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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgement.....	i
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Chapter 1 General Introduction

1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Statement of Problem	8
1.3 Research Question	11
1.4 Clarification of a basic term in this research: Cultural values.....	11
1.5 Method of the Research.....	12
1.6 Structure of the Research.....	13
1.7 Limitations of the Research.....	13

Chapter 2 An Overview of the Igbo people and Literature Review

2.1 Igbo people, a general Overview	14
2.1.1 The Igbo tribe.....	14
2.1.2 Geographical Location of the Igbo People	16
2.1.3 The Advent and Spread of Christianity in Igbo Land	22
2.2 A review of some literatures on Igbo religious Tradition cum Worldview.....	26
2.2.1 Igbo Religious Tradition	26
2.2.2 The Igbo Worldview	34
2.3 A review of some literatures on Christian religious education in the Igbo Context.....	36
2.3.1 Christian religious education during the European missionary era	36
2.3.2 Christian religious education after the European missionary era	39

Chapter 3 Comparative and Analytic study of some Igbo Religious Traditional Values in the light of Christian Religion

3.1 Focus I: Some Igbo Religious Traditional values that show close similarity to the Christian values.....	45
3.1.1 The Belief in a Supreme Being	45
3.1.2 The belief in the Existence of Levels of or Intermediary Beings	48
3.1.3 Communion of the Living and the Dead.....	52
3.1.4 Dignity of the Human Person	53
3.1.5 The Sacredness of Human Life.....	55

3.1.6 Community and Communion.....	58
3.2 Focus II: Values in Igbo Religious Tradition that can be contextually understood in relation to the Christian values.....	62
3.2.1 Veneration of the Saints vis a vis Ancestors veneration.....	62
3.2.2 Sacrifice in the Christian religious tradition vis a vis Sacrifice in Igbo religious tradition.....	66

Chapter 4

The Role of Igbo Religious Tradition in the Christian Religious Education of Igbo Children

4.1 Igbo Religious Traditional Values as Access Point in the Learning about the Christian Religion.....	72
4.1.1 Tapping from the Rich Traditional Values and Practices	73
4.1.2 Adapting the Christian religious educational design to fit the religious-cultural environment.....	75
4.1.3 The implication of the Above to Christian religious education of Igbo children – The Contextualization of Christian religious education.....	77
4.2 Igbo Religious Traditional Values as Pedagogical Instruments in the Teaching and Learning about Christian Religion.....	83
4.2.1 Religious Traditional Didactive Narratives	84
4.2.2 Religious Traditional Symbols and Rituals.....	88
4.2.3 The implication of the Above to Christian religious education of Igbo children – The Learner-centred Christian Religious Education	90

Chapter 5

General Conclusion

5.1 Evaluation.....	92
5.2 Conclusion	94
Bibliography.....	95
Abstract	103
Abstract	105

Chapter 1

General Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The gradual shift from the Catholic Church's teaching that "there is no salvation out of the Church"¹ has come with much change in Christian theology. This idea, which evolved in the theology of the fathers of the Church both before and after Augustine,² suggests that the Church is essential for salvation³. However, when one considers the historical context and ecclesiology behind this axiom,⁴ as well as the changed and constantly changing circumstances of the world today,⁵ one cannot but appreciate the effort of Vatican II council with regard to the change it brought to this understanding. Nevertheless, before delving into a short historical recap of this paradigm shift which culminated in the Second Vatican Council, it is important to note that there exists in the New Testament, apparent confirmation of the singular and general mediatorship of Jesus Christ which more or less may have informed the early Christians' position about salvation through the Church. Some examples can be seen in the Gospel according to John, where Christ proclaims, that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and that nobody comes to the Father except through him (Cf. John 14:6). Likewise, the apostle Peter declares before the Sanhedrin, that there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which they will be saved except the name of Jesus (Cf. Acts 4:12). These scriptural passages amongst others could underlie the early Christian assertion that salvation can only be reached through Christ and in relation the Church. This is because the New Testament also informs the Catholic Church self-understanding as the mystical Body of Christ, identifying herself as the scene of reconciliation and grace. Hence, Paul views the Church as Christ's body (Cf. 1 Cor. 12:12–27) and declares that Christ is the head of this body, which according to him is the Church (Cf. Col. 1:18). This Pauline

¹ CYPRIAN of Carthage, Epistle 72:21, in: Alexander Roberts – James Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 5, (American edition) New York: 1919, 384.

² Cf. Jacques DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, Maryknoll New York 1997, 86–96.

³ Cf. *ibid.*, 96.

⁴ Dupuis for one is of the view that this axiom which was characterized by a time of prevalent paganism and the presence many non-Christian Jews as well as schismatics and heretics applied to them all. Again, this axiom was informed by an ecclesiology a time that sees the Church as the ark of salvation, prefigured in the ark of Noah. Cf. DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 97.

⁵ Cf. DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 99–102. Here once more, Dupuis shows how the discovery of the new world and other people necessitated the reinterpretation of this axiom which today makes it more or less null and void.

ecclesiology shows a great link between the ecclesial community and Christ's saving action. Hence, Paul further teaches that Baptism joins believers into this body, as means of dying and rising with Christ (Cf. Rom. 6:3–5). Consequently, ecclesial membership becomes the sacramental means by which salvation is generally conveyed. However, one notices in the New Testament also inclusive themes that balance this exclusive theology. A good example of such inclusive theology can be seen in Paul. In his letter to the Romans, Paul explains that some Gentiles, who lack the knowledge of the law of God, can act according to the law's requirements through their natural intuition, which means that they have an inner sense of the law, shown by their hearts and consciences, which can either accuse or defend them (Cf. Rom. 2:14–15). Here, one notices that Paul presents conscience as a hub of divine encounter, implying that God's grace may work beyond defined covenantal lines. Again, the First Letter to Timothy also asserts that God wants all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (Cf. 1 Tim. 2:4). From the above biblical positions, one notices that the basic tension underlying the early Christian theology of salvation could be as a result of the belief in the exclusivity of the mediatorship of Christ as well as the universalism in God's salvific will. Succinctly, one can say that although the New Testament portrays a God whose compassion extends beyond human organizations, it also introduces Christ as the singular mediator and the Church as the sacrament of salvation.

Early Christian commentators struggled with these simultaneous declarations though in different ways depending on one's reaction to truth. Some examples include; Origen, who posits that divine providence extends to all people.⁶ Justin Martyr advances the idea by arguing that those who lived according to reason shared in the divine *Logos* even before Christ's incarnation – the *logos spermatikos*, or seed of the Word.⁷ As would become obvious, later efforts to reconcile the need of the Church with the possibility of salvation for non-Christians would draw on these concepts. Furthermore, combining Pauline universality with Cyprian's rigorism, Augustine of Hippo (354–430) produced a more sophisticated perspective. He believes that salvation can only be found in the *vera religio*, or true religion, which according to him is the *ecclesia Catholica*, and which has existed before historical

⁶ Cf. ORIGEN, *De Principiis*, I.6.1, in: Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 4, (American edition) New York: 1913, 260.

⁷ Cf. JUSTIN MARTYR, *Second Apology*, 13, in: Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. 1, (American edition) New York: 1913, 193.

Christianity.⁸ Hence, although Augustine kept the need of the Church for salvation, he also accepted even if partially, the mysterious functioning of grace beyond its visible borders by opining that the true religion has always been present among the ancients and has never been absent for anyone deserving of it.⁹ Thus, the questions about the fate of pagans who died before Christ led Augustine to suggest that righteous people from that time could still be saved and that anyone who lived a good life and believed in Christ, even if they were unaware of Him, would be saved through Him.¹⁰ One notices here, how Augustine's idea may have opened the theological path for the subsequent consideration on Implicit faith and desire baptism. Thus, Augustine's theology was both for the necessity of the Church as well as the freedom of divine grace.

Though scholastic theologians attempted to clarify the need of the Church and the sacraments for salvation, one notices nevertheless that there was not much significant shift from what was previously obtainable. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 confirmed: "There is one universal Church of the faithful, outside of which no one at all is Saved"¹¹. But, theologians like St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) nuanced this by presenting the idea of baptism of desire. For Aquinas, while baptism by water is a necessity in fact; its salvific benefit might be received by wish, provided the individual had implicit faith in God and charity motivated by grace.¹² Aquinas based this dogma in God's universal salvific will, and observed that due to the baptism of desire, which includes the intention of being baptized, a man can be saved even without water baptism.¹³ Here one sees Aquinas preserving both the sacramental economy of salvation and God's freedom to save beyond visible means. In the council of Trent which was a product of the reaction necessitated by the Protestant Reformation, one notices a reworking and promotion of Aquinas' position. The Council of Trent (1545–1563) confirmed the need for baptism and the Church for salvation.¹⁴ However, Trent's Decree on Justification (1547) stated that justification requires baptism or a genuine desire for it.¹⁵ When, in the 19th century, Fr. Leonard Feeney in Boston sparked controversy

⁸ Cf. Hilary Ndu OKEKE, The Optimism of Augustine of Hippo on The Salvation of Non-Christians, in: The Nigerian Journal of Theology (NJT) 39 (2025) 104–117, here 107.

⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

¹¹ FOURTH LATERAN COUNCIL, Constitution I: On the Catholic Faith, in: Norman Tanner (ed.), Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, vol. 1, Georgetown Washington DC 1990, 230.

¹² Cf. Thomas AQUINAS, Summa Theologica, III, q.68, a.2.

¹³ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁴ Cf. COUNCIL OF TRENT, Session VII: Decree on the Sacraments, (Canons on the sacrament of baptism 3 and 5), in: Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, vol. 2, ed. Norman Tanner, Georgetown Washington DC 1990, 685.

¹⁵ Council of Trent, Decree on Justification, Session VI, ch. 4, in: *ibid.*, 672.

by strictly interpreting the doctrine that no one can be saved outside the Church, the Holy See with reference to the council of Trent clarified in 1949 that membership in the Church can occur through actual or desired affiliation, allowing for the possibility of salvation for those who seek God sincerely but are unaware of the Gospel.¹⁶

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) was a significant moment for the Catholic Church, focusing on salvation beyond its own boundaries. With the evident increase in the awareness of the pluralistic nature of the world, the Church's change of view about other Christians, non-Christians, and nonbelievers became imminent. These changes can be observed in three key documents of the Vatican II Council: *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Nostra Aetate*. In *Lumen Gentium*, the Council clarified that the Church is essential for salvation because Christ, the sole mediator, is present in the Church.¹⁷ However, it also noted a difference between full membership in the Church and having a connection to it. While Catholics who accept its teachings and sacraments are fully part of the Church, there are also many truths and elements of holiness found outside its visible form.¹⁸ In article 16, *Lumen Gentium* represents in a clearer term, a significant change in Catholic inclusivism. Here it was stated clearly that those who do not know the Gospel or the Church, but sincerely seek God, can still achieve salvation.¹⁹ This definitely, applies to non-Catholic Christians, non-Christians like Jews and Muslims, and even to individuals who may not believe in God but follow moral guidelines. The Council clarifies however, that the salvation of such individuals is known only to God and that any truth or grace outside the Church serves as a preparation for the Gospel.²⁰ Although this later statement may sound inclusivist, it at least shows that the Church acknowledges the existence of some truth and grace in other religious traditions. *Nostra Aetate* (1965) on the other hand was more concerned with the explanation of how the Catholic Church relates to non-Christian religions. Hence, amongst other things, it states that the Church respects and regards what is true and holy in other religions and sees them as part of divine truth.²¹ With particular mention of religious traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and other unnamed religious traditions, *Nostra Aetate* recognizes the 'good

¹⁶ Cf. William MOST, Tragic Errors of Leonard Feeney, in: EWTN, URL: <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/tragic-errors-of-leonard-feeney-12314> [Accessed 17.10.2025].

¹⁷ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), in: Vatican Council II. The Basic Sixteen Documents of Vatican II. Constitutions. Decrees. Declaration, ed. by Austin FLANNERY, Northport/NY – Dublin 1996, 20 [Nr.14].

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, Nr. 8.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, Nr.16.

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

²¹ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate* (28 October 1965), in: Vatican Council II. The Basic Sixteen Documents, ed. by Austin FLANNERY, 570 – 571 [Nr.2].

things' present in them while emphasizing the Church's role in proclaiming the message of Christ to them.²² Thus, just like the *Lumen Gentium*, *Nostra Aetate* shows also a positive outlook towards other religions as something not totally negative to the salvific will of God. Furthermore, *Gaudium et Spes*, especially article 22 discusses the idea of universal salvation based on Christ. As the council Fathers noted here; "Since Christ died for everyone, and since all are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partakers, in a way known to God, in the Paschal Mystery"²³. One can say that this passage explains Vatican II's view on universal accessibility of God to all created beings which is based on a better understanding of the incarnation, such that Christ's ability to save suggests that everyone, in some way, experiences grace. Therefore, as a take away from these selected documents, one can summarize that while they see the Church as the clear sign of salvation, its reach goes beyond just where grace is found.

As is the case with every topic of interest, further engagements and clarifications with this topic continued after the Council. Document like the publication by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) aimed to clarify inclusivism's theological aspects. Hence, in 2000, the declaration, *Dominus Iesus*, under Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, emphasized the uniqueness of Christ's mediation and cautioned against interpretations that weaken the Church's identity, stating that denying Christ's unique role contradicts the Catholic faith.²⁴ Hence, *Dominus Iesus* emphasizes that contemporary theology should examine how other religious experiences and figures fit into God's plan for salvation, in the light of the belief in Christ's unique mediation.²⁵ It further explains that even though the Second Vatican Council affirms that Christ's mediation is singular and allows for various forms of participation that derive their significance from Him, any exploration of these participatory mediations however must align with the principle that they cannot be seen as parallel or complementary to Christ's mediation.²⁶ As expected, this declaration caused debate among theologians involved in interreligious dialogue, who saw it as a move away from Vatican II's openness.²⁷

²² Cf. *ibid.*

²³ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965), in: Vatican Council II. The Basic Sixteen Documents, ed. by Austin FLANNERY, 186 [Nr. 22]

²⁴ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church *Dominus Iesus* (August 6, 2000), in: AAS 92 (2000) 743–765, 755 [Nr.14].

²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁷ Thomas P. RAUSCH, Has The Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith Exceeded Its Authority?, in: Theological Studies 62 (2001) 802–810, here: 803–804.

Thus, more recent position of the Church shows a clear shift from what Dominus Iesus intended and aligns more with the openness of the Second Vatican council. As such, in his address to participants in the All-Religions' Conference in the Vatican, Pope Francis hints that "The lack of respect for the noble teachings of religions is one of the causes of the troubled situation in which the world finds itself today"²⁸. He explains further that all religions share a fundamental truth that emphasizes the importance of loving and honouring one another, respecting diversity, and caring for each other and the Earth, and ignoring these teachings contributes to global turmoil.²⁹

Thus, addressing a delegation from the Mosque of the Italian city of Bologna in June 2024, Pope Francis comments that "every believer must feel free to propose—never impose!—their own religion to other people, believers or not [and that] marriages between people of different religions must not be an opportunity to convert the spouse to one's own religion"³⁰. This position is substantiated further in his address during his apostolic Journey to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Singapore between 2 and 13 September 2024. In this Address which he presented during the interreligious meeting with young people, Pope Francis maintains that "all religions are paths to God [...] like different languages that express the divine [because] there is only one God, and religions are like languages, paths to reach God"³¹. Hence, he encourages the young people to follow the path of dialogue instead of comparison and competition among their religions because all are children of the one and only God.³² One can notice that the position of Pope Francis not only aligns closely to the teaching in *Nostra Aetate* which maintains that the Catholic Church respects, values and acknowledges the truth found in other religions; their teachings and practices that, despite differences, often reflect a universal truth that enlightens humanity³³, but also aligns with theologians like Jacques Dupuis, who aims to create a theology that respects other faiths while upholding Christ's uniqueness.³⁴ Thus, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith

²⁸ VATICAN NEWS, Pope: Lack of respect for religious values leads to intolerance, in: Vatican News (2024, 30. November), URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2024-11/pope-audience-all-religions-conference-interfaith.html> [accessed: 03.03.2026].

²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁰ VATICAN NEWS, Pope: All people should be free to choose and practice religion, in: Vatican News (2024, 26. June), URL: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2024-06/pope-every-human-being-should-be-free-to-choose-religion.html> [accessed 20.02.2026].

³¹ FRANCIS, Interreligious Meeting with Young People, in: The Holy See (13 September 2024), URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2024/september/documents/20240913-singapore-giovani.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com [accessed: 03.03.2026].

³² Cf. *ibid.*

³³ Cf. *Nostra Aetate* 2.

³⁴ Cf. DUPUIS, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 212–217.

(CDF) in her 2001 Notification on Dupuis' book on religious pluralism, while calling for caution in the reading and understanding of Dupuis text, acknowledges that the Holy Spirit works in human hearts and cultures, preparing them for the Gospel.³⁵ This publication further hints that non-Christians can experience salvation through elements of truth and goodness in their religions, even though the Catholic theology does not support the idea that these religions are valid paths to salvation, as they contain fundamental omissions and errors about God, humanity, and the world.³⁶ One notices from this short recap about the theological discourse of the Catholic Church and her relation to other religious tradition, that there is noticeable openness as well as serious caution. However, the Church's acknowledgement of the existence of some truth and good practice in other religions is already a good and positive step in this relationship and a key element in this research.

Hence, the believe in the possibility of salvation outside the Church is already a fact that is not debated any longer. As can be seen from the short historical recap above, this truth did not just evolve from no-where but underwent development that have led from an exclusivist orientated theology of the Roman Catholic Church to a more inclusive theology. Since the outset of the Second Vatican Council or even before it, there have been effort by theologians to show that other religious traditions can be means of salvation for their adherents. The effort was to show that the adherent of other religious traditions could attain salvation through them without having necessarily to believe in Christ or become member of the Catholic Church. This truth was somehow affirmed by the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* when it says that those who do not know Christ by no fault of their own can attain salvation.³⁷ And the Catechism of the Catholic Church reaffirmed that those who seek God sincerely may attain salvation even when they are not members of the Church.³⁸ This goes contrary to the old maxim of outside the church there is no salvation and goes a long way to show the Church's openness and inclusive theology, made possible by the Second Vatican Council. This paradigm shift by the Second Vatican Council lies in the council's realization of the positive values in other religious traditions; an acknowledgement that could also be seen in the later teachings of the Church's Magisterium³⁹ A further development in this

³⁵ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Notification on the Book Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism (Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York 1997) by Father JACQUES DUPUIS, S.J., (January 24, 2001), in: The Holy See, URL: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html [accessed: 20.10.2025], [Nr. 8].

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁷ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 16.

³⁸ Cf. CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH [CCC], London 1994 [Revised and Reprint: 2011], Nr. 847.

³⁹ This recognition which is very evident in *Nostra Aetate* 2, was further developed in later Church's teachings like *Redemptoris Missio* 55, CCC 843 etc.

direction is the Church's acknowledgment of the importance of dialogue with other religious traditions.⁴⁰ This realisation has influenced her approach to evangelization, whereby emphasis is on dialogue through openness and mutual learning.⁴¹ This recognition highlights at least implicitly that religious traditions have a role to play in the evangelization process of its people, as religious traditions are deeply intertwined with culture which shapes the worldview of peoples in the various parts of the world. Consequently, understanding these traditions and their role in evangelization is crucial for effective Christian religious education of children of the respective religious-traditional backgrounds. This is actually what this work intends to show using Igbo religious traditions as a case study.

1.2 Statement of Problem

In today's world, marked by different religions, global connections, and shared reliance, theology has a chance and a challenge, such that to stay relevant, theology must go beyond its own beliefs and actively interact with other religions, which implies not just being tolerant or curious but what should constitute an important task that reshapes what theology means, how it is practiced, and its purpose.⁴² Positively in this direction is the Catholic Church's continuous emphasis on dialogue with cultures,⁴³ which far from reducing the efficacy of theology and evangelisation, can enhance it. Whereby evangelization would aim at explicitly sharing with religious traditions, what they may have been experiencing implicitly through grace.⁴⁴ Thus, referencing J A T Robinson who cited example with Christianity encounter with Hinduism, Gavin D'Costa emphasizes the fact that theology can be influenced and can influence positively other traditions.⁴⁵ This shows further the need that theology pays attention to the historical and cultural setting of any people it encounters and should consider the diverse environment in which it occurs. Hence, theology since the outset of the modern times has always explored ways to move beyond one's own religious beliefs, primarily through interreligious dialogue, which became more formalized after the mid-1900s with moves following the Second Vatican Council like the creation of the Dicastery for

⁴⁰ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), Boston 1990, 72–73 [Nr.55].

⁴¹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴² Most theology of this Century have continued to propose this open and dialogical form that theology should take in the 21st century. Examples of this proposition can be seen in: Cf. Paul F. KNITTER, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY 2002, 173; and Michael BARNES, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, Cambridge 2002, 1.

⁴³ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 58.

⁴⁴ John Paul II hinted on this important outcome when he said that Faith is actually received when it becomes culture. Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 52.

⁴⁵ Cf. Gavin D'COSTA, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, Oxford 1986, 12.

Interreligious Dialogue and groups like the World Council of Churches. These institutions have released some important publications like, “Dialogue and Mission”⁴⁶ by the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, and “Teaching Christianity in dialogue with other faith traditions”⁴⁷ by the World Council of Churches. Noticeable in some of these publications is that they encourage a rethink on views about God, salvation, and truth using dialogue as a working tool.⁴⁸ A similar and further effort in this direction is the comparative theology, popularized by Francis X. Clooney, which emphasises that one stays rooted in one’s own faith while deeply engaging with other traditions.⁴⁹ This study not only offers insights into different beliefs but also enriches one’s theology. Again, is intercultural theology which highlights the link between religion and culture, showing how crossing cultural lines can lead to mutual enrichment.⁵⁰ Lastly, is public theology which deals with social issues like justice and human rights, fostering a common moral conversation that includes various religious perspectives.⁵¹ In all these efforts, one notices one thing that is common: the inclusion of individual religious traditions in the faith and moral discussion about them. Thus, encounter with other religious traditions becomes dialogue, which has the possibility of leading to the development of new ideas that are neither totally alien nor indigenous.

Here, one also needs to recall the stand of the World Council of Churches which emphasizes that teaching Christianity should include listening, not just speaking.⁵² And when one talks about listening here, one must also explain what it entails. This explanation can be found in the considerations of theologians such as David Tracy who believes that theology should be a public discussion which allows for dialogue and exchange with different traditions and worldviews.⁵³ Hence, the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences promotes a ‘triple dialogue’ with cultures, religions, and the poor as a way to approach

⁴⁶ Cf. DICASTERY FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* (3 March 1984), [Nr.2], URL: <https://www.dicasteryinterreligious.va/dialogue-and-mission-1984/> [accessed: 18.10.2025].

⁴⁷ WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Teaching Christianity in dialogue with other faith traditions*, (23 October 2000), URL: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/teaching-christianity-in-dialogue-with-other-faith-traditions> [accessed: 18.10.2025].

⁴⁸ This importance of dialogue is more or less the emphasis in these Publications from the two aforementioned institutions.

⁴⁹ This approach which was more or less popularized by Francis X. CLOONEY, is more evident in his work; *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*, Malden, MA 2010.

⁵⁰ This approach was much promoted by Henning WROGEMANN, particularly in his *Intercultural Theology, Volume 1: Intercultural Hermeneutics*, Downers Grove IL 2016.

⁵¹ Cf. Elaine GRAHAM, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age*, London 2013.

⁵² Cf. WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, *Teaching Christianity in Dialogue with Other Faith Traditions*.

⁵³ Cf. David TRACY, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, New York 1981, 3.

theology in Asia.⁵⁴ In all this one notices the continuous emphasis on the involvement of individual cultures and traditions or worldviews as some may call it, in theologizing or better put, in the teaching and learning of the Christian faith. A significant movement in this direction can be seen in the article published by Patricia Hannam and Gert Biesta, which was actually a reflection on the final report of the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE) United Kingdom that was published in England in 2018. According to them, the report first recommends changing the name from ‘Religious Education’ to ‘Religion and Worldviews’, because the latter places religion within the larger framework of worldviews, allowing for a broader perspective on the subject beyond just religion.⁵⁵ The article explains further the importance of the introduction of the term worldview. As it explains, worldview is a person’s way of understanding and responding to life, it acts as a philosophy that shapes how they see reality and their role in it, and that a person’s worldview is affected by and affects their beliefs, values, actions, experiences, identities, and commitments.⁵⁶

Narrowing this down to the context of this research, which is the Igbo religious tradition, commonly known and practiced as Igbo traditional religion (ITR), which is one of the many expressions of the African traditional Religion (ATR) as practiced by the Igbo race in west Africa Nigeria, it is important to note that after over 150 years of Christianity in Igboland, one notices a serious lack of commitment among many Igbo Christians. This is seen in the various waves of longing and movement back to the Igbo traditional religion especially among the younger generation. This calls for serious concerns as well as questions. When the Christian faith should have been rooted deep in the mind and lives of the people, one continues to hear a clarion call of ‘going back to our roots’ especially among the younger folk. Many from the younger generations continue to see Christianity as something foreign which has nothing in common with an ordinary life of a typical Igbo person. The veracity of this mindset remains difficult to be challenged because of various circumstances. Be that as it may, the truth remains that many Igbo children who later became adult today and have joined the movement of ‘Going back to our roots’ have received various forms of teaching about the Christian religion. This teaching is not only carried out in the churches but also in the schools where a child learns for an approximate of nine years about the Christian religion,

⁵⁴ Cf. FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS’ CONFERENCES (FABC), *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia* (April 1974), in: FABC Papers 64, 11 and 2, URL: <https://fabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FABC-Papers-64.pdf> [accessed: 18.10.2025].

⁵⁵ Cf. Patricia HANNAM–Gert BEISTA, *Religious Education, a matter of understanding? Reflections on the final Report of the Commission on Religious Education*, in: *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 40/1(Jan. 2019) 55–63, here: 56.

⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

as a subject called Christian Religious Studies (CRS). It becomes disturbing that after such a long time of learning about the Christian religion, one still has this feeling of alienation regarding the Christian religion, which often results to seeing the Christian religion as something that totally does not belong to his/her worldview.

1.3 Research Question

Amongst the various documents of the Second Vatican Council which shows the Church's openness towards other religious traditions, *Nostra Aetate* for one state emphatically that;

the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in [other] religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. [...] and in witness to the Christian faith and life, [...] recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men.⁵⁷

From the discussions above and borrowing the words of this quote from *Nostra Aetate*, one may ask with regard to the Igbo religious tradition which will be used here as a case study: What are those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings, good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among the Igbo, which though differing in many aspects from the ones the Christian religion holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men? And how can they contribute to a better Christian religious education of Igbo children? This work is therefore intended to answer these questions. As is already noted, this is important because children are always a product of various religious-cultural environment and background. This makes the study of the relevance of the Igbo religious-cultural environment for the teaching of the Christian religion amongst Igbo children important. Because the Igbo children as a matter of fact learn about the Christian religion in this Igbo religious-cultural environment.

