church to meet each other in dialogue. It is a movement towards a creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and the different cultures of the world. This is a relationship in which the Christian message not only comes to express itself within a particular culture, but is equally expected to be the normative, animating and unifying principle which transforms and re-creates such a culture. Though it is not proposed that inculturation is so new as to be called an ecclesial Copernican revolution, it may not be fair to present inculturation as just a carbon copy of already formulated answers the only difference being only in how it is newly labelled.

The Concept of Inculturation

One of the central differences between inculturation and adaptation is that where the former was "static" the latter strives for structural changes. Inculturation, among other things reviews and rearranges the „newly received structure" to make it suitable for the structure of the respective indigenous mode of cultural expression. Inculturation shows more dynamism in its way of dealing with cultures.

Inculturation maintains that the word of God, the gospel or the revealed message of God, must adapt itself to different cultures, naturalising among them in the image of the Prologue of St. John's Gospel – "and the Word took flesh and dwelt amongst us" (Joh 1:14) This incarnation approach presupposes the ability of the word of God to be at home in every culture.[33]

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[32] O. A. Onwubiko, 1.
[33] M. M´nteba, 94.

A closer look at what or how the concept of inculturation is to be understood shows that it depends primarily on whether inculturation is seen as an "analytical" category for the description of cultural contacts or as a "normative" idea, meaning a leading idea or a principle for the action of culturally foreign agents. Seen as an "analytic" category for the description of contacts between cultures, inculturation would then occupy itself more with abstract and non-personal aspects of such encounters. It would emphasise the process and result of the continuous encounter between the features of the interacting cultures. This may be viewed as acculturation and has much to do with "static" adaptation.

As a normative idea for the actions of those involved, inculturation is in a position to animate, direct and innovate the particular cultures in questions. It transforms these cultures, entailing more than a simple "static" external or superficial adaptation. This is an intimate "dynamic" transformation of these cultures through their encounter with the Christian message. A close look shows that theological thematisation of inculturation is primarily normative and questions or examines the fundamental orientation of the activities of the Church in relation to the situation whereby there is a growing together to one world with the goal of avoiding cultural colonialism.[34] Inculturation entails, among other things, a creative and lively encounter between the Message of Christ and the respective cultures of the world.

In terms of African inculturation theology, the movement "is characterized by its (anticipated) ability to be creative and pose new questions, and by its (anticipated) general departure from the format of Western theology,"[35] entailing a return to the original sources of Christian expression, i.e. the Bible and tradition. Again it involves a wholesome encounter of African traditional religion and culture with the Christian message as opposed to a mere selection of themes therefrom. This avoids the functionalisation and instrumentalisation of the African culture. African culture is treated as a whole in itself. The encounter is between the African culture and the original sources of Christian faith. African traditional religion is even looked at for insights of orientation and pattern in theologising. African traditional religion, being a way of life rather than a collection of doctrines,

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[34] K. Hilpert. 17.
[35] J. Ukpong, 516.

makes it easier for the African inculturation theology to be more practical-life-oriented in contrast to the cognitive-knowledge-oriented Western theology.

Inculturation can then be understood as a process in which a culture – in this case African culture – standing on its own basic cultural patterns tries to make the gospel its own. That means that this culture has an unprejudiced encounter with the gospel. This approach makes it easier to achieve a real evangelisation, which is an encounter between a particular culture and the gospel.[36] The central task of theologians consists in rethinking and re-expressing the Christian message in terms of the African cultural milieu (and heritage). The task basically involves creating a confrontation between the Christian faith and African culture in such a way that faith enlightens culture and in the process there results the interpretation and integration of both.[37] This means that the basis of revelation as found in scripture and tradition will be critically reflected upon for the purpose of giving the contents of this revelation an African cultural expression. A new theological reflection that is African and Christian will result.

The concept of inculturation as seen above corrects some of the deficiencies of the adaptation approach. The inculturation approach has no element of missionary paternalism. African culture is recognised fully, not only when it has something which, according to the judgement of Western theology, can be fixed into the Western Christianity. It is recognised for its own sake, on its own worth, for its thought patterns, religiosity, liveliness and ability to master the future. It is no longer an issue of ascribing a didactic value to African culture depending on its usefulness as a container of Western theology. The situation is not that of taking over of „nonessential" i.e. African culture while an "essential" Western theology is not adapted but simply imported.

Unlike the adaptation approach which is a one-way theology, the inculturation approach shows much of bilateral orientation in its proposals and leaves much room for exchange between the two sides, hence presupposing transformation on both sides. This approach does

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[36] L. Boff, *Gott kommt früher als der Missionar: Neuevangelisierung für eine Kultur des Lebens und der Freiheit*. (Aus dem Portugiesisch übersetzt von H. Goldstein.) (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 1992) , 27.
[37] Ukpong, 516.

not engender the passivity of the inhabitants of a particular culture. This can be understood from the point of view that inculturation, according to Roest Crollius

> is the integration of the christian experience... into the culture ..., 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 with the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the church universal.[38]

In Crollius' view, some specific elements that make inculturation necessary are highlighted. Inculturation is conceived as an animating, guiding and innovative force or movement within a culture. It is not a one-sided affair, for it is a positive advantage or enrichment of the universal Church. The role of the Message of Christ as "yeast" or catalyst is central here.

Models of Inculturation

Etymologically, the central concept in the word inculturation is – culture. There is a diversity of cultures. This means that general statements about inculturation are usually made only with the application of the abstract notion of culture. At the practical level differences abound between various cultures. Inculturation in our context is a theological enterprise. Theology as the human reflection on God presupposes two aspects – the divine and the human. As for our human reflection on God, we do this from a cultural point of view. Since there is a diversity of cultures, it follows then that there should be diversity of forms of reflection on God.

Inculturation as representing the encounter between a culture and the gospel has of necessity the disposition for a variety of models. This can be traced to the diversity of cultures. Each culture with all its unique characters is bound to have its peculiar encounter with the gospel. Even the same culture can have various encounters with the gospel. This is because culture is a dynamic entity. Hence changes

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[38] R. Crollius quoted in O. A. Onwubiko, 5.

abound in a culture and these changes make it then imperative for a culture to be in a dynamic process of encounter with the gospel.

Another point that shows the obvious presence of models of inculturation is that divine revelation has not been understood fully and finally by human beings. There is an on-going process of understanding the divine revelation. This means the nature of the encounter between the various cultures and the divine revelation as it is contained in the gospel depends also on the degree of the understanding of this divine revelation.

Another reason for the existence of models of inculturation is that the general consensus which characterises the description of inculturation disappears once it comes to the issue of the aims and the methods of inculturation. There is agreement as regards the wish to inculturate the Christian message. This evaporates immediately when discussions arise on the corresponding reflections on and consideration of the different paradigms.

These differences can be explained from the fact that the point of departure on one side (Christianity with all its traditions) and on the other side (the commitment of the individuals in their respective cultural environment to their cultures and life circumstances, especially the commitment to cultural identity) should as a matter of necessity allow for different accents or emphases. These models are testimonies to how strong and persistent such emphases can be. This is even more evident in different cultural groups from almost the same cultural area (e.g. the difference in the African cultures) where Christianity is still relatively new as well as in such cultures where it has been for years.[39] The models of inculturation to be treated here include inculturation as incarnation; conversion; reassimilation; transmission; interaction; process and then as dialogue. In all these models it is obvious that inculturation incorporates various and diverse spheres.

The differences shown by these models point to the fact that these must be differentiated, while the similarities between the models confirm that these spheres treated by inculturation are to some point interrelated. “Nevertheless, in the multiplicity of the approaches ..., the fundamental and always valid principle is that inculturation is the

[39] K. Hilpert, 17.

incarnation of the Christian Message and life in a concrete cultural area, in such a manner that experience not only comes to express itself with the proper elements of the culture in question ..., but that it is converted into the animating, normative and unifying principle which transforms and recreates that culture. Here mention is already made of inculturation as "the incarnation of the Christian Message".[40] Hence this will be the first model of inculturation to be treated.

Inculturation as Incarnation

For the proponents of this model, inculturation is based on the principle of incarnation. The "Word of God" or the gospel or the message of the divine revelation must adapt to the different cultures. It must naturalise in these cultures. St. John's presentation of the incarnation in the prologue of his gospel – "the word took flesh and dwelt amongst us" – is a central picture of this model. "Jesus was born into a culture. He lived that culture and used it to announce His message of salvation ... His mission to culture and through culture is summed up by the fact that He came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to perfect them (Mt 5:17)".[41]

In the Jewish culture the Law and the Prophets are the central pillars. Jesus' actions towards the perfection of these pillars of the Jewish culture and their application are a picture for this model of inculturation expresses the intent of this model. Culture makes it possible for the gospel to incarnate in basic cultural patterns available in the culture. It is a process of acquisition, with all the limitations which incarnation brings along with it.

The proponents of this model believe that it is only within the frame of culture, irrespective of the accompanying limitations, that the gospel will become concrete. The limitations of culture come from its nature as a product of human beings within time and space. As regards its temporal nature, a culture cannot offer everything that is required for the total understanding of the Message of Christ. This message transcends all cultures. It is not one culture alone within a particular space and time that can meet all the demands and challenges of the

[40] O. A. Onwubiko, 4.
[41] Ibid., 72.

Message of Christ. One should think of the whole of human culture. But not even the totality of human culture will be adequate. It is after all, a product of finite human beings. This product, even if it is argued that it encompasses all the facets of human existence, does not suffice. This is because it is then time- and space-bound.

Though God's plan of salvation which is the central content of the Message of Christ is to be lived within time and space, it is still beyond time and space. This plan is "already present" here on earth, still it is "yet to be fully present" i.e. it is yet to be fully actualised in the lives of the human beings. Some parts of this plan extend beyond the present human earthly existence. It is unfolding itself in an on-going process.

In the view of proponents of this model every culture is in a way self-contained or a concrete universal. Each has its own complete system of values and meaning.[42] It must be pointed out the "incarnational terminology" and the analogy being suggested is especially that exact. The notion here is not totally and sufficiently spelt out.

Inculturation as Conversion

This model holds that it is the "christian faith which should be 'inculturated' so that the particular culture in question is transformed through the yeast of the gospel. This culture will be newly given birth to through the Christian faith and tradition. This implies that inculturation presupposes conversion to Christianity.

With reference to Africa, the main statements of Christianity must be transferred into the African milieu and given an African face. The second phase in this process is that of explanation. It foresees a mental and internal purification of the African cultures in the light of revelation. Here is presupposed that Christianity does not destroy cultures. It rather brings the light of revelation to a culture and uncovers the ambiguities and deviations within it.

There are certain assumptions of this model which must be critically examined. Is there the certainty that the implantation of the Christian world of symbols will bring about the synthesis between Christianity

[42] L. Boff, 59.

and the culture concerned and the expected results? Can it be taken as guaranteed that the light of revelation in these cultures (example Western culture) will actually enlighten the cultures in which efforts "to christianise" have been and are still being made? This question is important, for it can be seen that after so many years of encounter with the Christian faith one cannot claim that these already "christianised" can reflect wholesomely and impeccably this light of the revelation. Some of the practices within these cultures often even contradict the Christian law of love. What will it then bring to other cultures like the African ones when they are exposed to such external cultural influences, according to this model, without the strong will to conversion? Which form of Christianity should then be seen by the Africans as the right one, which will receive indigenous expression?[43]

This model raises the impression that divine revelation is only found in a particular form of faith – Christian faith. Without denying the uniqueness of Christian faith, it must be mentioned that talking of the purification of African culture implies a great deal. One of the implications is that African cultures have never had experience of the divine. In considering how the Africans came about their deities and their experience of the divine, it is likely that any explanation will be correct as long as no reference is made to revelation. By talking of "purification" in reference to African culture, one could be implying that African culture is contaminated through and through. But what of an already enlightened and purified culture? This will help us to see what difference there is between such already enlightened and purified cultures and the not-yet-enlightened and still contaminated cultures – in this case, African cultures.

Furthermore, the definition of revelation in this model is something that deserves explanation, because the way it is used here raises many questions. Moreover this way of using the concept of divine revelation creates the impression that there is only one form of divine revelation. The model presents divine revelation as if to say it is only its own understanding of divine revelation that is valid.

Inculturation as Reassimilation

[43] M. M´nteba, 94f.

This model advocates a "creative acceptance" or a "critical reassimilation" of the basics and the works of the founder – Jesus Christ, which Christianity has brought forward. This is in order that the subsequent expression of Christian faith is the result of the synthesis of the existential predicament of the citizens of a culture – Africans – with the power of the gospel and risen Christ.[44]

An eminent African proponent of this model is Eboussi Boulaga. In his view, as long as Christianity is not reassimilated by the Africans from their own concrete situation, it will never be credible and will remain unadapted. He understands this concept of "reassimilation" as the memory of Jesus Christ, and the basics – the institutionalising activities of Christianity. This happens through the construction of a system in Africa's own contexts and languages. He explained the terms "basics" and "original" as that which has always been aided by the Christian experience, that to which it has been making reference – that is, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ here is referred to as the "figure or frame of fulfilled/actualised/accomplished humanness or human nature" which is open to all and valid for every existential predicament. The inculturation effort should, according to E. Boulaga, consist of this continuous striving towards a reassimilation of the event of Jesus Christ by the Christians against the background of the socio-cultural environment.

To be Christian, for E. Boulaga, does not mean principally consent to a credo or a tradition that is presented as a life style. Being Christian means to live the "Christic model" consistently and authentically. This means the power of the resurrection is experienced in one's own being (Sein) and existence (Dasein): one asks oneself how Christianity makes possible the expression of being human in one's own existential predicament. This includes the situation whereby selfish forces and arbitrary tendencies are kept under control and the law of love reigns.[45]

In this "guideline to conversion" which E. Boulaga presented – the transition from the contemplation of Christ's example to its full actualisation – he leaves little or no room for spontaneous enthusiasm for the faith and unconditional yes to the dogmatic statements. His

[44] Ibid., 94.
[45] Ibid. 97.

christology in this "christic model" raises many questions. These include among others: is the Christ of his "christic model" the same as the incarnate word or Jesus Christ of the Christian tradition?[46] For in his christic model, E. Boulaga maintains that Jesus' being first the son of the mother and hence the son of a human being comes before his being son of the father or son of God. Could this not be seen, at least to some extent, as a strong shift of emphasis away from the Godhead or divinity of Jesus? Can it still be maintained that this Jesus of his christic model is the same as the word incarnate and Lord Jesus Christ? Though his christic model has taken into consideration the human existential predicaments, the christology remains a problem.

Inculturation as Transmission

This model presupposes the existence of a piece of genuine Christian faith which remains free or "uncontaminated" by the elements of the cultures with which the Christian message has come in contact since the beginning of the history of the Christian faith. Inculturation means then that this nucleus of the Christian faith, which has grown into the cultures with which the Christian message came into contact, should be filtered out and be brought into the new culture that is encountering the Christian message. The central point is the transmission of the "essential" elements of the Christian message which should have been distilled out through a process of reduction (Reduktionsprozeß).

In this model the "inculturising transfer" should be promoted and actualised by leaving mission and proclamation of the gospel in the hands of the indigenous agents, including indigenous clerics as well as laity. One can also think of other important cultural and traditional personalities – especially corporate ones – in the particular culture. Even when such personalities may not taken active part in the mission, their repertoire of knowledge of the particular culture can be of immense advantage. Regional customs are to be tolerated, but not in lieu of collective ecclesiastically – introduced rites or as substitutes for laid-down defined texts. The respective cultures are reflected in the cathechetics where inculturation is seen as a programme for proclamation, teaching and pastoral ministry. The decisive transforming forces or agents between Christianity and the respective

[46] Ibid.

cultural patterns of life or society are the organised communities of the faithful, their agents, religious message and social practices.[47]

It could be argued that the Christian message has mixed with cultures right from the onset and that a view that still speaks of a "supracultural nucleus" of the Christian message is unrealistic, because the Christian message has undergone several cultural transformation processes. But this should not lead to our ignoring the fact that the "Message of Christ", though found in cultures that have encountered this Message is beyond all cultures. In its encounter with cultures it remains always identifiable in these cultures without being identified with these cultures. This means that the "Message of Christ" can still be extracted from these cultures in which it is identifiable without having to take up these cultures as essential elements of the Christian message.

The concept of transfer as presented by this model neglects the possibility of reception. Proponents of inculturation cannot afford to deny the fact that the Christian message should serve some elements of human culture and varied cultures. The gospel (like salt or yeast) and evangelisation are capable of permeating cultures without having to submit themselves to these cultures. The cultures will be transformed internally through their encounter with the "Message of Christ". Any form of coercion or simple "translation" of the christian message into foreign cultural cloak will be counterproductive.

The identity of the indigenous agents (in case of Africa – Africans) who should promote and actualise this inculturation, as suggested by this model, deserves closer attention. Firstly, it need not be indigenous agents, many of whom are alienated from their own cultures and are even more foreign than foreigners. Some lack adequate knowledge and experience of their very own culture. So being a native of a culture is not everything; some "foreigners" have done really marvellous work in the era of inculturation. The Pentecost incident where the audience asked "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?" (Acts 2:7-8) can be an example of how effectively "foreigner" can get across the "Message of Christ", and not even in the sense of translation. It must equally be said that knowledge and

[47] K. Hilpert, 18.

experience of the culture in question is very important. St. Paul in his missionary activities showed how important this point was and how fruitful it could be when used effectively. Paul rightly at Athens identified the unknown God of the Athenians with the true God whom he preached? Additionally Paul preached to the Athenians in philosophical terms they understood (Acts 17:16-34).

Another important point is the question of what theory or theology of mission is in play. As is evident, the theology of this model is very close to that of the adaptation model. Other cultures are just instrumentalised, functionalised and their cultural values are recognised as only "praeparatio evangelii". The suggestion of the active role of indigenous agents seems to have a central function, but it appears that they have only to continue the old practices of the foreign agents, who were confronted with opposition from the indigenous population. How else could the picture presented by the concept of "transfer" or "transmission" be understood? All is but a one way movement with little or no room for a real encounter between the various cultures and the "nucleus" of the Christian message. The indigenous elements would then serve only as conduit for the contents of the one-directional movement.

Inculturation as Interaction

In as much as this model tries to avoid the mistakes of the „inculturation as transmission"- model, the two are very close to one another. It contrasts with the immediately previous one which emphasized the transcription of traditional content by stressing primarily the mode of operation. The process of inculturation should take place in such a way that the identity of the culture in which Christianity is being implanted is not adversely affected. This demands a great amount of openness and readiness to endure or tolerate not only ambiguities but also contrasts. Equally important is the ability to carry out the necessary and meaningful reformations. The responsibility of the local or central church authorities to preserve unity and their readiness to intervene where it is felt that this unity is threatened has to be exercised now with due and adequate consideration of the needs of the indigenous peoples. Emphasis is now shifted from the idea of transfer of symbols, rites and texts, as represented by the immediately previous model, to the guiding

principle of interaction between the Christian message and the new culture which it is encountering. It is foreseen that something new will emerge through the dynamic interaction.

The locus of this interaction is an indigenous theology. It is indispensable for its authenticity to see that it is neither cut off from its cultural context nor forfeit the traditional theology of Christianity in this institutional regulation and in its nearness to the majority of the population. In a sense this model has to strive for balance between the needs of the local church existing in a particular culture and the traditional theology of the Christian faith as approved and taught by the official Church. The goals of inculturation as interaction can be seen in the different versions of liberation theology. The salvation aspects of the Christian message are interpreted from the background of the collective experience of injustice, oppression, discrimination and the necessity for structural reforms even in the church.

A weak point of this model is the reliance on a theoretical instrument for its analysis of the society. This makes it susceptible to attacks. This theoretical instrument can be found neither in the traditional theology nor in the indigenous culture. Furthermore, the openness for new cultural contexts can hardly withstand an adulteration by or mobilisation through ideologies, fundamentalist movements or regressive interests.[48] Irrespective of its efforts to avoid some of the deficits of the transmission model, this model still has deficits due to their similarities.

Inculturation as Process

This model does not consider inculturation as a fixed or rigid method or a goal or aim to be striven for. Inculturation is seen rather as a process that takes place on many different levels. Different degrees of intensity can exist simultaneously. Basically, this processual model includes the other models as stages, while the others have some aspects of this model.

The first stage in this processual model is giving the life and faith of the Christian community expression in the language and usual forms of the culture of the community. This is characterised by self-

[48] Ibid., 19f.

consciousness and a reflection of one's own cultural tradition removed from European elements. It continues until the doctrines taught and its experience begins to develop its own dynamisms in form of conflicts, regeneration, or innovation in the culture. The teachings and experiences begin to put impressive emphasis on the culture or to receive impulses from it so that something new originates.

The third stage comes when the church or ecclesial practical and theological thought and reflection covered with the socio-cultural and political reality in such a way that a new form of christian life and thought succeeds in understanding and asserting itself as an extension and enrichment of the whole church. At this stage a bilateral penetration or interpenetration occurs.

From this it is clear that inculturation is neither a step by step occurrence nor an isolated procedure, but presupposing it is not be hindered or disturbed it is a process that continues indefinitely, everywhere that the church meets a new cultural development. Through the introduction of stages, one can examine the extent of the development, which helps to avoid frustration and hopelessness should the anticipated success not come as quickly as expected.

All these notwithstanding, one of the problems of this model lies in the fact that it is not clearly demonstrated whether the process of qualitative intensification continues automatically or needs some direction and if so how far can this extrinsic force go and should it come – from outside i.e. universal church, or from the self developing local church? The question of whether the past inculturation practices of the church can serve as a model has to be answered. In some of the cultures where this model could be realised as in Asia and Africa, a christian is confronted with cultures intrinsically interwoven with the religion of the people, unlike the Western thought system where the separation between culture and religion is clearer and easily made.[49] This means that the agents in this process are very important to direct and articulate the process. Whether they should be external foreign agents or indigenous ones has to be defined.

[49] Ibid., 20f.

Chapter Four

Inculturation as Dialogue with the Message of Christ

4.1 Introduction

In almost all the models of inculturation presented above an element of dialogue can be found, in some more evident than in the others. In some it is presupposed, but ends up in anything but dialogue. In this work, inculturation as dialogue is chosen as the appropriate model of inculturation. This model addresses itself to the issue of inculturation like any other. Its main point of emphasis is to show that the active and fully-fledged participation of those who are concerned is the way through which the noble objectives of the inculturation movement can be achieved.

The concept of inculturation indicates the following: that which is to be inculturated, that into which it is to be inculturated, and in the case of Africa in relation to the official church that into which has been and is still being inculturated. That which is to be inculturated is the „Message of Christ", that into which it is to be inculturate is the African culture, while that which has been and still is being inculturated is the official church.

In explanation of the later concept, in referring to the official Church we mean the history and tradition of the Church, both of which testify to the fact that inculturation is not new to the Church. Hence we refer to the expression "Christian message" as being the result of the several inculturations between the gospel and the various cultures it

encountered before it came to Africa in the package of these cultural elements. We need to recall such central points as the encounter with Jewish culture, Roman, Greek and later European cultures. In the encounter with the gospel all these together constitute the bulk of what is referred to as the Christian message or tradition.

A conscious demarcation is made between the use of the two terms: "Message of Christ" and "Christian message". The former refers to the message of salvation as brought personally by Jesus Christ and revealed by, through and in his person, life, works and actions, death and resurrection. The later concept is used to mean the result of the encounter between the "Message of Christ" and the respective cultures it met before being introduced into Africa. This is found in the body of what we know today as the church's tradition.

There are three main parties in the dialogue as foreseen by this model the Message of Christ, the Africans and their cultures, and the official church. Africa has a special assignment in this dialogue. Firstly, her position is that of the party who has to talk with the two other parties, but no matter with which partner, the dialogue must have a "di-logical" essence.

The "di-logical essence of the dialogue is constituted differently depending on which partner Africa is talking with. As regards the official church – "that into which has been and is still being inculturated" two kinds of logic are involved one is the "logic of tradition" that is of the official church based on her age-long experience. The other is the logic of the African culture as a culture that has had experience of the divine in its own way. Thus it can be described as the logic of culture with its own experience of the inculturation of the divine message or revelation. Between the two – the Church and Africa – there exists the opportunity for encounter in the form of "a di-logical dialogue" at the horizontal level. Both are human parties with their respective experiences of the divine.

This facet of the dialogue between Africa and the "Message of Christ" also has its „di-logical" characteristics. These are founded in the fact that here we have a difference between "that into which is to be inculturated" and "that which is to be inculturated." The "Christo-divine" logic which is to come in contact or encounter with the "Afro-divine" logic consists of the divine logic as manifested in Christ as one aspect of the uniqueness of the event of Christ. It is the divine

logic which from the beginning has always posed problems for all the people or races who had the privilege of engaging it. The Old Testament history starting from Abraham, who could not understand the divine logic behind God promising an elderly childless man that he is going to be the father of a nation is full of examples. The same logic revealed to Mary a virgin; that she would conceive without knowing a man and bear the child, Emmanuel.

The Christo-divine logic is the logic which the letter to the Hebrews presented in Chapter 1 Verse 1-5. It is the logic of the Incarnation – the divine becoming human. This is the logic that formed the basis of the life and actions of Jesus Christ. It can be seen as that which Jesus often referred to as the "will of the Father." This logic could not easily be understood by the people around Jesus, even his very own disciples. It still runs through the life of the Christians and Christian community.

This logic has always been and will remain a challenge to all confronted with it. Of this logic St. Paul said "the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ... Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the World did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness or our proclamation, to save those who believe." (1 Corinthians 1:18-21). After this general presentation of divine logic, St. Paul approached the "Christo-divine" logic thus; "For Jews demand sings and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength." (1 Corinthians 1:22-25). It is this logic that can explain many things about the truth of the Message of Christ.

In this di-logical facet, Africa is not bereft of experience of the divine logic. Its experience of divine logic and its encounter with "Christo-divine" logic could aptly be presented by the passage from the letter to the Hebrews; "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by the son ..." (Heb. 1:1-2). The Afro-divine logic is the result of the Africa's encounter with the divine. Here the missionary activities can be seen

as one of the means through which God has tried to speak to Africa. In inculturation one can see the chance for Africa to be spoken to by the Son himself as part of its "di-logical" nature. This involvement of Africans and the Message of Christ has a horizontal-vertical dimension i. e. human as horizontal and the divine as vertical.

The emphasis on the "Message of Christ" is raising the impression that this message exists outside a culture in the form of a cultureless abstraction which can easily be inculturated and generates other problems. Emphasis on the "Message of Christ" is often criticised because it stresses the separation of the gospel from its cultural backgrounds. Critics ask if it is possible to separate or distil out the Message of Christ from the Mediterranean and Western cultural influences that have affected it. Is it still possible to stand outside the dogmas and doctrine, after almost two thousand years and get at the "Semitic original" version of the message? To some critics this is like peeling an onion and never finding the core.[1]

As interesting as this idea may appear, one has to ask if it is at all right to compare the Christian faith with an onion that has no core. A pertinent question here is, what role do these critics assign Jesus Christ in this onion-metaphor? This question is posed because it is clear that Jesus Christ is the nucleus or in the language of botany, the core. The incident of incarnation demonstrates vividly that Jesus is a concrete person: His being, His activities and everything about Him is the nucleus or the seed of Christian faith. He Himself is the Good News – the Message. Hence the "Message of Christ" of which we talk is identical with Jesus himself.

Paradoxically, the onion-metaphor does not reflect the fact that not every fruit is like an onion and Jesus` own comparisons of himself have many botanical symbolic references such as the vine or the sower i.e. referring to the "seeds". His comparison with mustard seed is equally vivid.

The difference between the onion-metaphor and the history of Christianity in its doctrinal development is like the (ontological) difference between the growth of a plant and the body or Church, which understands itself as "Corpus mysticum". Hence the onion-metaphor reflects aptly the way in which Christianity built itself up,

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[1] M. M´nteba, 100.

through the deposition and superimposition of successive layers of traditions, which means through continuous "inculturation".[2]

This metaphor may not have been an objection here. Jesus Christ and the Message of Christ have always been identified in cultures with which they have come in contact, but they have never identified with such cultures in relation to which they have always remained as correctives. The "... to you it was said, but I say to you" statements of the Sermon on the Mount serve as an example. The truth of incarnation is a clear example of how this relationship is to be understood: Christ is truly human and equally truly divine; his divine and human natures are not separated, yet not mixed. Hence the onion metaphor cannot hold for Christ as the core of the Christian faith which is based on the Message of Christ as embeded in and by Christ himself.

The fact is that although the Message of Christ cannot be lived outside a cultural form of expression, it still does not identify itself with cultures, but rather identifies itself in cultures. This is the case be it the Semitic cultural world of Jesus, that of Hellenism or the first century of Christianity, the Graeco-Roman and the Germanic epochs.[3]

In Christianity, it is evident that historical currents were distinguished by the role of Message of Christ as that which did not identify itself with, but only in, a culture. It stood often as a challenge to the elements of the several cultural milieus. "Jesus challenged Jewish messianism (for example), which laid emphasis on an earthly kingdom; would he make any compromise with the Pharisees on an earthly kingdom. He made no compromise with the Pharisees in their external observances and on their attitude of segregation and discrimination against the sinners and the publicans."[4]

Furthermore, the same trend continued long after the time of Christ. The disciples who were direct witnesses continued it. But it did not stop with them, for

> as Christianity moved from the Mediterranean region to Europe and flourished there for so many

[2] Ibid.
[3] L. Boff, 52.
[4] J. Ukpong, 504.

> centuries, European culture in no small measure shaped Christian expression and Christian ideals and in turn influenced European mentality outlook and culture. ... When Christianity reached Europe, it set up a stiff opposition to paganism. This was a testimony to and an expression of its capacity to challenge the cultural milieu.[5]

All these incidents show how wrong it is to describe the image with the onion-metaphor, whereby the Message of Christ is seen as having identified itself with the earlier culture which it encountered, leaving the impression that the only possibility left for inculturation is to take up everything – the content and container. It cannot be, for the Message of Christ is beyond every culture and epoch and could be inculturated without one necessarily taking the earlier cultures. It is not culture and time bound; it identifies itself in cultures and epochs, but not with any of them.

4.2 Africa's Partners in Inculturation as Dialogue

4.2.1 Africa in Dialogue with itself

It is only a human being who can say "I" to him/herself, that can say "You" to the other. Dialogue with oneself is an important prerequisite for dialogue with others. In a sense, dialogue presupposes self-knowledge. This self-knowledge is necessary for it leads to a self-image, which dare not be conceited, inflated or deflated.

Africa needs to know herself in order to engage in a meaningful dialogue with partners in the process of inculturation. This is an honest self appraisal that will help Africans know who they really are not who they think they are or wish to be, or who they are told that they are. This knowledge should be coupled with an acceptance of who they are. Africans must then develop the courage to be who they are. This courage implies the courage both to be a part of the larger Christian and world community and to stand alone as Africans. In a sense, it is the courage to be which is rooted in the true African self,

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[5] Ibid., 504f.

which will appear when the false African self has disappeared as a result of an honest and critical self-appraisal.

The above step is imperative. "When we talk about 'We Africans' we must be clear about who the subjects are. Contemporary Africans are in many ways different from their pre-colonial ancestors. Our experience of slavery, colonialism and missionary activity both Christian and Moslem in many ways have made us Africans in a different key. Those influences have affected such transformations in our self-understanding and life-style ... Our exposure to other influences have (sic) made of us cultural hybrids."[6] The Africans of today are the result of different cultural heritages. An effective dialogue will be easier if Africans can handle these heritages with openness, objectivity, maturity and creativity.

The African Christians have not yet succeeded in being critical enough of themselves. The idea of inculturation shows, among other things, that a part of the movement is the culture into which the Message of Christ is to inculturate; this ground must be thoroughly examined. There are questions calling for answers which can be provided only through Africa's honest and critical self-appraisal.[7]

Another aspect of this need of self knowledge is that it will help Africa know what she really needs and wants. The episode of the blind man in Jericho (Luke 18:31-43) is a good example for Africa. The blind man knew himself and also knew what he was lacking. That is why he reacted as he heard that it was Jesus Christ who was passing by. In relation to his predicament he knew that Jesus was the only person who could give him what he needed; he could distinguish between his needs and wants. Ordinary people took care of his wants through almsgiving. As he saw the chance of fulfilling his need for sight, he showed courage in accepting being blind. Hence, when others sternly ordered him to be quiet, he shouted even more loudly. Through his self-knowledge, this blind man was courageous to be a part of a larger whole. But based on this knowledge, he showed also the courage to stand alone – as blind. When Jesus asked him, "what do

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[6] L. N. Mbefo, 24f.
[7] K.J.K. Tossou, „*Chance und Schwierigkeiten der Inkulturation in Afrika*." in: Theologisch-Praktische Quartalschrift 139 (1991), 51ff.

you want me to do for you" (Luke 18:41) he was able to give a suitable answer.

It is then only through self-knowledge and the courage to be African, that Africa can encounter the Message of Christ. Without this self-knowledge Africa will end up behaving like the cripple in John 5:2-9, who, when asked by Jesus, in their encounter, if he wanted to be well, missed the point. The cripple just started complaining of what others did to him saying, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me."[8]

4.2.2 Africa in dialogue with the Official Church

This is a second important partner for Africa in its efforts towards inculturation. Opinions are usually divided as to the role the "Western" church should play in Africa's move towards inculturation. For most of those who see inculturation as the "Africanisation" of the Christian message the church has little or on role to play. This is because the group argues for an independent African Christianity. Some of the arguments against the church include the co-operation of the missionaries with the colonialists.

On the other hand, those who support the onion-metaphor and similar views believe the church is the only partner with whom Africa has to engage in the dialogue – inculturation. They do not see a difference between the Christian message as presented by the church and the Message of Christ.

Africa should get into dialogue with the church. The church is a partner on the basis of her role as "That into which has been and is still being inculturated." This dialogue should run on the horizontal level. The importance of this encounter is that it will help to correct the mistakes of the past where no chance was given to Africa to present itself. Monologue was then the order of the day. It should become dialogue, for this is the only possibility for a real encounter between Africa and the church.

The church as "that into which has been inculturated" has experience with inculturation. One can talk of „experience with inculturation"

[8] John's Gospel 5:7.

because the long history and tradition of the church are products of the encounter between the Message of Christ and different cultures. This notwithstanding, dialogue is the encounter with the Message of Christ. The Church can help Africa in this encounter. But the mere possession of a long tradition dare not stand as justification for trying to subject Africa to the perpetual tutelage of the Western church.

Other groups have had their own experience of the encounter with the Message of Christ. Europe and the rest of the Western world had and are still making their own experiences without having to be subjected to the perpetual cultural domination of the earlier Mediterranean cultures.