1.4 Clarification of a basic term in this research: Cultural values

Values as a generic concept which can represent both tangible and intangible goods, meaning they include non-moral values as well as ideal and moral ones, comes from human interactions with each other.⁵⁸ As such they have a relational, relative, and inherent nature

⁵⁷ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

⁵⁸ Cf. Regina POLAK, Values: A Contested Concept. Problem Outline and Interdisciplinary Approaches, in: Regina Polak – Patrick Rohs (eds.), Values – Politics – Religion. The European Value Study. In-depth Analysis – Interdisciplinary Perspectives – Future Prospects (Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations 26), Scham 2014, 33–93, here: 66.

which makes values present in various disciplines which includes but not limited to communication studies, literary studies, political studies, cultural studies, social Psychology, legal studies, economics, pedagogical and educational science etc.⁵⁹ With regard to the cultural studies which is important in this research, Polak notes that cultural studies emphasize that values must be understood within their cultural context, as values reflect what is important to people while culture explains the reasons behind these values; such that values represent strong beliefs about what is good and desirable, which influence culture, particularly social customs and habits.⁶⁰ As Schwartz explains, every person has ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that one learns and changes throughout one's life, known as mental programs which influence the person's behaviour but do not completely control it, as individuals can respond differently, especially under stress.⁶¹ This mental programming starts with family experiences and continues through interactions in various settings like school, work, and the community, such that many aspects of a person's mental programming are shared within a society; and this shared understanding is referred to as culture, which encompasses common ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, symbols, rituals, and shared figures of significance in a community.⁶² Hence, similar to Polak, Schwartz maintains that culture can be observed externally, but its true meaning is understood through the values held by its members, because these values define what is considered good or bad, desirable or undesirable, and shape the norms that dictate appropriate behaviour in different situations.⁶³ Thus, this understanding of values and particularly in this case cultural values will serve as a reference point in this research which focuses on finding those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings, good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among the Igbo, and how this can contribute to a better Christian religious education of Igbo children.

1.5 Method of the Research

Since the purpose of this work is to discover, using the words of *Nostra Aetate*, 'the good things' in the Igbo religious tradition as well as to show how this can contribute to a better Christian religious education of Igbo children, this work will be carried out using

⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 66–70.

⁶⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 68.

⁶¹ Cf. Shalom H. SCHWARTZ, Values and Culture, in: D. Munro et al. (eds.), *Motivation and Culture* (1997/01/01), 67–89, here: 67.

⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, 67–68.

⁶³ Cf. *ibid.*, 68.

comparative and analytic methods. These methods were chosen in order to discover some of those precepts and teachings, the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values present in Igbo Religious Tradition, which though differing in many aspects from those in the catholic Church but reflect a ray of that Truth⁶⁴, by comparing the Igbo religious traditional values in the light of the Christian religious values. Through critical analysis of the same, this work will show how this could contribute to a better Christian religious education of Igbo children.

1.6 Structure of the Research

Following the above-mentioned methodology for this research, this work will first study the Igbo people in general and review some literary works on Igbo religious tradition as well as Christian religious education in Igbo context. Then, a comparative and analytic study of some Positive values in Igbo religious tradition in the light of the Christian religious will be carried out. With that, some of those precepts and teachings, good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among the Igbo which, though differing in many aspects from the ones the Christian religion holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men will becomes evident. Finally, how this can contribute to the better Christian religious education of Igbo children will be further discussed.

1.7 Limitations of the Research

Worthy to note here is that in as much as the focus is on Igbo religious tradition, it is not intended to carry out an expository work on all religious belief of the Christian religion and the Igbo traditional religion. The goal here is to highlight some of the aspects in which the Christian religious tradition and the Igbo religious tradition share relative similarity as much as is necessary to give an adequate answer to the research questions. As such, it is limited in this aspect and the topic is very much open for further investigations.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

Chapter 2

An Overview of the Igbo people and Literature Review

2.1 Igbo people, a general Overview

Located in a country with over 250 ethnic nationalities and languages, the Igbo people form one of the three major ethnic nationalities in Nigeria together with the Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba.⁶⁵ Although this work is not meant to carry out a general study on the Igbo ethnic group, but Igbo religious tradition in relation to Christian religion, this general overview on the Igbo people will nevertheless contain comments about the Igbo tribe but will concentrate on their location and evangelization. Then a review of some literature on Igbo religious tradition as well as on Christian religious education in Igbo context will be carried out.

2.1.1 The Igbo tribe

As a matter of clarification, “the Igbo is both a language and the name of an ethnic group or tribe in Nigeria”⁶⁶. Just like with many other tribes of the world, there is no generally agreed historical record about the origin of the Igbo tribe. However, as Happiness C. Ogbu notes, Igbo prehistory is supported by archaeological evidence, notably from excavations by Shaw in Igbo-Ukwu, a town in Igbo land, which date to 805 A.D.⁶⁷ As she further explains, this period is believed to have seen stable social, political, and religious institutions in the Igbo region.⁶⁸ Additional findings from site in Bende, another Igbo town as well as Nsukka and Afikpo areas which also date to 805 A.D further indicate the long-standing presence of human settlements in the area.⁶⁹ In what could be termed a more detailed summary of the Igbo antiquity, a popular historian, A.E Afigbo notes that many scholars now recognize that West African societies are older than previously believed, with their major linguistic and cultural groups having maintained a consistent pattern for millennia before European contact.⁷⁰ As such, a study of the Kwa language sub-family, which includes but not limited to the Igbo language, suggests that its member languages began diverging from a common

⁶⁵ Cf. MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA, The People, URL: <https://foreignaffairs.gov.ng/nigeria/the-people/> [accessed: 20.10.2025].

⁶⁶ Promise OPARANOZIE, Christianity, Igbo Traditional Religion and Islamization, in: *People: International Journal of Social Sciences*, 5/3 (2019) 133-141, here: 135.

⁶⁷ Cf. Happiness C. OGBU, The Homogeneity of Igbo Culture, in: *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4/6 (2013) 393–400, here: 393.

⁶⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Cf. A.E AFIGBO, *Ropes of Sand. Study in Igbo History and Culture*, Nsukka 1981, 3.

ancestor approximately 5,000 to 6,000 years ago.⁷¹ Hence, Afigbo maintains that there is a long historical presence of the Igbo people in their current location, and argues that one key proof of this point is the Igbo loss of the memory or tradition of migration into their current land, despite Igbo groups like the Nri having rich long-lasting traditions, such that the idea of migration has been completely replaced with a myth of creation.⁷² Afigbo further argues that an important consideration is the significant changes the Igbo have made to their environment, which was once a tropical rain forest, and assumes that the current landscape suggests a long history of occupation, as significant environmental alteration would require extensive, long-term use of the land.⁷³ As such, archaeological evidence hints that Igbo land was inhabited as early as the third millennium B. C., with artifacts showing continuity with modern Igbo culture, which made historians believe that the Igbo have likely lived in their region for around two to three thousand years before the start of the Christian era.⁷⁴ This agrees with Isichei who opines that evidence suggests that people have lived in Igbo nation for at least 5,000 years, highlighting the region's long and continuous history.⁷⁵ With regard to the question of the original homeland of the Igbo race from where their ancestors migrated to where the Igbo people are located today, Afigbo firstly notes how until recently, many people studying the origins of ethnic groups in West Africa, particularly the Igbo, were influenced by what is called the "oriental mirage", which is the belief that various ethnic groups trace their roots back to the East, notably Egypt, Yemen, or the Holy Land.⁷⁶ He cites example with Rev. Mr. G. T. Basden, who suggests that the Igbo might be a branch of the Hebrew nation due to similarities in religious practices, cultural aspects like circumcision and mumification as well as similarities in language structures, such that some modern Igbo scholars believe that certain names in Igbo language were derived from Hebrew.⁷⁷ Again is M. D. W. Jeffreys, who argues that ancient Egypt was crucial to understanding Igbo history, pointing out similarities in social structure and religious practices.⁷⁸ However, Afigbo maintains that these claims of an oriental origin for the Igbo people are not considered credible by serious historians, and is of the opinion that since the Igbo people belong to the Negro race, which is relevant to understanding their origins, archaeological evidence

⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁷² Cf. *ibid.*, 3–4.

⁷³ Cf. *ibid.*, 4.

⁷⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Cf. Elizabeth. A. ISICHEI, *A History of the Igbo people*, London 1976, 3.

⁷⁶ Cf. AFIGBO, *Ropes of Sand*, 4–5.

⁷⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

suggests that this race may have originated near Asselar and Khartoum, indicating that the Igbo homeland is likely south of this area, and not as far north as Egypt, the Holy Land, or Yemen.⁷⁹ According to him, linguists believe that the Kwa sub-group within the Niger-Congo family which Igbo belongs, likely separated around the Niger-Benue confluence.⁸⁰ Hence, Isichei opines that the initial human settlers of Igbo land likely migrated from northern regions, possibly near the Niger confluence, and began to develop distinct linguistic differences from related languages like Edo and Yoruba around 4,600 years ago.⁸¹ Therefore, Afigbo concludes that historians will likely search for the Igbo and their Kwa relatives' origins in the Asselar and Khartoum regions until new evidence emerges.⁸² As already noted, since the aim of this work is not to study the historical origin of the Igbo race but the Igbo religious tradition in relation to Christian religion, attention will be directed further on the location of Igbo people as it looks today. This is important because this place was actually where the Igbo people live and had the first contact with the Christian religion.

2.1.2 Geographical Location of the Igbo People

Igbo land is the homeland of the Igbo people and encompasses the south-east and most of what is now south-south Nigeria. Thus, Harney-Sievers describes this area and notes that on the west, Igbo land extends beyond the River Niger, where groups like the Anioma and Ndokwa live, and to the east, it stretches to the Cross River basin, with southern limits at the Niger Delta's coastal areas, and the northern region rises toward the Nsukka plateau, blending tropical rainforest with savannah.⁸³ Hence, one can say that this area is divided into two unequal parts by the Niger River – the eastern region (the larger part) and the mid-western region. Moreso, pottery pieces found in Nsukka and Afikpo (both in current day Enugu and Ebonyi states of Nigeria respectively) which date back to around 3,000 to 2,500 BCE show that the Igbo region in West Africa is one of the oldest settled areas, based on archaeological and linguistic studies.⁸⁴ In the globe the Igbo land lies between latitude 5°–7° North and longitude 6°–8° East and covers about 15,800 square miles (approximately

⁷⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 6.

⁸¹ Cf. ISICHEI, *History of Igbo people*, 3.

⁸² Cf. AFIGBO, *Ropes of Sand*, 6.

⁸³ Axel HARNEY-SIEVERS, *Constructions of Belonging: Igbo Communities and the Nigerian State in the Twentieth Century* (Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora 23), Martlesham 2006, 15-18.

⁸⁴ Cf. Oleh Barack OKAKAH OBAMA, *History of Igbo people: An exploration of the origins of the Igbo tribe of Nigeria*, in: OMT channel (25 March 2025), URL: https://www.omtchannel.com.ng/2025/03/history-of-igbo-people-exploration-of.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com [accessed: 20.10.2025].

40,900 km²).⁸⁵ In what may be described as a precolonial stretch of Igbo land, William Balfour Baikie, in his 1856 book: ‘Narrative of an exploring voyage up the rivers Kwóra and Bínue (commonly known as the Niger and Tsádda) in 1854’, provides a geographical overview of the Igbo homeland. As he describes through his voyage which took place 60 years before ever the country Nigeria came into existence, the location and boundaries of the Igbo people, stretches from the Old Kalabar River to the Kworá on the Niger River and also includes land west of the Niger and borders Igara, Igala, and A’kpoto to the north, with only small tribes between it and the sea, all whose origins are linked to the Igbo people.⁸⁶ Hence, one say that the geography of the Igbo land, is originally characterized by numerous rivers and creeks in the south, which promoted trade, migration, and interactions with neighbouring small tribes such as Igala, Benin, Ibibio, and Ijaw, as well as access to the Atlantic via the Niger delta. With regard to its arrangement, this environment originally fostered a society organized into dispersed village clusters, age-grade associations, and local councils, rather than a centralized structure.⁸⁷ In his description of what he called “The Ibo [sic] country”⁸⁸, G. T. Basden, one of the earliest British explorers of Africa and a missionary in the British colonies of west Africa describes the expanse of the Igbo land as follows:

From the coastline of the Bight of Benin, the Ibo country skirts the Ibibio, Aro-Chuku and Efik territories. After that its eastern boundary is formed by the Cross River. On the southern and western sides, it stretches to the borders of the Ijaw, Jekri [sic], and Igabo and other tribes, and then spreads across the Niger to the confines of Benin. After passing 6° 31' N. Lat., it narrows in once more, and extends in wedge-like formation until its northernmost limits reach the boundary between southern and northern Nigeria, where the Akpotos and Munshis are the nearest neighbours.⁸⁹

Thus, Basden explains that the extensive territory of Igbo Land features diverse physical characteristics which includes the low-lying land in the delta region, crisscrossed by numerous creeks and often transforms into a tropical swamp for much of the year; traveling eastward inland reveals improved scenery with charming hills and valleys, characterized by scrub, jungle-grass, and patches of moorland; and the western side of the Niger features a lower, more fertile landscape dominated by forests.⁹⁰ Basden even hints that some Delta

⁸⁵ Cf. OGBU, *The Homogeneity of Igbo Culture*, 393.

⁸⁶ Cf. William BALFOUR BAIKIE, *Narrative of an exploring voyage up the rivers Kwóra and Bínue (commonly known as the Niger and Tsádda) in 1854*, London 1856, 307.

⁸⁷ Cf. THE EDITORS OF ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA, Igbo, In: *Encyclopedia Britannica*, September 5, 2025, URL: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Igbo> [accessed: 20.10.2025].

⁸⁸ G. T. BASDEN, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria: An Account of The Curious & Interesting Habits, Customs & Beliefs of a Little Known African People by One Who Has for Many Years Lived Amongst Them on Close & Intimate Terms*, London 1921, 27.

⁸⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 28–29.

districts, particularly near Bonny and coastal towns, which are not indigenously Igbo, have Igbo population who mainly consists of slaves that often outnumber the native inhabitants, and their language, 'Bonny Ibo,' is more dominant than other local dialects.⁹¹ Today, one notices that the geographical distribution of Igbo settlements has changed over time, with some Igbo-speaking groups like Aniocha, Ndokwa, Ukwuani who are located west of the Niger River, cut off to become part of Delta State and Edo states which do not belong to the current five Igbo states in Nigeria.

Hence, some scholars believe that the current political boundaries of Igboland are smaller than the historically larger territory inhabited by Igbo-speaking peoples. In his article published in the Guardian newspaper on May 2020, Aloy Ejimakor references the original boundaries of Igbo land recorded by William Balfour Baikie and states that today's Igboland is significantly reduced from its original size.⁹² As he further notes, the Post-War abandoned property policy and institutional injustices, including anti-Igbo gerrymandering, led to Igbo people losing their ancestral lands both physically and psychologically.⁹³ According to him, this loss diminished their connection to their historical territory by the Atlantic, known as '*Oshimiri*' (The Great Sea); a situation which became so dire that some descendants of Igbo ancestors, particularly those near the Atlantic but outside the so called Southeast Nigeria, now question their Igbo identity.⁹⁴ Citing an example, he notes the significant injustice which occurred in 1976 when the Justice Nasir Boundary Adjustment Commission although without absolute success, targeted core Igbo territories for reallocation to neighbouring South-South states of the current Nigerian geo-political distribution.⁹⁵

In summary, one can say that boundary adjustments during the colonial and post-colonial periods have influenced the administrative definition of Igboland. Again, the aftermath of the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War (1967-1970) and subsequent politically motivated new state creation show a conscious effort to decimate the Igbo Land. This is seen in the creation of states which indiscriminately cut across Igbo land, often joining some part of Igbo Land to the neighbouring tribes like Edo, Tiv, Igala, Efik, Itsekiri and Ijaw. Following the map of Nigeria as it stands today, what this implies is that although the current core Igbo states are Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, and parts of Delta and Rivers, historically, the Igbo

⁹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 28.

⁹² Cf. Aloy EJIMAKOR, Igboland is not landlocked, In: The Guardian, (26 May 2020), URL: https://guardian.ng/opinion/igboland-is-not-landlocked/?utm_source=chatgpt.com [accessed: 20.10.2025].

⁹³ Cf. *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

⁹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

presence was more widespread as is currently depicted. As such, one sees today, big population of Igbo speakers in states like Edo, Delta and Rivers, as well as some in states like Cross river, Kogi and even Benue. This could be the reason why many political scientists like Olu-Adeyemi Lanre see Nigeria not as a normal country, but as “a politically arranged country”⁹⁶. A number of maps would be important here for further elaboration and clarification.

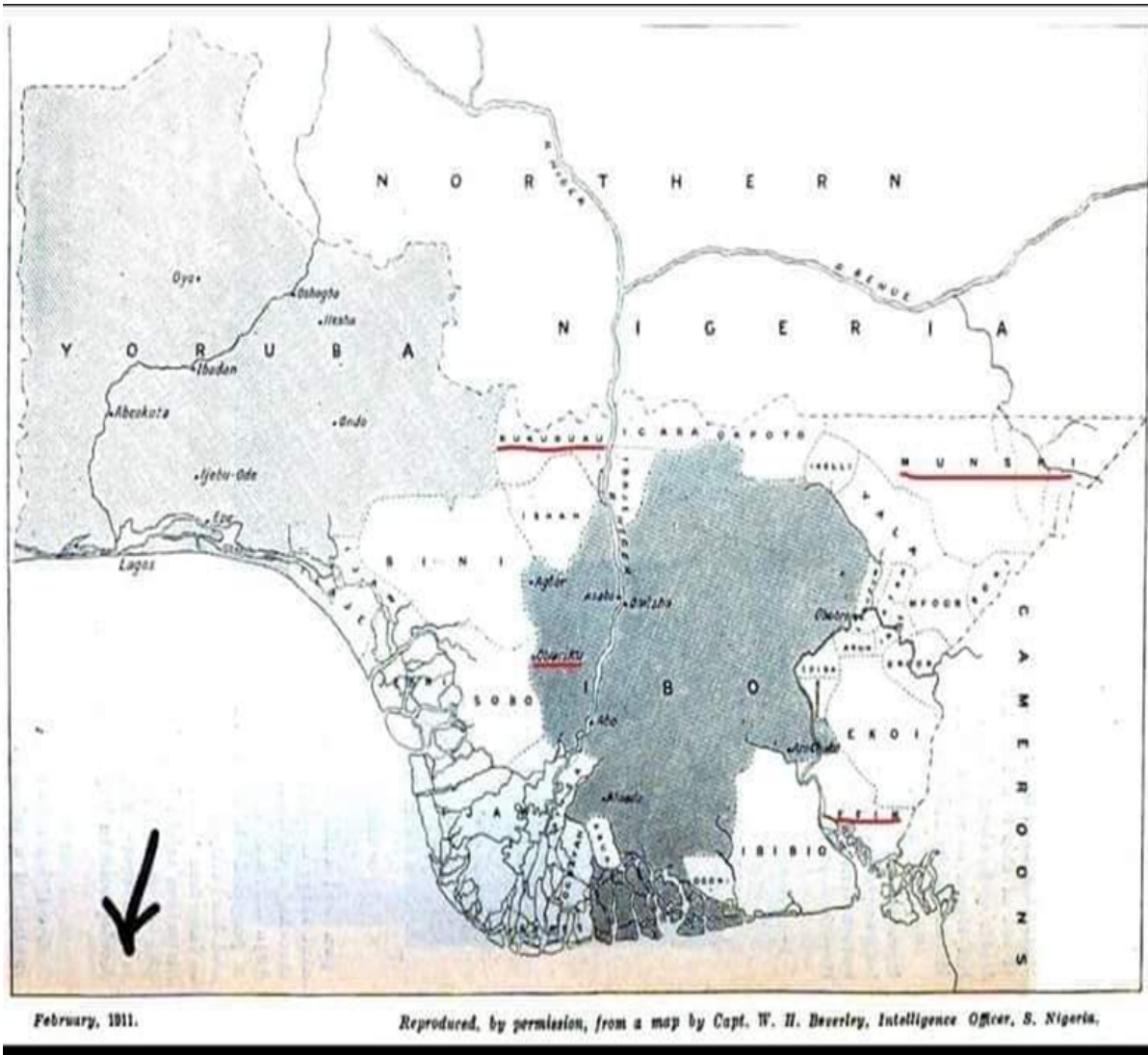


Fig. 1: This is a February 1911 published map by Captain W.H Beverley, British intelligence officer for southern Nigeria, 4 years before the amalgamation that led to the emergence of Nigeria and it depicts Igboland as was narrated by William Balfour Baikie, and not southeast Nigeria which was created following the balkanization of

⁹⁶ Olu-Adeyemi LANRE, Federalism in Nigeria – Problems, Prospects and the Imperative of Restructuring, in: International Journal Advances in Social Science and Humanities (August 2017) 5/8 40–52, here: 40.

old Eastern Region in 1967, almost over 100 years after Igboland is already defined by the explorer British Baikie in 1856.⁹⁷

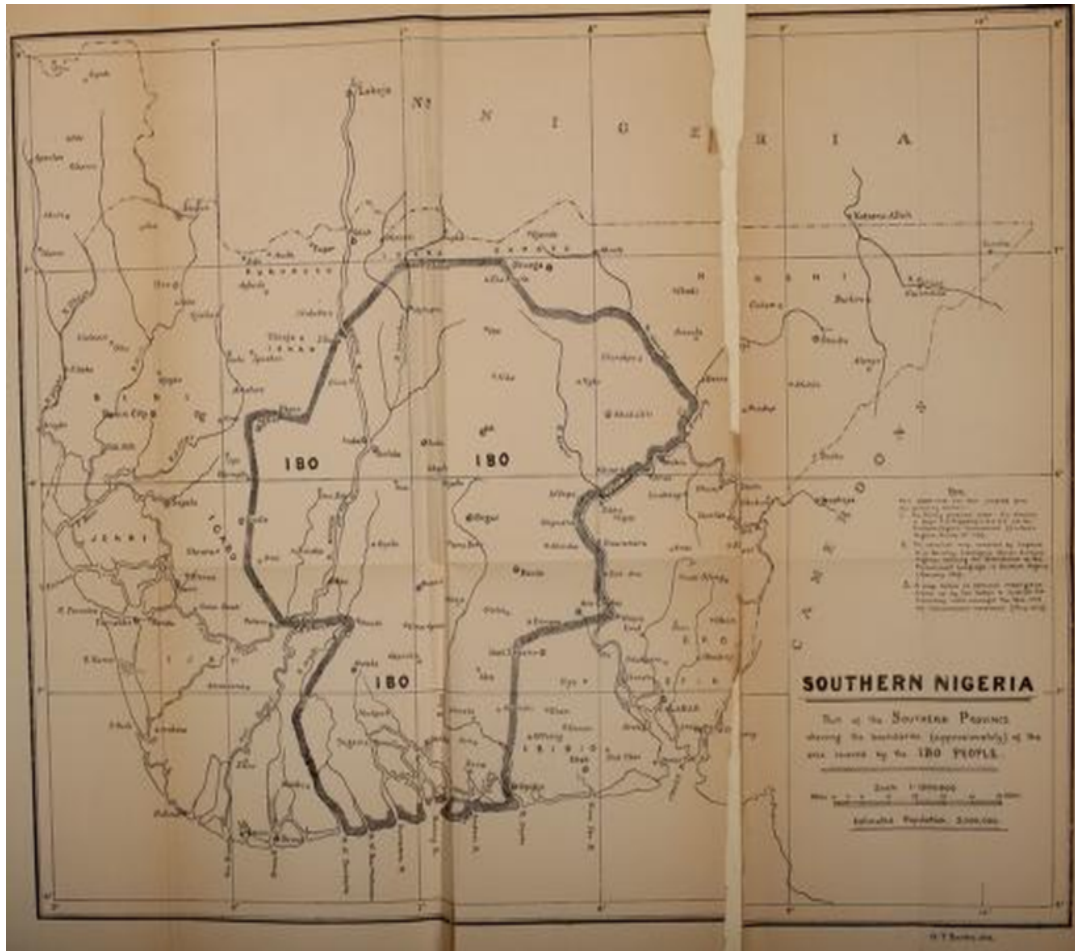


Fig. 2: This map which also depicts the stretch of Igbo land in Nigeria was copied from the book “Among the Ibos of Nigeria” written by G.T Basden in 1921, 39 years before Nigerian independence and 7 years after amalgamation. In his note on the write edge of the map, he described his sources as follows:

Note: This sketch map has been compiled from the following sources:

1. The survey produced under the direction of major F.G. Guggisberg C.M.G.R.E for the Southern Nigeria government (Southern Nigerian Survey N° 113)
2. The excellent map compiled by Captain W. H. Beverley, Intelligence Officer, Southern Nigeria, Showing the Distribution of the Predominant Languages in Southern Nigeria (February 1911)
3. Map based on personal investigation drawn up by the Author to illustrate the missionary work amongst the Ibos, and the Mohammedan movement (May 1909).⁹⁸

⁹⁷ This map although it exists in many works was copied from Nairaland forum where the copiable version was found, URL: <https://www.nairaland.com/6609409/see-1856-1911-historical-map> [accessed: 20.10.2025].

⁹⁸ BASDEN, Among the Ibos of Nigeria. This map and the notes to the map were taken from the history book by Basden, however the page where this map as well as this explanation to the map is located in this book is not numbered, but is found after page 306 and before the Index, page 307.

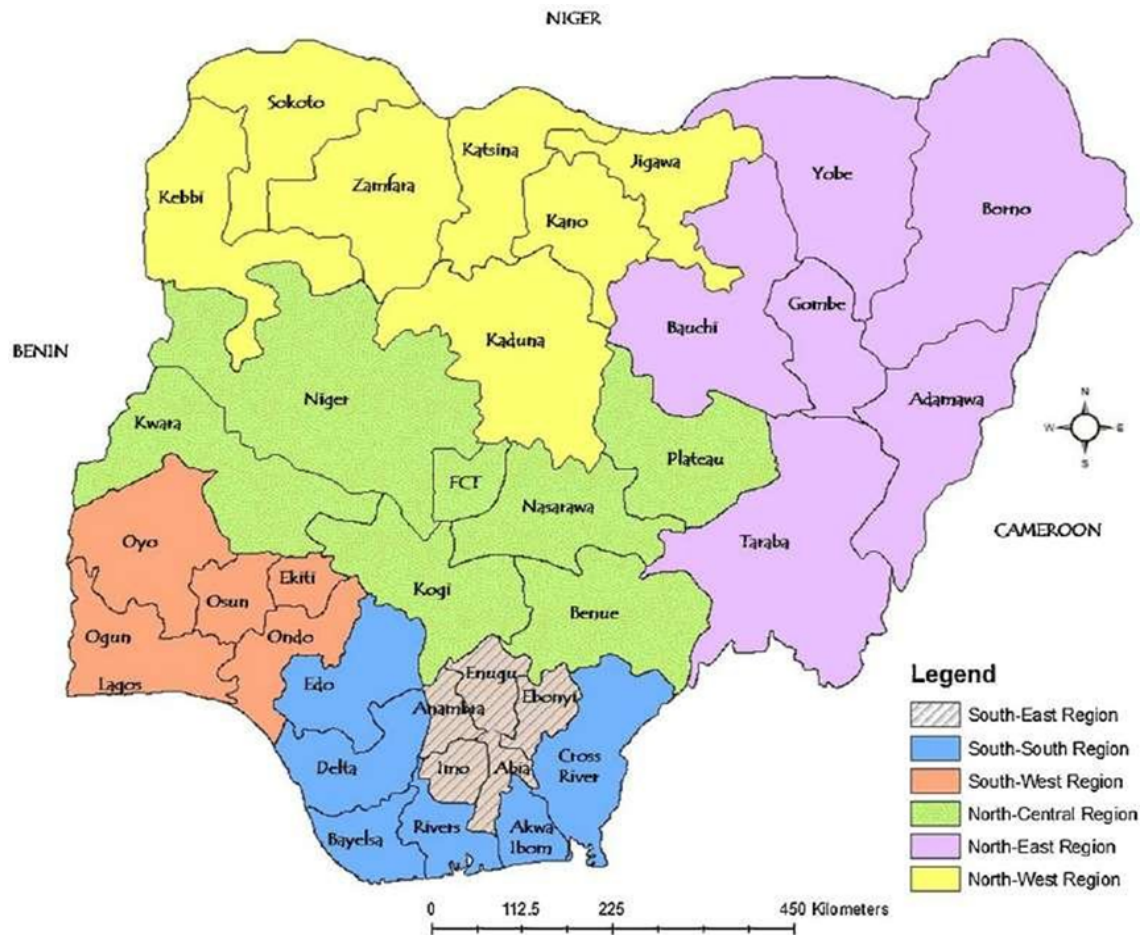


Fig. 3: This Map shows the current politically motivated division of Nigeria into six geopolitical zones, which when compared with the previous more ancient maps cuts across ethnic nationalities especially the Igbo ethnic group.⁹⁹

This map in Fig. 3 depicts the division of Nigeria as it stands today showing the six geopolitical zones with the 36 states, following its politically motivated division as already hinted above. The areas labelled as South-East Region which contains Enugu, Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo and Abia states are regarded today as the five Igbo states following this geopolitical division which was finalized between 1994 and 1996; 24 years after the Nigerian-Biafran civil war. This glaring indiscriminate division of people who before were united under one ethnic background has warranted the numerous calls for the restructuring of Nigeria's political landscape.¹⁰⁰ Of course, this has not been achieved till this day.