Africa cannot afford to do without this dialogue. What presently is being practised and defended as the true Christian faith is strongly (if not totally) coloured by Western cultures. The history of the perennial experience of the church with the Message of Christ is a valuable treasure. Only in an atmosphere of dialogue can the church profit fully, not only from the richness of African culture, but also from Africa's own experience of the encounter with the Message of Christ in a process of inculturation.

In order to be understood as the people of God, the Church has got to enter into real dialogue, not only with Africa, but with other cultures. She has to come to dialogue as to equal partner. The equality here is principally distributive. It is a chance for the Church to prove that she is the church not only of power hierarchies, but of the people of God. Tradition is a valuable treasure, but the church should not forget that her tradition and history also have negative sides. The victims of her tradition and history, e.g. Africans, may be forced to go on the defensive as some have done and are doing if there is no sign of a humble and honest dialogue between the Church and Africa. This is all the more necessary at this moment when Africa is moving towards inculturation of the Message of Christ. In such a situation, tradition might turn out to be the dead faith of the living, instead of being the living faith of the dead.

4.2.3 Africa in Dialogue with Christ

The centrepiece of inculturation in Africa is the Message of Christ as found in Jesus it is this "which is to be inculturated." Christ is the speaker in this dialogue; in a sense He is the content of what is being addressed because His message is Himself; He addresses this message through different possible organs at times He Himself constituting an avenue to different peoples at different times.

This aspect of dialogue has the vertical-horizontal characteristic as a dialogue between God and human begins. It is between unequal partners. In our attempt to analyse this dialogue, it becomes evident that "the Word" is the essence of this venture in dialogue; in this case Jesus Christ is "the Word".

The word is not just a tool which makes dialogue possible; more is entailed. Within the word – Jesus Christ – there are many dimensions including message, reflection and action. As true words are not simultaneously praxis, dialogue with Christ transforms the addressee. Africa must enter into dialogue with Jesus Christ and encounter his Message. Dialogue of this nature is an existential necessity.

The question to be posed here is how can Africa come to the Message of Christ? The answer lies in the New Testament. "In all respects the New Testament is the document wherein there appears the picture of Jesus as the Christ in its original and basic form. All other documents, from the Apostolic Fathers to the writings of the present-day theologians are dependent upon this original document."[9] However as many and different books and epochs make up the New Testament, the answer can still be found here and the various authors have different approaches while treating the same theme, the New Testament may not be the first place where Africa should try to encounter the Message of Christ.

It dare not be forgotten that "in itself the New Testament is an integral part of the event which it documents, it presents the receptive side of that event and provides, as such, a witness to its factual side ..., one

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[9] P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Existence and the Christ*. Vol. 2. (Chicago: SCM Press Ltd., 1978), 117.

can say the New Testament as a whole is the basic document of the event upon which the Christian faith rests."[10] The many differences evident in the New Testament testify to the different forms of encounter which these respective groups had with the Message of Christ. This bears witness to the possibility of unity without uniformity as regards the inculturation of the Message of Christ. In the diversity of the encounter with, and the experience of the Message of Christ, the New Testament indicates unity in the agreement of its books with the assertion that Jesus is the Christ.

In a sense, African history, tradition, culture and religion can be taken as the "African Old Testament." Inculturation as dialogue, if successfully actualised, will lead to what we call the "African New Testament." The other experiences of Africa could be seen as God speaking to the Africans through their ancestors and in many ways through the "prophets" (i.e. missionaries, the official Church). Inculturation as dialogue with Christ can then be seen as the coming of time in which God –will now speak to Africans through his son Jesus Christ.

Through inculturation as dialogue one can anticipate the coming of the "African New Testament". Human existence in general has never been silent, but has always been nourished by true words exchanged in real dialogue. Human beings transform their world through dialogue, for to exist in a human way, is to name the world and to change it.[11]

In the life of Christians Christ is the true Word which is not the privileged possession of some few people or particular culture. Every human being has the chance of transforming his/her world through dialogue in which an encounter with this true word – Jesus Christ, which dialogue is an existential necessity for every Christian. Because of this, everybody should be supported in receiving the chance of having this experience; none should try to have the experience on behalf of the others. Those who have been deprived of their primordial right to engage in this dialogue, should work to get it, make continuous use of it and strive to prevent situations of its deprivation.

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[10] Ibid.
[11] P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Translated by M Bergmann Ramos). (England: Penguin Books, 1972), 60f.

Africans can be assured of Christ as their partner in dialogue. History has proved the reliability of this partner. God is a God of love and is love himself and from his essence as love God has already fulfilled a necessary condition for dialogue. "Dialogue cannot exist ... in the absence of a profound love for the world and for men. The naming of the World, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself ... love is an act of courage ... love is a commitment --- And this commitment, because it is loving, is dialogical."[12]

We need only recall that the world was created out of love which now characterises God's relationship with the world: the whole of the Old Testament is filled with evidence of God's love. This same love is presented by St. John in his first epistle: "God's love was revealed among us in this way that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him." (1 John 4:9). God is the source of love which must be seen as God's initiative.

Africa needs to be humble in her dialogue with Christ. As inculturation cannot be an act of arrogance. Without humility Africa cannot be a partner in the encounter with the Message of Christ. The "Christ-divine" logic which we mentioned earlier as a part of the "di-logic" of this dialogue presents Africa with challenges.

4.3 Justification of Inculturation as Dialogue

4.3.1 The Factor of Biblical History

All engaged with the issue of inculturation, agree on its need but this consensus closes once it comes to the issue of the goals and methods of inculturation. Hence the different models of inculturation.

In Africa the issue of inculturation has developed into a central and urgent challenge for the local churches in Africa, becoming even a question of survival for them. It could be maintained that the future of the church in Africa is at stake.

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[12] Ibid., 62.

From the previous chapter, it is clear that the activities of the missionaries in Africa were anything but dialogical: there has been no dialogue between the Message of Christ and the African culture. This lack of dialogue is a central cause of the problems of the Christianity in Africa. Basically, religion is one of the greatest cultural achievements of the human race. Throughout the ages, human beings have always found answers, even to the most complex questions of life. Every culture produces its own religion i.e. produces answers to the questions of human beings in this culture. Such questions are questions about meaning in and of human existence, etc.[13]

Culture is the sum total of the answers given to the questions of life. Religiously, cultures are the answers which human beings give to the questions of life based mainly on their community. Religions are reactions to the "initial-action" of God, ways of receiving the divine self-revelation on the part of the particular group in question. They are channels through which God communicates His revelation to humanity in different times, places and cultural milieu.[14]

The biblical account of the history of salvation as experienced by the Jews confirms this. It shows in a very vivid way that dialogue is an essential form of the divine self-revelation. The whole of the Old Testament is filled with incidents of a real dialogical encounter between God and his people. The individuals who were actively involved in this dialogue – Abraham, Moses, Jacob, the prophets etc. – were living testimonies of such encounters. They were always aware of who they were; they could ask their partner to present himself; they showed all their reactions, even doubts; and they asked questions to which they got answers.

The same trend continued in the New Testament. Jesus Christ was in constant dialogue with Jewish culture. His was a personal existential dialogue with a people, their culture, religion and entire life. He was identified in the Jewish culture without identifying himself with that culture. He encountered the people at their respective levels and in their respective situations. Doubt was not excluded in this version of dialogue; even among his disciples he tolerated all the facets of dialogue. They asked and were asked questions; gave and were given

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[13] L. Boff, 41.
[14] Ibid., 41f.

answers. He rebuked and at times (e.g. from Peter) was rebuked, was asked critical questions. Even to the last moment the principle of dialogue characterised his life and encounter with the people.

This tradition of dialogue was continued by Christ's disciples. The history of Christianity in their time is filled with examples. The early Church in Jerusalem and the Christian community were all organised on this basis and practised dialogue not only among themselves, but also with other peoples. "The council of Jerusalem affords us the actual regulation arrived at the Council (Acts 15) as the basic attitude of the apostles in approaching their first problem of inculturation of Christianity."[15] The attitude of the apostles was that of understanding and dialogue and accompanied all their activities in spreading the Gospel.

Paul was always ready to enter into dialogue with the different groups to whom he preached, be it in Athens where he not only identified their unknown God with the true God, but also preached to them in philosophical terms (Acts 17:16-34), or in Antioch in Pisidia, where he did not hesitate to tell the Jews that by their hard-heartedness they had forfeited their right to be favoured (Acts 13:46-47).

4.3.2 The Factor of Early Church History

This practice of dialogue with the indigenous culture continued with the missionary practice in the early Church. It went on from the Acts of the Apostles through the Didache and even continued through the first great mission of the church into the outer reaches of the then Roman Empire. "The adoption of the Koine Greek as a medium of evangelisation is based on the principles of inculturation.... The relation between the Church and Gentile culture became an issue when the church entered the Roman Empire. She embraced the imperial culture, absorbing its symbols of authority, language, institutions, legal systems and military terminologies."[16]

The tradition of dialogue went on as Christianity entered other European cultural territories. The church used the same method with the English, Irish, the German, the Slavs and those barbarians who

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[15] J. Ukpong, 504.
[16] O. A. Onwubiko, 75.

now constitute Christian Europe, though this tradition was no longer practised in the Post-Reformation missionary era. The European Christian missionaries who began work in non-European areas either forgot or discarded the very principle of their own evangelisation.

4.3.3 The Vatican II – Inculturation as Dialogue

Vatican II gave inculturation and its authentic realisation a new impetus through its strong emphasis in its different documents, testifying to the old tradition of dialogue as a means of inculturation. "The church learned early in its history to express the Christian message in the concepts and language of different peoples and philosophers."[17] It set dialogue between all peoples as a central goal of the Church. In its approach to non-Christians, it emphasised inculturation declaring, "in virtue of its mission to enlighten the whole world with the message of the Gospel and gather together in one Spirit all men of very nation, race and culture, the church shows itself sincere dialogue and strengthens it: ... it is our hope that frank dialogue will spur us all on to receive the impulses of the Spirit with fidelity and act upon them with alacrity."[18]

In its "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" dialogue is central. In this document "On Dialogue with Unbelievers" it recognises willingness to engage in dialogue (also with unbelievers) is seen as the measure and the strength of the general renewal being carried out in the church. The document goes into details treating dialogue as a method of evangelisation, outlining the essential conditions of these forms of dialogue and the norms they imply. Dialogue is seen as an implicit proclamation of the Gospel.[19] "The Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et spes" discusses dialogue with the world as such. What is immediately in question here is not the preaching of the Gospel. But rather the dialogue which Christians wish to establish with men who do not share their faith, in order either to search together for the truth in different areas, or to solve the more urgent problems of our day by social action.[20] Here dialogue does not

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[17] *Gaudium et Spes* No 44.
[18] Ibid., No. 92.
[19] *Gaudium et Spes* No. 65.
[20] "On Dialogue with the Unbelievers: Humanae Personae Dignitatem." in: *Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Ed. A. Flannery. (England:

necessarily have an apostolic purpose, but it entails bearing witness to one's own belief as part of the proclamation of the gospel by church. This does not weaken the document as an example for inculturation as dialogue, especially African inculturation.

4.3.4 The Factor of Different Points of Arguments

The Church is no longer „European", but is developing into a global church. Only one-third of Catholics live in Europe. The former mission areas have now developed into local churches, of which one effect is the development of a plurality of forms of the Christian way of life and thought. The Church shows she has realised that the gospel cannot be tied to one particular political, economic, social or cultural system as today efforts are being made officially by the Church to enter into dialogue with other religions and cultures, missionary activities should be understood as dialogical ventures.[21]

Differently, inculturation as dialogue with non-Christians lies in making understandable something different from what others already know, namely, the Message of Christ. As they will be making a "dialogical" experience of the Message of Christ from the beginning "superficially" converting it is easy and yet not quite easy. It is easy for they have already an experience of the Christian message. This experience is valuable even though it may not have been a "dialogical" experience of the Message of Christ. On the other hand, the difficulty consists in the fact that these "superficially" converted Christians must examine their present experience of Christianity in order to enable them to deepen their Christian faith. Where this entails taking fundamental decisions they will need support to develop a deep conviction of, and faith in, the Message of Christ. Effort will be made not only towards correcting what may prove to be wrong in their disposition towards the Christian faith but towards enriching their experience of Christian faith through inculturation as dialogue with the Message of Christ. The African situation, among other things, the syncretic religious life of many African Christians, makes inculturation of the Message of Christ very important and urgent and

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Fowler Wright Book Ltd., 1975), 1002.

[21] T. Kramm, "Kirche und Inkulturation in der Dritten Welt. " in: *Stimmen der Zeit*. Band 203 (1985), 821f.

in terms of statistics, the total number of Christians in Africa is still on the increase.

The above situation raises many questions whose answers are numerous because the causes involved are varied. A close analysis of this situation, especially when judged from some observed acts of syncretism among African Christians, shows that the practices are not so much a sign of lack of commitment to Christian faith from the side of these Africans but expressions of the fact that Christianity, as brought to the Africans, has not been in position to respond fully to the demands of the African predicament.[22] Such a situation shows the need for searching for a new breakthrough in the movement towards the inculturation of the Message of Christ. From all indications, inculturation as dialogue between Africans and the Message of Christ is the only plausible way.

Neither "Africanisation" of Christianity nor the "Christianisation" of Africa can solve the problem. This is because the expression "Christianisation of Africa" implies christianisation of Africa following the adaptation model of inculturation; in reality this means implanting a certain form of the Christian religion in Africa. But this is just what the missionaries have already tried. The results are obvious. On the other hand, "Africanisation of Christianity" implies that a certain form of Christianity which has already been inculturated elsewhere can be somehow "blackened" or "tropicalised". But inculturation cannot simply be an issue of adding a few African tokens: vernacular translations instead of foreign languages, drums and xylophones instead of organs and violins, native cloths with corresponding native designs sewn in otherwise Western tunic. It is not enough to translate prayers composed elsewhere and in a non-African spirit or the foreign Roman rites into indigenous African languages. The same applies to the replacement of the gothic chasuble with an indigo loin-cloth.

A reasonable solution could be achieved through an existential reception of the message of salvation[23] which is possible through dialogue with the Message of Christ. The apostles and other disciples are living testimonies of this type of encounter. Peter is an example

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[22] J. Ukpong, 510.
[23] M. M`nteba, 100.

who dialogued with Christ himself. In Matt. 19:16-30 there is dialogue between Christ and the rich young man as well as between Jesus and Peter. It is not only with his disciples and those who are interested in his message that Jesus dialogued, but with his opponents. Jesus did not hesitate to engage himself in dialogue with such opposing groups as the Pharisees. In most of his works of healing, in his teaching of the people and even during His trial Jesus practised dialogue. The reason why dialogue produces such results is, among other things, which it relies, among other things, on conviction rather than on manipulation or coercion of partner.

Furthermore, "in order to evangelize black Africa, there is need to establish a relationship with the 'Living revelation where God begins to speak ... using an African style to speak to Africans."[24] For God is not only to speak to Africans but to begin speaking with Africans means being in dialogue. This has been the way God has revealed himself to human beings throughout the history of salvation. "Africa is a setting where human beings search for communion with God.... In such a context, it makes more sense to talk of our faith in the good news of God's presence in the world through Christ using (among others) the very techniques of African oral tradition."[25] Speakers here of the "African oral tradition", we see this in the context of dialogue which consists in more than spoken words.

In this tradition where the history and culture (including religion) is transmitted principally orally, it is not a one-way movement a monologue. The recipients are not reduced to passive listeners, but engage in dialogue with those who deliver the message. Questions are asked and doubts are raised if need be. Such doubts and other critical dispositions are welcomed and cherished. The recipients participate actively and effect the necessary changes within the culture. This is one of the reasons why the culture has survived and could be passed on from generation to generation.

Another reason why it is urgent that inculturation should be seen and practised as dialogue in an African context comes from the situation of things in most African churches where there is a lack of real

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[24] J. M. Ela, *My Faith as an African* (Translated from the French by J. P. Brown and S. Perry). (New York: Orbis Books Maryknoll, 1988), 45.
[25] Ibid.

dialogue between the clergy and the laity. An analysis of the priorities and central issues of church life in Africa reveals that sensitive topics that raise questions of conscience do not receive adequate attention. What is talked about is consciously chosen by the clergy who see it as their responsibility to decide what is to be believed, thought and done. The questions, predicaments, needs and hopes of the people are simply set aside. The laity need only receive and execute decisions from above. "Church discussions (of course the clergy within itself) rarely refer to what actually happens in the heart of villages and slums in order to determine the basic outlines of the church's practices, ..."[26]

If anything at all is done for the people and their problems, it is most often a question of severing them with already-made solutions which have been reached by the church hierarchy. The whole situation is one in which it seems that the real function of the churches is restricted to reproducing models which did not originate in, and have never been re-examined in, a specifically African context. This is the situation notwithstanding the fact that inculturation has since become the theme of many declarations, studies, conferences, and speeches. The concrete circumstances of the people who carry the African culture are not given the attention they deserve.[27]

If one raises his/her head and looks at the relationship between the African churches and their counterparts in the West, he/she will be confronted with almost the same situation. "No one is ignorant of the gulf separating the churches of the societies of opulence from those of the lands attempting development.... To what extent is the situation of the churches of black Africa not a neo-colonial situation, analogous to that of stymied societies living in a situation of strict dependency on the great decision making centres, which are the monopoly of the countries of the northern hemisphere?"[28] This situation does not favour dialogue between the two sides. This is because the dependence of the African local churches on those in the West is already a sign of inequality. In critical matters and moments this inequality does not facilitate free and independent decision making.

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[26] Ibid., 120.
[27] Ibid., 120f.
[28] J. M. Ela, *African Cry* (Translated from the French by R. R. Barr). (New York: Orbis Books Maryknoll, 1986), 105f.

This is more the case with reference to the African local churches, than with their Western counterparts.

Something must be done to improve this situation which already has had grave consequences for the life and future of not less than 236 million people. Dialogue is the way to address the needs of these people, for whom Christ also came and who articulate in expressing their needs. Indeed how could one address these needs without the people themselves presenting them as they are principally culture-bound. This entails the great importance of understanding various cultures in making dialogue possible. "The issue of human cultures, swept up in the dynamism of Pentecost, gives birth to local churches. We many speak of local churches (in the real sense of the word), then, only if we acknowledge each church's right to be different. Each church is shaped by a milieu and an ambient culture, by its history, by the theological reflections it develops under pressure of circumstances, by the internal conflicts it takes up and resolves."[29] Hence a framework of dialogue can achieve the noble objective of inculturation in Africa, so that Africans will hear and speak with God in Jesus Christ who addresses Himself immediately to them in their own indigenous and respective predicaments.

At this point, it is assumed that we have sufficiently covered the points speaking for inculturation as dialogue. Any inculturation effort dare not forget that effectiveness will be achieved only when the "evangelisers" and as well "those be evangelised" find themselves in a system of dialogue: a situation in which each allows himself/herself to be evangelised by the other. There they exchange their religious experiences with one another, listen to one another, respect and value their differences, and recognise that the Word and the Spirit can be encountered in the other. It is a system where critical self-appraisal is not left out and where there is a consciousness that all are brought together by, committed to, and directed by, the Message of Christ with whom they should be in constant dialogue. Theology as human reflection on divine truths is done from a certain cultural standpoint, then inculturation as a theological venture which deals in a special way with culture bearing the imprint of the particular culture in which it has successfully taken place.

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[29] Ibid. 111.

4.4 Problems and Challenges of Inculturation as Dialogue

Everyone today in the church must have heard of or read about the concept of, and the efforts towards inculturation. It is a noble venture, but like any such ventures it is confronted with problems and poses challenges which differ according to the models. Some of these problems and challenges are found in every model, while others are specifically restricted to a particular one.

The cause of some of these problems and challenges can be seen in the fact that "theology ... (etymologically), has to do with human reflection on truths, make up the divine element... As for human reflection on God... (t)ruths about God, indeed all religious truths make up the divine element.... As for the human reflection on these truths, this can only be done from a cultural point of view... The fruits of such reflection formulated as theology necessarily bear the imprint of that culture."[30] The same point we have seen about theology in general applies to inculturation as a theological venture.

The contact between the cultures of colonialists in Africa and those of the different African groups cannot be described as having been dialogical. It was more of a confrontation and annihilation of other cultures and their "otherness" through the colonialists. The Christian religion is not innocent of this crime. Its catechism was taught in the context of a colonial project as introduced the European ecclesiastical system. Missionaries identified without exception the "orbis christianus" with the divine global order. The church was understood as the kingdom of God. The pope and the emperor stood as the only representatives of God before the human race.

Catechism was taught and practised without considering the intercultural dialogue. It was simply a transplantation of a ready-made model of Christianity, which was a European cultural product, presented as divine revelation.[31] An example can be drawn from how they acted in some parts of Africa. From the beginning their programme was not just a religious invasion, but was coupled with

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[30] J. Ukpong, 511.
[31] L. Boff, 34.

political invasion. In the background was the secular military arm of the colonialist. Their objective included the "christianisation" of the African "pagans" and the evolution of money economy, in sum the creation in Africa of a society similar to that of contemporary Europe. In some cases the missionaries accepted war as a means to this end as opening a door for the gospel to enter a country. The sword of the spirit was often preceded by a sword of steel. In most cases the missionaries even consciously encouraged interstate antagonism, rather than working for unity.

In 1892 the missionaries (with the support of the colonial army) led a war against the Ijebu people in Nigeria, one of the tribes in Southern Nigeria. "The European missionaries accepted responsibility for the war... The missionaries provided the reason why they brought about the missionary war. They observed that of all the coastal tribes they knew, the Ijebu were most intelligent, the most industrious and the shrewdest. If converted, they believed, they (Ijebu) would become the spearhead of missionary propaganda in the rest of the country."[32] But can conversion through war be compatible with the missionary mandate of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18-20) if there is no dialogue in war. War may have been seemed rather to be the easiest way to enforce a ready-made European model of Christianity.

These points, among others, form the foundation of the problems and challenges of inculturation today in Africa. They are more vivid in the model of inculturation as dialogue. The central point of the challenge of inculturation as dialogue is to be seen in the fact that nobody can evangelise convincingly and effectively without having first engaged himself/herself with the life of the people to be evangelised and with the culture-producing forces of this group. There is need to take account of this people's way of life. The early missionary activities gave the people the chance of hearing the gospel in its Western cultural form, but failed to take into consideration "something as real as the people's view of the world: a view which explicitly and implicitly contains their concerns, their perceptions of themselves and of the oppressors, their religious beliefs ..., their fatalism… None of

[32] E.A. Ayandele, 66f.

these elements can be seen separately, for in interaction all of them compose a totality."[33]

The evangeliser is challenged to be open to the culture of the people to be evangelised. But this certain amount of solidarity though necessary, does not exclude a critical appraisal of the culture in question. Solidarity here should be understood as meaning finding a way into the culture and helping the culture to realize its potential. This mode of action testifies to the evangelist's awareness of the reality of God's presence in this culture no matter what form it may assume.[34]

4.4.1 Problems of the Euro-Western Christianity in Inculturation as Dialogue

The present Western form of Christianity has some problems with inculturation. Yet the official church is one of Africa's partners in dialogue, and the African churches do not see inculturation principally as a venture towards secession.

The bold new steps taken by the church as indicated by the Vatican II in its documents are noble objectives but the actualisation of the goals set including inculturation and interreligious dialogue is confronted with many problems. Though the initiatives came from the church, the fact that they were to some point reactions to the changes in the surrounding world is very important. Rapid developments in the world presented and still present the Church with problems and challenges. Unlike before, when the Church was an indispensable partner in every aspect of the world, things are no longer the same and steps taken by the church are often responses to question posed from outside.

Western Christianity still carries the burden of history in its activities in non-European territories, for example Africa. Its collaboration with colonialism cannot just be left untreated for the trauma of this historical epoch is still fresh among the victims. Anthropologically psychological damage was done to these victims instead of receiving the Good News they were forcefully Europeanised.

It seems that Western Christianity is not wholly ready to make the basic reparations. Today the Western concept of God is still presented

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[33] P. Freire, 149.
[34] L. Boff, 45f.

as if it were the only valid concept. But this is one of the central mistakes of the missionaries in non-European territories. As they entered these territories none of them was conscious of the fact that the concept of God they were preaching was culture-bound, a concept which was a syncretic product consisting of Jewish-biblical, Graeco-Roman and Germanic element.[35] This is a point already made in the presentation of the adaptation approach – one of the models of "indigenisation" of the Christian message. This model proposes taking over the "non-essential" in the African cultural elements, and adapting them to the "essential", i.e. the European format of Christian faith. This format with its concept of God remained untouched in the whole process for it was seen as the paradigm and hence in no need of change. In this adaptation process the themes selected for consideration and the method of organising and actualising them rigidly followed the pattern of Western theology.

Another aspect of the problem of Western Christianity's historical burden is that church history is full of its own problems with which the church was confronted and which it survived: schisms, heresies, divisions and reformations. Also, the journey of the church from the community of common people and outcasts to the palaces and empires left imprints on the church. The experience of the church in this phase of her history explains the church authority's attitude of scepticism towards novelties. It was no longer sufficiently flexible and was not at ease in listening to a new logic which did not suit its own.

This leads to a problem of "self-misunderstanding". At some decisive moments the church seemed to miss the goal of her own existence and act like mundane institutions. She seemed to forget that she had another standard of judgement with which she had judged others and that she would be judged by these standards. An example can be seen in her role during slavery and colonialism. The new image she has given herself since the Vatican II as "the people of God" is yet to be experienced by all Christians everywhere. There are still indications that the old mistake of confusing of herself with the kingdom of God still abounds. Official objection may be made, but some of her actions testify to this point.

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[35] Ibid., 38.

The Church emphasises tradition, but made the mistake in her encounter with other cultures. Her stand on and her treatment of such issues like slavery and colonialism are examples. For instance she has not yet convinced herself of the need to apologise to the victims of her stand on and treatment of slavery, the slave trade, and colonialism. Should it be argued that these happened long ago, it will then be asked how to reconcile this with her claim to a long tradition. The sincerity of the claim on tradition will be more convincing when whole-heartedly, officially and with the readiness to help agrees to alleviate effectively the subsequent sufferings of the victims of the negative sides of this her rightly cherished history. Apology is an essential part of dialogue for it shows respect for the partners as equals.

Theologically, the Church gives the impression that she is ready to recognise the inculturation of the gospel. But as soon as a local church takes steps to become, not just geographically and topologically, but theologically and ontologically a real local church the official church authority restricts and at times obstructs such a move. The usual argument is in the name of unity. Examples can be seen in the restrictions posed on the Zairian liturgy or in the ban on the Indian liturgy; church authority is not yet at ease with the idea of unity without uniformity. It is between a rock and a hard place, between "Babel" and "Pentecost". Laws and guidelines are very necessary, but should not suffocate or block creativity and initiative, particularly not in the church.[36]

To the church authority's fear of inculturation, should be added to what could be defined as a fear of modern times. This fear is in a sense justified for the nature of the development of things in the present. It is obvious that most modern trends are revolutionary, laic, secularised and exotic. But the position of the church does not help. It is not the task of the church to complain for situations should be seen not only as challenges, but as opportunities. Otherwise the danger is

[36] W. Bühlmann, " Die Entwicklung der Evangelisation seit dem II Vatikanum. Schwerpunkte – Problemfelder – Perspektiven." in: *Evangelisation in der Dritten Welt. Anstoß für Europa*. Hg. L. Bertsch u. F. Schlösser. (Freiburg: Herder, 1981), 22f.

that the church will hold tight to tradition, while missing opportunity after opportunity.[37]

The church has not succeeded in penetrating the life of the African people. Christian faith is not yet a part of their daily life, but still is experienced as a book religion, a sort of "Sunday to Sunday" medicine. In daily life people still fly to the protection of their respective traditional religions which have answers to the needs of their daily life. This is a problem for the official church, which is a product of the plantation theory with which Africa was "Christianised", and the new theology of mission has not yet been put into effective practice. The local church institutions which receive the blessings of the officials of the church operate in such a way as to make these problems obvious.[38]

Another basic problem is that of racism in all its variations. This is coupled with the problem of Eurocentrism, the European appropriation of Christianity as their own "Kulturgut", and the superiority complex coupled with arrogance which leads to considering everything European or Western as the standard of judgement. This attitude led to the exportation of Christianity to other peoples as "made in Europe".[39] And today in the church these problems remain. Paternalism in the church (which is reflected in such tendencies as "we know better than you what you need" or the "roma locuta, causa finita" mentality also belongs in this category of problems.

Theoretically, one may consider some of these problems to be non-existent. Especially taking into consideration the declarations and documents of the church, but theory and practice are two different worlds. Hence another problem area is canon law. The minute prescriptions of canon law make it difficult, for example, for the local African churches to enrich the celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments by using elements of African cultural background. Customs of initiation and rites of traditional marriage in Africa have many meaningful cultural elements which should be fairly integrated into local African church practice. To attain a maturity which will be

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[37] Ibid., 25.
[38] H. Hochegger, „Kirche in Zaire. Sprachliche Inkulturation und Begegnung mit der tradierten Religion". in: *Theologisch-Praktische Quartalschrift* 132 (1984), 246.
[39] O. A. Onwubiko, Page not indicated.

one of the positive results of inculturation as dialogue with the Message of Christ they need a self-concept entailing more than the judicious application of the letters of canon law. Most of these laws reflect European backgrounds and are easily practicable within the European context, yet have simply been baptised for the universal church.

The apparent claim of the church, which presents Western Christianity as the only universal, true and absolute religion is a very great problem. Often the church talks of dialogue, recognition of other religions, freedom of religion, etc. A closer look shows that most of these concepts have peculiar meaning within the context of the Western Christianity. The much-orchestrated dialogue is meant to be out of a situation where the church "dictates" the terms, having already fixed the goal as well as the position and role of the partners. Even concerning the freedom of religion, which is related to freedom of conscience, one may ask how free the Christians can be with their consciences, which have already been modelled after a particular pattern determined by the official church. Often non-Christian consciences are seen as erring or are deficient or found wanting; or at best only implicitly or anonymously Christian?[40]

Though the church is trying to follow Vatican II, in some essential matters one still experiences the Church of "extra ecclesia nulla salus". In her claim to be the only true, absolute, universal religion, the Church seems to forget that her history puts this claim in question and raises serious doubts. How can a religion with such a history as that of Western Christianity consciously make such a claim? How does one reconcile this claim with her declared willingness to recognise and respect religious pluralism?

Another problematic point is the church's definition and understanding of divine revelation. This is presented as if it were a doctrine, a closed incident that took place and can only have occurred in a particular time and place in history. No Christian denies the uniqueness of the incarnation as the height of divine revelation. But does this mean that only a unilineal concept of revelation, as presented

[40] I. Puthiadam, „Christlicher Glaube und christliches Leben in einer Welt religiöser Pluralität." (Aus dem Engl. Übersetzt von K. Hermans). in: *Concilium* 16 (1980), 370f.

in the Western Christianity upon its adoption from Judaism is valid? God has been revealing Himself to people continuously; the Apex of this is his son Jesus Christ.

The mystery of divine revelation as it occurred in Jesus Christ has not been finally fathomed. Can one not talk of divine revelation through Jesus Christ, the Way as continuous and divergent? Will it not be better to see divine revelation as a promise, instead of as a doctrine? As a promise

> which remains to be verified in its realization in the future of the world. Thus it unceasingly opens out upon the future of a new creation, a new exodus. God's revelation in history always comports a horizon of the future, in which the divine design will be accomplished in its fullness. Out beyond events having the value of a sign, a more distant perspective appears, that of the end of the ages.[41]

These are the main obstacles posed by the Western Christianity to inculturation as dialogue with the Message of Christ. Western cultures in which Western Christianity is based and lives, have understood and tried to present themselves as the paradigm of culture. This claim is based on their tradition and historical achievements. They are not easily disposed towards critical reflexive appraisal. The structures of injustice and oppression have made people and institutions within these cultures including a reasonable number of Christians and Christian institutions insensitive to the cry elsewhere. Prominent among them are those who reject the idea of dialogue and encapsulate themselves in their own cultural world and values. It could be maintained that Western Christianity as it developed historically blocks the way for the inculturation of the Message of Christ. It no longer finds real adjustments easy to exercise thorough the practice of self-criticism.[42]

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[41] J. M. Ela, African Cry, 33.
[42] L. Boff, 61.

4.4.2 Challenges and Opportunities of Inculturation as Dialogue in Reference to Euro-Western Christianity

A litany of problems and challenges faces Christianity in the world today. We have seen some aspects of the problems of inculturation movement for the present structure and practice of the official church. Inculturation presents either challenges or opportunities to the church depending on how ready the church is to take up these challenges. In the case of Africa, it can be seen as an opportunity for the church to enter into the hearts of not less than one hundred and fifty million people. It must be made clear that this does not depend on the Church alone.

The winds of change are blowing. As J.M. Ela puts it

> Christianity has endured for a long time, maintaining its Graeco-Latin heritage within the context of a society fashioned by Western models. Today the church must examine that entire experience, recognising that it has lost its cultural monopoly as well as the theological systems that seemed to guarantee it. A new age is beginning that gives great importance to non-western churches ... The centre of gravity of Christianity continues to shift. It is possible that the black continent will become a real prize for the church.[43]

The church itself is aware of this development. It is not only that the number of non-European Christians is on the increase while the number of European Christians is decreasing. The official church is aware of this trend in Europe and has shown efforts in trying equivocally to make clear her stand on important issues of the modern society. She has shown her teaching authority as regards such issues of doctrine and morals. At the administrative level she is careful in appointing the leaders of different institutions and local churches. Being aware of the challenges of the world of today, she has taken the task of changing her methods of evangelisation to emphasize the practice of dialogue. Some of the church's standpoints and measures remain controversial, such as conservative doctrines, the appointment

[43] J. M. Ela, My Faith as an African, 116.

of some leaders in different areas of church activities, and the authoritative way of dealing with "liberal" voices in the church. Today there is the strong tendency of categorising representatives of the church or groups within the church into "conservatives" and "liberals", through these measures and developments do not bring the desired results.

Although the Christian faith does not depend on the number of its followers, the church should take the great number of African Christians seriously. J.M. Ela notes that "the one hundred and fifty million Christians in Africa today are a significant resource on the Christian faith. But the Christian communities of Africa can truly set free their dynamism only if the church agrees to stop standardising and centralising its practices and rules (without the known neglect of a due and adequate consideration of the essential peculiarities of the African cultures)."[44]

With reference to the history of the church's relationship with Africa one can only suggest a self-critical reflection: that her role was compromised with slavery and colonialism, that her missionary activity was marred by conversion through conquest in the framework of European expansionism. The oppressed people of Africa, their myths and mythologies, rites and religion were not taken seriously; when considered at all this was not without prejudice, hence their diminished role in the construction of the type of Christianity planned for Africa. Now that we enter a new millennium and the movement for inculturation gathers momentum, the church is expected to show a clear acknowledgement of her responsibility for her role in the past and honestly, sincerely, and officially to ask for pardon from all concerned. This is an issue not just of camouflaging with apologetic excuses, but of mourning together with all the victims.[45] Such step will go a long way to reduce the weight of the burden of history on the church. The diminishing credibility of the church – evident in the proliferation of Christian sects in Africa – might come to a stop.