⁹⁹ Cf. LANRE, *Federalism in Nigeria*, 49.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *ibid.* This call for restructuring was the key issue discussed by Olu-Adeyemi in this article. In so much as there are many others who call for the same restructuring and some regimes especially the presidency of Goodluck Ebere Jonathan (2010 – 2015) has made some effort in this regard, it continues to be sabotaged by the many other that this inequality and injustice favors.

2.1.3 The Advent and Spread of Christianity in Igbo Land

As a work which is not goaled at the historical study of Christianity in Igbo Land, this section on the advent and spread of Christianity in Igbo land will only concentrate on the general information that is necessary for the purpose of this research. Worthy to note here is that the advent of Christianity in Igboland marked a major cultural shift for the Igbo people. This is because prior to European missions, Igbo society was highly religious and religion influences all facets of life, including birth, marriage, justice, and governance. Thus, Okeke et al note that Igbo religion is traditional and deeply rooted in Igbo culture.¹⁰¹ As they further note, it is passed down orally from one generation to the next, leading to widespread adherence and a significant influence on the community's consciousness.¹⁰² However, by the early twentieth century, much of Igboland had adopted Christianity, making it one of the most Christianised regions in Africa. This transformation began in the mid-nineteenth century. Generally, Missionary activity in Nigeria is closely linked to the broader European invasion of West Africa, beginning with the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, when commercial and religious motives were intertwined, as Christian priests often accompanied traders to counter the spread of Islam and promote Christianity in new territories.¹⁰³

However, the first expatriate missionary to arrive in Igbo land was James Fredrick Schon, a German based in Freetown, Sierra Leone, who led an evangelistic team from the Church Missionary Society (CMS) that travelled with a British commercial expedition to the Niger in 1841 together with Ajayi Crowther and Simon Jonas, who were ex-slaves.¹⁰⁴ This 1841 expedition proved unsuccessful, as two of its three ships were lost and 54 crew members lost their lives to malaria soon after leaving England.¹⁰⁵ However, the survivors managed to establish treaties of friendship between Great Britain and some West African tribes, including a treaty with the Igbo people through Obi Ossai of Aboh and Christianity was also preached, with Simon Jonas, an Igbo ex-slave, remaining behind in Aboh to share

¹⁰¹ Cf. Chukwuma O. OKEKE et al, Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity in Eastern Nigeria: The Igbo Example, in: SAGE Open (April-June 2017) 1–10, her 2.

¹⁰² Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Cf. K. ONWUKA DIKE, Project Canterbury. Origins of the Niger Mission 1841-1891. A paper read at the Centenary of the Mission at Christ Church, Onitsha, on 13 November 1957, URL: https://anglicanhistory.org/africa/ng/dike_origins1957.html [accessed: 21.10.2025].

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Onyeka John EGWUONWU – Cyprian Obiora ALOKWU, Christianity in Igboland: The Place and Impact of Some Selected Missionaries (1800-1920), in: Awka Journal of History (AJOH) Maiden Issue 2/1 (Aug. 2024) 70 – 90, here: 71.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Onyeka John EGWUONWU – Emmanuel Chinedu NNATUANYA, The Spread of Christianity in Old Eastern Nigeria and Impact of Some European Christian Women, 1841-1950, in: Crowther Journal of Arts and Humanities 2/3 (April 2025) 82–95, here: 84.

the Gospel.¹⁰⁶ Because of the failure of the 1841 expedition, the CMS left, but although they returned in 1854 in another Igbo town, Asaba, they left once again and only returned with the success of the 1857 expedition, when the CMS resettled in Onitsha and established their mission there in the same year.¹⁰⁷ As such, it was in 1857 that the CMS organized an expedition to the Niger, similar to the one of 1841, which was supported by the British Government and Liverpool merchant Macgregor Laird, and this expedition was led by William Baikie.¹⁰⁸ The missionary team included Ajayi Crowther, a Yoruba ex-slave and Rev. John Christopher Taylor, a volunteer from Sierra Leone with Igbo ex-slave parents.¹⁰⁹ They reached Onitsha on July 26, 1857, where they were welcomed by the community head Obi Akazua and his chiefs and the CMS then established a permanent mission station and expanded their work to other Igbo towns.¹¹⁰ Thus, in a more particular sense, it was not until 1854 that Christianity came to Igbo-land in southeastern Nigeria.¹¹¹ What could be described as the summary of the Christianisation of Igbo land began in 1857 when the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) established its first permanent mission in Onitsha, northwest Igbo-land and later expanded to Awka in 1903; this was followed by the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) which also started in Onitsha in 1885, led by Reverend Father Joseph Lutz, while the Society of African Missions (SMA) set up in Asaba, on the west bank of the river Niger; the United Presbyterian Mission launched its first station in 1888 at Unwana in eastern Igbo-land and later spread to Arochukwu, Ohafia, and Abiriba; the Primitive Methodists entered the area in 1910, starting a mission at Bende and later expanding to Uzuakoli, Umuahia, and other locations.¹¹² Following the Aro expedition, the Qua Iboe Mission (QIM) moved into the Igbo heartland in the 1920s, setting up in the Ngwa area and Owerri villages and by the 1930s, other groups like the African Church, the Salvation Army, the Seventh Day Adventist Mission, the First Century Gospel Mission, and Jehovah Witnesses were also active in the Igbo hinterland.¹¹³

Worthy to note however, is that the introduction of Christianity was more than just a religious change; it was linked to British colonial expansion. Hence, Historian like F. K.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Cf. EGWUONWU–ALOKWU, *Christianity in Igboland*, 76.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. EGWUONWU–NNATUANYA, *The Spread of Christianity in Old Eastern Nigeria*, 85.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Cf. Ndu Life NJOKU et al, *The Encounter with “Evil Forests” in Igbo-land: The Legacy of Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Missionaries’ Interactions with African Culture*, in: *Journal of Social History* 50/3 (2017) 466–480, here: 466.

¹¹² Cf. *ibid.*, 469–470.

¹¹³ Cf. *ibid.*, 470.

Ekechi notes that colonialism and Christianity, while different in their goals and approaches, were two powerful forces that changed Igboland, working together to weaken traditional authority.¹¹⁴ With the combined effort of the various missions, Christianity spread rapidly across Igbo-land in the early 1900s leading most Igbo people to abandon their traditional religion and practices for Christianity. As Njoku et al describe it, nearly every village established Christian churches, and traditional Igbo beliefs were judged against Christian standards, leading to the rejection of many cultural practices.¹¹⁵ The reason for the quick success of Christian mission in Igbo land could be varied. As Njoku et al note, some believe that the Igbo's ability to adapt to new ways of life played a key role, as they were drawn to the political, social, and economic benefits that came with Christianity and Western education.¹¹⁶

Another perspective highlights the competitive nature of Igbo society, where communities strive to surpass one another, such that when Christian missionaries showcased the advantages of their missions in villages where they were active, nearby communities are often attracted to follow suit.¹¹⁷ Again, some scholars point to either the Igbo fear of white people or the strong preaching of missionaries as factors in the conversion process.¹¹⁸ However, this does not imply that the evangelization among the Igbo people was seamless. Worthy of mention here therefore is that there were serious confrontations between the Igbo religious tradition and Christian religion when they met each other some of which exists till date. Thus, Njoku et al recognise the differing attitudes of various Christian missions in Igbo-land towards traditional Igbo beliefs and practices, noting that while the Anglican missionaries of the CMS largely rejected indigenous beliefs, the Holy Ghost missionaries of the RCM, who arrived later, disagreed with this approach and aimed to attract more Igbo converts by learning from the Anglicans' mistakes.¹¹⁹ However, the missionaries were united in their disapproval of some practices like those linked to evil forests, as a result of which the missionaries with the help of colonial administrators destroyed these forests, converting these land into mission compounds and schools with the belief that destroying the forests would weaken Igbo religious tradition and make conversion to Christianity easier.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴ Cf. F. K. EKECHI, Colonialism and Christianity in West Africa: The Igbo Case, 1900–1915, in: *The Journal of African History* 12/1 (1971) 103–115, here: 104.

¹¹⁵ Cf. NJOKU et al, *The Encounter with "Evil Forests" in Igbo-land*, 470.

¹¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 471.

¹²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

Describing this tension between the Christian mission and Igbo religious tradition, Okeke et al observe that the Igbo people were worried that if they accepted Christianity, their gods would punish them; diviners and medicine men expressed that the gods were angry about the new religion and advised people not to join the missionaries; some others rejected Christianity because they believed it aimed to destroy their culture; but despite these fears and objections, Christianity started to gain followers in Igbo land.¹²¹

Furthermore, they note that conflict often existed between Christians and traditionalists because the Christian missionaries acted as social radicals who were plunged in the eradication and condemnation of indigenous faith; condemning traditional music and song, drama, and dance as wrong and immoral; destroying statues, pictures, and symbols of amazing artistic achievement and aesthetic value without reason as gods and works of the devil.¹²² According to them, this was a manifestation that the missionaries were not ready to confront conventional religion and these actions established the stage for disputes that often broke out among the Christians and the conservatives.¹²³ Hence, Igbo culture, rooted in traditional religion that shaped moral and social behaviours, faced changes with the arrival of Christian missionaries and traders beginning from 1857.¹²⁴ This introduced a diversity of religious beliefs and values, with Christianity challenging traditional practices such as divination, oracle consultation, and ancestor worship.¹²⁵ As Oparanozie captures this scenario, the introduction of new religions into Igbo religious tradition led to competition and social disruptions, as each religion struggled to maintain its influence, although they all acknowledge the same ultimate creator, referred to as the Almighty God, regardless of the names they use.¹²⁶ As a result of these challenges, although the Igbo land is today predominantly Christians of different confessions, one still notices an internal divide and alienation amongst some Igbo Christians. This divide manifests itself in various forms of syncretic practices and more radically in the new wave of the so called ‘going back to our root’.

¹²¹ Cf. OKEKE et al, *Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity*, 4.

¹²² Cf. *ibid.*

¹²³ Cf. *ibid.*

¹²⁴ Cf. Mary Kristel Grace Chinyere NWUBA, *The Interface Between Igbo Traditional Religion and Christianity*, in: *African Journal of History and Culture* 13/1 (January-June 2021) 31–42, here: 40.

¹²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

¹²⁶ Cf. OPARANOZIE, *Christianity, Igbo Traditional Religion and Islamization*, 136.

2.2 A review of some literatures on Igbo religious Tradition cum Worldview

The discussion here which will focus on the Igbo religious tradition and worldview is very important because of the inseparable nature of the two and how they are related to religion. Hence in his explanation of this relationship Nasr asserts that tradition refers to truths or principles of divine origin revealed to humanity through messengers like prophets and the Logos, which encompasses various applications of these principles across law, society, art, symbolism, and science, ultimately leading to Supreme Knowledge and its attainment.¹²⁷ In other words, and in a broader understanding, tradition includes principles that connect humanity to the Heaven, while religion can be viewed as the essential truths revealed by Heaven that link humanity to its divine Origin.¹²⁸ Thus, Nasr notes that each of the major religions like: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, creates a traditional worldview that serves as the foundation for a tradition that applies its principles across a given group of people.¹²⁹ This is understandable because tradition as a matter of fact encompasses beliefs, customs, and stories that influence an individual's or community's worldview. As Nasr captures it, the word tradition is related etymologically to transmission and contains within the scope of its meaning the idea of the transmission of knowledge, practice, techniques, laws, forms, and many other elements of both an oral and written nature; making it like a living presence which leaves its imprint amongst peoples but is not reducible to that imprint.¹³⁰ Therefore one can say that tradition consists of narratives and practices passed down through generations that convey core values, shaping perspectives on life, God, and the universe. This understanding will be the guiding principle in the discussion about Igbo religious Tradition.

2.2.1 Igbo Religious Tradition

For a better appreciation of the discussion on Igbo religious tradition, it would be good to have a working understanding of the phrase, religious tradition. For this purpose, Darren E Sherkat, in his article "Religiosity"¹³¹ will be of good help. Religious traditions according to

¹²⁷ Cf. Seyyed Hossein NASR, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, New York 1989, 64.

¹²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

¹²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

¹³¹ Darren E SHERKAT, *Religiosity*, in: James D. Wright (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 20, Amsterdam ²2015, 377–380. This article revises K.J. Christiano's previous work on religiosity, and refers to individual and collective attachments to religion. It highlights how religiosity distinguishes connections to religious traditions and identifies subgroups within them. The diversity or uniformity of religiosity can lead to both solidarity and conflict among nations or groups. Additionally, individuals' religious commitments are linked to various social outcomes, such as social mobility, ethnic solidarity, and political engagement.

him are sets of beliefs, practices, and institutions that define a common type of religiosity.¹³² As he explains further, these beliefs, practices, and institutions provide broad understandings of the supernatural, which are formed within societies and practiced by both groups and individuals.¹³³ They also offer unique explanations, often recorded in sacred texts by those who follow the religious tradition, examples of which can be seen in contemporary religious traditions like Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Druze, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Mormonism, Sikhism, Sufism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism.¹³⁴ As he observes, historically in religious traditions, many distinct supernatural beliefs have disappeared due to the destruction of cultures through conquest, leading to a limited understanding of the religions practiced by Indigenous populations in places like the Americas and Australia, as well as early European non-Christian religions and Hindu traditions;¹³⁵ and one can add following this clarification, African (Igbo) religious traditions. Thus, in line with this explanation by Darren E Sherkat, one can understand the Igbo religious tradition as sets of beliefs, practices, and institutions that define the religiosity of the Igbo people and provide broad understandings as well as offers unique explanations of the supernatural within the Igbo society and is practiced by both groups and individuals in Igbo land. Going further by the above general observation by Darren E Sherkat, most of these traditional Igbo beliefs and practices have disappeared, and particularly in the case of the Igbo people, through slavery, colonialism and the consequent western influence, religiously and otherwise.

Against all odds however, one needs to emphasis here that the Igbo people, just like most other Africans are traditionally religious and have a strong sense of the sacred. Hence, in his description of the Igbo people, Arthur Glyn Leonard, a soldier and ethnographer who happened to be one of the early British explorers in today's southern Nigeria, notes that the Igbo people follow a natural form of morality that comes from living in nature and that although their values may seem too harsh or simple for modern cultural tastes, they are genuinely religious people.¹³⁶ In what could be called his comparison of the Igbo people with the Hindus in India, he reports that just as what has been said about the Hindus, the Igbo people 'eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously, dress religiously, and sin

¹³² Cf. *ibid.*, 377.

¹³³ Cf. *ibid.*

¹³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

¹³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

¹³⁶ Cf. Leonard ARTHUR GLYN, *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes*, London 1906, 429.

religiously'¹³⁷. Hence, he summarizes; “in a few words, the religion of these natives, as I have all along endeavoured to point out, is their existence, and their existence is their religion”¹³⁸. As such, Aparanozie notes that in the Igbo society, there are no atheists as religion is deeply intertwined with cultural identity, and the Igbo person acknowledges the existence of a Supreme Being and worships Him with great reverence.¹³⁹ Little wonder, the Igbo were very receptive to Christianity when the missionaries arrived Igboland. Thus, Basden in his report about the progress of the British exploration in Igbo land notes that “missionary interests shew [sic] evidence of vigorous prosperity”¹⁴⁰. In his description of the Igbo religious tradition he writes;

Amongst the Ibo people there is a distinct recognition of a Supreme Being—beneficent in character—who is above every other spirit, good or evil. He is believed to control all things in heaven and earth, and dispenses rewards and punishments according to merit. Anything that occurs, for which no visible explanation is forthcoming, is attributed either to Him or His eternal enemy Ekwensu, i.e. the Devil. But Chukwu (as He is called) is supreme, and at His service are many ministering spirits whose sole business it is to fulfil His commands. [...] This Supreme Being is designated by different rites, the chief of which are Chukwu (=Chi-ukwu) i.e. the Great God; Olisa bulu uwa, usually shortened to Osebulu uwa or Olisa simply. The underlying idea of the name is, “God who fashions the world.” In the southern districts Chineke (God the Creator) is the prevailing name. The knowledge of the Supreme Being is practically confined to the name and the interpretation thereof. Besides the recognition of a Beneficent Being, there is a profound belief in an Evil Spirit. The two are eternally opposed to each other, each striving to influence mankind for good or evil, but Chukwu is always classed as superior to Ekwensu.¹⁴¹

This description by Basden, summarizes in a way, the Igbo attitude to the divine and confirms his close association with these people as he notes in the heading of his book. Although there may exist many practices and rituals with regard to the Igbo relationship with the Chukwu, which when considered from the contemporary understanding of things some of which may be plausible and some not, Basden nevertheless notes that “there does not appear to be any actual Devil Worship among the Ibos[sic]”¹⁴². As such, what many may refer to as fetish practices in Igbo religious tradition could be understood as the expression of the spirituality and interconnectedness of the Igbo worldview. Thus, Chukwudebelu et al, observe that the Igbo worldview is strongly connected to spirituality, giving spiritual

¹³⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Cf. OPARANOZIE, Christianity, Igbo Traditional Religion and Islamization, 133.

¹⁴⁰ BASDEN, Among the Ibos of Nigeria, 28.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 215–216.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 221.

meanings to all parts of life.¹⁴³ As they further explained, the Igbo peoples' religion and cultural practices are based on a cosmology that shapes their worldview, making their worldview to include beliefs, attitudes, and cultural practices, which create a distinct way for the Igbo to see and engage with the world.¹⁴⁴

In their description of the Igbo religious tradition, Okeke et al underscore further what Basden already noted in his report about the Igbo people. As they explain, the individual Igbo person experiences religious involvement that begins before birth and goes on after death, making the Igbo person's life like a religious play that connects the living with ancestors and future generations in a spiritual link.¹⁴⁵ In their words, "everyone is in fact a religious carrier [and] there are no missionary elders to propagate the religion, and one individual does not preach his religion to another as is the case with nontraditional proselytizing religions"¹⁴⁶. In what could be seen as a more detailed description of the nature of the Igbo traditional religion, Okeke et al just like Basden noted that the Igbo people believe in a Supreme Being who controls the world and everything in it; a believe which manifest in Igbo names, such as *Chukwuemeka* (God has done much), *Chukwuka* (God is greater), *Chukwuma* (God knows), etc.¹⁴⁷ According to them, the Supreme Being (*Chukwu*) is not depicted in any physical form or assigned a shrine; instead, He is considered to live above the sky and is thought to be everywhere and invisible.¹⁴⁸ Apart from the believe in a Supreme God who is beyond understanding, the Igbo people also believe in many lesser deities some of which include: *Ala* (the earth goddess), *Ufiejioḱu* (the god of agriculture), *Idemili* (the god of water), *Agwu* (the god of medicine), etc, who play important roles in the daily lives of the Igbo, guiding their actions and beliefs.¹⁴⁹ Just as these gods can influence human life, humans at the same time can influence the activities of these gods through offerings and libations.¹⁵⁰ This shows that these gods are not actually worshiped but are seen as intermediaries and that is why these lesser gods are often represented with various images. Thus, Basden notes "that no object in itself is worshipped by the Ibos [sic]; it is sacred only

¹⁴³ Cf. Ifeanyi A. CHUKWUDEBELU et al., Developing an Igbo Christianity: An Analysis of Igbo and Christian Worldviews, in: Nigerian Journal of African Studies (NJAS) 6/1 (2024) 1–9, here: 2.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. OKEKE et al, Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity, 2.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

as the habitation of a spirit”¹⁵¹. As he further explains, such object “has only that relative sanctity to which it is entitled as the shrine or home of a certain spirit”¹⁵².

Therefore, in connection to the lesser deities, Okeke et al further note that the Igbo people have personalized gods, such as *Chi* and *Ikenga*, alongside their main deity, Chukwu and that each person has their own *Chi*, which acts as a guardian spirit.¹⁵³ This is probably what Basden referred to as “the private and family gods—those which are kept within the house and compound and which have a much closer connection with the individual than those which are public and general”¹⁵⁴. Hence, Okeke et al explain that *Chi* is seen as a person’s spiritual double or genius, and Igbo proverb like ‘*Onye kwe, chi ya ekwe*’ (when one says yes, his personal god says yes) highlights the important role of *chi* in the individual’s life and in personal decision making.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, *Ikenga*, another grade of a personal god is typically owned by adult male who have reached manhood and gained independence from their fathers to start their own families and it must be celebrated and consecrated to be effective.¹⁵⁶ Thus, Basden noted that in an Igbo house there are many sacred objects, which differ in importance with the *Ikenga* being the most universal and holds the top rank, such that every house must have one since it is the first god a young man seeks at the start of his career and relies on for good luck in his ventures.¹⁵⁷

Another aspect of Igbo religious tradition which Okeke et al highlight is the believe in Ancestors, who are deceased family members that have lived a good life and who are seen as having powerful abilities to bless or curse, as guardians of morality and are often honoured with shrines and symbols.¹⁵⁸ This shows how the Igbo society places great importance on character and strongly believes in life after death as well as the importance of proper burial rites.¹⁵⁹ The Igbo also believe that dead ancestors may be reborn in their families, particularly in newborns who might share traits with the ancestors.¹⁶⁰ More so, Okeke et al note two important traditional symbols: *Ofo* and *Ogu* in Igbo tradition which have significant psychological effects, influencing the conscience of the Igbo people.¹⁶¹ While the *Ofo*, stands for justice, truth, and righteousness, representing fair play, trust, and moral integrity,

¹⁵¹ BASDEN, Among the Ibos of Nigeria, 218.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Cf. OKEKE et al, Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity, 2.

¹⁵⁴ BASDEN, Among the Ibos of Nigeria, 218.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. OKEKE et al, Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity, 2.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 2–3.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. BASDEN, Among the Ibos of Nigeria, 219.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. OKEKE et al, Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity, 3.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Cf. *ibid.*

making it crucial for social, political, and religious functions like the Bible in Christian religion; the *Ogu* which is linked to *Ofo* represents justice and innocence and is often used in disputes to promote peaceful resolutions.¹⁶² As they noted, this practice encourages respectful and peaceful interactions among individuals in Igbo society.¹⁶³

Finally, Okeke et al note that the Igbo people hold the Earth (*Ala*) in high regard, seeing it as a source of life and essential resources like food and water and as a vital sustainer of all living beings and fertility, such that committing an abomination against *Ala* (*Nso ala*), like murder is taken very seriously, as it can lead to severe consequences.¹⁶⁴ This is understandable because the offence pertains not just to the culprit but the entire people who live on the land upon which the offence was committed. Hence, Basden notes that acts like murder, theft, and adultery are seen as serious crimes against both God and people because the natives believe that committing these acts goes against God's will, and punishment will come, either to the sinner or their descendants if the sinner escapes.¹⁶⁵

From what Basden pointed out above, one can understand why it is common in Igbo tradition to perform a kind of ritual called *ikpu aru*, which is similar to reparation in Christian religion, whenever any of such abominable acts occur. This is simply an effort on the part of the people to amend and appease the earth goddess (*Ala*) for the evil in order to evade a pending misfortune that could result from the evil act. As Okeke et al explain, this is because *Ala* is seen as the owner of everyone and public morality is linked to her authority.¹⁶⁶ Hence, in Igbo tradition, one is expected to differentiate practices that are acceptable in the land (*Ome na-Ala*) from practices that are abominable in the land (*Nso Ala or Aru na-Ala*) and to act accordingly. Moreso, the interconnectedness of the Igbo people and their religious orientation is so deep that it is difficult to separate the Igbo worldview from their religious orientation which has individual, communal, physical and spiritual connectedness. Thus, Okeke et al note that the Igbo religious tradition views life as a cycle, with the reality of death and reincarnation where those who lived good lives can return as humans and those who lived poorly cannot reincarnate but instead exist as harmful spirits.¹⁶⁷ This worldview sees the universe as consisting of two worlds: the visible and invisible, organized in a hierarchy with the Supreme Being (*Chi ukwu*) at the top, followed by smaller deities, human

¹⁶² Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁶³ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Cf. BASDEN, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, 216.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. OKEKE et al, *Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity*, 3.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 4.

beings, totem animals, tree gods, and physical features like river gods.¹⁶⁸ Basden noticed this sacredness of some animals, trees, and water bodies in Igbo land and reports that one must relate carefully with them, such that even if one mistakenly takes fish from such water bodies, he or she must return it or when one mistakenly injures the sacred animals, it is regarded as a grievous offence, still if one mistakenly kills them, a year funeral rite to mourn them is required.¹⁶⁹ From the foregoing, one could notice how the Igbo interconnected idea of realities also informs the sense of sacred that the Igbo tradition attaches not just to human life but to the life of other creatures as well.

Similarly, in a work he co-authored with Kingsley I. Uwaegbute, Damian O. Odo and Paulinus O. Agbo, Omaka K. Ngele explains that the Igbo religious tradition centres on the belief in spiritual beings, with the highest being known as *Chukwu*, or the high God, who is seen as the creator of the world and everything in it.¹⁷⁰ They further highlight the various names that are given to *Chukwu*, reflecting his creative role, some of which include: *Chineke* (Creator God), *Chi-Okike* (God who creates), and others like *Chukwu Abiama* and *Agalabaji Igwe* (The pillar that holds the sky) and *Ezechiteoke* (King spirit that is the creator).¹⁷¹ As they further explain, below *Chukwu* (the creator God) are various divinities which are considered his creations, with the most powerful among these divinities being *Ala* (the Earth goddess), who is seen as a protector of morality, and other deities like *Anyanwu* (the sun god), *Amadioha* (the god of sky) etc.¹⁷² Once more, one notices here the emphasis on *Ala* (the earth goddess) just like Okeke et al as already discussed above.