As was said above and in agreement with H. Bühlmann the church finds herself today in a moment of tension and polarisation between

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[44] Ibid.

[45] H. Küng, „Lateinamerika als Herausforderung. Zum Problem der Inkulturation des Christentums." in: *Der eine Gott in vielen Kulturen*, 263.

the "conservative" and the "liberal" groups within the church. A good number of her members is not easily motivated for changes and as regards some teachings and practices. Some officials of the church are in this group. The "conservative" group argue that the old practices have stood the test of time and nobody is sure of what the new ideas and changes are to bring. Order and tradition are values we need not to neglect. But it is a mistake to see the function of the church as restricted only to preservation, excluding the creation of order, traditions and values. The church needs to show a more balanced disposition in this new post-Vatican II era that has come.[46] An all-encompassing principal affirmation of this era is very necessary; the church needs to overcome her fear.

It should not go unmentioned that there is an equal number of the church members who want to change almost everything within the church. This group maintains that the church should adapt to the developments in today's world. They seem to forget that the Church is not an ordinary mundane institution. Again this group needs to realise that if some teachings and practices of the Church are old, it does not mean that they are no longer relevant.

The "tension" between these two groups has slowed down the actualisation of the new impulses from the Second Vatican Council. Balance is needed between these two standpoints. The question may not be of either change or no change, but rather of preservation as well as change.

The uniqueness of divine revelation through Jesus Christ is central for Christian faith: God speaking through his son is apex of divine revelation regarding his saving purpose in respect to the human race (Heb. 9:12).[47] This unique event is one to which every culture should have access. The peak of revelation is Christ and not the Church which should try to follow the example of St. Paul in Athens in realising the presence of the knowledge of God among the Athenians and using their concept of the "unknown God" to deliver the gospel. Divine revelation occurs in the histories of the various peoples. Though the incarnation as seen by the Christians as the peak of revelation is unique, but earlier there was a multiplicity of divine

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[46] H. Bühlmann, 21.
[47] R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer and R. E. Murphy, 922.

revelations. The letter to the Hebrews (Heb. 1:1-4) shows the historical trend towards this peak of divine revelations. Paul's effort not to contradict the uniqueness of the incarnation as the peak the revelation can be understood as meaning that the multiplicity of divine revelation – one of which is his Athenian experience – leads to the apogee of revelations which is Jesus Christ. In this context Paul used natural theology as a positive threshold to the gospel.

The respective cultures with their previous and pre-Christ history of divine revelation should be allowed to experience on their own way the uniqueness of the incident of divine revelation in Jesus Christ. Divine revelation before the advent of Christ was not entirely unilinear. Christ's coming is a point of convergence to which everything leads and then a point of divergence from which everything departs. This incident of divine revelation did not cancel the multilinear nature of divine revelation. Christ himself was a different person to different persons without having a multiple personality. To the leaders he was a political threat, while he was a saviour (even if only politically) to the common people of his time.

This non-unilinear process of divine revelation, which did not stop with the incarnation but continued in Him, is to be found in many places in the New Testament. The conversion of Paul (Acts. 9:1-19) is a case in point. In verse 4 of this chapter the question – "Why do you persecute me?" – shows that in his disciples Jesus himself is persecuted. This is an example of a non-unilinear process of revelation. The miracles that occurred after Jesus was no longer physically present with his disciples were not only or principally outward confirmations of Christ's message, but vehicles of the same message. In a sense they are "revelation events", which continuous non-unilinear process of divine revelation shows it to be a developing process.

The church can help non-European Christians in their efforts to experience the uniqueness of divine revelation in Jesus Christ by not insisting that the Western experience of this incident is the only valid one. Without their own experience of this incident of divine revelation in Jesus, it will have no meaning for them and cannot become the "Good News of Salvation".

This is not to underrate or forget the importance of unity and the efforts made to sow and protect the seed of unity in the Church.

Among the demands for reform in the Church the European demands differ from those coming from non-European Christians and show the diversity of the situation of the members of the church. These demands can be the seeds for acknowledging diversity within ecclesial unity, "right to be different" within and not outside the church. The diversified nature of the church members and their demands call for attention of the church authority. The questions addressed to the church by the non-European cultural traditions may need non-European answers. Though such questions pose extra challenges, they may constitute an essential contribution to the future of the Church.[48]

Not only Africa, but all other non-European cultural worlds that are Christian should be granted the freedom to articulate their situation more adequately. The risks of transformations should be taken when all concerned plumb the very depths of the Message of Christ. That is, when the experience the uniqueness of divine revelation in the person of Christ in their own way and from their own background, and hence witness it incarnate and dwelling among them. This insertion will be easier if greater freedom is accorded to the local churches by the central church authority. This will enable these local churches in the pastoral ministry to be more present in their cultural world. This was one of the goals of the Second Vatican Council and from this background local churches can make valid responses to the particular questions of their time and cultural world.[49]

This entails an important challenge facing the Church as regards inculturation as dialogue, namely, the apparent contradiction between the claim of the Church, that Roman Catholic Christianity is the only true universal and absolute religion on the one hand, and, on the other, the affirmation of religious pluralism. Vatican II in its document on the church (Lumen Gentium) affirms both the uniqueness of the Roman Catholic Christianity and a certain religious pluralism. Inclusivism may suggest an apparent, though not a real contradiction for though faith can be unique, its religious expression is obviously plural. These plural expressions are often the basis for religion. Contradiction in this issue develops once personal faith and

[48] J. M. Ela, African Cry, 116.
[49] Ibid., 117

convictions are absolutised and generalised. In such a situation religious pluralism has no chance.[50]

Christianity emphasizes the individuality of human beings. This does not mean that community is not valued in this faith and every Christian can participate according to his/her potentialities and maturity in the wealth of the living faith and opportunities that abound in Christ. But may one not ask here if it is really the will of God that all races of the world should belong to just one religion. If yes, to which religion for every religion is already limited in its history and conditioned and bound to change. Religions are not God. Even if they occupy the absolute centre of the peoples life and respond to their "ultimate concern" (in Tillich's sense of the word), they are human realities.

Religions belong to the sphere of symbols and function like symbols. Such symbols receive their meaning only at the structural level and within particular contexts. It might then be that it is in relation to the structural and contextual contrasts between religions that the absolute in every religion receives its meaning.[51] I would agree with I. Puthiadam in his view above for this can help us to see that religions can be complementary to one another.

The above understanding of the complementary relationship that can exist between religions is not unknown to the church. Since Vatican II there has been the wind not only of "theological renaissance" but that of theological pluralism. Theology was now to be occupied with the human situation. Pluralism is recognised not only as existing on account of the plurality of philosophies, but also by reason of a plurality of the life-experiences of peoples in their cultures. The different forms of Christian involvement in the world play a very important role.[52] This pluralism which the church has already been witnessing within its own walls, should be a help for her to encounter the growing challenges of religious pluralism in the present world.

The church's own theology of the wealth of the life in the divine Trinity could be important here. Taking her inspiration from the theology of Trinity, she could strive to build a form of "trinitarian"

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[50] I. Puthiadam, 370.
[51] Ibid., 374.
[52] J. Ukpong, 507f.

relationship with other religions that is not between a superior and inferior partner, an adult and a child, an expert and a lay person. She could try to see the distributive equality among the religions as the chance and base for dialogue between her and African traditional religions in the process of inculturation as dialogue. Otherwise, how are we to understand the introductory part of the "Document on Dialogue with Unbelievers", that "... men have become aware of pluralism and indeed have come to see it as the hallmark of our age. True pluralism, however, is impossible unless men and communities of different origins and cultures undertake dialogue."[53]

4.4.3 African Problems with Regard to Inculturation as Dialogue

Africa generally is confronted today with problems in different spheres of life. Most that we are going to address here are on the way of a dialogical inculturation of the gospel. Some extend also to other non-religious spheres of the lives of Africans.

Talking of Africa in terms of inculturation, one must acknowledge the well known diversity of cultures among the various African people. This diversity of cultures raises the question as to whether there can be a uniform pattern of inculturation in Africa. Reflections on divine truth are always made from a cultural background. How should Africa get on with the problems that will definitely arise as a result of this diversity when each African group encounters the Message of Christ from its own standpoint? It is important to highlight that this is an issue of diversity of cultures in Africa because in many cases when the issue of inculturation is discussed the impression is often mistakenly created that there is only one African culture or that African cultures (for those who recognise the many cultures) are homogeneous. This view is entertained in forgetfulness of the fact that every culture possesses sets of values and ideals. These are not just things that can be pushed aside, for they most often pertain to the "ultimate concern" of the various African people.

The movement for inculturation as dialogue must then reckon with difficulties. Historically, which Africa is referred to? Who is an African? What is the factor that makes a person, group, culture, issue or movement African? As inculturation in our context is an important

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[53] „On Dialogue with Unbelievers". in: A. Flannery, *Vatican II*, 1002.

aspect of African theology as it pertains to Africa's encounter with the Message of Christ. Hence it follows that since every theology is culturally conditioned, the question as to who is competent to do African theology (i.e. to be involved in the dialogue with the Message of Christ) is seen to be more pertinent than in other sciences. For theology (inculturation) cannot be approached with cold objectivity; peoples and cultures must be fully involved in the enterprise for inculturation as dialogue. As this implies involvement in the Message of Christ and in the African predicament, such a theology of inculturation should be done by those who are involved in both African culture and Christian theology. This means more than just being a Christian titularly; besides, if in-depth knowledge of the African socio cultural situation is necessary, is one qualified just because he/she is African or disqualified because she/he is not African? How should we consider, for instance, the many Africans who have not only lost touch with their African culture, but have not studied it scientifically? Or should one be excluded just because of being non-African? If so how should we consider those non-African who are well versed in African culture.[54]

If we dwell further on "studying African culture scientifically" are we not running the risk of making inculturation an elitist venture? Are we not making the mistake of judging African culture by an inadequate standard if we go on to emphasise its "being scientifically studied"? What is more important in inculturation – having a scientifically worked out programme or letting the life of the people be touched and positively influenced by the Message of Christ?

If we go a bit deeper on the issue of scientific study of African culture, do we not see that most such studies (even when made by Africans) are conducted from foreign backgrounds and with foreign standards? An example can be seen (as was presented the earlier part of this chapter) in the works of some African theologians who advocate the adaptation approach as a model of inculturation for Africa. These African theologians use the format, procedure and standards of Western theology and hence treat African culture as the „non-essential" while the Western culture and the Euro-Christian standards are taken to be the "essential" elements.

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[54] J. Ukpong, 512.

As found in many universities and seminaries in Africa there are professors and lecturers who have studied African cultures and teach them, but approach African culture with "cold objectivity". Cases even abound of those who are virtually ignorant of African cultures – though they have studied them "scientifically". For most African culture is not the dominant factor in their endeavours, though these are the purported teachers of African culture. The real masters of African cultures are in the countryside: though[55] people from this background are often denied the chance to be involved because they have not "studied" the African culture "scientifically". Can Africa still afford to continue denying these people who really know African culture the chance for active and effective involvement in the process of inculturation as dialogue?

Further unsolved problem is that Africa has no clear collective picture of her past, especially the pre-colonial past. For one reason or another, many Africans tend to see pre-colonial African history as one of immaculate purity. Hence inculturation means for some of these groups of people, recovery of the African culture of that era. Such views belong to the ideology which operates in a network that "falsifies the past, persuading the masses that Africa's ancestral past was free of any internal tensions or conflicts. The past, they are told, was all order and stability, all concord and harmony. It is dangerous to call the past something that it is not, to falsify and distort it ..."[56] Such a move is only an illusion and an escape which hinders any serious effort towards inculturation as dialogue.

A phase of African history that constitutes problems for the movement of inculturation as dialogue in Africa is the colonial experience of Africa. The open wounds of colonialism, in the creation of which the missionaries participated, are still a painful and disturbing heritage of African history and culture. Colonialism, among other things, effected transformations in African self-understanding, thought patterns, life-styles and world-views. It made cultural hybrids of Africans. The African of today as a product of two heritages – one indigenous, the other alien suffers an identity crisis. One of the evils of colonialism as

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[55] O. P`Bitek, „Africa's Cultural Revolution". in: *Voices from Twentieth-Century Africa. Griots and Towncriers*. Ed. I. Chinweizu, (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), vii.

[56] J. M. Ela, African Cry, 127.

regards our topic (inculturation) is that it precluded Africans from participating objectively in their own indigenous cultures that is, the in social, economic, cultural and political decisions which deeply affect them and their environment. Foreign cultures were imposed on Africans and today's identity crisis has resulted from this experience. This might be expressed in the fact that colonialism is a disease of the mind.[57]

Another problem subsequent to Africa's experience of colonialism is the negative side of missionary activities in Africa.

> In the mind of numerous African Christians, shaken by the traumas of colonialism, the contribution of the missionary churches is perfection incarnate. Hence the tendency to reproduce the institutions and methods, the practices and even the problem of Christian activity and the style of presence handed down from the first evangelisation. In other words, the contributions of the mission societies have been integrated by the African churches without examination. An uncriticised ecclesiology, that of the first period of the implantation of Christianity ... continues to inspire styles of life and thought.[58]

This situation is problematic and one of the causes of the under-development in theology which Africa suffers today. This entails a cultural burden, namely, European Christianity weighing uncomfortably on the orientation and practice of African theology. What else could be the cause not only of the dearth of initiative in reflection and research on the difficulties of the Christian faith within the African cultural context? There is a prevailing smog of conformism which is indicative not only of intellectual stagnation and barrenness, but also of mental alienation.[59] A closer examination of

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[57] C. Udeani, "The Struggle for Identity: Africa's efforts and problems in contemplating, rediscovery, redifining (sic), nurturing and preservation of the African identity." in: *Kulturverständnis und Entwicklung*. Hg. K. Zapotoczky u. H. Griebl. (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel/Südwind, 1994), 149f.
[58] J. M. Ela, African Cry, 108.
[59] Ibid., 106f.

some points in earlier missionary theology will throw more light on the origin of the situation.

Simply put, theology has to do with human reflection on God, which can be done only from a cultural point of view. It has two important aspects – the divine and human. From the aspect of the divine, it is evident that the concept of God presented by the missionaries was very foreign and distant. Its strangeness was increased by the colonial activities which took place in Africa. As presented in a colonial context God was shown as commanding adaptation and submission to the foreign, colonial and oppressive order or structure[60] in which creativity has no place. To reflect on a foreign God leads to alienation, for they consciously or unconsciously acquiesced in accepting this concept of God. Secondly, as in order to be able of reflect on him, they have to be something different from what they are at the moment.

The defined goal is to be European. Structures were built and are still maintained which have been producing these "aliens". Anybody who has lived in seminaries, christian philosophy and theology faculties, and convents in Africa will be witness to this trend. Though the qualification "Roman" irritates some Catholics, it describes exactly the character of the church in Africa. How many non-Africans who went to Africa looking for Christianity usually leave Africa disappointed because of the high concentration and wide spread of latinity among the African churches. Could we attribute this to financial dependence of the African churches on the Western church as some have argued? On the one hand it would seem so, for the financial help received till now has always been invested in sustaining wrongly-conceived structures. Yet it is the local church authorities who want to run these institutions as they think such institutions are run in the West. For instance, in the liturgy more money is easily made available for foreign publishers to provide medieval liturgical texts that are no longer published instead of making this sum available for creative minds to produce something that is liturgically suitable for the African local churches. It is noteworthy that most of these texts have already been revised or jettisoned by the central Church authority.

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[60] Ibid., 29f.

Many litres of Italian and Greek mass wine are being imported by the African clergy for the celebration of the eucharist irrespective of the consent of the central Church authority that Africans search for appropriate alternatives. Africa has an abundance of such alternatives, such as palm wine that is found in most African countries and has very important religious meaning for these Africans. A good number of the African clergy are not ready to give such alternative a chance.

All this indicates that even if another means of income is found, it may not bring any serious change. Most of the African clergy wants to continue imitating for their own convenience their counterparts in the West. This is often done at an extremely painful cost of already poverty-stricken African Christians.

Another problematic factor for inculturation as dialogue in Africa is the type of picture of Christianity implanted in Africa. Africa sees an antagonistically divided Christianity, a systematically distorted image of Christianity. The circumstance surrounding missionary activities in Africa brought this "privatisation" to the peak and disrupted Africa's chances of experiencing and developing a unified view of Christianity. Africans did not have the much needed historical critical sensitivity towards these divergent versions of Christianity and received more of the reasons for the existence and continued sustenance of these divisions than the common elements found in these various versions of Christianity.[61] Africa has never been homogeneous, but with a divided picture of Christianity, consisting of antagonistic groups, more divisions arose. Due to divisions engendered through taboos and sanctions African Christians are today the "divided people of God". In some communities and even families, the enmity between the African Christians (based on the Christian group to which they belong) is greater than the officially difference between their groups. Examples of this could be found in the relationship between Catholics and Anglicans. The enmity between these fronts is much more than the one that may have existed between Martin Luther and the Pope during the Reformation.

The structure of Christianity in Africa is still planned, executed and sustained principally from outside not only as regards what to do but also how to do it. An example is the call for an African Council in the

[61] Ibid., 30.

Catholic Church. This was ignored for a long time and partly rejected but later on was considered. But what happened is that instead of an African Council, an African Synod was granted. Even the synod was held under the supervision of important representatives or officials of the Church who set the themes and guidelines for the synod.[62] Whatever may be the ecclesial juridical difference between a council and a synod, the distinction is mainly a matter of emphasis. Talking of an „African council" this was, among other things, to point out that the universal church should give meaningful and serious attention to issues regarding Africa and Christianity. This can be considered reasonable judging not only from the number of African Christians but from the need for the Message of Christ to take root in Africa, often now referred to as "future" of the church?

The problem caused by the structure of African Christianity is also evident in the organisation in disciplinary and legal spheres. From the moment there is a Christian community developing in a totally definite and different socio cultural environment itself, it become normal and obvious that special adaptations must be made for it as regards its organisation in the administrative and juridical spheres, as characteristics emerge that distinguish it from other groups in other areas. But this has not been the case with African Christian communities and structures. Founded by missionaries according to Western standards from the "Latin" Church, they must remain satisfied with the application of the complete and unadapted Roman canon law to their situations.

There have been calls for the revision of the Codex Iuris Canonici and the work on a "Lex fundamentalis Ecclesiae" in Africa. Beyond general organisational church principles, based on the gospel and the elements of the Christian tradition, these should create room for everybody everywhere, and for an independent organisation corresponding to the various historical and cultural situations. The underlying principles will then be adapted to the particular local circumstances.[63] This is missing in the African local churches today. It is not that African local churches should become self-enclosed

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[62] K. J. K. Tossou, 57.

[63] T. Tschibangu, "Plädoyer für eine christliche Vollreife einer jungen Kirche - Überlegungen aufgrund der Entwicklung der afrikanischen Kirche." (Aus dem Franz. Übertragen von A. Ahlbrecht). in: *Concilium* 17 (1981), 328.

monads; the problem here is that of appropriately necessary autonomy. The absence of this makes it impossible to direct sufficient attention to vital questions and poses a specially difficult problem for inculturation. Without calling for secession from the universal church, inculturation will be possible, only if these local churches have the freedom of initiative and action which will not hinder them from taking necessary steps and risks.

Lack of a clear, common definition of inculturation and its goals, and of methods of achieving these goals, is a big problem for Africa. The language of inculturation has become so multi-faceted and ambiguous that it does not make it easy for African Christianity to present a necessary united front. This situation offers security to those authorities who fear that, through such African solidarity, African Christians might proceed to question the whole of the neo-colonial exploitation still flourishing in Africa today[64] an example of which can be seen in such concepts as authenticity, which often is wrongly used.

The fear mentioned above is not entertained by non-Africans alone; some Africans themselves have this fear. Hence there is an effort to curb the thrust of free thinking, for this would entail the introduction of debate and discussion in all aspects of life. Recourse to a theory that returns Africa to the past is an effort to keep it from facing immediate essential problems. Thus the search for an African identity as proposed by this group of Africans shows itself to be a search for a mythological past, a past that has never been well known to Africans except principally through the works of European ethnologists.[65] The call for restoration of the "authentic" identity does not afford the chance to control our development but distracts Africans from a reasonably substantial critique of their present life situation.

In the retreat to "authenticity" with all its ideological practices and theories, alienation is changed into bureaucratically institutionalised practices decreed and imposed by ukase. In the new system of colonial domination, it can be maintained only artificially. This is done in the form of an official ideology conceived to reinforce popular ignorance so that the masses are distracted from knowing something of their real

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[64] J. M. Ela, My Faith as an African, 147.
[65] J. M. Ela, African Cry, 126.

condition. In being deprived of all opportunity to criticise the prevailing system, they are thus denied genuine authenticity and are sent off on a journey in search of a mythical past which is not what they need.[66]

Another important problem confronting Africa's efforts towards inculturation is, paradoxically, the African clergy. Irrespective of the restoration of the theology of charisma, the role of the African clergy in the church paints a picture best described as „tyranny of the clergy". A monolithic structure of the clergy is found almost everywhere. The ministry of the laity is still seen as a mandate or privilege granted to the laity by the clergy. The clergy tends to insist obstinately on resolving almost every question or problem of ministries and Christian life in Africa at the clerical level.[67]

This does not augur well for inculturation, because African culture principally is still in the hands of the ordinary people who belong to the laity. This means the exclusion from a vital role in the inculturation process. Most members of the African clergy, on account of the form of their training and the structure in which they are operating, are prejudiced in favour of the West and limited in their knowledge of African culture. Some of them are totally ignorant of actual African culture; most who know something got their knowledge not from live encounter and experience, but from books, usually authored by foreigners. Members of the clergy who are free from these disadvantages and have the prerequisites for a sound contribution are usually too few to do anything effective. When they are not outnumbered, they remain passive out of fear of the stringent measures of the official church passed on those who have dared to try. Those who have braved it usually fall out of grace among the officials of the church and are denied the necessary means to continue their ventures. Those who are presented as real inculturation theologians "mostly sing their master's voice"; most often they work and live according to the principle: he who pays the piper dictates the tones.

As regards theological creativity, the African clergy has yet to manifest this. It seems not to realise how incumbent on them it is to make a daring effort to re-assess critically the traditional systems of

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[66] Ibid. 126f.
[67] J. M. Ela, My Faith as an African, 56ff.

theology in order to gain new perspectives. Their uncritical acceptance of a Western theology is a sign of theological immaturity coupled with a prejudiced and uncritical rejection of anything differing from the theology developed in the West.

An example of this issue can be found in the local churches in Africa. In some parishes members of the clergy try to disrupt the existing traditional social network. In a society where respect for the elders is a central part of the culture, cases abound where gross neglect of this is the constant practice. Such cases have nothing to do with the teachings of Christ or the Christian faith but have to do principally with African culture. Most of members of the clergy do not know more than these elders. But due to lack of disposition towards dialogue they take refuge in forbidding that of which they are ignorant instead of making effort to become informed so as to understand what is really meant by these aspects of African culture. This can be seen as a sign of intellectual irresponsibility but should not surprise anybody that leading African clergy trained in "Western colonial and alienating seminaries and convents", most of whom finished their training in Europe and America, are anything other than what they have been educated to be.

All these problems notwithstanding, there are chances for the success of inculturation in Africa. The difficulties presented above and other similar ones should be seen as challenges facing the African inculturation movement.

4.4.4 Challenges of Inculturation in Africa

Africa faces many challenges in her movement towards inculturation; all the problems we have mentioned also challenge African inculturation movement. The outstanding trouble in facing problems, even when described as challenges, is that they are hydra-headed and have intertwined causes. Some of these causes lie outside the religious sphere which means that the first challenge is to establish co-operation with some other spheres such as the political, economic, ideological, sociological, etc.

A change of attitude is urgently called for. Generally, African Christians must allow themselves to be dominated by an „inspirational

unrest" that will urge them to take the necessary risks involved in the inculturation of the Message of Christ. They must nurture a sincere constructive discontent with the present situation of Christianity in Africa. They must stop complaining, deploring and lamenting. Africans dare not forget that the causes of some of the problems actually are in Africa and among Africans. As the roots of some of these problems lie partially in the social structure, the most effective solutions cannot be imported. Africa must learn to stop looking for scapegoats or justifications for their misery. Even if these are found, this will not make a useful contribution, so there is no need to waste time and energy here.

When African history is presented as a hindrance, and its misappropriation and misunderstanding as a cause, there is a call for further explanation. This does not mean that Africans should not busy themselves with their history; African history must be brought along and preserved as an absolutely essential heritage of Africa. In this, the challenge is for Africans to deal critically, consciously and objectively with their history, and which is part of the effort towards the rediscovery of Africa for Africans. Only by doing so can Africans find a base from which Africans can help themselves. Without this, there will not be "that into which to inculturate". Such a situation (should it take place) would mean a woeful failure of the inculturation movement.

In this rigorous examination the African Christian or theologian has the task, on the one hand, of identifying the important and relevant aspects of African culture through its rigorous criticism. Since the Christian faith or Message of Christ as the Africans have it today is already embedded in Western cultural expression, another huge task will be the identification of the "kernel"/"nucleus" of the message as it exists in Western Christianity. Most African theology today takes the adaptation approach. This operates on the premise that within the African cultures/world there are conceptual models in which Christian message in its cultural setting and expression can be communicated. This is the task of "translating" the Christian message from its Western cultural setting into one that is African. This approach is still strongly present today within African theology and seems to have taken the theological format of the West as the norm. The adaptation approach's view of Christianity relies on a theology of revelation

which emphasis the disclosure of doctrine and hence its attitude towards African traditional religion and culture is one of mistrust.[68]

The adaptation approach still retains in its finished product the pattern of Western theology. In terms of method it turns principally to the Bible and tradition to find its justification. The concern and challenge of inculturation as dialogue is to find a way of helping the African people at their different levels to express their own true experience of faith and life. Furthermore, ways should be sought to clarify how the people can be helped to attain the needed freedom for their self-expression in the absence of which people cannot live out their faith in terms of their African cultural milieu. Hence the African movement for inculturation as dialogue has the challenge of reflecting upon the data of revelation and reinterpreting them in the light of the African cultural milieu. It should look to the Bible and tradition to discover and recover the spirit of the Message of Christ which is the object of Christian faith.[69]

Inculturation as dialogue may be described as giving birth to or sowing the seed of African Christianity. This implies among other things, re-articulating and re-expressing the Message of Christ in the context of African culture. It involves confronting the Christian faith with the African cultural world so that this faith, based principally on the Message of Christ, will enlighten the African culture. In this process it can be expected that a reinterpretation and integration of both Christian faith and African culture will take place. The basic truths of revelation as found in scripture and tradition are critically reflected upon for the purpose of giving them African cultural expression. A new theological reflection that is African as well Christian will be a product of this process.[70]

The desire to inculturate the Message of Christ in African culture through a process of dialogue is wholesome and right, but Africans have to be ready for a series of challenges. The challenge of courage in being African is required. M. James puts this challenge rightly:

> African Christianity, in order to play its parts in ... Africa, must work out its own theology from its

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[68] J. Ukpong, 516.
[69] Ibid., 517.
[70] Ibid., 516.

> own experience. Much of what Western European Christians regard as essential theology is irrelevant to African Christian experience. There are problems which can be resolved only by African Christians and it may well be that in the process of working out this theology African Christianity will make its contribution not only to ... Africa but also to world Christianity.[71]

This, it is expected, should help African Christians to understand their own situation. They must endeavour to comprehend the nature and ramifications of the situation in which they live, their past and future in the light of the Scripture. Here they must awaken to a realisation of themselves, as they are and not as they ought to be. All in all, theology is also in the last resort, a divine-human encounter. It is a continuous reinterpretation of the divine message of salvation in every generation, culture and people. It is a representation of the will and way of God in and through Jesus Christ in a dialogue with different thought-forms and cultural patterns. Inculturation at this level of the divine-human encounter has hardly begun in Africa. Inculturation as dialogue with the Message of Christ in Africa has to interpret this Message of Christ in terms which are relevant and essential to African existence and culture.[72]

The next challenge could be termed the challenge of the unaddressed and unanswered questions of the African Christians. Because of the way missionary activities have been carried out and the way the Church has been operating in Africa. There is need to re-evaluate its practices, attitudes and teaching on such questions that are still unanswered. Undue emphasis on the administration of the sacraments in place of evangelisation, as has been the case in many African local churches, did not solve any of these problems. This remnant of the missionary practice reflects a time when all that mattered was the salvation of souls of Africans and not the African as a unity of body and soul. There is need for a shift of emphasis. Hence the church in Africa should show the courage to abandon the comfort of such missionary praxis organised around centres of worship. Instead it

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[71] H. Rücker, *Afrikanische Theologie. Darstellung und Dialog*. (Innsbruck: Tyrolia Verlag,1985), 41.
[72] Ibid., 47.

should take up the specific and radical concerns of people and attend the entire person. This will imply serious changes in many areas.[73]

In talking of inculturation, we mean the culture of the people. This, as is obvious, cannot be treated in isolation from the other facets of the society and its problems. In the African situation, where exploitation victimizes the people, this situation challenges the church in its move towards inculturation to redefine the fundamental project of Christianity in Africa. The problems and challenges of inculturation in Africa are not located only on the level of discourse but also on the level of concrete commitment. Hence, the need for the church to promote a kind of Christianity that will help the African masses escape the deadlock that has followed independence. It should therefore re-examine the prefabricated ideas of North Atlantic theology. It has to define itself according to the struggles of the people in their resistance against the structures of domination.[74]

As regards the problem of the tyranny of the clergy, the challenge is that the officials of the churches in Africa must realise that inculturation has to be a movement of the whole Christian community. As such, inculturation as communal act of encounter and acceptance of the Message of Christ places great demands which include pastoral attention and decisive listening to the breath of all of God's (Africans) people and its "sensus fidei". Stiff theological constructs coming directly from an academic think-tank are of little or no use here. It will be totally wrong to conceive inculturation as a purely academic venture; and more wrongly still as reserved only for the elite – the clergy for example – and considering the laity only as a passive player who should only receive injunctions from above.[75]

Africa and Africans must be prepared for the challenge of the Message of Christ itself. This challenge is to be found everywhere where there has been a real encounter between the Message of Christ and the particular people and culture in question. Hence it is very necessary for Africans to guard against the illusion of thinking inculturation will be just a naive and easy introduction only of the comfortable aspects of the Message of Christ. During his time, Jesus`

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[73] J. M. Ela, *My Faith as an African.* 142.
[74] Ibid., 176.
[75] M. M`nteba, 102.

attitude towards the Jewish cultural heritage was basically positive and sympathetic, even though it included strong criticism of developments he judged harmful. Jesus himself challenged Jewish messianism. He was opposed to and condemned the Pharisees in their superficial and external observances. He took the same stand on their attitude of segregation and discrimination against the "sinners" and the publicans. That upon reaching Europe, Christianity set up a stiff opposition to paganism testifies to Christianity's capacity to challenge the cultural milieu.[76]

4.5 Goal, Guiding Principles, Prerequisites, Spheres and Methods of Inculturation as Dialogue

All these subtopics deserve further discussion, but their treatment here, no matter how short, is geared towards positioning them within our model of inculturation as dialogue.

4.5.1 Goal of Inculturation as Dialogue

Dialogue is not new to the Christian faith. Christian theology and the biblical account of the history of salvation bear testimony to the role of dialogue as form of divine-human relationship. Generally, the goal of inculturation as dialogue within the African context is to make it possible for Africa to develop the right form of relationship to the Message of Christ. Dialogue with the Message of Christ will turn this message for them into the Good News of Salvation. One can ask how a person or group can encounter this message in itself. For otherwise there can be no dialogue with the Message of Christ. In encounter with the Message of Christ there is always a mediation. In the case of Africa this points to the missionaries for even though they made mistakes they will remain the primary medium through which Africans have heard the Message of Christ.

Inculturation has the goal of making it possible for Africans to be Africans and remain Africans even after they have become Christian. It will enable the Message of Christ to act as a catalyst in African

[76] J. Ukpong, 504f.

culture. It is not concerned with the clarification of doctrines, but is occupied with helping the Africans to live the Message. It aims to make the Message of Christ and the Christian tradition and doctrines meaningful to the Africans in their life situation. In a way it is concerned with presenting the Message of Christ in a particular African context within the universal church. As dialogue inculturation takes up the task of listening to, and asking questions about, the Message of Christ. It thinks about, articulates, tries to understand and re-express it within or in terms of the African cultural milieu, hence making it possible for Africans to live it as the Message of Christ and Good News of salvation.

Within the Church itself, inculturation as dialogue strives towards finding a common language in matters concerning the canon law, liturgy, dogma etc. It is obvious that such problems can only be solved adequately through dialogue with, and within, the church.[77] Inculturation as dialogue must play a very vital role in the Church's efforts towards accomplishing the noble objectives and the Second Vatican Council. As a part of the Church's venture it aims at correcting some of the mistakes made during the mission era and subsequent years in Africa. It could be seen equally as working with the church to actualise the original apostolic mandate of Jesus Christ; "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations ..." (Mt 28:19-20).

Another important goal of inculturation as dialogue is to challenge Africans to make their reasonable contributions as equal partners in the community of the universal Christian family; to ask themselves pertinent questions about Christian faith; to take the fundamental option of being converted and of , being thereby both fully Christian and fully African.

Inculturation as dialogue aims at introducing a fresh breeze into the Christian community so that those who have not had the chance to contribute in their talents and charisma to the service of the universal Christian community will have the chance to do it.

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[77] T. Kramm, 822.

4.5.2 Guiding Principles of Inculturation as Dialogue

Having stated the goals of inculturation as dialogue, some principles are needed to guide such a venture so as to accomplish its goal; certain prerequisites have to be fulfilled. This is a matter of recommendation. As each African group has its peculiar point of departure, it is not a matter of striving for a uniform concept.

The situation of Africans today is in a way similar to that of the early Christians who were confronted with the question of whether they would continue their life according to their Jewish traditions. Secondly, there was the case of the pagans who were converted for whom it became a problem whether in their new faith they were to be bound by the elements of Jewish culture.