Just like Okeke et al, Ngele et al also recognise the special place that ancestors hold in Igbo religious tradition, stating that they are cherished members of families who have passed away, and are therefore honoured through prayers and sacrifices, and to whom the living also recourse to for protection and support.¹⁷³ In addition, Ngele et al just like Okeke et al recognise the presence of communal as well as personal gods in Igbo religious tradition. According to them, each Igbo town or village has specific god which is often referred to as Oracles and which are seen as messengers of *Chukwu*, the Igbo high or Supreme God, making it possible that the traditional name for each Oracle can differ with various dialects

¹⁶⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Cf. BASDEN, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, 217–218.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Omaka K. NGELE, *Sōteria* [salvation] in Christianity and *Ubandu* [wholeness] in Igbo traditional religion: Towards a renewed understanding, in: HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies 73/3 (2017), a4639. URL: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4639> [accessed: 12.11.2025], here: 3.

¹⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁷² Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁷³ Cf. *ibid.*, 3–4.

in Igbo language, and that each oracle is served by a traditional priest.¹⁷⁴ Again, each person has a *chi*, a personal god that guides their destiny.¹⁷⁵ This explanation offered by Ngele et al also agrees with that of Ezeanya and Enweonwu who remark that the Igbo people believe in the Supreme Being, *Chi-ukwu* (Chukwu), the Creator of the universe, who resides in an unreachable height and governs the world through minor deities, such as *Amadioha* (deity of justice), *Anyanwu* (deity of the sun and beauty), and *Ani/Ala* (earth deity).¹⁷⁶ As they explain, mortals typically pray to these minor deities rather than praying directly to Chukwu, such that there are existence of community, family as well as personal deities and ancestral spirits that are closer to the Supreme Being and are consulted in prayer.¹⁷⁷ Thus, Ngele et al conclude by rejoining that although there exist a belief in many spiritual beings both good and bad which can impact human lives in Igbo religious tradition, the Igbo worship Chukwu, the high God, which reflects monotheism, while also recognizing many other gods, chief among which is the Earth goddess as the custodian of moral conduct, upheld through *Omenala/Omenani*, the Igbo code of ethics.¹⁷⁸

Once more, one can here contrast between *Omenala* (acceptable code of conduct in Igbo tradition) and *Nso-ala* (actions that are not acceptable and which requires reparation to the earth goddess when such eventually happens). With this contrast, it becomes understandable why the Igbo people normally refer to their culture and tradition as ‘*Omenala/Omenani*’ depending on the dialect, and Igbo traditional religion focuses on ‘*Odinala/Odinani*’ (something that is foundational to the land); which is a belief system that is based on the belief in Supreme Beings (*Chukwu*, *Chineke*, or *Chukwuokikeabiana*), spirits and ancestors.¹⁷⁹ Suffice it to say therefore that “Igbo traditional religion (ITR) is the indigenous faith of the Igbo people [*Odinani*; and it] is the belief system [*Omenala/Omenani*] that has been handed down from one generation to another”¹⁸⁰. This Igbo traditional religion is commonly referred to as *Omenala* or *Omenani* in Igbo language, depending on the dialect spoken in a given area. Again, up till today in Igbo land, those who do not belong to the any of the mainstream religions like Christianity, Islam and Judaism are referred to as those who

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Oguejiofo C. P. EZEANYA–Olisa Anthony ENWEONWU, Seed of Christianity in Traditional Igbo (African) Culture: Need for Inculturational Evangelization, in: *Indiana Journal of Arts & Literature*, 3/1 (2022) 13-23, here: 14.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. NGELE et al, *Sōteria* [salvation] in Christianity and Ubandu [wholeness] in Igbo traditional religion, 4.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Sunday Adiele OKOROAFOR–Christopher. C. OKEREKE, Effects of Christianity on Igbo Traditional Religion and Culture, in: *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 3/4 (Oct 2019) 789–802, here: 794.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

practice *Omenala/Omenani*. This simply reaffirms the Igbo understanding of existence or reality as interconnected and inseparable from religion, which has already been hinted in this work. It further explains the idea behind the Igbo worldview or cosmology as some call it, which shall be discussed below.

2.2.2 The Igbo Worldview

As it has been noted in the reflection on the final report of the Commission on Religious Education (CoRE) United Kingdom, which recommends changing the name ‘Religious Education’ to ‘Religion and Worldviews’ Patricia Hannam and Gert Biesta describe worldview as a person’s way of understanding and responding to life, which acts as a philosophy that shapes how they see reality and their role in it; and they further opine that a person’s worldview is affected by and affects their beliefs, values, actions, experiences, identities, and commitments.¹⁸¹ From this understanding, one can infer that the Igbo worldview is the way the Igbo people understand and respond to life, which acts as a philosophy that shapes how they see reality and their role in it, and which affects and is affected by their belief, values, actions, experiences, identities and commitments. Thus, Okeke et al note that the Igbo traditional worldview sees the universe as having two parts: the visible and the invisible where all beings must fit into one of these two worlds in an ordered hierarchy, which includes a Supreme Being (*Chi ukwu*), gods and goddesses, humans, totem animals like the sacred python, tree gods, river gods, and beings associated with evil forests.¹⁸² According to them, the journey of life and death is seen by the Igbo as cyclical, which informs the Igbo believe in reincarnation; however only good people who lived virtuous lives can return in human form while those who lived bad lives cannot reincarnate as humans but instead exist as harmful spirits, aiming to trouble those who had good lives.¹⁸³ From the above description of the hierarchy of beings one notices that human beings more or less occupy the central position. Chukwudebelu et al therefore observe that the Igbo worldview is deeply spiritual, with human being as central to their cosmology, which influences how they view nature, society, and spiritual beings; and various elements like the sky, earth, trees, mountains, rivers, animals, spirits, ancestors, time, and humans play important roles and shape their economic, political, and religious structures.¹⁸⁴ As Ejizu

¹⁸¹ Cf. HANNAM–BEISTA, Religious Education, a matter of understanding, 56.

¹⁸² Cf. OKEKE et al, Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity, 4.

¹⁸³ Cf. *ibid*.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. CHUKWUDEBELU et al., Developing an Igbo Christianity, 2–3.

highlights, Igbo religion and cultural practices are based on this their worldview and cosmology which serve as foundation that affects both personal and group religious actions and life in general.¹⁸⁵ Hence, one can agree with Chukwudebelu et al that “the Igbo worldview encompasses beliefs, attitudes, and cultural practices, providing a unique lens through which the Igbo perceive and interact with the world”¹⁸⁶.

In a similar way, Ngele et al observe that the Igbo peoples’ understanding of the world and life is greatly influenced by their religious beliefs and they see the world as having two main parts: the sky (*eluigwe*), where Chukwu resides, and the earth (*uwa*), where humans, animals, and spirits live.¹⁸⁷ According to them, the Igbo believe that humans cannot exist without their physical surroundings, which include mountains, trees, and rivers, often seen as sacred places.¹⁸⁸ Additionally, they recognize another realm called *Alammuṓ*, a spiritual world that is considered the land of ancestors.¹⁸⁹ They agree with Chukwudebelu et al in maintaining that humans are central to Chukwu’s creation, who on the other hand must maintain spiritual connections with their environment and the spiritual world because the physical and spiritual realms are closely linked.¹⁹⁰ For the Igbo, nurturing relationships with both realms is crucial and this is achieved through sacrifices, prayers, libations, and following cultural practices (*Omenala*); thus underscoring Igbo worldview emphasis on an ongoing interaction between the physical, spiritual, and the worlds beyond.¹⁹¹

In what she describes as Igbo cosmology, Ogbu explains that the Igbo people believe in a Supreme Being who is beyond and all-powerful and does not involve in minor human affairs, which are left to spirits and ancestors serving as His messengers.¹⁹² These spirits, are viewed as strong beings tied to natural elements like, trees, valleys, rivers, mountains, and storms; together with a personal guiding spirit called *Chi*, and the earth goddess called *Ani*, they are often revered with shrines and festivals.¹⁹³ Asserting the interconnectedness of the Igbo worldview, she explains that the Igbo believe in reincarnation and a rewarding afterlife, where those who die well join the ancestors who maintain a close relationship with their descendants, participating in prayers and rituals involving kola nuts, palm wine, and

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Christopher I EJIZU, *Ofo: Igbo ritual symbol*, Enugu 1986, 96–97.

¹⁸⁶ CHUKWUDEBELU et al., *Developing an Igbo Christianity*. 3.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. NGELE et al, *Sōteria [salvation] in Christianity and Ubandu [wholeness] in Igbo traditional religion*, 4.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁹² Cf. OGBU, *The Homogeneity of Igbo Culture*, 396–396.

¹⁹³ Cf. *ibid.*, 396.

sacrifices like fowls and goats.¹⁹⁴ She further highlights the Igbo communal understanding of life, maintaining that the Igbo people hold a strong sense of responsibility towards their family and community; which according to her is both a source of strength and weakness, whereby those who achieve success are expected to support those less fortunate within their family, extending this responsibility to kinsmen, village clans, and the broader town community.¹⁹⁵ As she concludes, moral codes, *Omenala* which is deeply rooted in Igbo religion, emphasize the importance of ethical behaviour, with theft considered as a serious sin; and severe offenses include suicide, incest, and theft of crops or livestock, which are all viewed as abominations against the earth goddess who is seen as the custodian of the ethical life.¹⁹⁶ From the foregoing, one can summarise that Igbo worldview is not just dualistic in nature but it also manifests the presence of deep interconnectedness and relationship amongst beings and various level of beings with human being at the centre. Consequently, this understanding of the world informs the Igbo, values, practices and in fact all aspects of their life including their reaction in the face of other worldviews like Christian worldview; and therefore, should be taken into serious consideration when people who are products of this worldview meet with other worldviews, and in the case of this research, the Christian religious worldview.

2.3 A review of some literatures on Christian religious education in the Igbo Context

For a better appreciation, this section will be discussed under two categories: Christian religious education during the European missionary era and Christian religious education after the European missionary era.

2.3.1 Christian religious education during the European missionary era

As already noted, the Igbo people were very receptive to the Christian faith. This is not just because the Igbo people are very religious but also because the system of evangelization through education which the missionaries applied was very attractive. Hence, Egwuonwu notes that “at the arrival of Christian missionaries, they found out that for the gospel to have its free course in the lives of the Igbo people, there is need to introduce Western education

¹⁹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

that is Christian oriented”¹⁹⁷ According to him, the missionaries played a crucial role in developing Western education in Igboland to support their goals of conversion by establishing schools to educate children before they fully embraced traditional beliefs, believing that teaching them Christian ideas early would be more effective than targeting adults already committed to local religion.¹⁹⁸ More so, the schools aimed to create locals who could spread the gospel in the Igbo language and dialects which led to the establishment of teacher training colleges to prepare native converts as church workers when expatriate workers were hard to find.¹⁹⁹

Considering the above information, it could be said that it is the defining aim of Christian education during the missionary era in Igbo land and establishes the reason for the process and systems it undertook. As such, there was not much interest in learning about the culture and tradition of the people but impacting the Christian doctrine, which explains why children, who were not yet rooted in the culture and traditions of the land were the target population. One can argue that this makes the then Christian education appear more or less like an indoctrination which often leads to half-baked Christians and contradicts the idea of dialogue which became more emphasised with the advent of the Second Vatican Council. Hence Basden notes that understanding the native mind requires significant time, patience, and careful questioning, along with ongoing observation, because familiarity with other religions may cause confusion if one rushes the process, and any preconceived notions held by the inquirer will likely lead to misguided conclusions.²⁰⁰ An experience which he further narrates, between an expatriate missionary and a local Christian convert interpreter will be necessary here. Basden narrates;

I have known cases where utterly false answers have been given simply in order to bring to an end a tiresome catechism. Statements have been accepted as truth which were the very antithesis of the actual facts. I have on occasion remonstrated with interpreters for giving inaccurate information. I have known such to answer a question in the negative, and then upon being further pressed, ‘But do not the people do this or that?’ The original reply has been completely reversed. Whenever the interpreter was rebuked for leading the inquirer to a false conclusion the excuse invariably was, ‘But that was what he wanted; his opinion was already formed, and who am I that I should contradict the white man?’²⁰¹

¹⁹⁷ Onyeka John EGWUONWU, Christian Missionary Education in Igboland and Implications of Government Take Over of Mission Schools, 1857-1975, in: *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development* 8/1 (2025) 146–154, here: 146.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 148.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Cf. BASDEN, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, 212.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

As such, one can further argue that just as in the case of this convert narrated by Basden, most of the product of this type of religious education may not be deeply converted but are satisfied as long as conflict with the master is avoided. In what could be called the features of Christian education during the missionary era, Egwuonwu notes that early Christian missionary education in Igboland primarily used the Holy Bible as the main textbook, linking all subjects to it, because the missionaries aimed to convert everyone in their mission houses, and many schools were located within the mission compounds.²⁰² The basic curriculum included Reading, Writing, Religion, and Arithmetic, with English as the main language of instruction, although some missionaries also learned local languages for teaching purposes.²⁰³ As he further notes, some priests and missionaries also worked as school teachers, tuition was free at first, the missions preferred to have children live with them to prevent dropouts and some candidates were often retained at the end who continued working at the mission as catechists and teachers.²⁰⁴ As Udoeye notes, the main goal of evangelization is to convert people to Christianity, and missionaries were driven by a strong desire to make new converts through direct evangelization using catechesis which involves teaching Christian beliefs and doctrines directly to new followers, such that the focus of education at first was not just about academic learning; it was primarily aimed at teaching converts how to read the Bible.²⁰⁵

As a more direct description of the system, Ekechi observes that the elementary school books were based on the Holy scripture, teaching virtues and condemning vices and that the basic curriculum in schools included Bible stories, prayers, music, arithmetic, geography, and English, which served practically as the language of commerce and civilization.²⁰⁶ As he notes, the missionaries started by introducing a boarding school system to protect baptized students from surrounding pagan influences.²⁰⁷ Hence, Udoeye summarizes that school revolutionary evangelization brought a new way of thinking, moving from a narrow view to a wider understanding of reality and raising questions about traditional beliefs and practices that were usually taken for granted, however through the lens of religious teachings, which labelled everything African as superstition.²⁰⁸ He therefore concludes that as a result of this,

²⁰² Cf. EGWUONWU, *Christian Missionary Education in Igboland*, 148.

²⁰³ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁰⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Cf. Edwin Anaegboka UDOYE, *Resolving the Prevailing Conflicts between Christianity and African (Igbo) Traditional Religion through Inculturation* (Beiträge zur Missionswissenschaft und Interkulturellen Theologie 26), Berlin – Zürich 2011, 182.

²⁰⁶ Cf. Felix K. EKECHI, *Missionary Enterprise & Rivalry in Igboland 1857–1914*, London 1972, 24–25.

²⁰⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 26.

²⁰⁸ Cf. UDOYE, *Resolving the Prevailing Conflicts*, 184.

schools produced zealots who opposed various traditional institutions without truly understanding the values they were rejecting; enthusiastic with their new faith, they did not consider what was good or bad about traditional practices, leading some converts to experience identity crisis.²⁰⁹ This proposition is understandable when one recalls as already noted, that the target population of the missionaries and missionary schools were children, who as a matter of fact knew little or nothing about their traditions.

Although the missionary's effort in the schools was linked deeply to evangelisation, one cannot deny their immense contribution in the development of education in general in Igbo land. Statistically, as of 1960 when Nigeria gained political independence, Igboland had three dioceses with many educational institutions which include: Onitsha Diocese with 853 primary schools, 18 secondary schools, and 5 teachers' training institutions; Owerri Diocese with 658 primary schools, 12 secondary schools, and 13 teachers' training institutions; and Umuahia Diocese with 297 primary schools, 5 secondary schools, and 11 teachers' training institutions; totalling, 1,858 primary schools, 35 secondary schools, and 29 teachers' training institutions in Igboland.²¹⁰ Hence, Egwuonwu notes that although Christian missionaries aimed to spread Christianity, their main legacy was in education and creating written forms of local languages, which they manifested in their effort in translating the Bible into Igbo language and developing Igbo literature, which helped Igbo converts feel a sense of belonging and encouraged many Igbo people to stay committed to their Christian faith.²¹¹ In summary, one can say that Christian religious education in this era was conversion oriented which determined how it was structured and executed. To make the execution easier, it was interwoven with the general education system which offered a better life in the colonial government, thus making it attractive. The outcome could be easily imagined as already hinted, viz; emergence of Christians who were not deeply rooted in Christianity and at the same time alienated from their own culture and tradition which otherwise should have formed the basis for an authentic experience in the encounter with the Christian religion.

2.3.2 Christian religious education after the European missionary era

Worthy to note here is that the European missionary activities in Igbo land did not end with the Nigerian Independence in October 1960 but around February 1970 following the end of

²⁰⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

²¹⁰ Cf. Joseph O. OKAFOR, The Spiritan Contribution to Education in Igboland, in: Spiritan Horizons 9/9 (2014) 87–97, here: 92.

²¹¹ Cf. EGWUONWU, Christian Missionary Education in Igboland, 149.

Nigerian-Biafran Civil war, when the foreign missionaries, were expelled from the country with the accusation of humanitarian activities that the government thought was interfering with its political interests and blockade on the Biafran population.²¹² As such the management of these schools fall directly on those trained by the missionaries. However, with the Nigerian government take over of all mission-owned schools in the 1970s changes became inevitable. With regard to the Christian religious education, Egwuonwu notes that while mission schools designed their curriculum with a warm touch, drawing inspiration from Christian values and Western education styles, focusing a lot on religious teachings, while also covering subjects like English, math, science, and various humanities topics; the government on the other hand sought to create a more secular and nationally relevant curriculum.²¹³ Whether this could help in the deepening of the Christian faith remains a big question, when one considers the diverse ethnic composition of the Nigerian population as well as the post war government instability and policy implementation. Hence Okoh observes, that the ups and downs of government have really shaped Nigeria's civil and political history, making it tough for stable policies to take root and be put into action, such that over the years, especially since 1970, there have been some fantastic ideas aimed at improving Nigeria's education and school system, which have faced challenges due to conflict, and unfortunately, haven't quite come to fruition.²¹⁴

Narrowing this down further to Christian religious education in Igboland, Okoh notes that the curriculum for Christian religious education really showcases the diverse nature of Nigerian schools, because besides the main denominations talked about in the history of the advent of Christianity in Igboland, there exist tons of other Christian groups and Pentecostal churches.²¹⁵ This necessitated and rightly so, the effort of making the study curriculum so inclusive, focusing on themes and topics that revolve around God and the Bible, while specific themes and topics unique to each Christian group, are taken care of in their respective catechetical materials.²¹⁶ Although this is a good step towards an all inclusive Christian religious education, one can also argue that the effort concentrated on trying to unite various Christian denominations in school and not actually in contextualizing the Christian religion to be understandable with the environmental categories and worldview of

²¹² Cf. *ibid.*, 150.

²¹³ Cf. *ibid.*, 153.

²¹⁴ Cf. Michael OKOH, *Fostering Christian Faith in Schools and Christian Communities Through Igbo Traditional Values. Towards a Holistic Approach in Christian Religious Education and Catechesis in Igboland (Nigeria)*, (Tübinger perspektiven zur Pastoraltheologie und Religionspädagogik 45), Berlin 2012, 138.

²¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 143.

²¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

the children, for a better assimilation and internalisation. Moreso, with regard to the catechetical classes handled by various Christian groups, one notices not much difference from the system used by the missionaries. Hence, Okoh notes that in many dioceses in Igbo land, the major way of teaching about the Christian faith is through catechetical instruction, which involves a fun set of questions and answers that helps people learn about the Christian faith; with the go-to text, which include topics about God, creation, sin, commandment, the Church, sacraments and the Holy Spirit, that was officially approved by a former bishop of Umuahia diocese, Antonius Nwedo on December 8th, 1959.²¹⁷

From the foregoing, one could immediately imagine an inevitable system where Christian religious education could often be seen as one of those academic hurdles one needs to jump for the progress of one's academic journey, with reference to the general school curriculum requirement for religious Studies, or for the reception of one sacrament or the other, as in the case of the catechism handled by the denominations, and not necessary what one needs to understand and internalize as a way of life. Hence, Onovughe and Mordi note that although the goal of Christian Religious Education in schools is to enhance the morals of individuals and society by fostering character development and moral training in students, there are however concerns about its effectiveness in making a meaningful impact on students and society.²¹⁸ This is because many pupils mistakenly believe that Christian Religious Education is easy to pass due to their Christian background and familiarity with the Bible, leading to a lack of seriousness in their studies; a misconception which negatively affects religious education, particularly in primary and secondary schools.²¹⁹ In all, one notices here, just as Okoh rightly observes, a sharp difference between the catechism method in Igboland which emphasises learning by memorization and experimental learning method in the western part of the world, which emphasis learning through experience.²²⁰ This difference is understandable and was possible when one considers the perfect blend of the Christian religion with the European culture and tradition, which has definitely helped in the establishment of a worldview that makes Christianity a way of life. Thus, in the words of Cristinel-Mugurel Popa, "the calling card of Europe bears the signature of Christianity, [because] the evolution of Christianity in history intersects with the historical evolution of

²¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 146.

²¹⁸ Cf. Sunday ONOVUGHE–J. F. MORDI, *The Challenges of Teaching Christian Religious Education in Nigerian School and the way forward in the 21st Century a Position Paper*, in: *International Journal of Education and Evaluation*, 3/6 (2017) 66–74, here: 67.

²¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

²²⁰ Cf. OKOH, *Fostering Christian Faith in Schools*, 147.

Europe”²²¹. Christianity has significantly enriched European culture and shaped its identity, providing a spiritual foundation that unites diverse material and spiritual values, fostering a community based on shared elements and values.²²² As such, despite societal evolution and increasing diversity, Christianity continues to inspire cultural, social, and religious life, serving as a distinctive hallmark of Europe.²²³

Considering the discussions above, one can summarise that although wonderful effort has been made to better the teaching and learning of the Christian religion in Igboland, it still lacks a basic ingredient. This has to do with finding a possible blend between the Christian religion and the Igbo religious tradition, which consists of the cultural beliefs and practices that shape the life of the Igbo children and informs their worldview. This blend does not actually mean syncretism nor should it promote syncretism, but should aim at trying to make the Christian religion more understandable to the children who are product of this religious tradition, by using categories that are familiar to their worldview and understanding of reality.

²²¹ Cristinel-Mugurel POPA, Christianity - An Integral Part of European Culture and Identity, in: RAIS Journal for Social Sciences 8/1 (2024) 90–99, here: 90.

²²² Cf. *ibid.*, 93.

²²³ Cf. *ibid.*, 98.

Chapter 3

Comparative and Analytic study of some Igbo Religious Traditional Values in the light of Christian Religion

As it has already been noted in the first chapter of this work, the major paradigm shift brought in by the Second Vatican Council with regard to the Christians attitude in the face of other religious traditions is the council's realization of the positive values in other religious traditions.²²⁴ In what one can refer to as a historical background to this new position, Dupuis recalls that there are two lines of thoughts that existed in the argument about other religious traditions before Vatican II: 'The fulfilment theory', which argues that non-Christian religions are intended by God only as a preparation for the Christian religion that is its fulfilment; and 'the presence of the mystery of Christ' theory, which sees other religions as vehicles of supernatural grace with Christ genuinely present in them and as a proper means of salvation for their faithful adherents.²²⁵ As a development of particular concern, Dupuis notes that the Vatican II council's approach to this was pastoral and not doctrinal in that the council advocated for new attitudes of mutual understanding, appreciation, dialogue and co-operation between the religious traditions and Christianity.²²⁶

As such, in working out the doctrinal basis for this pastoral approach, the council dismantled the old prejudices and negative judgement about other religious traditions and pointed out the positive values and gifts in them.²²⁷ Dupuis, therefore, discusses the Council's teaching on non-Christians and their religions under two focal points: the possibility of salvation for individuals belonging to other religious traditions; and the role of these religious traditions as God's design for salvation of its' adherents.²²⁸ With regard to non-Christian individuals' salvation, the answer for Dupuis is on the positive because the pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes* already emphasizes the possibility of salvation through God's infinite grace, by the universal action of the Spirit of God.²²⁹ With regard to the role of the religious traditions as God's design, Dupuis sees that as more important and difficult to determine because it concerns whether the Council's perspective go beyond the 'fulfilment theory' and recognizes a permanent task of the religious traditions in the order of

²²⁴ Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2

²²⁵ Cf. DUPUIS, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 158.

²²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

²²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 160.

²²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 161.

²²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

salvation.²³⁰ To respond to this, Dupuis reviews some ecclesiastical texts, focusing on the positive values which these texts ascribed to the religious traditions; and the texts include: The Constitution *Lumen gentium* (16-17), the Declaration *Nostra aetate* (2), and the Decree *Ad gentes* (3, 9, 11). According to Dupuis, one idea that runs through these texts is that the council addresses three themes in each of them: the salvation of individuals outside the Church, the authentic values present in non-Christian religions, and the Church's recognition and appreciation of these values, along with its attitude towards those religious traditions and their followers.²³¹ Thus, he recaps as an example in *Nostra Aetate* that the Church looks with favour on the right dispositions and positive gifts in other religious traditions, while acknowledging that it is part of her mission to bring them to fulfilment through the message of the Gospel.²³² This final assertion of fulfilment through the message of the Gospel sparked further division in the reception of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the religious traditions which according to Dupuis ranges from theologians, who hold a rather reductionist position to those who hold a maximalist position.²³³

In what could be called the magisterial clarification on the debate among theologians following the teaching of Vatican II on other religious traditions, Dupuis brings in the contributions from the post-conciliar teachings of Paul VI and John Paul II. He highlights that the conciliar and post-conciliar documents show that the Church's teaching is neither monolithic nor of one piece, and concretized this with example in Paul VI, who adhered more to the fulfilment theory which the conciliar documents themselves suggest and John Paul II, who was more positive by his introduction of the efficacious presence of the Spirit in the traditions, although he did not eventually go beyond the fulfilment theory.²³⁴ Dupuis therefore concludes that even though the Church's teachings contain various overtones and nuances of meaning, they show unprecedented openness towards other religious traditions, which has not yet been expressed in this way in earlier official documents of the Church, and that even if the Council never explicitly recognises the other religious traditions as paths of salvation for their members, it did so implicitly by recognising the positive values and elements of truth and grace in them.²³⁵ As earlier noted in this work, this recognition emphasises the importance of dialogue with other religious traditions and

²³⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 162.

²³¹ Cf. *ibid.*

²³² Cf. *ibid.*, 164.

²³³ Cf. *ibid.*, 165.

²³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 170–178.

²³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 179.

should influence the Christian approach towards evangelization, through openness and mutual learning.²³⁶ This highlights at least implicitly, that other religious traditions have a role to play in the Christian religious education of their people and is in fact the reason for the questions which this work intends to answer; viz: What are those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings, good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found in the Igbo religious tradition, which though differing in many aspects from the ones the Christian religion holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men; and how can this contribute to a better Christian religious education of Igbo children? Therefore, an expository and a comparative study of some Igbo religious traditional values in the light of the Christian religion will show that the Igbo religious tradition, just like the Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and other religious traditions share in these positive elements spoken about in *Nostra Aetate*, which as already noted, should influence evangelization through openness and mutual learning; and as such, highlights the important role the Igbo religious tradition can and has to play in the Christian religious education of Igbo children, who are products of this tradition that forms and informs their worldview.

For the purpose of a better organization, this comparative cum analytic study will be carried out in two parts. The first part will focus on those Igbo religious traditional values which share close similarity with the Christian religion. The second part will focus on those values which can be interpreted and understood contextually in relation to the Christian religion.