Looking back on how these and other similar problems were addressed and solved, it can be assumed that, perhaps unthematised, a sort of guideline was laid down for inculturation. We see that in Jewish culture, as well as in the pagan Hellenistic milieu, the inculturation of the gospel took place within the respective cultures and traditions. The Greeks were not introduced to the Christian faith through the wisdom of the Old Testament, but rather through the wisdom of the Greek poets and philosophers and through the traditional Hellenistic religion (Acts 14:15-17).[78] As a precedent, this means that inculturation as dialogue must strive to introduce the Message of Christ into the areas of African culture and tradition. For inculturation as dialogue to achieve one of its goals within the African cultural context one condition which needs to be fulfilled is the correct understanding of the gospel both in words and deeds. This prerequisite is the completed inculturation process of the African subjects which has to involve living and practising the faith and hence the human person as a whole in his or her daily life.

The guiding principles point also to the fact that dialogue should not be conceived and understood superficially or myopically. This is because the true nature and purpose of dialogue in general and here in particular "does not exclude other forms of communication, such as, among others, ... contention and controversy, nor does it rule out the

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[78]. N. B. Abeng, "Scheitern die Inkulturationsbemühungen des Christentums in Afrika?", in: *Concilium* 26 (1990), 416.

defence of the rights of the human person. In general... an open ... mind, which is the foundation of dialogue, is needed."[79] This dialogue must encompass all areas of human life. If inculturation as dialogue is to achieve its aims, the rules of truth and freedom should not be found to be lacking.

Another important guiding principle is that of the complementarity of the experience of the divine. This is important for we need to recall that the mystery which every religion experiences and tries to express in its own way is the same. Differences come principally from the way it is expressed. But it is in taking seriously these different expressions of the same divine by others that the mystery of the divine human relationship becomes gradually clear. Every religion has the basic experience of the diversity of encounter with the divine, basic experience of a distinctive encounter with the divine which, may prove to be complementary. This encounter may be such whereby the divine enters into the world and is met by human beings with awe and hesitation. The case of complementarity of religious experience, calls for openness. Instead of a group trying to prove and defend its own experience as the sole or as absolute, the principle of recognition of the validity of the experience of the divine by others should guide.[80] Complementarity, bilateral enrichment and fulfilment of real diversity of religious experience should be taken seriously.

Complementarity of religious experiences leads to tolerance as the next guiding principle. In the Old Testament tolerance was not lacking. In the book of Numbers (11:26-30), Moses' attitude towards Eldad and Medad who prophesied without being registered is tolerance. Among others, the recognition of Eldad`s and Medad`s prophetic charisma by Moses, against the objection of Joshua, serves to protect the independence of the prophetic office. This office is protected from those who would subject it to unnecessary institutional control.[81] Even in the New Testament, the call for tolerance was a centrepiece of Jesus admonitions to his disciples as future leaders of the Christian community. "John said to him, "Teacher we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us'" (Mark 9:38-40; Luke 9:49-50).

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[79] "On Dialogue with Unbelievers". in: A. Flannery, *Vatican II*, 1003.
[80] I. Puthiadam, 377.
[81] R. E. Brown, J. A. Fitzmyer and R. E. Murphy, 85.

Jesus' answer and reaction is a clear example of the role of tolerance in the Christian community. "Jesus' tolerant attitude is grounded in the idea that anyone who exorcized in his name would be slow to speak ill of him."[82] These are examples warning against the tendency towards exclusivism and cliquishness in the church when it comes to the relationship of dialogue between different religions and cultures. The church, and in short, individual Christians misunderstand the meaning of being Christian, if this think that their own version and practice of Christian faith is exclusive one. This calls for tolerance and openness to others who work "in Jesus' name", i.e. who strive towards being Christians in their own way and do not adhere to old ways.

A group or a person is not tolerant for recognising and accepting the other only because they cannot be eliminated. Tolerance is the acceptance of the other out of goodwill. This grows out of the fact that one becomes conscious of the independence that exists between them. One needs the experiences of the other so as to understand better the truth of the universe, humanity and God.[83] This fact of independence should be borne in mind when we talk of inculturation as dialogue. This is especially the case for the dialogue between African culture and the Church. A related guiding principle is what may be termed the „trinitarian principle" which concerns the basic relativity of each and every culture. Though every culture is a complete system of meaning, each still remains open for other systems. This is because no particular culture exhausts all the latent possibilities of the human beings as individuals as well as social beings. The guiding principle here should be that of the mystery of the Trinity, the radical relativity ("Relationalität") between the three divine persons. Each divine person is one and unique, but in continuous relationship and in perichoresis with the other two divine persons. Community and reciprocity explain why these three divine persons are one God. Wherever relativity („Relationalität") among cultures is respected, care is taken that no culture oppresses the other.[84] This means that the relationship among cultures should be that of equals.

Emphasis here is laid on distributive equality; it should not develop into a relationship between superior and inferior partners. Being

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[82] Ibid., 616.
[83] L. Boff, 70.
[84] Ibid., 59.

different should be understood in terms of being distributively equal, without reason to swallow up the other or lord it over him/her. The other must be able to be and to remain other.

A very important part of the prerequisites for inculturation as dialogue includes also what M. Buber, in his description of a genuine dialogue, called its characteristics. In a genuine dialogue the partners turn toward one another in all honesty. Every partner sees the other partners as equally important. The sincere attention given to one another by the partners is a confirmation and acceptance of the other as a real partner. This acceptance and confirmation has nothing to do with the opinion or views of the partner as regards what is at stake, but a recognition of him/her as partner for dialogue. This means everyone has the right to have and represent his/her opinion; every participant can contribute his/her views sincerely.[85]

All the partners in dialogue must show a firm resolution and readiness for a dialogical synthesis of culture. In and through this synthesis it is possible to resolve the contradictions – where they arise – between different cultures and views of partners and peoples, to the enrichment of all the partners. This dialogical cultural synthesis does not deny the differences between the views of the respective partners; it is really based on these differences. It denies rather the "invasion" of one by the other. This was missing as the missionaries started working in Africa. No serious account was taken of such things as the African peoples` view of the world, their concerns, hopes, doubts, their way of perceiving themselves and others, their religious beliefs etc. All these should be considered jointly, for none of them can be seen separately.

Another important prerequisite is humility. No dialogue can exist without humility, which is very important at the horizontal or human level. Inculturation as dialogue cannot be an act of arrogance. As the encounter between partners addressed to a common task, it is broken if the parties or one of them lack humility. How can a party enter into a dialogue if it always projects ignorance onto other parties, especially when it never perceives its own ignorance? How can there be genuine dialogue if a party regards itself as a case apart from other parties. What chances has genuine dialogue if a party sees itself as the sole

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[85] M. Buber, *Das Dialogische Prinzip*. (Gerlingen: Verlag Lambert Schneider GmbH, 1994), 293.

possessor of truth and knowledge; arrogance is incompatible with any dialogue worth its name. At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; both should be trying to learn from one another in humility.

Inculturation as dialogue demands strong confidence in the partner, faith in his/her power to make and remake, to create and recreate. This trust is a prerequisite for dialogue. It is not naïve, but critical, it never loses sight of the fact that although it is within human potential to create and transform in a particular situation, though this potential may be impaired in its use. In the absence of this faith, dialogue just becomes a farce which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation.

Hope is another important element of this dialogue. It is rooted in the incompleteness of human beings, from which they step forward in a continuous search which can be carried out only in union with others. This does not consist in passivity – folding one's arms waiting. Inculturation is an encounter in which Africans seek to be more fully African without having to stop being Christian. This cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness.

As a prerequisite for inculturation, dialogue cannot exist without critical thinking, to recognise and discern an indivisible solidarity between human beings everywhere in the world as children of God. It admits no dichotomy, be it among them or between human beings and the world. Reality is a process and transformation, not as a static entity. Such critical thinking does not separate itself from action, for the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality. Inculturation then is to be understood as a continuous process[86] based on love, humility, faith, hope, critical thinking, and action. All these must be present for without them, there is no dialogue. Hence communication, in the absence of a true encounter will remain an illusion.

[86] P. Freire, 63ff.

4.5.3 Spheres of Inculturation as Dialogue

That inculturation involves the African as a whole person means that basically every area of African life should be involved in this encounter with the Message of Christ. Though all cannot be treated here, that does not mean that only those which are treated are important. The essence of Christ's message is life: Christ came in order that the people might have life and life in abundance. His experience of, and way of dealing with, the Jewish culture of his time shows his in-depth knowledge of the Jewish tradition, history, politics, daily life, future expectations etc. This encounter between Jewish culture and Christian faith through Jesus and his disciples, like the later encounters between this and other cultures (particularly through his disciples) was total and radical. Principally, one of the goals of inculturation is that Africans find their own expression of the Message of Christ.

Theological Sphere:

This is the obvious sphere where inculturation has to take place. The statement of the Second Vatican Council on this is very apt in finding it necessary "that in each of the... socio-cultural religions,... theological investigation should be encouraged and the facts and words revealed by God, contained in sacred scripture, and explained by the Fathers and Magisterium of the Church, submitted to a new examination ... In this way it will be more clearly understood by what means the faith can be explained in terms of the philosophy and wisdom of the people, and how their customs, concept of life and social structures can be reconciled with be standard proposed by divine revelation."[87] Divine revelation within the African history and culture must also be studied. Obviously the African people have not been a godless race, and it is important to integrate their experience of God.

The development at the theological level in Africa has moved from mere adaptation, through adjustment to the justification for an indigenous theology which will constitute autonomous reflection and

[87] Ad Gentes No. 22.

work on, and with, the Message of Christ in Africa. The development of an African theology through serious efforts of independent theological researches is a very important step towards the construction of a non-western African theology, not only for the African churches but also for the universal Church.

Liturgical Sphere

Many efforts have already been made in this area examples of which ... include the translation of texts into the vernacular, and introduction of indigenous symbols into sacramental rites without the format of the rite being changed."[88] But this is not enough. For inculturation cannot be simply a matter of a few Africans tokens; efforts must be made to extend the whole of African symbolism to all religious expressions of the Christian faith in Africa. In the construction of African indigenous Christian rites, the existing Roman ritual format must be questioned and re-examined in order that the essence of Christian faith based on the Message of Christ must receive adequate treatment.

We already have some African rites – the Camerounian rite; and the Zairean Mass. Some of these rites are not based on, nor do they rely essentially on the Roman liturgical rite. Typical example is the Zaire Mass, "whose format is different from the traditional one with the following prominent features. At the beginning of the Mass there is a long litany involving the ancestors; the penitential rites comes after the homily, followed by aspersion and kiss of peace; the Eucharistic prayers are composed according to African prayer pattern; there is much interpolation, singing, dancing, drumming, and bodily gesture all through the mass."[89]

Other areas of liturgy must equally be encompassed. Further development is necessary. In all these areas inculturation as dialogue between African culture and the Message of Christ must remain the goal.

Pedagogical Sphere

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[88] J. Ukpong, 514.
[89] Ibid., 516.

Here the principle of dialogue should be very central and new forms of catechism must be developed. Unlike the present situation of catechetical practice in many African local churches where what is passed on is a mere translation of foreign Western catechisms one that is suitable for the people to whom it is addressed must be developed. Africa must try to maintain her very own "personality". This new catechism should be able to answer the questions peculiar to African Christians. It should also integrate them as African into the universal Church. Hence the subject matter remains divine revelation as is contained in the history of divine salvation that very important part of which is the Message of Christ.

At this pedagogical level, effort must be made towards an exchange between the evangelisers and those being evangelised which calls for respect and readiness to learn from one another.

Sphere of Spirituality

Every group of people, every culture has its own traditional mental and spiritual life, and African culture is not bereft of its own spirituality. This reflects African social constellations which are based on a very tightly woven religious organisational forms or patterns and oriented toward a distinctly marked-out philosophical world-view. Today, in the effort towards inculturation, spiritual experiences for encountering the Message of Christ which will enrich the spiritual life and experience of African Christians must be found.

All the African prayer forms and the deep spiritual experience and heritage of the African traditional religion and culture must be seriously taken into account. They have an immense role to play in the renewal and inculturation of the personal and communal forms of prayer, liturgy and spirituality is immense.[90] The integration of this very important aspect of the African traditional religion and culture will go a long way to assuage the spiritual thirsts of African Christians. Many Christian sects and other religions in Africa have discovered this and have been making successful and fruitful use of this fact.

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[90] T. Tschibangu, 327

Organisational-Structural Material Sphere

Till now the version of the church known to many Africans is a divided version of Christianity. The official centralist image of the church is prevalent everywhere. Many do not have that real sense of belonging for they miss the communitarian Christianity found everywhere among the early Christians. In inculturation in Africa where the community plays a very important role, it is very important that every effort should be taken to make the church in Africa a true community of the faithful.

That most of the local churches in Africa are materially poor is a very great hindrance. It puts the local churches in a dependent relationship on the churches of the West and many plans cannot be executed for dearth of means. At times, projects already started must be abandoned due to unreliable and sporadic sources of income. It is a bitter experience when such projects that are very necessary to the people, but which do not find favour with the sponsors, have to be abandoned or extensively revised to find favour. In most cases after such revisions the projects and plans loose their local validity.

Hence inculturation at this level should incorporate efforts or ways to find means of solving the material problems of the local African churches. This will help the local churches gain more of the autonomy desperately needed to actualise the inculturation of the Message of Christ in Africa. This will mean questioning and re-examining already existing structures. Some of them may deserve to be rejected if they do not contribute positively to the taking root of the Message of Christ in Africa. Creativity is needed here as well and it is especially necessary to bring to life new and satisfactory structures that will contribute positively towards the realisation of the inculturation of the Message of Christ in Africa.

Upon the achievement of this much needed material self-reliance, the autonomy and independence of the local churches will follow and will guarantee the way for a balanced relationship of dialogue between the local churches in Africa and the universal Church.

Mundane Sphere

African traditional religion is neither a doctrinal nor a book religion, nor is it a “sunday-to-sunday” religion. In every sense of the word it is

a lived religion that is everywhere in the life of the people. To understand and encounter Africans as religious beings one should not forget that African traditional religion is not primarily a collection of doctrines and rites but more a way of life and an interpretation of the world. It expresses itself in very aspect of life of the African people and can in no way be separated from their daily life. Basically the way Africans eat, plant grain, celebrate feasts and festivals, manage social contacts, etc. all are influenced by their traditional religion.

The Message of Christ is not anti-life. If the encounter between the Jewish culture and Jesus is examined, it is clear that every aspect of life was involved. One of the goals/purposes of the Message of Christ is that the people will have life and have it in abundance, and this includes life here on earth.

The Christianity that was brought to, and is being practised in many parts of Africa shows many anti-life and mundane elements. It is unnecessarily „over-spiritualised" and undue emphasis is laid on salvation of the soul alone as if taking care of the material welfare of the people were evil. One notices an over emphasis on life after death which naturally leads to passivity among the Christians. They do not feel the life-promoting and liberating force of the Message of Christ; their mundane life has been reduced to a mere stepping stone towards life after death. The church authority shows little or practically no interest in the social, political and economic problems and situations of the people. They always try to pacify the oppressed, exploited and suffering masses with such wrongly applied ideas as "Blessed are the poor ...; your reward is in heaven" etc. These would seem to be an effort to make the poor people think and feel that their miserable condition was divinely sanctioned.

Inculturation must help the people find a way to the God of life. It must help them return to the God of revelation, who takes sides with the poor and oppressed; rather than helping them to endure their sufferings they must liberate themselves.[91] Where Christianity supports resignation and fatalism, the inculturation movement must help the people, relying on the Message of Christ, to protest against all forms of injustice and oppression. Hence the mundane sphere is a very important area where much has to be done for the Africans in, and

[91] J. M. Ela, *African Cry*, 53

through, the process of inculturation. Issues pertaining to economy, politics, freedom and human rights must be given appropriate attention. The human person must be seen as an integrated whole and treated as a person in the world, as a part of the mundane sphere.

4.6 Methods of Inculturation as Dialogue

Because of the diversity of the African cultures and peoples, it must be made clear that there cannot be a common uniform method of inculturation in Africa. There must be room for diversity in the methods applied and some of the methods suggested here are not obligatory. Satisfactory methods will be the result of the practical experiences obtained in the process based on the knowledge of the goals of inculturation as dialogue with the Message of Christ. Secondly, an in-depth knowledge of the culture, history, and tradition of the particular group of people in Africa is a conditio sine qua non. The history of the different inculturations of the Christian faith testifies clearly that there cannot be but one particular uniform method.

The different approaches of Christ to many groups of his time is a clear example and support of this freedom in the choice of a satisfactory method of inculturation as dialogue. Dialogue in itself presupposes openness, critical disposition towards oneself, and readiness to learn; inculturation as dialogue must incorporate these qualities. Attentive listening to the other and silent reflection are very important in transcending what has been, and improving what can still be expressed.

The emphasis must be on the Message of Christ as it is presented in, by and through the life, words and deeds of Jesus Christ, the New Testament, as the Bible is a genuine expression of authentic Jewish and Christian religious experiences, it would be self-deceit to expect ready-made solutions to the problems of our own time in the Bible. Hence it should be taken as a point of departure and serve as source of inspiration.[92]

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[92] I. Puthiadam, 371.

In general, a search should be made for the *ipsissimma intentio Dei* especially in the Old Testament. This search applies to African traditional culture, religion and history for it contains the African peoples' experience of God. From this background the Message of Christ can be understood. As for the New Testament, the approach is that of trying to find out the *ipsissimma intentio Iesu*. This will help to distinguish between the Message of Christ and its application to the Jewish tradition and culture. This *ipsissimma intentio Iesu* will then form the central guiding principle of inculturation as dialogue with the Message of Christ. As culture is not a static deposit our method must be that of a dynamic process and dialectical in nature. Culture transforms itself each time it encounters something different and new and incorporates it into its already existing pattern. As this affects the cultural pattern into which it has been taken, the process gives birth to something new and a transformation of the culture takes place. What was taken in is no longer what it was, and the same applies to that which has taken it in. This is the nature of inculturation as dialogue for African culture: Africa becomes truly Christian and truly Christian faith becomes truly African.

The method for achieving this truly African Christian culture might be called the dialectical-processual-interactive method. This method brings along with it negations, uncertainty, distortions etc. But the goal of inculturation is not transcription of something that already exists; it expects something new and is processual and interactive. Our method must take care that true identity of the partners does not get lost in this process. Hence the repeated call for openness and readiness to accept the Message of Christ in order that something will result.

In pointing to the process as a part of the method of inculturation, we emphasise that inculturation cannot be realised through a fixed method as the process runs at different levels and in different spheres. This means not a regimented temporal order but rather different grades of intensity. It is quite possible that these levels exist simultaneously.[93] R. Crollius suggests the following levels: firstly, of adaptation; second self-consciousness and reflection on ones own cultural tradition coupled with a simultaneous distancing from the

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[93] K. Hilpert, 19f.

European elements; third a convergence of Christian practice and theological reflection on one side with socio-cultural and political realities on the other side; understanding of the newly produced forms of Christian life and thought as an extension and enrichment for the universal Christian community.[94] This entails respect and acceptance of the other's divergent views with goodwill because the other's experiences are necessary in order to comprehend the truth about the universe, humanity and God in a better, in a broader, more varied and deeper way.[95] This is not an act between unequal partners but of interdependence between concerned people.

As culture is dynamic the methods will concentrate on African history, cultures and traditions. Other models of inculturation suggest a retreat to African roots, but this cannot exhaust all that could be done with reference to African history, culture and tradition and must be critical in character. The goal is not just to present catalogues of similarities or points of connections between a catechism with scholastic imprints and African traditions. The method should be rather more in-depth anthropological and theological reflection on African history, culture and tradition centred on the symbols. The goal would be the transmitted concepts and a new encounter with them in the present situation of Africa. Efforts should not be geared towards revival of an African past which can never be reproduced nor need inculturation of necessity work out African attributes of God that sound like such scholastic concepts as esse, substance or immutable while these as in any philosophy of God, are part of the African attributes of God. But what is more important to the Africans has been and remains, a God who understands how to be present among the people with their culture and in the different circumstances of life i.e. one with existential relevance. This is the concrete African experience of God. It does not mean that God's attributes are exhausted for the African for whom God is both immanent and transcendent. The immanence of God while important for every philosophy of God is of paramount importance to Africa for through this divine attribute a smooth beginning can be made in the process inculturation as dialogue.

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[94] Ibid., 20f.
[95] L. Boff, 70.

The foregoing comments point to a method implied all along as we have been treating inculturation as dialogue, i. e. existential analysis. Hence we have been using the expression "Message of Christ" as distinct from "Christian message" because the former is arrived at through the distinction of the substance from the accidents of history and culture which form part of the later expression of the Christian message.

Applied to African history, culture and traditions, the approach of existential analysis sees the whole process of inculturation as dialogue from a newly actualised perception of history, tradition and culture. This helps history, culture and tradition to retain their value as cradles of creativity by not allowing them turn into ideologies or nostalgia but remain existentially relevant and current as living memories and creative élan.[96] Tradition as an example will remain and function as the living faith of the dead, in contrast to traditionalism which, as an ideology, might be termed the dead faith of the living.

With reference to African culture, there is no separation or dichotomy between the sacred and profane in the dynamics of African culture. The mundane reality is the place in which the sacred and the consecrated unfold and are experienced. African symbols are to be understood as the language, of this point of connection between the sacred and the profane. They express the drama of life, the tension between life and death, and that the fate of the human being draws its meaning from the victory of life over dead and good over evil. Hence, there is continuity between the fate of the cosmos and that of the human being: the salvation of the human being is equally that of his/her environment or cosmos.[97] For inculturation to be "à jour" it has to contribute to the victory of life over the forces of death. That means, among other things, having existential relevance which can be achieved through existential analysis, interpretation and application of both the Message of Christ and important elements of African culture, history and tradition. The issue of existential interpretation leads to the method of hermeneutic which is very important, for the way in which inculturation can achieve the preservation of African identity without

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[96] K.J.K. Tossou, 54f.
[97] N.B. Abeng, 415.

deforming the Message of Christ in African culture.[98] It is through this hermeneutic approach that entrance can be found into the African world of symbols which is very important for understanding the African past, culture, tradition and religion.

A method of applying the products of the foregoing procedures is equally necessary. Inculturation as dialogue which is an encounter presupposes transformation. Dialogue consists, among other things, of word, reflection and action. These aspects are very important, for if any is missing the others suffer. In such a radical interaction as inculturation, there cannot be true words without a corresponding praxis. Sacrifice of action means verbalism which often leads to passivity; sacrifice of reflection can lead to a blind copying which ends up in activism.

Inculturation as dialogue with the Message of Christ should lead to a transformation of the world and culture of those involved, which entails as well the transformation of these people themselves. Any inculturation model which does not succeed here may have failed to jointly understand and promote word, reflection and action. Inculturation cannot produce such a result if its central components are separated for there can be no transformation without action.[99] Through inculturation as dialogue African people have the possibility of an existential encounter with the Message of Christ which is characterised through its visible positive influence on people's life. Africans should be in position to lead every aspect of their daily life in the spirit of the Message of Christ which encompass as all aspects of their life. At this point it will be an experience of Salvation, where all who have encountered the Message of Christ have been transformed. At this point Africans can bear testimony based on their proper experience within their own cultural milieu and as Africans of the life-giving and liberating dimensions of the Message of Christ. Whichever method, wherever it is used, it must encompass all the people in that area.

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[98] N. Muschete, "Das Verhältnis der Kirche der Christenheit zu neuen Kulturen der Dritten Welt". (Aus dem Franz. Übers. V. E. Ruser-Lindemann). in: *Concilium*, 17 (1981), 494.
[99] P. Freire, 60f.

Chapter Five

Igbo Culture in Dialogue with the Message of Christ

5.1 Igbo Culture and Inculturation

In the early part of this work we saw the traditional world and religion of the Igbos and that it has remained an ongoing challenge to Christianity. One reason is that the Igbos, like the other African groups, go in search of a concrete happiness both in the shadow of the ancestors and today in the light of the gospel. We need to recall that, more than any other group the Igbos, accepted Christianity principally for utilitarian purposes.

Furthermore, the challenge of the Igbo culture stems from the fact that the Igbos (like other African groups) live a relationship with the invisible God through a special series of meditations: family customs, marriage customs, techniques of healing, rites of initiation, special relationship to ancestors etc. These cultural constructs of the Igbos were not duly considered either by the early missionaries or by their indigenous successors.

Christianity came to Igboland during a period of great disruption in the region. The presence and practice of the Europeans (both colonialists and missionaries) left many traditional systems broken. No real effort was made towards dialogue between Christianity in its European version and the Igbo culture. Hence “the Church in Igboland grew up as it were, divided away from the cultural roots of Iboland to

wear a additional toga of foreignness other than the foreignness that belongs intrinsically to the Gospel itself …."[1]

Traditional Igbo society and culture stresses a considerable individualism as well as communal solidarity. This trend is found in many other African traditional societies and cultures. Through membership in the community individuals are assisted by built-in values to aspire towards different goals in life. With the advent and spread of Christianity, coupled with the subsequent Westernisation and secularisation, Igbo traditional cultural values and the moral codes supporting them began to break up. This engendered religious confusion among many of the Igbo people.

In the first place the missionaries brought an antagonistic picture of Christianity divided among themselves. Today many Igbo converts live their version of Western Christianity in this way. Again, these converts try to maintain a dual relationship. Though converted Christians, they remain consciously and unconsciously deeply-rooted in Igbo traditional religion. The fact that irrespective of the conversion into Christianity, the Igbos still flock to their traditional religion should be indicative of the ambiguity existing in their religious life. This shows clearly that there is need for dialogue between Igbo traditional culture and the Message of Christ.

Efforts have been made in this direction, but the persistence of the situation indicates that more is called for. Such a problem cannot be solved merely through translation of Western Christian doctrines into Igbo vernacular. "The work of the interpretation of the Gospel through Igbo cultural life experiences so as to provide, from the biblical revelation (i.e. the Message of Christ), new value systems for the people... becomes the inevitable challenge to theologians of our day."[2] This is because this Message of Christ contains within itself the new universal possibilities for human beings through the reconciliation Christ has instituted between God and human beings.

Igbo culture and tradition cannot be left aside. Like any other culture it is to a substantial degree the repository of the Igbo peoples experience of the divine in their history. It also contains the Igbo

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[1] E. Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture: A Study of the Interaction of Christianity and Igbo Culture*. (New York: NOK Publishers Ltd., 1974), 230.
[2] Ibid.

culture's orientation to the values which have developed along the years. Such values as respect for human life, justice, courage, and communal co-operation are vivid expressions of the Igbo sense of community, etc., Such sociological as well as theological resources within Igbo culture make inculturation as dialogue between Igbo culture and the Message of Christ possible. This encounter will serve as the fountain of the new values for life in the Igbo cultural world. The new cultural dimensions created will lead to a new lease of community as well as individual life for Igbos.

Generally, like any other human beings, the Igbos are confronted with all forms of tensions based on existential human predicament. Such tensions include confronting the forces of estrangement. Igbo history and culture show many traces of such encounters of estrangement – both natural and artificial. Estrangement through the forces of nature in Igbo culture is seen in the cultural and religious symbols and practices of the Igbos. Their recognition of the forces of evil, darkness, death and nature, and their search for the patronage of the deities through religious rituals, rites, feasts, festivals and symbols are vivid evidence of these forces of estrangement. Such incidents as the slave trade, colonialism, and collaboration of the missionary agents with the colonialists, etc., testify to man-made estrangements with which the Igbos, like other African groups are still confronted.

The Igbo adherents of non-African religions are cut from their roots. Western Christianity and other non-African religions have had at their core a subtle mix of encouragement and coercion in "christianising" and "civilising" the indigenous peoples and prodding them to see their heritage in the dark colours of evil, everything that existed before the advent of Western Christianity and "civilisation" was stamped heathen. Not only among the Igbos, but all over the continent of Africa, major non-African religions have destroyed the characteristic features of African life. This development has wrecked a lot of havoc on the African personality and identity, an example of which can be taken from the present situation of Igbo Christians with regards to their identity as Africans. Christian missionaries broke into the traditional solidarity with denominational varieties and rivalries. Some mission regulations threatened the traditional society. Perhaps most fundamental among these methods was the emphasis and exaltation of the individual and his/her soul, whereas indigenous Igbo society is communal. Every member of the society is no more than a unit in an

organic whole and thinks, speaks, believes and acts as such. With such undue emphasis on the individual it was easy to "convert" a number of people.

This concept of the individual is foreign to Igbo worldview which joins the individual with a strong communal solidarity. In this culture the individual is "individual-in-community" and through the membership in the community receives meaning and identity and can strive towards self-actualisation.

The methods of conversion of the missionaries as presented above, removed the individual from this important organic whole. The "converts" not only imbibed a new set of religious beliefs, but began to nurse alien ideas detrimental to the welfare and solidarity of the communal life pattern. Some people may not see anything wrong here especially with this emphasis upon the individual. But in a society such as the Igbo where religion is the real cement and even the basis of secular authority, conversion of the individual which implies in most cases a wholesome renunciation of the traditional religion and way of life is detrimental to the traditional community which bases the Igbo (African) personality and identity.

Today the majority of Igbo Christians (like other African Christians) tend (judging solely from external appearances) towards the individualist conception imbibed through Western Christianity. This notwithstanding, they still retain strong attachments to their society and culture. There the indigenous African and Western-missionary concept of the individual continue to jostle together and mix in a way that not only defies easy analysis but produces a personality as well as an identity crisis among the Igbos.

The present situation of the Igbos as well as other Africans, an example of which is presented above, testifies to a rapid increase in the number of forces of estrangement. These include extreme poverty, hunger, diseases, wars, dictatorship, exploitation and oppression of the masses. The list continues to increase daily: these are universally forces of estrangement and are not bound to a particular culture, time or group of human beings.

Estrangement points to the underlying characteristic of the existential predicament of the human being. Human beings as they exist are not what they essentially are, and ought and can be, but are estranged

from their true being. The depth of the estrangement lies in the fact that one belongs essentially to that from which one is estranged. Human beings are not complete strangers to their true being, for they belong to this true being.[3]

Even if estrangement is not clearly evident in every culture in the same identical way, it is implied in most of the descriptions of the human predicament among various cultures. Confronted with some of these different forces of estrangement Igbo culture, can find a way through inculturation as dialogue with the Message of Christ, for it is Christ alone who has succeeded in conquering these forces of estrangement and conquered the gap between essence and existence. This life of Christ is not possible only for one with divine nature. Being human in every sense of the word, like every human being Jesus is finite freedom. Otherwise not being truly human he could not be the Christ.

For the Igbos, as well as other estranged peoples of Africa, inculturation as dialogue with the Message of Christ offers a real chance for productive confrontation with these forces of estrangement. This will be achieved only through an honest, serious and critical encounter with the Message of Christ by understanding it within the Igbo worldview and thought-pattern. The way Christ dealt with the forces of estrangement in the human predicament will then be the model for inculturation among the Igbos. In this way Igbos will experience the liberating dimension of the Message of Christ. This expectation cannot be branded utopic, for the Message of Christ has universal validity and its expectation cannot be branded utopian for Jesus himself participated fully and without any reservations in all the tragic elements of existence.

In terms of the eschatological symbolism it can also be said that

> Christ is the end of existence (i. e. in the sense of aim or purpose, for history has come to an intrinsic end qualitatively in the appearance of Jesus Christ as a historical reality). He is the end of existence lived in estrangement, conflicts, and self-destruction… His appearance is realized eschatology…, it is fulfilment "in principle", and

[3] P. Tillich, 45.

> it is the manifestation of the power and the beginning of fulfilment.[4]

For the Igbo culture and traditional religion it also means that inculturation as dialogue with the Message of Christ offers opportunity to experience what fulfilment qualitatively means. Hence it can be echoed with the letter to the Hebrews (1: 1-2) that in days past God spoke to us through our natural environment, history, culture, ancestors and even through the missionaries. But in these days he not only has spoken to the world (Africa's included) through His son, but the still speaks to human beings in their various situations. Only through such existential encounter is the Message of Christ the Good News of salvation.

5.2 General Conclusion

This work could be taken as one of the many searches for the way through which the Message of Christ can take root in Africa. Its last two chapters became "prescriptive" programmatic as the author's response to lack of adequate objective guidelines on how the Message of Christ is to take root in Africa which was discovered during the earlier parts of this work.

This situation applies also to the Igbo society. The various authors working in this area presume the existence of such objective guidelines, but face the difficulty of trying to build a house without a drawn architectural plan. The owner presumes that the idea which exists only in his/her mind is already known to others. It is very difficult if not impossible for others to follow this idea.

Much details of Igbo culture were not given in the last chapter, but what was said of African culture in general applies to the Igbo as well. Hence mention is made only of some possible areas of dialogue between the Message of Christ and Igbo traditional religion for going

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[4] Ibid., 119.

into additional details would overstretch the scope of this work which intended only to lay a foundation for subsequent detailed works in this direction. Hence this work will require a good deal of follow-up in order to develop more detailed and adequate treatment of the different aspects of Igbo culture within the project of inculturation as dialogue with the Message of Christ. Igbo traditional religion is part of a complex interacting system and due to the intertwined position of religion with other aspects of life within the Igbo society such subsequent works will have to be interdisciplinary in outlook.

Returning to inculturation as dialogue with the Message of Christ, one should not forget the cross-cultural character of this message. This makes up for the limitations of the Igbo traditional religion which, to a great extent, is culture bound. Another problem of the Igbo traditional religion which can be solved by the Message of Christ is its inability to give adequate answers to modern questions of the Igbo people.

Igbo traditional religion is not bereft of positive contributions but of necessity is regional and culture-bound. But this is needed in inculturation as dialogue for, among other things, it forms the basis of the social network of the Igbo society which is not only present but deep enough in their lives that basic decisions are taken based on this traditional religion. It is difficult today to discern easily what other values influence Igbo people's decisions. Both Western and African values play important roles and are both partners in the dialogue – the Message of Christ and Igbo traditional religion – are needed.

Those who see Christian faith as an aspect of European imperialism in Africa argue that African traditional religion alone is enough to give adequate solutions to African problems. The Message of Christ contains within itself a universally valid message of salvation. It offers new possibilities for the Africans in general and for the Igbos in particular for it has, among other things, a unique model of divine human relationship exemplified in Jesus himself. This is not found in the Igbo traditional religion.

On the other hand, Igbo concept of community, though a valuable aspect to Igbo culture, is strongly exclusive. Those outside the Igbo cultural world are not easily integrated. For this and other limitations of the Igbo idea of community the Message of Christ is needed. The message aims, among other things, to build a universal community of God's children. In inculturation as dialogue with this message, the

Igbo culture with its concept of community can be complemented with the concept of a universal community of the children of God.

This whole work has tried to show that for the Message of Christ to take root in Africa there should be dialogue between it and African culture. Within this context of dialogue the message can be believed as the Good News of salvation which indeed is what inculturation is all about.

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