3.1 Focus I: Some Igbo Religious Traditional values that show close similarity to the Christian values

These values are important because they can serve as a point of contact between Igbo religious tradition and Christianity. This could create the desired condition for dialogue, openness and mutual learning in the teaching and the learning of the Christian faith amongst the Igbo children. Some of them shall be discussed below.

3.1.1 The Belief in a Supreme Being

The Christian religion professes the belief in a Supreme being which is called God, who is eternal, omnipotent, and incomprehensible. Hence, Pius XI writes; “above all other reality

²³⁶ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 55.

there exists one supreme Being: God, the omnipotent Creator of all things, the all-wise and just Judge of all men”²³⁷. As he further explains, “it is not because men believe in God that He exists; rather because He exists do all men whose eyes are not deliberately closed to the truth believe in Him and pray to Him”²³⁸. This God is the creator of the universe,²³⁹ the one who sustains it²⁴⁰ and is above all other creature²⁴¹. Just like the Christian religion, the Igbo traditional religion believes in the existence of a Supreme Being, traditionally referred to as *Chukwu*. Ndiukwu describes this Supreme Being known as *Chukwu* in Igbo as follows;

Chukwu [is] supreme God whose power, essence and existence supersede others [....] He is the creator of heaven and earth; He is the God Jesus Christ came to reveal. He is a being who has caused and continues to sustain the existence and all things in the universe. He created all things both visible and invisible, and they depend on Him. His ontological existence surpasses human intelligence that is why His history of creation is confined into myths. The Myths is to reveal or make intelligible the creation of the world and to bring into meaning that everything or being has its existence from God.²⁴²

Hence, in the Hebrew Bible which is eventually the Christian Old Testament part of the Scripture, one sees also the use of narrative²⁴³ as a literary genre in the form of myths and stories to give meaning to the unexplainable creative activities of God and human response to God respectively. Schmid explains that these functional mythic structure in narratives, particularly from the book of Genesis to 2 Kings, are seen as expressions about God because the perspective which regards them as myth emerged in the modern era, as it was not a consideration in antiquity for two main reasons: first, the ancient Near Eastern worldview did not approach God theoretically but rather through his actions and experiences; second, ancient literature typically employed mythical categories to address fundamental questions, framing existence as inquiries about origins that required narrative forms.²⁴⁴ As he explains, Genesis–2 Kings presents a complex narrative that addresses the universality and particularity of divine action, God’s care, and the relationship between divine beneficence

²³⁷ PIUS XI, Encyclical on Atheistic Communism *Divini Redemptoris* (19 March 1937), Kansas City 2006, 17 [Nr. 26].

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 2.

²⁴⁰ Cf. CCC, 49; *Gaudium et Spes*, 36.

²⁴¹ Cf. CCC, 300; PIUS XI, *Divini Redemptoris*, 26.

²⁴² Aloysius Eberechukwu NDIUKWU, *Authenticity of Belief in Africa (Igbo) Traditional Religion. A Critical Appraisal in the Light of the Christian Faith* (European University Studies XXIII Theology/946), Frankfurt am Main 2014, 357.

²⁴³ Cf. Konrad SCHMID, *A Historical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* [trans. by Peter Altmann], Grand Rapids 2019, 263. Konrad Schmid explains the narrative genres that are evident in the Hebrew bible which is eventually the Christian Old Testament. This narratives form part of the bible from Genesis to 2 Kings as one long story from creation to the demise of Judah and Jerusalem.

²⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 264.

and human effort as well as answer to questions like the reasons humanity lives outside the divine garden, the existence of evil, explanation for Israel's existence in diaspora, etc.²⁴⁵ Just like most of the ancient religious traditions in the ancient near eastern world where the Hebrew Bible (Christian Old Testament) has its origin, Igbo religious tradition believes that the world is not without a cause and has stories that provides answer to this unexplainable realities like creation and origin of thing. Hence, Ogbonna argues that as there are various creation stories from different cultures, like the Genesis creation narratives in the Bible, which is believed to be influenced by Ancient Near Eastern tales like the Gilgamesh Epic, Enuma Elish, and Atrahasis, there exist also similar creation stories from African cultures, particularly the Igbo, Yoruba, and Akan.²⁴⁶

Worthy of note however, is that although the supreme Being is inexplicable both in Christian religion and in other religious traditions, there has always been effort by human beings to explain the nature of this supreme Being. Thus, the Christian religion sees this Supreme being as existing in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who are not separate Gods but one in essence. As most Christians say in the Nicene creed, the Father is almighty and creator of heaven and earth, the Son is not created but begotten and consubstantial with the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both,²⁴⁷ emphasizing distinct roles within the unity of God's nature. Hence, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states;

We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance; for the person of the Father is one, the Son's is another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.²⁴⁸

This God according to the Catechism "is at work in all the actions of his creatures"²⁴⁹. On the other hand, the understanding of the nature of this one and only supreme Being in the Igbo religious tradition differs with that of Christian religion. Hence although Isichie observes that the missionaries were particularly interested in the Igbo religious traditional belief in a supreme Being, known by various names such as *Chukwu* (Supreme God), *Chineke* (Creator of the universe), *Obasi di nelu* (The God whose abode is in the highest),

²⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 264–265.

²⁴⁶ Cf. Nweke Innocent OGBONNA, Creation Story in Genesis Chapter One in Relation to the African Understanding of Creation: An Overview, in: *Aku: An African Journal of Contemporary Research*, 4/1 (2023), 102–113, here: 102.

²⁴⁷ Cf. The order of Mass (The Ordinary Form of the Rosm Rite) Latin and English, USA 2016, 11.

²⁴⁸ CCC, 266.

²⁴⁹ CCC, 308.

Ose bulu uwa (The One who sustains the universe), etc, which are names that have behind them an attempt to explain the nature of God; she also notes that the role of *Chukwu* in Igbo religious life is debated because He is often seen as a benevolent but distant figure.²⁵⁰ According to Isichei, this leads followers to direct prayers and sacrifices to lesser spirits that actively influence human affairs, which include deities like: *Amadioha* (god of Thunder), *Igwe* (god of the sky), and *Anyanwu* (the sun god).²⁵¹ Hence, although there exist this shared believe in the supreme Being in both Christian religion and in Igbo religious tradition, there exists however, different understanding about the nature of the Supreme Being in both religious traditions. This difference in understanding is what most probably forms and informs the nature of the relationship between the supreme Being and humans in both Igbo religious tradition and in Christian religion. Hence, unlike the Igbo *Chukwu* whose abode is far away from the people, the Christian God is always seen as being close to his creatures (Cf. Deut. 4:7) and as such is involved in their affairs.

3.1.2 The belief in the Existence of Levels of or Intermediary Beings

Evident in the Christian religion is the belief in intermediary beings or spirits normally referred to as angels, and this belief can be substantiated both scripturally and from Tradition. Thus, angels according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, are seen as spiritual beings created by God, serving as messengers and agents of His will.²⁵² Furthermore, the Catechism explains that angels are beings that continuously glorify God and support His plans for humanity, in that they are seen as guardians and guides, aiding in spiritual growth and protection.²⁵³ As a religion that has its roots in the Jewish religious traditions, the backdrop of Christian angelology is therefore noticeable in the Jewish religious tradition angelology. Hence, Schmid observes that although the strict monotheism of the Jewish exilic period renounced the notion of angels in the Jewish tradition, angels on the contrary has always been used in the Jewish tradition to depict divine appearances which is evident in many parts of the Hebrew scripture like: Gen. 18:2; 28:11–12 and 32:25.²⁵⁴ Schmid further explains that the apparent renunciation of the notion of angels in the later Jewish tradition was probably to maintain the theological distance established by monotheism of the exilic period between God and the world, creator and creation; however,

²⁵⁰ Cf. Elizabeth ISICHEI, Ibo and Christian Beliefs: Some Aspects of a Theological Encounter, in: *African Affairs*, 68/271 (Apr. 1969) 121–134, here 124.

²⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁵² Cf. CCC, 350.

²⁵³ Cf. *ibid.*, 352.

²⁵⁴ Cf. SCHMID, *A Historical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, 300.

this space was eventually filled with numinous powers of various kinds, which gave rise to the traditional conception of a heavenly court in which angels and mystical creatures are clearly subordinate to God, such that God is imagined as an earthly king, ruling over various courts with various orders and levels of beings.²⁵⁵ Thus, with reference to the Ancient Near Eastern institutions which is the setting of the Hebrew bible, Schmid makes the following conclusion; viz: angels are messengers who completely represent their sender such that angels are messengers of YHWH or better put, an earthly manifestation of God himself; the winged angels which appeared first in the book of Daniel (Cf. Dan. 9:21) shows the heavenly descent of the angels; finally, the later appearance of angels with names could mark the end of the step towards an autonomous angelology in Judaism that no longer interpret angels as direct forms of divine revelation, rather as numinous actors in their own right.²⁵⁶ Following Schmid's propositions, one can deduce that this development probably gave a favourable background to angels also being seen as guardian and companion of individuals like in the case of Tobias (Cf. Tob. 5: 17, 22) and in this case it was the angel Raphael (Tob. 12,15).

As a matter fact, the teaching and belief about the existence of such intermediary beings often referred to as angels, is not only backed by passages in the Old and New Testaments but also by practices in the tradition of the Catholic Church. Hence, the Catholic Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy highlights the significant roles of angels in both the Old and New Testaments, illustrating their interventions in key biblical events like: closing the gates of paradise, saving Hagar and Ishmael, stopping Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, announcing miraculous births, protecting the righteous, as well as in assisting figures like Elijah and Azariah; and angels also played a crucial role in the life of Jesus, from announcing his birth to protecting him and ministering to him during his trials.²⁵⁷ Even the New Testament reports Jesus telling his audience that there will be great joy amongst the angels in heaven over a repentant sinner (Cf. Lk 15:10), and culminates this in Jesus' saying that he will return with the host of angels to judge humanity (Cf. Mt.25:31). Moreso, the Directory on Popular Piety further indicates how angels are honoured in the Christian tradition for their role in salvation, with specific feasts like the Feast of the Archangels on September 29 and the Feast of Guardian Angels on October 2, during which the Church venerates and seeks the intercession of holy angels, who provide 'mysterious and powerful

²⁵⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 301–302.

²⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 301 & 303.

²⁵⁷ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy Principles and Guidelines*, London 2002, 150–151 [Nr. 214].

assistance' throughout her history.²⁵⁸ As this document further highlights, the Church during her liturgical celebrations aligns with angelic hymns and invokes their help for the Eucharistic sacrifice, she entrusts the angels with the prayers of the faithful, the contrition of penitents, and the protection of the innocent and also prays for their guardianship over the faithful during sleep, assistance in times of distress, and guidance for souls into paradise during funerals.²⁵⁹ As the catechism of the catholic Church summarizes it, the Church's liturgy involves adoration of the thrice-holy God alongside angels, seeking their assistance through prayers like the Roman Canon's and the Funeral Liturgy's invocation for angels to lead souls to Paradise.²⁶⁰

In the Igbo Religious Tradition, one sees something very similar. Hence, Ndiukwu observes that the Supreme Being (Chukwu) "is not directly worshiped in Igbo traditional religion; rather he is approached through the intermediaries [that] mediate between God and human beings [and] they sacrifice to Chukwu through the lesser gods"²⁶¹. Hence, he explains that there are lots of deities who are seen as pure spirits that came from *Chukwu* (God) with different roles and powers, who serve as intermediaries between God and humanity, with each looking after different parts of creation and various natural events as instruments of God's love and guidance.²⁶² Some examples include but are not limited to: the *Ala* deity, the most revered and influential in Igboland, who takes care of the Land; the *Igwe* deity, who watches over the sky; the *Amadioha* deity, responsible for Thunder; and the *Anyanwu* deity, who brings us the sun, among others.²⁶³ Thus, Isichei observes that in Igboland, various lesser spirits are linked to specific natural sites, such as groves or streams, and these spirits can influence human affairs positively or negatively, depending on if the proper sacrifices are made.²⁶⁴ She further hinted on the concept of personal tutelary spirits, *chi*, which is prevalent across Igbo culture.²⁶⁵ Here, it is important to differentiate between *chi* which relates to the individual persons and the *Chi-ukwu*, often written also as *Chukwu* which is the creator God, the supreme Being. As Chukwudebelu explains, in Igbo traditional belief, *chi* is a special spiritual force given to each person by God at birth that connects individuals

²⁵⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 151–152 [Nr. 215].

²⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Cf. CCC, 335.

²⁶¹ NDIUKWU, *Authenticity of Belief in Africa (Igbo) Traditional Religion*, 357.

²⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, 358.

²⁶³ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁶⁴ Cf. ISICHEI, *Ibo and Christian Beliefs*, 125.

²⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

to the Supreme Being and represents a piece of divine essence that influences their life.²⁶⁶ In essence, *chi* guides the individuals through their life experiences until they die, when it returns to God, and as such, embodies the link between the divine and the individual, affecting their spiritual journey and destiny.²⁶⁷ Hence, one can opine that although the understanding about the two concepts may differ, this concept of *chi* as a personal guiding spirit in Igbo religious tradition could share a similarity with the Christian religion concept of Guardian Angel.

Thus, the Catholic Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy teaches that devotion to Guardian Angels is a prominent aspect of popular piety and highlights St. Basil the Great's teaching that every believer has a Guardian Angel for protection and guidance, as well as St. Bernard of Clairvaux's emphasis on their role, whereby Guardian Angels are seen as divine assistance in life.²⁶⁸ As the Directory notes, this devotion fosters a Christian life marked by gratitude to God, awareness of the angels' presence, and confidence in facing challenges, as they guide and protect the faithful.²⁶⁹ Even the New Testament somehow recognised the role of the Guardian Angels by referring to them as 'ministering spirits' for those destined for salvation (Cf. Heb. 1:14). Thus, the Catechism summarizes the role of the Guardian Angels by teaching that human beings throughout their existence, from birth to death, are continually supported by the care and intercession of angels, who act as protectors and guides for believers such that even while still on earth, Christians experience a connection with angels.²⁷⁰ From the foregoing, one can say that although the understanding of the nature and functions of the intermediary spiritual beings may differ in these two religious traditions, the reality of their existence is however believed in both Christian and Igbo religious traditions. Worthy of note nevertheless, is the peculiar semblance between the idea of the Guardian Angel as developed through the Hebrew tradition of angelology to its Christian heritage and the Igbo conceptual equivalent of the same reality called *chi* in Igbo religious tradition.

²⁶⁶ Cf. Ifeanyi A. CHUKWUDEBELU et al, Unveiling the Depths: A Scholarly Exploration of the Igbo Worldview, in: Sapientia Foundation Journal of Education, Sciences and Gender Studies (SFJESGS), 6/1 (March, 2024), 433–441, here: 437.

²⁶⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 438.

²⁶⁸ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, Directory on Popular Piety, 152–153 [Nr. 216].

²⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁷⁰ Cf. CCC, 336.

3.1.3 Communion of the Living and the Dead

The communion of the living and the dead is a key element of Catholic theology which underscores the spiritual connection among all members of the Church, including those on Earth, in Purgatory, and in Heaven. The Catechism of the Catholic Church articulates this belief, by stating that Christians “believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church”²⁷¹. Therefore, evident in Christian religion is the belief in a deep spiritual connection between the living and the dead, which is upheld through prayer, especially by offering the Eucharist as a key form of intercession for those who have passed away.²⁷² Thus, this communion which is evident in the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church does not just concern those believed to be undergoing purification that need prayers but also saints, who are believed to be Christians who are now enjoying the beatific vision of God and are often referred to as the “Church triumphant”²⁷³, who also intercede for the living.

In the Igbo traditional religion, one sees something very similar. Hence, Chukwudebelu et al note that the Igbo worldview sees the universe as consisting of two connected realms: the human world and the spirit world which includes the heavens where deities reside and the underworld where spirits and ancestors reside, and these beings which are interconnected interact continuously.²⁷⁴ According to them, the lines between these realms are flexible, allowing influence and blending between the material and spiritual worlds, which emphasizes the dynamic relationship between the visible and invisible worlds that shapes the Igbo understanding of existence.²⁷⁵ In line with this, Isichei observes that in Igbo religious tradition, the dead play a crucial role.²⁷⁶ She explains further that the Igbo people view spirits as having a para-body, creating a world of spirits that mirrors the living world, including its social hierarchy and geography, where the dead maintain their status, such that rituals like sacrifices at burials, are essential for ensuring a proper transition to the spirit world.²⁷⁷ Hence, Isichei highlights the importance of the connection between the living and the dead, whereby the dead rely on their descendants for burial rites and sacrifices, while

²⁷¹ CCC, 962.

²⁷² Cf. CCC, 1055.

²⁷³ Jovian P. LANG, *Dictionary of the Liturgy*, New York 1989, 112.

²⁷⁴ Cf. CHUKWUDEBELU et al, *Unveiling the Depths*, 438–439.

²⁷⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 439.

²⁷⁶ Cf. ISICHEI, *Ibo and Christian Beliefs*, 125.

²⁷⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

they, in return, oversee and influence the community.²⁷⁸ As she explains further, secret societies like *muo* (Cultural Masquerade), harness the power of the dead, with initiates claiming to embody these spirits and wielding significant authority in their communities.²⁷⁹

Once again, even though the understanding of the nature of the relationship between the living and the dead may differ in Christian and Igbo traditions, one cannot deny the fact that at least there exists in both traditions, the consciousness of a relationship between the living and dead members in each religious tradition.

3.1.4 Dignity of the Human Person

In the Christian religion, one notices the emphasis on the dignity of the human person, whereby it is believed that every individual has an inherent dignity because human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Cf. Gen.1:26–27). Thus, the Catholic Church in her social teaching emphasizes that respect for human dignity is essential for upholding human rights and ensuring justice in society.²⁸⁰ As she further explains, the fact that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God creates a unique relationship with God that should encourage individuals to know, love, and serve God, while respecting and promoting harmony among people; and because the dignity of the human person includes both spiritual and physical aspects, it highlights the inseparability of body and soul, which together reflect the divine image.²⁸¹ Thus, the catholic Church just like most other Christians see any violation of human dignity as a violation against God,²⁸² and the Catechism of the Catholic Church calls for individuals and societies to foster conditions that uphold and enhance the dignity of every person.²⁸³ Just as Pope John Paul II notes, “society as a whole must respect, defend and promote the dignity of every human person, at every moment and in every condition of that person’s life”²⁸⁴.

One can notice that one thing that is common to these teachings on the dignity of the human person which have been hinted above, is that the teachings are based on the fact that

²⁷⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 126.

²⁷⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁸⁰ Cf. DICASTERY FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Declaration on Human Dignity *Dignitas Infinita* (2 April 2024), Nr. 64, in: The Holy See, URL: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_dcf_doc_20240402_dignitas-infinita_en.html [accessed: 06.02 2026].

²⁸¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 18.

²⁸² Cf. JOHN PAUL II., Post Synodal apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the world *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), Ottawa 1989, 105–107 [Nr. 37].

²⁸³ Cf. CCC, 1926.

²⁸⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical on the Value and Inviolability of Human Life *Evangelium Vitae* (25 March 1995), New York 1995, 166 [Nr. 81].

the human person is not just a body but an embodiment of spirit and body as it is clear from the scriptural passage in Genesis (Cf. Gen.1:26–27). This dual nature of the human person is also vivid in the Igbo traditional understanding of the human person. Hence, Nweke observes that in the effort to reconstruct the various dimensions of the human person with the influence of the Christian understanding, the Igbo people elaborated the immaterial aspects of the human person through four principles: *Obi*, *Chi*, *Eke*, and *Mmuo* and explains that *Obi* represents a man's life-force and emotional centre; *Chi* is the destiny spirit believed to be an emanation of the creator; *Eke* serves as the ancestral guardian spirit; and *Mmuo* which is more or less an associate of the *Chi*, is the spirit that returns to God after death.²⁸⁵ From this description, one can further understand *Chi* in addition to the earlier explanation, as the image of the creator God in man.

Again, in relation to the lesser deities in Igbo religious tradition which has been discussed above, Okeke et al note that the Igbo people have personalized gods, such as *Chi* and *Ikenga*, alongside their main deity, *Chukwu* and that each person has their own *Chi*, which acts as a guardian spirit.²⁸⁶ Hence, Okafor observes that the Igbo understanding of the human person is deeply rooted in religion and closely linked to the concept of *Chi*, which represents the divine spirit that animates individuals and that Igbo people consider *Chi* central to their spiritual practices, as all actions are influenced by their relationship with this divine spirit.²⁸⁷ *Chi* as he explains is a unique personal life-force that varies for everyone, which represents the spiritual essence that accompanies one in one's life journey.²⁸⁸ It is fundamental to human existence and is a key aspect of what it means to be a human person (*Mmadu*).²⁸⁹ Hence, in his explanation of the concept of the human person, Ezedike opines that "according to an old Igbo centenarian, God created all things beautifully, then at last he created what he called MMADU, let goodness be, as a synthesis of all that is good in visible creation"²⁹⁰. As he asserts;

[the human person] according to the Igbo world-view, possesses what may well be called spiritual instincts making him capable and desirous of the supreme values: truth, goodness, peace and beauty. These values designate a totality of hierarchised values, all which is loved,

²⁸⁵ Cf. Emmanuel Nweke OKAFOR, The Concept of Chi in the Igbo Philosophy of a Person, in: *Prajñā Vihāra*, 21/2 (July to December 2020), 62–81, here: 72.

²⁸⁶ Cf. OKEKE et al, *Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity*, 2.

²⁸⁷ Cf. OKAFOR, The Concept of Chi in the Igbo Philosophy of a Person, 69.

²⁸⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁸⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 70.

²⁹⁰ Edward Uzoma EZEDIKE, The Concept of Human Person in African Ontology: A Critical Reflection on the Igbo Notion of Man, in: *African Research Review (AFRREV)*, 13 (2)/54 (April 2019), 131–137, here 132.

desired and realized by MMADU, man who lived in this world. Above all, man possesses chi, Igbo image of God which elevates him and places him above all visible creation.²⁹¹

From the foregoing, one notices that the fact that the dignity of the human person is directly linked to the creator God could be noticed both in the Christian religious tradition and in the Igbo religious tradition. As such, despite the likely differences in the understanding, explanation and use of terminologies that explains this fact, the belief that something of the creator God is present in the human person and that this divine presence is responsible for the desired and inalienable dignity that every human person possesses can be seen in both Christian and Igbo religious traditions.

3.1.5 The Sacredness of Human Life

In the Christian religion there exists also a great regard for the human life. The Catechism of the Catholic Church asserts that human life must be fully respected and protected from conception, highlighting that every individual possesses inherent rights, including the fundamental right to life.²⁹² Furthermore, the Catechism emphasizes that human life is a divine gift that possesses inherent dignity deserving of respect.²⁹³ Thus, the catechism with reference to the fifth commandment that prohibits murder, emphasizes that such acts violate human dignity, the golden rule, as well as the holiness of the Creator, and maintains that this law is universally applicable and binds everyone at all times and in all places.²⁹⁴ Still emphasizing on this matter, John Paul II notes that human life is a gift from God, which reflects His image and shares in His breath of life.²⁹⁵ As he further explains, God as the sole Lord of life holds authority over it, as emphasized in the biblical account where He tells Noah that He will demand an account for human life.²⁹⁶ Thus, he asserts that the sacredness of life is rooted in God's creative action, and it remains in a unique relationship with the Creator such that no one has the right to directly destroy human life.²⁹⁷ As John Paul II further notes, this is important because any genuine human development begins with respecting and defending life, a gift from God that comes with responsibility.²⁹⁸ Hence, since

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Cf. CCC, 2270.

²⁹³ Cf. CCC, 2258.

²⁹⁴ Cf. CCC, 2261.

²⁹⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 39.

²⁹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 53.

²⁹⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (6 November 1999), Pasay City Philippines 2000, 118–119 [Nr. 35].

humans are guardians of life, not its owners, human beings must honour it from conception to natural death, because progress of civil society depends on respecting all human life, especially that of the vulnerable, including the unborn, sick, disabled, and elderly; for every life is a gift to be valued by all.²⁹⁹

In the Igbo religious tradition, one sees something very much similar. Hence, Okafor notes that in Igbo religious tradition, human life is regarded as the most important asset, which is reflected in the meanings of some of their names such as *Ndubuisi* (Life is Supreme), *Ndukaku* (Life is greater than wealth), and *Nduka* (Life is the greatest), thus emphasizing the significance and value of life in Igbo religious tradition.³⁰⁰ In Igbo tradition therefore, human life is seen as the pinnacle of God's creation, which imparts a unique significance to everyone.³⁰¹ Okafor explains further that amongst the Igbo people, life is regarded as a divine gift which explains the ontology of Igbo names like *Chinyelu* (God has gifted); and life is also viewed as a mystery from God which also explains the ontology of Igbo names like *Chinwendu* (God is the owner of life).³⁰² According to him, this belief encourages living life to the fullest, embracing both joy and suffering, acknowledging that life involves conflict and various tensions, which are accepted as part of existence.³⁰³ As he notes, this understanding that life is a gift from God ultimately shapes the Igbo worldview and values.³⁰⁴ Thus, Ezedike confirms that the Igbo culture places immense value on life, as reflected in their naming conventions such as *Ndubuisi* (Life is the prime necessity) and *Ndukaku* (Life is superior to wealth), which illustrate the belief that life is the most important treasure.³⁰⁵ He further notes that there exist also other names, which emphasize the importance of preserving life and the divine ownership of life.³⁰⁶ Thus, the Igbo tradition views life as a sacred gift from the divine and emphasizes the importance of preserving and promoting human life such that actions that threaten life are traditionally seen as taboos.³⁰⁷

Because this belief stems from the understanding that life is a gift from God which implies that no one has authority over another's life except God, the Igbo people view killing of any sort or suicide as an abomination and a just punishment for killing is either death or banishment of the offender, because taking the life of another denies the offender their own

²⁹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁰⁰ Cf. OKAFOR, *The Concept of Chi in the Igbo Philosophy of a Person*, 63.

³⁰¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 65.

³⁰² Cf. *ibid.*, 66.

³⁰³ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁰⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Cf. EZEDIKE, *The Concept of Human Person in African Ontology*, 134–135.

³⁰⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 135.

³⁰⁷ Cf. CHUKWUDEBELU et al., *Unveiling the Depths*, 439.

right to live. A good example can be seen in the prose, 'Things Fall Apart' by Chinua Achebe. In this work which brought the Igbo tradition to limelight, Okonkwo, the major character in Achebe's story, accidentally killed a young man during the funeral of Ezeudu, an important personality in the clan; this act, though unintentional, was a serious crime that required Okonkwo who was a village warrior to face banishment for seven years because it was seen as an offense against the earth goddess, and anyone who did so had to leave the land; thus Okonkwo and his family left, while their house and properties were destroyed to cleanse the land of the bloodshed caused by his action.³⁰⁸ Again, on his return from the banishment and when confronted by the erosion of their tradition through the influence of expatriate culture and religion, Okonkwo fought to restore sanity to the extent of killing an expatriate out of anger, and realising the enormous consequence, he went and hung himself; again this was seen as an abomination such that the villagers who as a matter of tradition should not touch his dead body employed the help of foreigners to help them bury the corpse and they later performed the proper ritual to appease the gods of the land.³⁰⁹ As such, although Okonkwo was a great warrior in the village, but because of this singular act, he could not receive a befitting burial that is worthy of his statue in the community. Hence Achebe narrates;

Obierika [a close friend of Okonkwo], who had been gazing steadily at his friend's dangling body, turned suddenly to the District Commissioner and said ferociously: 'That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; -and now he will be buried like a dog.'³¹⁰

This story helps one to understand how the Igbo people hold human life in high esteem which no one has the right to take no matter what. Thus, Ezedike further observes that this reverence for life extends to a strong emphasis on children, which is prioritized above other moral considerations, such that regardless of the circumstances surrounding a child's birth, the presence of a child is seen as paramount, leading to a diminished focus on moral judgments in such cases.³¹¹ Therefore, Chukwudebelu articulates this high respect for the human life in Igbo religious tradition and notes that the desire for longevity leads the Igbo to seek connections with spiritual powers and ancestors for security and lineage continuity, such that childlessness is deeply mourned due to its impact on family traditions, while sickness is seen as a threat to life, prompting divination and remedies to restore health.³¹²

³⁰⁸ Cf. Chinua ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart*, New York 1994, 120–125.

³⁰⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 198–208.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

³¹¹ Cf. EZEDIKE, *The Concept of Human Person in African Ontology*, 135.

³¹² Cf. CHUKWUDEBELU et al., *Unveiling the Depths*, 439.

Once more, one can notice here the close similarity in the high regard given to the human life in both Igbo and Christian traditions. Although there could exist some differences with regard to their areas of emphasis, common in both traditions however is that life is a gift from God which is meant to be cherished and that no person has the right to take neither his or her life nor the life of the other.

3.1.6 Community and Communion

Fostering Communality and communion have always been part and parcel of the Christian tradition. Hence, in the New Testament, especially in the act of the apostles one reads that early Christians regularly come together and meet at the houses of willing members for worship, breaking and sharing of bread commonly known as communion and other activities (Cf. Acts 16:11–15, 25–34; 17:1–9; 18:7–8). Hence, in addition to scriptural passages which presupposes that the Catholic Church's emphasis on community and communion is based on the fact that she sees herself as the Body of Christ (Cf. 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1: 22–23; Col. 1:24; Rom. 12:5), the teaching of the Catholic Church also presupposes that the practical expression of this communality is realized in the breaking and sharing of bread referred today as the Eucharist.³¹³ Moreso, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* describes the Church as a communal entity that serves as a sacrament or sign of both a deep union with God and the unity of all humanity.³¹⁴ As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, access into this community is enabled through the rite of Christian initiation which include: Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist.³¹⁵ Because its unity is rooted in communion, Benedict XVI further explains that the celebration of the Eucharist unites believers with Christ and each other, creating a single body.³¹⁶ He further hints that this sacramental communion is not only vital for the Church's identity and mission, but also highlights the communal aspect of the Christian faith.³¹⁷

Often, this communion is regarded as *Koinonia* which is taken as one of the basic aspects of Christian life.³¹⁸ The term *Koinonia* according to Vorgrimler, implies solidarity and mutual responsibility within the Christian community or among communities.³¹⁹ Kuhnke

³¹³ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 3.

³¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 1.

³¹⁵ Cf. CCC, 1212, 1213, 1285 and 1322.

³¹⁶ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (27 February 2007), Ijamsville Maryland 2007, 100–101 [Nr. 76].

³¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

³¹⁸ Cf. Leo KARRER, Grundvollzüge christlicher Praxis, in: Herbert HASLINGER (Hg.), *Handbuch praktische Theologie*, Bd. 2: Durchführung, Mainz 2000, 381.

³¹⁹ Herbert VORGRIMLER, *Neues Theologisches Wörterbuch*, Freiburg i. B. u. a. 2000, 355.

also emphasizes that it is characteristic of the New Testament discourse on Koinonia that it serves to indicate the nature and quality of relationships among Christians and to delineate the identity of the community constituted by these relationships from other social relationship patterns.³²⁰ From the above understanding, one could say that Koinonia is the solidarity among Christians that should manifest in a tangible unity within the Christian community. This solidarity or unity among Christians was an important prayer and desire of Jesus Christ. As such, Jesus himself sees this unity as a sign that Christians belong to Him and as a sign to convince people that He was sent by the Father (Cf. John 17:20–21). Therefore, the Catholic Church has repeatedly pointed out the serious scandal and damage caused by the disunity among Christians and considers the scandal of Christian disunity as a serious wound on the body of Christ, which hinders the credibility and effectiveness of the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel to the world.³²¹

A more contemporary teaching that emphasises communality amongst Christians could be seen in the idea of synodality, defined in the Final Document of the Synod on Synodality as the collective journey of Christians with Christ towards God's Kingdom, in unity with humanity; and as something that is mission oriented, should encourage gathering at all Church levels for mutual listening, dialogue, and community discernment.³²² Thus, in the light and the spirit of synodality, this document sees communion, participation, and mission are three inseparable aspects of the Church's life.³²³ As one can notice, this recent move by the Synod on Synodality indicates a shift towards a more participatory approach to communal life of the Church, where all members have a role to play and can contribute to the process of discernment. This is probably based on his conviction which Pope Francis, the convener of this synod initially made open in *Fratelli Tutti* (October 2020) that “no one can face life in isolation... We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead”³²⁴. Thus, he emphasizes the significance of collective dreaming, suggesting that individual dreams can lead to illusions and he advocates

³²⁰ Ulrich KUHNKE, *Koinonia. Zur theologischen Rekonstruktion der Identität christlicher Gemeinde*, Düsseldorf 1992, 111.

³²¹ Cf. PAUL VI., Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 Dezember 1975), Boston (No date) 53–55 [Nr. 77].

³²² Cf. FRANCIS, XVI Ordinary General Assembly of The Synod of Bishops. For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission. Final Document (November 2024), Nr. 28, URL: https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf [accessed: 09.04.2024].

³²³ Cf. *ibid.*, Nr. 3.

³²⁴ FRANCIS, Encyclical on Fraternity and Social Friendship *Fratelli Tutti* (3 October 2020), New Jersey 2020, 4–5 [Nr. 8].

for unity as a global family, where diverse beliefs and voices contribute to a shared vision for humanity and the planet, we all inhabit.³²⁵

In a like manner, this high regard for communality is one of the basic elements of Igbo religious tradition. As Ayika explains, the traditional Igbo society is characterized by egalitarianism, communality, and a strong sense of religiousness, which fosters community consciousness among individuals, promoting a collective effort to achieve not only survival but a fulfilling life, whereby each person has a unique, self-determined role and contributes to the overall harmony and beauty of the community.³²⁶ Hence, the Igbo perspective views a human being as both an individual entity and as part of a community.³²⁷ Ezedike articulates the communal nature of life in Igbo tradition when he says;

Another important aspect of Igbo life view is unity of life as the centre of cohesion and solidarity. By this we mean a relationship of being and life between each individual and his descendants, his family, his brothers and his sisters in the village, his antecedents and also with God, the ultimate source of life. [...] It results from a communion or participation in the same reality, the same vital principle which unites a number of beings with one another.³²⁸

From this perspective, Okafor emphasizes the importance of communalism in Igbo cosmology, which highlights that humans are inherently social beings who coexist with others of various backgrounds, and which is encapsulated in the Igbo proverb '*Otu osisi anaghi emebe ohia*' (a tree does not make a forest); thus underscoring the belief that individual actions can impact on the community.³²⁹ Hence, narrating about his experience amongst the Igbo people, Basden comments that "there is seldom independent action, probably never where other members of the tribe or family are involved, however remotely"³³⁰.

Thus, Okafor further highlights, the communal nature of Igbo cosmology which emphasizes that an individual's significance is derived from their recognition and acceptance by the community and that personal autonomy is intertwined with communal influence; a reality that suggests that individuals exist in relation to their family, village, or clan, and that the community's existence is essential for individual identity.³³¹ Hence, he asserts that, "it can be said that the personality of an [Igbo person], hinges on community spirituality and

³²⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

³²⁶ Cf. Philip Emenike AYIKA, Communal Relations in the Traditional Igbo Society, in: *Nnadiabube Journal of Philosophy* 3/2 (2019) 99–113, here: 99.

³²⁷ Cf. OKAFOR, The Concept of Chi in the Igbo Philosophy of a Person, 63.

³²⁸ EZEDIKE, The Concept of Human Person in African Ontology, 134.

³²⁹ Cf. OKAFOR, The Concept of Chi in the Igbo Philosophy of a Person, 67.

³³⁰ BASDEN, Among the Ibos of Nigeria, 10.

³³¹ Cf. OKAFOR, The Concept of Chi in the Igbo Philosophy of a Person, 67.

manifests in the self-surrender of the 'I' to the 'We'"³³². As Mbiti expresses this fact which concerns almost all African traditions generally, the African concept of family extends beyond the nuclear definition common in Europe and North America and includes a wide range of relatives such as children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and siblings, who form extended families where multiple households live closely together, often consisting of ten to a hundred members; and also encompasses deceased relatives, referred to as the 'living-dead,' who are remembered and believed to still influence the family's affairs and also includes the future generations.³³³ Relating this communal view to the life of the individual, Mbiti emphasizes that individuals do not exist in isolation but are intrinsically linked to the collective, such that an individual's existence is shaped by their connections to others, including past and present generations.³³⁴

Similar to the rite of Christian initiation obtainable in the Christian religion, Mbiti notes that physical birth alone is insufficient, such that individuals must undergo rites of incorporation to fully integrate into society, a process that continues throughout their lives and even after death and this integration is seen as a religious act.³³⁵ He further highlights that in traditional African societies, individuals gain self-awareness, responsibilities, and experiences through their relationships with others, whereby Joys and sorrows are shared within the community, and that family ties extend beyond individual ownership, affecting the entire group, such that the well-being of the individual is intertwined with that of the community.³³⁶ Thus, Mbiti sums up the communal nature of traditional African and maintains that "the individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.' This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man"³³⁷. Although this perspective is different from European perspectives where the individual has an important status, one cannot totally deny that it could nevertheless help in a significant manner in reformulating and teaching some the Christian ideas like solidarity, living together, being part of a community etc; especially when it concerns the Igbo context. As it is already noted in this work, the Igbo religious tradition as has been discussed already has a great regard for the dignity of the human person. Thus, the African communal perspective as expressed by Mbiti here does not in any way imply the subjugation of the individual

³³² Ibid., 68.

³³³ Cf. John S. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, New York 1970, 138–139.

³³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 141.

³³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

³³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

³³⁷ Ibid.

person but helps to ensure and promote the life of the individual. Hence, as an example, one sees in Achebe's *Things fall apart* how the village life is sustained by cooperation in farming³³⁸, various communal ritual like marriage ritual³³⁹ and festivals like the new yam festival³⁴⁰.

As a recap from the examples explained above and considering the similarity in understanding amongst these Christian and Igbo religious traditional values, one could say that although these Igbo religious traditional values may differ in interpretation and as such functionally from those of the Christian religion compared here; however, the little similarity they share conceptually could be used at least analogically for the teaching of the Christian religion to children of Igbo descent. This will probably enhance understanding and assimilation of the values of the Christian religion because the categories used in the teaching would be those that the learners are much familiar and at home with.

3.2 Focus II: Values in Igbo Religious Tradition that can be contextually understood in relation to the Christian values

These values are important because they can be used allegorically in the explanation of some Christian religious values and could in effect improve understanding and appreciation of these Christian religious values. Some of them would be studied comparatively below with their Christian religious simile in order to highlight this point.

3.2.1 Veneration of the Saints vis a vis Ancestors veneration

Important to note here is that long-standing Eurocentric theology which was also helped by colonization has resulted not just in the imbalance between the European saints and African saints, but also in the lack of proper appreciation of many African traditional models of good life. Thus, Maina observes that African Catholics have long felt that their saints are overlooked, while Europe has seen numerous canonizations in recent decades and this imbalance makes many Africans struggle to connect with Christianity, especially Catholicism, due to its focus on European saints and foreign cultures, which could be counterproductive for inculturation.³⁴¹ However, just as Chukwudebelu notes, "in both Igbo

³³⁸ Cf. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 22–23.

³³⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 110–119.

³⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, 36–45.

³⁴¹ Cf. Joseph MAINA, A church grows in Africa, but where are its saints? in: *National Catholic Reporter* (June 19, 2025), URL: <https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/church-grows-africa-where-are-its-saints> [accessed: 05.05.2026].

cosmology and Christian worldviews, the concepts of Ancestors and Saints exhibit intriguing parallels, particularly in their roles as benevolent spiritual entities connected to the living”³⁴².

Thus, the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that the Church canonizes saints to acknowledge their heroic virtue and fidelity to God’s grace, who in turn become models and intercessors for believers, sustaining their hope.³⁴³ The Catechism further explains that saints in heaven are closely united to Christ and help the Church become more holy, intercede with God for us and their support helps us in our weaknesses.³⁴⁴ As such, although the Church teaches that worship is only directed to God who is a Trinity, she also notes that worship is extended although in a different way first of all to the mother of God, Mary and then to the saints³⁴⁵. This position is of course in resonance with various teaching of the Church. A good examples is the teaching of Leo XIII who says that while the holy Sacrifice of the Mass is meant to be offered only to God, it can also be celebrated in honour of the saints in heaven in order to seek their help and support.³⁴⁶ Again, in his ‘Reflection on several Saints’ during the General Audience in August 2008, Benedict XVI charges the public to walk with the Saints, because they embody the Gospel’s message and provide access to Jesus.³⁴⁷ He goes further to say that cultivating knowledge and devotion to the Saints is essential and that every day offers a chance to connect with the saints, whom he here refers to as ‘heavenly Patrons’³⁴⁸. He concludes by charging the audience to familiarize themselves with the saints and use the experiences of the saints as a source of hope that they themselves could one day be like them.³⁴⁹

As the Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy sums this up, the cult of the Saints, particularly martyrs, is an ancient practice rooted in Scripture and early Church traditions of both Eastern and Western Churches, where the saints have consistently been venerated; and the Church has defended the theological basis for this practice especially in response to Protestant objections, demonstrated clearly the relationship between the cult of the Saints

³⁴² CHUKWUDEBELU et al., *Developing an Igbo Christianity*, 5.

³⁴³ Cf. CCC, 828.

³⁴⁴ Cf. CCC, 956.

³⁴⁵ Cf. PAUL VI, *Apostolic Exhortation for the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary *Marialis Cultus** (2 February 1974), in: AAS 66 (1974) 113–168, 135–136 [Nr. 25].

³⁴⁶ Cf. Leo XIII, *Encyclical on the Holy Eucharist *Mirae Caritatis** (28 May 1902), Nr. 12, in: Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_28051902_mirae-caritatis.html [accessed: 04.03.2026].

³⁴⁷ Cf. BENEDICT XVI, *General Audience, Reflection on several Saints* (20 August 2008), in: The Holy See, URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20080820.html [accessed: 04.03.2026].

³⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁴⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

and Church doctrine, and has carefully regulated the liturgical and devotional expressions of this veneration with emphasis on the exemplary Christian lives of these Saints.³⁵⁰ As the Vatican II document on the sacred liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* remarks, “by celebrating their anniversaries, the Church proclaims the achievement of the paschal mystery in the saints [... and] proposes them to the faithful as examples [...] and through their merits she begs God’s favours”³⁵¹. Hence, the Directory of popular piety and liturgy summarises that the Church’s doctrine and Liturgy highlight the Saints as essential figures for the faithful because they serve several roles which include: historical witness to the universal call to holiness across diverse cultures and life situations, models of evangelical life, intercessors who support and pray for Christians still on their earthly pilgrimage because they understand their needs, and as patrons of Local Churches, nations, and specific professions or circumstances, who offer guidance and protection in various aspects of life.³⁵²

Similarly, in the Igbo religious tradition, “ancestors, in this context, are revered spirits of the deceased who, having once lived as humans, possess superior knowledge of the spiritual world and play a protective and advisory role for their descendants”³⁵³. Just as Christian saints are individuals celebrated for their exemplary lives and holiness, similarly the criteria for ancestral cult inclusion in Igbo religious tradition, requires evidence of a virtuous life and community recognition.³⁵⁴ Thus, Ezeanya notes that ancestors are revered figures known by the community for their integrity and holiness and individuals aspire to join this noble class of ancestors upon death by living virtuous lives, because only those deemed good are accepted.³⁵⁵ Put differently, “the lives of ancestors inspire moral living, [in the community] just as Christian saints serve as models of holiness and faith for believers [such that] both traditions emphasize the continued influence of these revered figures on the conduct and values of the living”³⁵⁶. Moreso, ancestors are believed to be capable of some spiritual influences because of their closeness to the deities. Thus, Ezeanya notes that ancestors are seen as a source of pride and protection for communities because they are believed to be with the deities and can intercede with deities on behalf of the living.³⁵⁷ As

³⁵⁰ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy, 208.

³⁵¹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 266.

³⁵² Cf. CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy, 211.

³⁵³ CHUKWUDEBELU et al., Developing an Igbo Christianity, 5.

³⁵⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁵⁵ Cf. EZEANYA–ENWEONWU, Seed of Christianity in Traditional Igbo (African) Culture, 15.

³⁵⁶ CHUKWUDEBELU et al., Developing an Igbo Christianity, 5.

³⁵⁷ Cf. EZEANYA–ENWEONWU, Seed of Christianity in Traditional Igbo (African) Culture, 15.

such, they are called upon to help avert dangers and ensure the well-being of their families; and to honour as well as to sustain and reinforce this connection, families symbolically feed their ancestors during meals by performing rituals like the breaking of Kolanut and pouring libation in a sacred place in form of a small building within the compound called *Obi*.³⁵⁸

This explains the reason for the existence of altars in traditional Igbo homes for the veneration of the ancestors and sacrifice to the ancestors, which is very much similar to the Christian veneration of the relics of the saints at their different altars in different churches, as well as placing offering and petitions for various intention on these altars. Hence, Chukwudebelu et al. explain that Igbo families perform rituals and sacrifice to honour their ancestors, similar to how Christians venerate saints, whereby ancestral shrines in Igbo homes could parallel churches dedicated to specific saints, both serving as focal points for seeking guidance, protection, and blessings.³⁵⁹ As they note, just as ancestors serve as intermediaries for spiritual communication with the gods and the Supreme Being, similarly in Christianity, saints are thought to intercede for the living by communicating with God or intervening personally.³⁶⁰ As such, “these practices underscore the profound spiritual connection between the Igbo and their ancestors, and emphasizes the importance of ancestral veneration in shaping their cultural and religious beliefs”,³⁶¹ similar to the Christian tradition where the faith as lived and practiced by the dead Christians continues to shape and influence the Christian belief today. Thus, much as it is the case in Christian religious tradition, “by honouring their ancestors through rituals and observances, the Igbo maintain a sense of continuity and respect for their lineage, fostering a deep sense of belonging and identity within their communities”³⁶². Therefore, one could say that similar to the way saints in the Christian tradition serve as spiritual intermediaries, models of virtue and sources of inspiration for the Christians, ancestors also serve as spiritual intermediaries, models of virtue and sources of inspiration in the Igbo religious tradition.³⁶³ As Chukwudebelu et al comment, this highlights the common human desire to connect with the transcendent through respected spiritual figures.³⁶⁴

³⁵⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁵⁹ Cf. CHUKWUDEBELU et al., *Developing an Igbo Christianity*, 5.

³⁶⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁶¹ CHUKWUDEBELU et al., *Unveiling the Depths*, 438.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ Cf. CHUKWUDEBELU et al., *Developing an Igbo Christianity*, 5.

³⁶⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

3.2.2 Sacrifice in the Christian religious tradition vis a vis Sacrifice in Igbo religious tradition

Sacrifice according to Schmid belongs to the oldest cultic performance of humanity.³⁶⁵ Thus, in his encyclical *Caritatis Studium*, Leo XIII notes that religion fundamentally involves Sacrifice, which reflects the acknowledgment of God as the Supreme Lord, such that sacrifice is essential for the existence and understanding of Religion.³⁶⁶ Although this work does not aim to discuss sacrifice as a topic neither in Christian theology nor in Igbo religious tradition because of want of space, but just to present sacrifice as an important aspect of the Christian religion and the Igbo religious tradition; however, in order to ensure proper understanding, it would be necessary to clarify the meaning of sacrifice that is being referred to in this work. This is because sacrifice is a generic term that could be used to communicate different meanings. Thus, sacrifice can have a popular or personal meaning which implies renunciation for a motive and a ritual meaning which has to do with religious public worship.³⁶⁷ It is actually this second meaning of sacrifice that this work is interested in and which it intends to discuss. In the religious sense therefore, “sacrifice is an act of the virtue of religion [which consists in] communion, oblation or immolation”³⁶⁸. Through sacrifice humans acknowledges God’s supremacy and offers him adoration and worship as well as thanks for benefits, pardon for offences and plea for more goodness.³⁶⁹ This makes adoration, thanksgiving, propitiation and impetration the ends of sacrifice.³⁷⁰ From the above considerations, Arinze defines sacrifice “as an act of external and public worship, made up of oblation and immolation that signify the interior disposition with which the individual or community acknowledges God’s infinite excellence and avows his subjection to God”³⁷¹.

In the Christian religious tradition, although sacrifice takes on a new form and understanding, one cannot deny that it still shares in the general religious goal of sacrifice, especially when one considers the Jewish religious background and context of the Christian religion. Describing this taking on of a new form, Schmid remarks that although sacrifice was an important cultic practice in the Hebrew Bible, Christian religion holds it as less

³⁶⁵ Cf. SCHMID, *Historical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, 384.

³⁶⁶ Cf. LEO XIII, Encyclical on The Church in Scotland *Caritatis Studium* (25 July 1898), Nr. 10, in: The Holy See, URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_25071898_caritatis-studium.html [accessed: 09.03.2026].

³⁶⁷ Cf. Francis A. ARINZE, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion* [Edited by: J.S Boston], Ibadan 1970 [Reprint: 1978], 31.

³⁶⁸ Ibid, 32.

³⁶⁹ Cf. ibid, 33.

³⁷⁰ Cf. ibid, 33.

³⁷¹ Ibid, 33.

important since it has been overtaken by the sacrificial death of Jesus.³⁷² This sacrificial death of Christ, who once and for all offered himself to God the Father through his death on the cross to achieve eternal redemption,³⁷³ is commemorated every time the Eucharist is celebrated. Thus, while recognizing that the Evangelical Law surpasses the Old Law, because the former perfects what the later began, Leo XIII opines that the sacrifice of the Cross was foreshadowed by the Old Covenant sacrifices and continues through the Eucharistic Sacrifice after Christ's Ascension whereby the Eucharist represents the true sacrifice stemming from Christ's death, rather than being a mere commemoration.³⁷⁴ Likewise, the Catechism of Catholic Church teaches that the sacrifice of Christ and the Eucharist are considered as one single sacrifice because the same Christ who offered himself on the cross is present and is offered in the Mass, but in an unbloody manner through the ministry of priests.³⁷⁵

Explaining the nature of this sacrifice, the Catechism teaches that the Eucharist represents also the Church's sacrifice, as she participates in the offering of Christ, her Head, whereby the Church, as the Body of Christ, is wholly offered alongside Him and joins in His intercession for humanity, such that in the Eucharist, Christ's sacrifice becomes that of His followers, whose lives, prayers, praise, sufferings and works are united with His offering, gaining new significance.³⁷⁶ Thus, the Catechism accentuates that the Mass serves as both a sacrificial memorial of the cross and a sacred communion with Jesus' body and blood, with its primary focus being the fostering of a close union between the faithful and Christ through communion, whereby receiving communion means receiving Christ himself.³⁷⁷ Explaining this further, Francis notes that the value of the Mass lies in its biblical significance as a 'memorial,' which is not just a recollection of past events but a way to make them present and real.³⁷⁸ As he explains further, Jesus Christ fulfilled the Passover through his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension, and the Mass serves as the memorial of this Passover, which goes beyond mere remembrance to actively making present the events of 20 centuries ago.³⁷⁹ Hence, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GI) maintains that the sacrificial

³⁷² Cf. SCHMID, *Historical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, 378–379.

³⁷³ Cf. CCC, 1366.

³⁷⁴ Cf. LEO XIII, *Caritatis Studium*, 10.

³⁷⁵ Cf. CCC, 1367.

³⁷⁶ Cf. CCC, 1368.

³⁷⁷ Cf. CCC, 1382.

³⁷⁸ Cf. FRANCIS, General Audience (22 November, 2017), in: The Holy See, URL: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20171122_udienza-generale.html [accessed: 09.03.2026].

³⁷⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

nature of the Mass, which is affirmed by the Council of Trent and reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council, aligns the Church's prayer with her beliefs, such that the Mass, instituted by Christ at the Last Supper, represents the same sacrifice as the Cross, differing only in how it is offered.³⁸⁰ As the GI explains, the Mass serves as a sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving, propitiation, and satisfaction.³⁸¹ From the foregoing, one can see that the nature and the general goals of sacrifice in general as has been hinted at the beginning of this discussion are also evident in the Christian religion. As a sacrifice that has its roots in the context of the Jewish Passover,³⁸² one could also say that the Eucharist shares the general nature of cultic sacrifice although in a theologically modified manner, which involves the offering of a sensible object even if symbolically. Consequently, it also shares in the general goals of sacrifice which may include have praise and thanksgiving, propitiation and satisfaction, as well as petition for the needs of the participants.

Just like many other religious traditions, the Igbo religious tradition holds sacrifice in a very high esteem and shares in the general understanding of the nature and goals of sacrifice like other religious traditions. As Basden captures in his historical book about the Igbo people, “the idea of sacrifice amongst the Ibo[sic] people is very similar to that of many other primitive peoples, i.e. sacrifices are offered, not from any desire to give, but because of the fear that, unless they are offered their lives and interests will be blighted”³⁸³. Hence, Onwuatiegwu and Osigwe maintain that the Igbo-African tradition emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans, spirits, and deities, and views sacrifice as a means to communicate and enhance this bond, such that sacrifice is considered as a reciprocal act, where offerings are made to deities or spirits in return for blessings, protection, or assistance in human matters.³⁸⁴ As they further explain, the Igbo tradition acknowledges the mysteries of the world and attributes them to a Supreme Being and other unseen forces, and believes that fostering a good relationship with these entities was essential for the people's well-being, leading to the practice of sacrifice as a way to show submission, gratitude, and loyalty to the Divine Creator.³⁸⁵ Even though “there is no form of direct sacrifice to the Supreme

³⁸⁰ Cf. GENERAL INSTRUCTION OF THE ROMAN MISSAL. *Institutio Generalis Romani*. Including Adaptations for the diocese of Kenya (English translation of third typical edition), Nairobi 2003, 11–12, [Nr. 2].

³⁸¹ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁸² Cf. CCC, 1363. Pope Francis in his General audience on November 22, 2017 also made reference to this relation and used the analogy of the celebration of the Passover as the reenactment of the liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt to highlight this relationship.

³⁸³ BASDEN, Among the Ibos of Nigeria, 223.

³⁸⁴ Cf. Ignatius Nnaemeka ONWUATUEGWU–Casimir N. OSIGWE, Comparative Analysis of Sacrifice: Igbo-African Traditional Notion and Christian Understanding in Relation to Notion, Forms, Intentions, and Implications, in: Universal Library of Arts and Humanities 1/1 (2024) 27–33, here 27.

³⁸⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 27–28.

Being”³⁸⁶ in Igbo religious tradition, the general understanding about the goals of sacrifice in Igbo religious tradition is not very far from that of the Christian religion, despite the fact that the nature and understanding of sacrifice between these two religious traditions may differ. Hence, Arinze notes that the end of sacrifice in Igbo religious traditions includes: expiation, when an offence which needed appeasement is committed so as to maintain good relationship with the spiritual forces, sacrifice to ward off molestation from unknown spirits and thanksgiving for good things received.³⁸⁷

Just as Basden records, sacrifices are essential in Igbo tradition for dealing with strange spirits believed to cause illness or misfortune, in order to appease them.³⁸⁸ Furthermore, he notes that sacrifices are also required in cases of serious diseases like leprosy or smallpox, and cases of suicides or when a man dies during his wife’s mourning period, which are more or less regarded as abominations which needed appeasement.³⁸⁹ Again, as Basden highlights, the materials for sacrifice in Igbo tradition are normally made up of edibles and animals according to the prescription of the traditional priest who before hand has to enquire from the gods.³⁹⁰ Some good examples can be seen in the case of Okonkwo, the protagonist in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. It happened that Okonkwo out of anger beat his youngest wife within the sacred week known as the week of peace, an action which was forbidden as evil in the eyes of the gods because it was an insult to the earth goddess and can lead to poor harvest for the whole community.³⁹¹ To appease the earth goddess, Okonkwo was made to offer sacrifice to the shrine of *Am* with materials which included: one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries.³⁹² Again, when Okonkwo, who though was regarded as a great warrior in the clan, angrily murdered the messenger from the expatriates whom he believed were encroaching dangerously into their tradition, and fully aware of the consequences went and hung himself, that was seen by the community as an abomination which requires sacrifice for ritual cleansing of the land.³⁹³

Moreso, sometimes and in extreme cases the material for the sacrifice could involve a human being. Thus, Basden observes further that just as it was the case in many religious traditions, human sacrifices have historically been practiced throughout West Africa as well

³⁸⁶ BASDEN, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, 230.

³⁸⁷ Cf. ARINZE, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, 34–44.

³⁸⁸ Cf. BASDEN, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, 224.

³⁸⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

³⁹¹ Cf. ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart*, 29–30.

³⁹² Cf. *ibid.*, 30–31.

³⁹³ Cf. *ibid.*, 204–208.

as in Igbo tradition, but this practice has given way, thanks to the influence of Christianity and the accompanying civilization.³⁹⁴ As Basden records, such sacrifices were not personal but were often made during communal events, especially in response to crises like political turmoil, epidemics, or disasters, after consulting with *Dibias* (medicine-men).³⁹⁵ As he explains, initially, animal sacrifices were preferred, but when those failed, human sacrifices were resorted to as a last hope and the victims, were never a fellow kinsman but typically a young male, who must either be a slaves purchased for that purpose or a war captive, normally chosen for their strength to bear the sins of the community, and the ceremony itself was viewed as an act of carrying away an abomination.³⁹⁶ Once more, a good example of this is depicted by Achebe in his award-winning prose, *Things Fall Apart* with the case of Ikemefuna. As Achebe narrates, the fifteen-year-old boy, Ikemefuna from Mbaino was given to Umuofia as a peace offering to avoid war after his father killed a woman from Umuofia and he was placed under Okonkwo's care for three years; but because the Oracle of the Hills and Caves has decreed his death as punishment for a murder committed by his home village Mbaino as a sacrifice to appease the gods and settle the dispute, he was killed and personally by Okonkwo, an action he undertook in order not to appear weak or as a coward before his clansmen.³⁹⁷

From the foregoing, one could say that although the nature and understanding of sacrifice between the Christian religious tradition and the Igbo religious tradition may differ, however one cannot deny totally the similarity of purpose that sacrifice in Christian and Igbo religious traditions share even if partially. This similarity of purpose could be seen from the point of view that sacrifice in the above two religious traditions shows first and foremost the acknowledgment of the infinity of the Supreme being and human finite nature, as well as the need to maintain a good relationship between the spiritual and the physical world. The ends of sacrifice in both Igbo and Christian traditions as one can also notice from the exposition above further include a show of humility, thanksgiving for good things received, propitiation for offences committed and impetration for the well being of the entire people.

Ultimately, the discussions above have tried to highlight some of those values of Igbo religious tradition, which according to Nostra Aetate, though differing in many aspects from the ones the Christian religion holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that

³⁹⁴ Cf. BASDEN, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, 230.

³⁹⁵ Cf. *ibid*, 231.

³⁹⁶ Cf. *ibid*.

³⁹⁷ Cf. ACHEBE, *Things Fall Apart*, 57–61.

Truth.³⁹⁸ Therefore, although this comparative study of Igbo religious traditional values that show close similarity to the Christian religious values and values in Igbo religious tradition that can be contextually understood in relation to the Christian religion values do not aim to equate the Christian religion values with the Igbo religious traditional values, it nevertheless shows the possibility of dialogue between these two traditions based on the values they share even if partially. The reason is because it is believed that through such sincere dialogue, Christian religion continues to refine and complete different cultures it comes in contact with. A very good example is the issue of human sacrifice as already noted above, which came to a stop with the help of the contact between the Igbo religious tradition and the Christian religion. Important to note nevertheless is that the emphasis on the role of the Igbo religious traditional values which this work intends to unravel, might not only serve as a meeting point in the dialogue between the Igbo traditional religion and Christian religion, but could also help for a better understanding and appreciation of the Christian religion among the children of Igbo descent, when these values are employed in the teaching and learning of the Christian faith in their case. This is because it will go a long way to reducing the prevalent idea among many Igbo young folks today, who see Christianity as something foreign. On the contrary, it could enhance their understanding of Christianity and help them see the Christian religion as a religion that is explainable with and within their own traditional religious-cultural concepts and context respectively. This possible pedagogical function of the Igbo religious traditional values will be discussed further in the next chapter.

³⁹⁸ Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

Chapter 4

The Role of Igbo Religious Tradition in the Christian Religious Education of Igbo Children

In the previous chapter, it was noted that the importance of the Igbo religious traditional values lies not just in the fact that it could serve as a meeting point in the dialogue between the Igbo traditional religion and Christian religion, because of the presence of values in Igbo religious tradition, which though differing in many aspects from the ones the Christian religion holds, nonetheless reflect a ray of Truth;³⁹⁹ but also that it could help for a better internalization of the Christian religion among Igbo children, when these values are employed in the learning about the Christian religion. To explicate this point, the discussion about how the Igbo religious traditional values can contribute to a better Christian religious education of Igbo children will be carried out under two subtitles; viz: Igbo religious traditional values as access point in the learning about the Christian Religion, and Igbo religious traditional values as pedagogical instrument in the learning about the Christian Religion. Therefore, further discussions in this work will centre on these two possible pedagogical functions of the Igbo religious traditional values in relation to the teaching and learning about the Christian religion.

4.1 Igbo Religious Traditional Values as Access Point in the Learning about the Christian Religion

As earlier commented, theology in today's world of global connections and shared reliance, in order to stay relevant, must go beyond its own confinement and actively interact with other religious traditions by being not just tolerant or curious, but also by reshaping what theology means, how it is practiced, and its purpose.⁴⁰⁰ As has been noted severally in this work, and what one can term positive in this direction, is the Catholic Church's continuous emphasis on dialogue with cultures and religious traditions.⁴⁰¹ What this implies with reference to this research is that even the teaching and learning about the Christian religion could aim at explicitly sharing with children from various religious traditions, what they may have been experiencing implicitly through grace, and in this case the children of Igbo descent. As this work would suggest, one of the great ways to do this could be by tapping

³⁹⁹ Cf. *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, Maryknoll, NY 2002, 173 and Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, Cambridge 2002, 1.

⁴⁰¹ Examples can be seen in, *Gaudium et Spes*, 58 and *Redemptoris Missio*, 52.

from the rich traditional values and practices of the Igbo learners, which can serve as a wonderful gateway to exploring deeper theological ideas together and by adapting the Christian religious educational designs to fit the religious-cultural environment of the Igbo learners. These proposals as well as their implication to Christian religious education of Igbo children will be discussed subsequently.

4.1.1 Tapping from the Rich Traditional Values and Practices

The usefulness and importance of this approach is very obvious such that it can be noticed even in the time of the apostles especially when they were confronted with diverse cultures that go beyond the regular Jewish temple tradition of the first century followers of Jesus. A good example can be seen in the case of the apostle Paul in his second missionary journey, particularly in Acts 17. As Luke recorded, Paul spoke to the people of Athens gathered at the Areopagus beginning with the acknowledgment of their spirituality manifested in many altars dedicated to various gods and eventually introduced his message in relation to an altar dedicated to an unknown god (Cf. Acts 17,16–29). Even though Paul did not totally convert the entire people gathered at the Areopagus, some eventually believed and became followers of the way (Cf. Acts 17, 32–34). This engagement with belief and practices of people from other religious traditions can also be seen when early Christian and some ancient traditions like the Jewish, Greek and Romans came into contact. As it is historically proven, this encounter often provided room for dialogue and exchange between them and in effect often became access point for the Christian religion into these religious traditions and vice versa. With regard to the Jewish religion for example, Guillet is of the view that the post exilic Jewish Synagogue provided the early Christian with their ritual and the environment in that both Jesus and the apostles after him were regular visitors of the Jewish Synagogue, such that the evangelizing mission of the 12 followers of Jesus was first practiced in the Synagogues, and that it could be that the Christian term ‘Apostle’ is simply a transcription of the Jewish word for those ‘envoys’, delegated by the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem to visit the Synagogues all over where the Jews were scattered to ensure unity of relationship and doctrine.⁴⁰² Again, Ilaria Bultrighini and Sacha Stern note that during the time of the early Christians, which is historically situated in the Roman imperial period, the early Christians adopted and adapted the terminology of the Jewish biblical week to establish what is now known as the Christian week, with a significant shift from a Christian perspective

⁴⁰² Cf. J. GUILLET, From Synagogue to Early Christian Assembly: I, in: *Life of the Spirit* Vol. 12, No. 133: *God’s Word Written: I* (July 1957), 22–29, here 22–27.

which was the substitution of the Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) with the Christian Lord's Day (Sunday) as the primary day for worship and community gatherings.⁴⁰³ They observe further that in accordance with the Jewish week, which designates the Sabbath as the seventh day, Sunday was recognized as the first day of the Christian week and by the fourth century, Sunday was consistently identified as the first day of the week in various texts, including those not specifically Christian.⁴⁰⁴ According to them, the most vivid example in this development is the emperor Constantine's law of 321 CE which promoted and, in a sense, finalized the development that made Sunday not just a day of rest and worship but the first day of the week.⁴⁰⁵ Thus, F. Connel notes that just as the Jewish sabbath was replaced with the Christian Sunday as the major liturgical day of the week, the Jewish Passover was also replaced by the Christian Easter as the major liturgical celebration of the year.⁴⁰⁶ This development could be concretized by the two terminologies that were adopted from the Jewish Passover into the Christian Easter celebration; viz: Pascha and Pentecost. As F. Connel notes; "the earliest Christian name for Easter, *Pascha*, is the same as the Greek word for Passover, and the earliest theologies of Easter, in the second century, draw from the Jewish theology of Passover"⁴⁰⁷. With regard to Pentecost, he further notes however, that "whereas the Jewish Pentecost was a harvest feast and one that commemorates the covenant and was assigned to the fiftieth day after Passover, the Christian Pentecost was originally a period of fifty days during which each day has the same value and function"⁴⁰⁸.

From the foregoing, one could say that the arrangement of the Christian week which has Sunday as the first day and as the weekly commemoration of the resurrection, as well as the celebration of Easter as an annual commemoration of the same, may have most likely emerged from the encounter between the Jewish and Christian traditions. This historical fact shows how the Christian religion can tap from the rich traditional values and practices and a people, and this could be applicable to various religious traditions and in this case, the Igbo religious tradition.

⁴⁰³ Cf. Ilaria BULTRIGHINI – Sacha STERN, The Seven-Day Week in the Roman Empire. Origin, Standardization, and Diffusion, in: Sacha STERN (ed.), *Calendars in the Making. The Origins of Calendars from the Roman Empire to the Later Middle Ages* (Time, Astronomy, and Calendars. Texts and Studies 10), Leiden–Boston 2021, 10–79, 58.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 66–68.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Martin F. CONNELL, Year, Liturgical, in: Paul BRADSHAW (ed.), *The new SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, London 2002 [Reprint: 2005], 491–493, 492.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ Pierre JOUNEL, The Year, in: Irénée H. DALMAIS et al., *The Liturgy and Time* [trans. By Matthew J O'CONNELL], (The Church at Prayer. Introduction to the Liturgy 4), Collegeville/MN 1986, 31–150, 57.

4.1.2 Adapting the Christian religious educational design to fit the religious-cultural environment

When one speaks about adaptation here, a flashback into the historical events in the Christian religion will once more be of great help. One of those historical events that will be highlighted here is the formation and design of the Christian liturgical calendar. In the formation of the Christian liturgical calendar, one notices a great adaptation and exchange between the Christian religion and the tradition of the then prevailing Roman empire. Thus, M. Augé notes that the formation of the Christian liturgical calendar resulted from a further development of the practices of the apostles and their early Christians, who celebrated Sunday as a weekly memorial of the Lord and Easter as an annual memorial of the same.⁴⁰⁹ For the purpose of clarification and for the purpose of this work, calendar as defined by Jovian P. Lang will be adopted in this research. According to Jovian P. Lang, calendar is “a method of dividing the lunar or solar year, or both, into a table of the months, weeks, and days of the year”⁴¹⁰.

From this general understanding, one can immediately imagine the content of the Christian calendar which is the subject of discussion in this paragraph. So, following P. Lang further, what makes this special arrangement called a calendar Christian was inscribing in it “the names of the feasts to be celebrated and of the saints to be honoured”⁴¹¹. The emphasis here is therefore that from its origin, the Christian calendar has its basis on the civil calendar, particularly the solar calendar of the Romans established by Julius Caesar in 45 B.C called the Julian calendar.⁴¹² However, because this Julian calendar was not synchronous with the seasonal date for Easter which created a problem of irregularity in the celebration of Easter, the Julian calendar was replaced by its reformed version by Pope Gregory XIII known as the Gregorian calendar in 1582.⁴¹³ This new version of calendar developed by Pope Gregory received a popular acceptance by Christians and served for further development of the liturgical calendar proper. Thus, Lang observes that, “the celebrations in the [Gregorian] calendar developed by giving new meaning to pre-Christian feasts or these were totally supplemented by Christian feasts”⁴¹⁴. Some examples as they stand today in the Christian calendar are: Advent and Christmas.

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. Matias AUGÉ, *The Liturgical Year in the First Four Centuries*, in: Anscar J. CHUPUNGO (ed.), *Handbook for Liturgical studies*, vol. 5: *Liturgical Time and Space*, Collegeville/MN 2000, 135–155, 135

⁴¹⁰ Jovian P. LANG, *Dictionary of the Liturgy*, New York 1989, 77.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁴¹² Cf. *ibid.*

⁴¹³ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

Advent which was the last among the liturgical season to be developed comes from the Latin word *Adventus* which means coming.⁴¹⁵ Although the historical development of this season remains obscure,⁴¹⁶ the very Latin origin of this word, *adventus* in its cultic usage signifies “the annual visit of the god to his temples in order to visit his people”⁴¹⁷. This term which was probably adopted by the early Christian was used by the Christians of the third and fourth century to refer to the coming of Son of God among humans in flesh and with this adoption, this word received new interpretation which helped for its proper connection with Christmas.⁴¹⁸ It was not until around the end of the fourth century, that one notices hints about preparation for Epiphany in Gaul and in Spain evident in the council of Saragossa of AD 380, which recommended a constant attendance of the assembly for mainly ascetical practices in the three weeks that preceded Epiphany.⁴¹⁹

On the other hand, although the term Advent has been in use in Rome since the third century, it has no preparatory connotation but was only used institutionally as a cultic terminology; however, with contact with the practices of the Gaul, the term Advent which appeared in second half of the sixth century in the Roman sacramentary acquired also a new meaning and later developed into a four-week preparatory period in the liturgical Year.⁴²⁰ Hence, as M. Auge observes; “Despite the complexity of the origin of Advent, this liturgical season eventually formed a unity with Christmas (Epiphany), for which it is the preparation”⁴²¹. Further reform from Vatican II council made it that this season which was “primarily penitential in spirit [...] also reflects the joy of anticipation [...] not only for Christ’s first appearance on earth but also reflect his second coming”⁴²². This lead to the development of the reading during advent such that from the first Sunday of advent to December 16 is eschatological in tone and from December 17 the tone becomes more of preparation for Christmas.⁴²³ One notices therefore that this division of advent into two parts, could be accounted for by the double historical sources of the origin of Advent, viz: the Gaul penitential orientation and the traditional roman cultic expectation orientation.⁴²⁴

⁴¹⁵ Cf. Alexander J. NEIL, Advent, in: Paul BRADSHAW (ed.), *The New SCM Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*, London 2005, 2.

⁴¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ Matias AUGÉ, *The Liturgical Year in the Roman Rite*, in: Anscar J. CHUPUNGCO (ed.), *Handbook for Liturgical Studies*, vol. 5: *Liturgical Time and space*, Collegeville/MN 2000, 177–210, 201.

⁴¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴²⁰ Cf. JOUNEL, *The Year*, 92.

⁴²¹ AUGÉ, *The Liturgical Year in the Roman Rite*, 203.

⁴²² LANG, *Dictionary of the Liturgy*, 18.

⁴²³ Cf. AUGÉ, *The Liturgical Year in the Roman Rite*, 203.

⁴²⁴ Cf. NEIL, Advent, 2.

Furthermore, Christmas which is the focal point in this season, has a similar historical background. Historically, the early Christians had only one feast which is the weekly and annual celebration of the Paschal feast. It was only in the fourth century that the celebration of the appearance of Jesus Christ came into existence, as “a counterbalance to the Pagan feasts of the winter solstices, which were celebrated in Rome on December 25 and in Egypt on January 6”⁴²⁵. These feasts which are both feasts of manifestations, are the birth of the Unconquered Sun in Rome, (*Natele* – Birthday) and the feast of the triumphant Sun in Egypt and Arabia, (*Epiphaneia*) respectively.⁴²⁶ As Jounel summarizes, since December 25 has its origin in the Roman tradition, it has maintained its meaning as a commemoration of the birth of Jesus; but when Rome in the second half of the fourth century began to celebrate January 6 which originates from the east, a new interpretation was required, and this was found in the remembrance and veneration of the wise men; an interpretation which fits well the focus point of January 6, the Epiphany.⁴²⁷ Ultimately, what this short historical exposure intends to emphasis is that the above discussions and examples underline the fact that from the earliest times, the Christian religion has always engaged the various religious traditions it encounters in her missionary expansion. Again, this encounter as well as the consequent exchange cum cultural adoption and adaptation that comes with the encounter have always served as access point for the Christian religion to reach the people of those traditions and to make the Christian messages easily assimilable to them.

4.1.3 The implication of the Above to Christian religious education of Igbo children – The Contextualization of Christian religious education

When one considers the short historical hints above, one could realize why religious education today in most countries in the southern hemisphere confronts teachers more than before with the exciting task of helping students connect with Christian teachings in a way that resonates in the long-standing societal values and practices that are active in the diverse societies that they find themselves.⁴²⁸ This is understandable because every individual is a product of a particular cultural environment which shapes his or her worldviews as well as the approach to life and new things. Like many other cultures in African and Nigeria, the

⁴²⁵ JOUNEL, *The Year*, 78.

⁴²⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 78–79.

⁴²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 80–81.

⁴²⁸ Cf. Christo LOMBARD, *Namibia and South Africa as Examples of Religious and Moral Education in Changing Societies*, in: Karin Sporre–Jan Mannberg (Eds.), *Values, Religions and Education in Changing Societies*, Dordrecht 2010, 129–144, here 129–130. Here Lombard hinted on this point using Namibia and South Africa as examples.

Igbo people's traditional religious values significantly influence their social ethics and communal identity.⁴²⁹ This Igbo worldview which was already established before the arrival of Christianity in the nineteenth century, offers a rich framework of beliefs and practices.⁴³⁰ However, as it was also noted, the advent of Christianity in Igboland in the nineteenth century through European missionaries, who also happened to set up churches and most schools in Igboland in southern Nigeria,⁴³¹ and who unassumingly viewed many Igbo traditional religious values and practices as incompatible with Christianity, led to the destruction of sacred shrines and the discouragement of traditional rituals and practices⁴³². Therefore, instead of the contact with the Igbo religious tradition serving as a point of encounter and access point to the Christian religion as proposed above, it often caused conflicts and rivalry between Christian converts and their traditional communities,⁴³³ as converts were pressured to forsake their traditional values and identities⁴³⁴.

Today, most scholars of African theology are beginning to see these traditional values not as barriers to Christian education, but as valuable resources for teaching the Christian faith, and many now promote a more contextual approach to Christianity with regard to the various African traditional religious understanding. A good example is Kwame Bediako, who in his work, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* tries to show that that African traditional religions and cultures offer valuable spiritual insights that can enhance Christian theology, whereby African Christianity should no longer be seen as a western religion nor a copy of European Christianity but as a renewed culturally rooted expression of the Christian faith.⁴³⁵ Particularly in Chapter 6 of this book Bediako discusses the concept of "primal imagination" which he sees as the deep, pre-reflective worldview common in many African societies, whereby the spiritual and physical realms are inseparably connected and which supposes a universe alive with spiritual forces, ancestors, and divine presence, as something that should strongly resonate with African Christianity and help in making the gospel feel immediately relevant rather than foreign; such that Bediako sees primal imagination as a bridge through which Christianity can be authentically

⁴²⁹ Cf. OKEKE et al, *Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity in Eastern Nigeria*, 2; ARTHUR GLYN, *The Lower Niger and Its Tribes*, 429.

⁴³⁰ Cf. CHUKWUDEBELU et al., *Developing an Igbo Christianity*, 2–3.

⁴³¹ Cf. EGWUONWU, *Christian Missionary Education in Igboland*, 148; EKECHI, *Missionary Enterprise*, 26.

⁴³² Cf. OKEKE et al, *Conflicts Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity*, 4; NJOKU et al, *The Encounter with "Evil Forests" in Igbo-land*, 471.

⁴³³ Cf. OPARANOZIE, *Christianity, Igbo Traditional Religion and Islamization*, 136.

⁴³⁴ Cf. Udoeye, *Resolving the Prevailing Conflicts*, 184.

⁴³⁵ Cf. Kwame BEDIKO, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, New York 1995, [in this work, Bediako generally tried to prove this point, discussing it under various topic and with numerous arguments].

understood, shaping a vibrant holistic faith rooted in African cultural and religious consciousness.⁴³⁶ Again, in Chapters 7 he explores the idea of “translatability and the cultural incarnation of the faith”, and maintains that the Christian message can be expressed meaningfully in any language and culture without losing its essence, such that as Jesus entered a specific human context, the gospel can take root within diverse cultures; and with reference to the various Bible translation in Africa which enables local people to interpret faith through their own categories and experiences, Bediako argues that this process is not distortion but fulfillment, as Christianity would become culturally embodied, allowing African believers to appropriate the faith authentically and contribute new theological insights.⁴³⁷ Moreso, a Tanzanian theologian Laurenti Magesa, in his book, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, argues that African moral traditions align with most Christian teachings.⁴³⁸ He asserts that both share core values, because African morality is rooted in ‘life-giving’ principles that promotes community and harmony and complements the Christian message of liberation,⁴³⁹ and that African worldviews, which emphasize ancestors and community (Ubuntu), can provide a valid foundation for understanding God, making them compatible with Christianity⁴⁴⁰.

One can immediately notice an alignment between these positions and the Igbo religious tradition which professes belief in Chukwu, the Supreme God, which can create a wonderful starting point for the teaching of the Christian idea of God to Children of Igbo descent, whereby religious educators can kick things off by looking into the Igbo traditional views of Chukwu and then connecting those to the biblical teachings about God as the creator and sustainer of everything. In this way, the Igbo children can build on what they already know traditionally instead of learning about the Christian concepts of God in isolation. Again, the Igbo moral system also gives a great framework for grasping Christian teachings about sin and righteousness. As earlier noted in this work, the Igbo people believe that acting immorally disturbs the harmony between people as well as the community and the spiritual world. Likewise, Christian theology tells us that sin is an action, statement, or desire that contradicts eternal law and harms human nature and solidarity.⁴⁴¹ By pointing out these similarities, religious educators can help Igbo children see Christian moral teachings in a

⁴³⁶ Cf. *ibid*, 91–106.

⁴³⁷ Cf. *ibid*, 109–123.

⁴³⁸ Cf. Laurenti MAGESA, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, New York 1997, xi.

⁴³⁹ Cf. *ibid*, 35.

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. *ibid*, 45.

⁴⁴¹ Cf. CCC, 1849.

way that feels relevant to their indigenous religious tradition. Moreso, the Igbo sense of communality as already explained earlier can further assist students in understanding the Christian idea of the Church. The Church is often seen as a community of believers who uplift each other both spiritually and socially.⁴⁴² This really resonates with the Igbo focus on collective identity and shared responsibility as has been explained earlier in this work in the discussion about community and communality. In addition, traditional rituals like sacrifices as was discussed earlier expresses gratitude, purification, and reconciliation in Igbo religious tradition as well as in Christian religion. These symbolic actions can help pupils connect with similar aspects of Christian worship, like the Eucharist and other liturgical celebrations.

What is actually being emphasised through these examples is that bringing Igbo traditional religious values into the teaching and learning of Christian religion can make learning more relatable and enjoyable and can help not just in the assimilation and understanding but also in the internalization of the Christian religion amongst children of Igbo descent. This is because it will enable students to associate Christian theological ideas with their known experiences, which is super important in teaching and learning. Hence, researches which actually root in constructivist theory of learning emphasize that learning is a dynamic process that involves interpreting new information based on prior knowledge and experience, such that learning happens better when new ideas are linked to what learners already know.⁴⁴³ Jean Piaget for one, believes that learning happens either when new information are fitted into what is already known or when understanding are tweaked to make room for new experiences.⁴⁴⁴ Again, Lev Vygotsky further hints on this point in his discussion of the concept of the ‘zone of proximal development’ with regard to the relationship between development and learning and suggests that learners can achieve higher levels of understanding when new material is scaffolded upon prior knowledge with appropriate guidance.⁴⁴⁵

Moreso, David Ausubel, a key figure in educational psychology, explicitly articulates the importance of prior knowledge when he famously states; “if I had to reduce all of educational psychology to just one principle, I would say [that the] most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows [and the teacher needs to]

⁴⁴² Cf. CCC, 751–752.

⁴⁴³ Cf. Catherine Twomey FOSNOT (ed.), *Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives, and Practice*. New York 1996, 30.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. Jean PIAGET, *The Origins of Intelligence in Children* [trans. by Magaret Cook], New York 1952, 6–8 and 27–29.

⁴⁴⁵ Cf. L. S. VYGOTSKY, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. by Michael Cole et al, Cambridge MA 1978, 84–91.

ascertain this and teach [the learner] accordingly”⁴⁴⁶. Further more, in their discussion about ‘Levels of Processing,’ Fergus Craik and Robert Lockhart point out that information tied to what one already knows gets stored more deeply in one’s memory, such that when one encodes things deeply, it boosts one’s chances of recalling that information later since it’s linked to various cognitive pathways.⁴⁴⁷ Thus, Deci Edward and Ryan Richard in their self-determination theory maintain that learners are more motivated when they perceive that learning activities are meaningful and connected to their lives.⁴⁴⁸ One can therefore relate why the educational theorist, Thomas Groome in his work ‘Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision’ points out that good religious education should see students “not as objects to be acted upon and modelled as we decide, but subjects with whom we enter into a relationship of mutuality and equality”⁴⁴⁹. As he explains further;

as subject our students has the right to speak their own word and name their own reality. As teachers, we have a right to speak our own words, but also the obligation to hear theirs. We can share our stories and visions with them and make present the Story and vision of the Christian community in whose name we educate. But we must also bring them to know their own story and vision and to critically appropriate the ‘knowing’ of other people of faith in their pilgrimage to God.⁴⁵⁰

Hence, he believes that Christianity is not an indoctrination of people into some condition, facts and realities that are unchangeable, but a proclamation of a history of salvation, of God’s revelatory activity on men as well as the human free response to and interpretation of this revelatory activity of God.⁴⁵¹

From the foregoing, one could understand why the Contemporary Catholic catechetical directives continue to show great emphasis on the fact that the indigenous cultural traditions are not and should not be peripheral but a constitutive of an authentic religious education. As the Directory for Catechesis insists, catechesis must bring the Gospel “into the very heart of every culture and cultures”⁴⁵². Thus, in its discussion about the methodology for catechesis, the Directory emphasizes the pedagogical importance of indigenous languages, symbols, narratives, as well as ritual forms, customs and traditions in transmitting faith.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁶ David P. AUSUBEL, *Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View*, New York 1968, vi.

⁴⁴⁷ Cf. Fergus I. M. CRAIK–Robert S. LOCKHART, *Levels of Processing: A Framework for Memory Research*, in: *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behaviour*, 11/6 (December 1972) 671–684, here: 675–677.

⁴⁴⁸ Cf. Edward L. DECI–Richard M. RYAN, *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behaviour*, New York 1985, 32–35, 68–70.

⁴⁴⁹ Thomas H. GROOME, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision*, New York 1980, 263.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 263–264.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 264.

⁴⁵² PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION, *Directory for Catechesis*, Washington ²2020, 234 [Nr. 396].

⁴⁵³ Cf. *Directory for Catechesis*, 123–132 [Nrs.194–217].

This perspective is deepened in the teaching of Francis, particularly in *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Querida Amazonia*, where culture is described as the concrete locus in which grace becomes incarnate⁴⁵⁴ and where indigenous culture is recognized as a genuine resource for mutual learning respectively.⁴⁵⁵ Thus, rejecting earlier assimilationist models, recent magisterial teaching explicitly opposes the imposition of uniform cultural expressions of Christianity, advocating instead for a pluriform and dialogical approach that respects the identity, language, and spiritual worldview of indigenous peoples.⁴⁵⁶ Rooted in the foundations of *Ad Gentes* and *Gravissimum Educationis*, this vision reframes religious education as a process of holistic formation in which faith and culture mutually illuminate one another.⁴⁵⁷

Ultimately, one could say, following the above positions that in today's Catholic catechetical framework, that the integration of indigenous cultural traditions is not merely a contextual adaptation but a theological and pedagogical imperative essential for the integrity and effectiveness of faith formation. Even though, some traditional practices may conflict with Christian teachings, one has to note that the task also includes carefully distinguishing between cultural values that support Christian theology and those that contradict it. Thus, the General Directory for Catechesis instructs that inculturation which refers to the deep and gradual process of integrating the Christian faith into various cultures should involve a meaningful exchange of cultural riches with Christ message but should go beyond mere external adaptations that aim to merely appeal and influence individuals and communities; such that the Christian community must discern which cultural elements align with the faith and those that needed to be purified or transformed.⁴⁵⁸ As the document further directs, this discernment should be guided by principles of compatibility with the Gospel and

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's world *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), Dublin 2023, 64 [Nr. 115].

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. FRANCIS, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia* (2 February 2020), Cottbus 2020, 32–35 [Nr. 36–40].

⁴⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, Nr. 37. This point was further emphasized in the document from the Dicastery for Culture and Education and Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, Joint Statement on the “Doctrine of Discovery” released on March 30 2023, which formally rejects the “Doctrine of Discovery,” clarifying it is not part of the teachings of the catholic Church and recognizes that 15th-century papal bulls were exploited by colonial powers to justify the theft of Indigenous lands and human rights violations, and it went further to expresses regret for the Church's inadequate opposition to these injustices in the past. It went further to project dialogue as opposed forced assimilation as the current attitude of the church in the face of other traditions. Cf. Nr. 4–6, URL: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2023/03/30/230330b.html> [accessed: 21.02.2026].

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Ad Gentes*, 22. [Also emphasized in Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1].

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, General Directory for Catechesis, Washington 2018, 104 [Nr. 109].

communion with the universal Church, and it requires the involvement of the entire community to authentically reflect their Christian experience.⁴⁵⁹

Therefore, one could conclude and with particular reference to Igbo tradition that by carefully incorporating the Igbo traditional values into Christian education, students can hold onto their cultural identity while discovering the Christian beliefs. In this way, they could steer clear of the cultural disconnect that is often associated with the early missionary Christian educational method while becoming Christians and even more authentically. Moreso, this type of religious education will foster a friendly dialogue between traditional beliefs and Christian teachings and help students to sharpen their critical thinking skills as they compare and assess different religious viewpoints. Hence, one could see that when the teaching of Christian religion today takes into account the existing traditional values of the cultures it encounters as an entry point, just as it has always done in the past as earlier showcased with historical examples in this chapter, it could help students to grasp theological concepts better by relating them to their experiences. One can therefore imagine why the recent teachings of the Catholic Church, some of which have been mentioned above are always emphasising this approach with their continuous emphasis on dialogue. Thus, with particular reference to Igbo children whose religious traditional context is being discussed in this work, traditional religious values like respect for life as well as the human person, reverence for ancestors, communal solidarity, the concept of sacrifice and belief in the supreme being amongst others, can serve as bridges connecting indigenous spirituality with Christian theology and practice. This would not only enhance the better teaching of the Christian religion to these children but could also enhance their understanding and assimilation of the Christian religion.

4.2 Igbo Religious Traditional Values as Pedagogical Instruments in the Teaching and Learning about Christian Religion

When one speaks about religious traditional values as pedagogical instrument in the learning about Christian religion, one recalls immediately the Directory for Catechesis (2020) emphasis about the pedagogical importance of indigenous languages, symbols, narratives, as well as ritual forms in transmitting faith.⁴⁶⁰ The above-mentioned elements amongst others, could be said to represent elements of tradition even though tradition is not limited

⁴⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid*, 105 [Nr. 109].

⁴⁶⁰ Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION, *Directory for Catechesis*, 123–132 [Nrs.194–217].

to these elements. Again, there exist almost in every religious tradition these elements. Thus, using some traditional material and non-material values like traditional didactic narratives as well as symbols and rituals as pedagogical instrument for the teaching and learning about the Christian religion, together with its pedagogical implication will be discussed further in this section.

4.2.1 Religious Traditional Didactic Narratives

The use of didactic traditional narratives as a pedagogical instrument in the teaching and learning about religion could be said to be as old as religion itself and could be noticed in almost every known religion. Hence, Schmid explains that the functional mythic structure which exist as narratives in the Christian Old Testament, particularly from the book of Genesis up to 2 Kings, are seen as expressions about God because the perspective which regards them as myth emerged in the modern era and was not a consideration in antiquity for two main reasons: first, the ancient Near Eastern worldview did not approach God theoretically but rather through his actions and experiences; second, ancient literature typically employed mythical categories to address fundamental questions using narrative forms.⁴⁶¹ As he explains, Genesis–2 Kings presents a complex narrative that addresses the universality and particularity of divine action, God’s care, and the relationship between divine beneficence and human effort as well as answer to questions like the existence of evil amongst other things.⁴⁶²

Therefore, just like most of the ancient religious traditions in the ancient near eastern world where the Hebrew bible (Christian Old Testament) has its origin, Igbo religious tradition believes that the world is not without a cause and has stories that provides answers to these existential realities. In reference to this, Ndiukwu notes that the existence of God (*Chukwu*) in Igbo religious tradition transcends human understanding, which is why creation is often explained through myths, that serve to clarify the world’s creation and convey that all beings originate from God and ultimately return to Him.⁴⁶³ Hence, Nweke assumes that various creation stories that exist in various Ancient Near Eastern traditions, like the Gilgamesh Epic, Enuma Elish and Atrahasis, as well as similar creation stories from African

⁴⁶¹ Cf. SCHMID, A Historical Theology of the Hebrew Bible, 264.

⁴⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, 264–265.

⁴⁶³ Cf. NDIUKWU, Authenticity of Belief in Africa (Igbo) Traditional Religion, 357.

traditions, particularly the Igbo, Yoruba, and Akan are good examples in the human effort to make sense out of the various existential realities.⁴⁶⁴

Accordingly, and more than before, modern folkloristic studies have continued to prove the importance of these mythical narratives not just as a source of religious knowledge but also as a good instrument for the propagation of belief system values; which by extension could be useful also for the propagation of the Christian religious values. By way of explanation, Bascom, one of the leading folklorists explains that myths are narratives regarded as truthful accounts of the distant past within their societies, accepted on faith, taught as beliefs, and used as authoritative responses to doubt.⁴⁶⁵ Typically sacred and linked to theology and rituals, myths often feature non-human characters like animals, deities, or culture heroes with human traits, and explore themes such as the origins of the world, humanity, and natural phenomena, as well as the actions and relationships of deities.⁴⁶⁶ As Bascom further notes, myths may also explain ceremonial practices and taboos, although such explanations are not exclusive to them.⁴⁶⁷ However, he goes further to hint that as societal beliefs evolve, fewer individuals may adhere to a myth, particularly during rapid cultural changes when entire belief systems can lose credibility.⁴⁶⁸ As such, Bascom opines that understanding the prevailing beliefs of the people at any given time is crucial, as people's actions are influenced by their perceptions of truth.⁴⁶⁹

Furthermore, Marion Bowman, another figure in modern folkloristic studies notes that the study of religion by folklorists emphasizes understanding belief as lived experience, which values oral traditions alongside written forms.⁴⁷⁰ According to her, Folkloristic approaches highlight the dynamic nature of belief as expressed through behaviour, rituals, and material culture, offering a nuanced view of how belief manifests in everyday life.⁴⁷¹ As she further observes, insights from folklore genres, such as personal experience narratives and belief stories, are crucial not just for analysing traditional religion, but also for understanding contemporary spirituality, especially in a globalized context.⁴⁷² Hence, one could say that the significance of mythical narratives consist therefore not just in their

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. NWEKE, Creation Story in Genesis Chapter One, 102.

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. William BASCOM, The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives, in: *The Journal of American Folklore* 78/307 (1965) 3–20, here: 4.

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁸ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. Marion BOWMANN, Vernacular Religion, Contemporary Spirituality and Emergent Identities: Lesson from Lauri Honko, in: *Approaching Religion* 4/1 (May 2014) 101–113, here: 103.

⁴⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁷² Cf. *ibid.*, 103–104.

existence as traditional stories but also in their relevance as carriers of belief systems and traditions amongst various communities. Just as it is obvious in the Biblical narratives hinted above which shares similarity with other Ancient Near Eastern narratives, other ancient traditional narratives are also carriers of religious stories, that could even be applied as a veritable instrument for the understanding and propagation of the Christian religion in the various traditional context in which these traditional mythical narratives are in existence.

From the fore going, one could say that Igbo religious traditional stories could be a treasure trove of teaching tools that could really enrich the pedagogical approach of Christian education, especially in themes where cultural context matters. As is already hinted in the earlier chapters of this work, religion for the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, is not just a separate part of life; it is woven into everything they do. Therefore, it could be understandable when one says that their beliefs come alive through myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, and rituals, which form part and parcel of their daily life, as means of passing down important lessons about the universe, ethics, and community identity from one generation to the next. As such, these various forms of narratives and rituals are not just for entertainment but have a deeper purpose, because they carry valuable insights about the divine, the moral fabric of the universe, and how humans connect with the spiritual world.

Thus, classical African scholars like John S. Mbiti and Elizabeth Isichei have long pointed out that African traditional religion to which Igbo religious tradition belongs is pedagogical at its core, whereby oral traditions play a crucial role in shaping morals and maintaining social connections.⁴⁷³ So, tapping into these narratives forms and ritual practices can really help make the teaching of Christian religious education more relatable and meaningful for the Children of Igbo descent. In this context, stories become powerful lenses through which people make sense of life, their responsibilities, and their destinies, which makes them especially valuable for teaching religious principles. More recent research from African scholars like Chukwudebelu and Molokwu, backs this up by showing that Igbo traditional narratives and beliefs are vital for sharing indigenous knowledge and promoting Christian religious education amongst the Igbo people in today's world.⁴⁷⁴ As such, Igbo traditional narratives could serve as effective tools that could enable Igbo Children understand the Christian religion by making biblical teachings more relatable, especially in

⁴⁷³ Cf. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1–5; ISICHEI, *A History of the Igbo People*, 45–52.

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. Ifeanyi A. CHUKWUDEBELU–Geoffrey C. MOLOKWU, *African Contextual Theology: A Holistic Response to Neo-Traditionalism in Igbo Society*, in: *Journal of Media, Culture and Communication* 2/5 (2022), 18–30, here: 25–26.

contexts where Western theological concepts may seem too idealistic. These narratives could enhance learning by translating abstract theological ideas into culturally relevant stories, similar to biblical stories and the parables of Jesus. This shared purpose in usage between Igbo traditional narratives and biblical stories and parables as one can see in various parts of the Bible, highlights the common use of narrative for moral and theological instruction that is more or less common in various religious traditions. Hence, as already hinted, Igbo religious tradition articulates a worldview centred on belief in a supreme deity, *Chukwu* or *Chineke*, who is understood as the creator and sustainer of the universe, alongside a hierarchy of divinities and ancestral intermediaries. This cosmological structure, which is frequently conveyed through narrative forms in the form of various Igbo creation myths could provide a framework for understanding divine-human relationships that is analogous in many respects to Christian theology. Thus, Mbiti and Arinze both note that African traditional religion possesses a monotheistic orientation with structured systems of mediation;⁴⁷⁵ a position which shares aspects of similarity with the Christian religion.

This perspective has been further developed in contemporary African theological discourse, where scholars like Kanu argues that indigenous concepts of mediation can be typologically linked to the Christian understanding of Christ as mediator, whereby African traditional religion to which the Igbo religious tradition belongs is viewed as a divine gift, intended to prepare the people for evangelization.⁴⁷⁶ Moreso, opinions like Aboekwe's notion of the reinterpretation of Igbo religious traditional categories such as ancestors to function analogously to Christian saints,⁴⁷⁷ could also illustrates a dynamic process of religious adaptation and pedagogical integration. Ultimately, what is being emphasized here is that most of the Igbo religious traditional beliefs and values are normally transmitted through traditional narratives, similar to what is obtainable in both biblical and some non biblical traditions. This underscores the pedagogical value of Igbo religious traditional narratives as instruments which can enable learners of the Christian religion to construct meaning within familiar conceptual frameworks, and could therefore serve as bridges between the Igbo religious traditional and Christian religion worldviews. Additionally, the Igbo traditional narratives just like other African traditional narratives are deeply embedded in communal and performative contexts, which entails a communal activity involving

⁴⁷⁵ Cf. MBITI, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 29–35; ARINZE, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, 12–18.

⁴⁷⁶ Cf. Ikehukwu A. KANU, *The Igbo-African Kola Nut as a 'Type' of Holy Communion*, in: *Villanova Journal of Science, Technology and Management* 2/ 1 (2020) 95–109, here: 101–103.

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Mary Emilia ABOEKWE, *Igbo Christians and Complexities of Ancestor Worship*, in: *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 11/ 7 (2025) 143–154, here 145–147.

participation, dramatization, and interaction;⁴⁷⁸ thereby fostering collective learning and shared meaning.

When one aligns this with the constructivist and culturally responsive pedagogy of Gay, which advocates for the use of learners' cultural backgrounds as foundational resources in the learning process,⁴⁷⁹ these insights could suggest that incorporating Igbo traditional narrative forms into Christian religious education could create a more holistic and culturally resonant learning environment that enhances both comprehension and participation. Moreso, because many Igbo traditional narratives are important for teaching ethical values and social norms by featuring moral dilemmas and characters that demonstrate the consequences of actions, researchers like Yerokun and Oni would believe in the possibility of a convergence between Igbo religious tradition and Christianity in themes like communal responsibility, moral accountability and justice.⁴⁸⁰ Again, this alignment could allow Christian religious educators in Igbo context to use the indigenous stories to effectively convey Christian principles in a culturally relevant manner.

4.2.2 Religious Traditional Symbols and Rituals

Just like religious narratives, there is also the presence of religious symbols and rituals in almost all the major religions of the world.⁴⁸¹ Just like various other people in Africa, the Igbo folk in southeastern Nigeria has also rich deposit of religious traditional material objects and rituals that are not just about spirituality, but also play a big role in sharing knowledge, shaping morals, and building community identity. Thus, Metuh observes that the Igbo traditional religion is characterized by a symbolic universe in which meaning is mediated not just through myths, proverbs and similar narratives but also through symbols like the *ofọ* (staff of authority and justice), *ikenga* (a sign of personal achievement and strength), and

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Isidore OKPEWHO, *African Oral Literature: background, character and continuity*, Indiana 1992, 3–20 and 36–45; Ruth H. FINNEGAN, *Oral Literature in Africa* (world Oral Literature Series I), Cambridge 2012, 1–14 and 108–112;

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. Geneva GAY, *Culturally Responsive Teaching. Theory, Research and practice*, New York–London 2018, 33–56.

⁴⁸⁰ In addition to the references on this point already made in the comparative study above, one can also see such effort in recent works like; Cf. Timothy O. A. YEROKUN–Abidemi J. ONI, *African Traditional Religion and Christianity: Ethical and Religious Values in Dialogue*, in: *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 9/8 (2025) 6458–6465, here: 6461–6462.

⁴⁸¹ Cf. Eliade MIRCEA, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* [trans. by: Willard R. TRASK], New York 1959; Smart NINIAN, *The World's Religions*, Cambridge 1998, 10–21. Here Mircea and Ninian respectively show how religion is expressed through symbols and rituals as well as how symbols and rituals constitute the main features of the major religions like Christianity, Judaism, Islam Buddhism and Hinduism.

ogụ (innocence and righteousness), along with sacred spaces like shrines and ancestral altars, which hold deep moral values and important ideas about life.⁴⁸²

Because these symbols and sacred spaces are really meaningful, they could serve as helpful visual and hands-on tools that bring abstract ideas to life in the teaching of the Christian religion. A good example could be in the teaching of the Christian concept of justice, which might seem a bit abstract for some children of Igbo descent who are not at home with such theological concept; but in the Igbo religious tradition, it is clearly shown through the *ofọ*, which stands for truth, fairness, and divine approval.⁴⁸³ When teachers connect the dots between *ofọ* and biblical ideas of righteousness and divine justice like in Proverbs 21:3, it can help students understand and engage much better. Again, are festivals like the New Yam Festival (*Iri Ji*), which not only shows how Igbo religious traditional practices highlight how vital community, family ties, and shared responsibilities are, but is also a wonderful time for coming together in gratitude, making amends, and strengthening social bonds.⁴⁸⁴ These can as well be utilized to really enhance the teaching of Christian ideas like the Body of Christ (Cf. 1 Corinthians 12:12–27) and the importance of worshiping together. Thus, by connecting Christian teachings to these beloved communal traditions, Christian religion educators can help children in the Igbo context who are learning about the Christian religion to gain a richer understanding of faith that embraces both individual and community aspects.

Moreso, rituals in Igbo religious tradition similarly serve educational purposes by reinforcing communal values and ethical norms through repeated performance and participation. Hence Arinze observes that ritual prayers and sacrifice are always a community activity involving virtually everyone in the community.⁴⁸⁵ As such they are not merely ceremonial acts but pedagogical processes that encode and transmit cultural knowledge across generations. In a Christian pedagogical context, this ritual prayers and sacrifices can be analogically linked to practices such as public prayers and eucharistic sacrifice which is also a community activity,⁴⁸⁶ thereby providing learners in Igbo context with familiar frameworks through which to understand Christian liturgical activities.

⁴⁸² Cf. Emefie Ikenga METUH, *God and Man in African Religion*, Enugu 1999, 45–47,

⁴⁸³ Cf. *ibid.*, 52. Here E. I. Metuh extensively describes the concept of *ofọ* in Igbo religious Tradition.

⁴⁸⁴ Cf. ARINZE, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, 88–90.

⁴⁸⁵ Cf. ARINZE, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, 22–24.

⁴⁸⁶ Cf. CCC, 1368.

4.2.3 The implication of the Above to Christian religious education of Igbo children – The Learner-centred Christian Religious Education

When one considers the application of religious traditional narratives, symbols and rituals, which more or less form part and parcel of day-to-day experience of a people, as a pedagogical instrument in the teaching of Christian religion, a better outcome in teaching and learning could be expected. This is because it aligns not just with the constructivist learning theory which emphasizes the importance of building new knowledge upon existing cognitive structures,⁴⁸⁷ but also with the principles of inculturation theology which advocates for the expression of the Christian faith within the cultural categories of a given people.⁴⁸⁸

Ultimately, what is being emphasised here is the importance of the learner's environment as an important instrument for the propagation of knowledge. Hence, although Bransford et al observe that learning theories do not offer a straightforward guide for creating effective learning environments, they do however agree that the theories highlight critical questions regarding the design of these environments, by indicating the need to reconsider what is taught, how it is taught, and how it is assessed.⁴⁸⁹ Thus, they opine among other things, that learning environments should be learner-centred, knowledge-centred, assessment-centred as well as community-centred;⁴⁹⁰ which according to them should be viewed as a system of interconnected components that support each other.⁴⁹¹

As a matter of particular attention here, Bransford et al explain that learner-centred educational environment focuses on the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that learners bring and emphasizes sensitivity to students' cultural practices and their impact on learning, as well as the students' language practices as a foundation for further learning.⁴⁹² Citing an example with a study at Kamehameha School in Hawaii, Bransford et al report that it was found that teachers who integrated students' home and community cultural practices into

⁴⁸⁷ The constructivist learning theory suggests that knowledge is not just handed over from the environment or a teacher; instead, it is something that learners actively create through their experiences, reflections, and social interactions, where what they already know helps them build new understandings. With Jean Piaget (1896–1980) considered as the founder of constructivism with his emphasis on Cognitive Constructivism; constructivism has many proponents, who differ in their emphasis like: Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) with his Social Constructivism, Jerome Bruner (1915–2016) with Discovery Learning, John Dewey (1859–1952) with Experiential Education amongst others.

⁴⁸⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 52.

⁴⁸⁹ Cf. John D. BRANSFORD et al (eds.), *How people learn. Brain, mind, experience, and school*, Washington 2000, 131.

⁴⁹⁰ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴⁹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 133.

⁴⁹² Cf. *ibid.*, 133 & 135.

literacy instruction saw significant improvements in reading test scores; and by using native Hawaiian ‘talk-story’ narratives, shifting the focus from decoding to comprehension, and incorporating students’ home experiences into discussions, students enhanced their reading performance.⁴⁹³ Hence, they conclude that;

Overall, learner-centred environments include teachers who are aware that learners construct their own meanings, beginning with the beliefs, understandings, and cultural practices they bring to the classroom. If teaching is conceived as constructing a bridge between the subject matter and the student, learner-centred teachers keep a constant eye on both ends of the bridge. [...] Accomplished teachers ‘give learners reason,’ by respecting and understanding learners’ prior experiences and understandings, assuming that these can serve as a foundation on which to build bridges to new understandings.⁴⁹⁴

Ultimately, the above position summarizes what is being emphasised generally in this work about how the Igbo religious traditional values can serve not just as an entry point but also as teaching tools for the Christian religious education of Igbo children. This is because it is believed that would enable a better understanding and assimilation of the Christian religion amongst children Igbo. However, one must not forget the fact that integrating Igbo traditional symbols and rituals into the teaching of Christian education, although could be exiting, could also be a bit tricky. One of the main concerns here is the risk of syncretism, where aspects of traditional beliefs mix with Christian teachings in ways that can create confusion. To navigate this, Christian religion educators in Igbo context can take a thoughtful and careful approach to identify what works well together and what does not. For instance, the way justice is symbolized in *ọfọ* might resonate nicely with Christian values, but some rituals that involve honouring multiple deities could clash with the idea of one God in the Christian religion. So, when using Igbo symbols and rituals in teaching Christian religion, it is also important to keep in mind a clear understanding of the Christian theology and doctrine.

⁴⁹³ Cf. *ibid.*, 135.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

Chapter 5

General Conclusion

5.1 Evaluation

In the course of this work, the aim has been to show that the Igbo religious tradition which is a part of the larger African religious tradition, just like other religious traditions of the world, has an important role to play for a successful Christian religious education of children of Igbo descent. As can be seen in this work, this position is not just based on the submissions of the Second Vatican council especially in the *Nostra Aetate*, but it is also encouraged by the subsequent magisterial teachings of the Roman Catholic Church as well as various submission from theologians within and outside the continent of Africa. Again, as also noted in this work, theories of education, especially the constructivist theory in its various forms show that the things that a child already knows or has experienced are important in building further knowledge. However, the historical legacy of Christian missionary education in Igbo land which was discussed in Chapter 2 of this work, shows a marginalization of indigenous religious practices, which led many Igbo Christian converts to see their traditional heritage as incompatible with their Christian faith. This could be understandable from the point of view that most of these Igbo religious traditional values and practices were not comprehensible to the missionaries. Again, the Igbo land has long been evangelized before the submissions of the Second Vatican Council that not only tries to officially engage and understand other religious traditions but also encourages dialogue with them as a way of evangelisation. To address this, this work proposes that a shift towards a Christian religious educational model that appreciates the importance of indigenous traditional values by engaging and integrating them into the teaching and learning about the Christian religion would be of help.

Thus, scholars like Bediako would suggest that Christianity in Africa truly comes to life when it is expressed in the local language and resonates with the everyday thoughts and experiences of the people.⁴⁹⁵ This is important because since religious traditions exist not just as beliefs but also as practices and institutions which defines a common type of religiosity.⁴⁹⁶ Thus, one could opine that Igbo religious tradition with its rich rituals, practices and other sensory elements like music, dance, and visual symbols, can promote

⁴⁹⁵ Cf. Kwame BEDIAKO, *Christianity in Africa*, 61–62.

⁴⁹⁶ Cf. Darren E SHERKAT, *Religiosity*, 377.

embodied learning beyond mere cognitive understanding; and integrating such into Christian religious education could improve engagement, retention, and emotional connection. In this way, the Igbo religious traditional values, some of which has been discussed in this work and which align with some Christian values could help create a bridge between Igbo traditional religious and Christian religious moral and ethical frameworks; and that could promote continuity in moral and ethical instruction and character formation. In a similar way, the presence of various forms of didactic narratives in Igbo religious tradition could also serve as effective tools for teaching moral and theological truths. Thus, incorporating such traditional narratives into the teaching of the Christian religion could improve understanding when these narratives are used alongside biblical stories to reinforce lessons especially for younger audiences. This is because most of these narratives do not just have a familiar setting but are also told using the local language and style. As a matter of fact, traditional language plays a crucial role in integrating pedagogy,⁴⁹⁷ such that using the Igbo language and style of speech, along with its indigenous terms and metaphors, can enhance understanding and relevance.

This idea which has long been emphasised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO) Guidelines on Language and Education Principle affirms that the mother-tongue instruction is not just important but inevitable, at least at the initial stages of a child educational trajectory, because it improves learning outcomes.⁴⁹⁸ Thus, the unfortunate situation, which this work intends to bring to limelight is that in contrast to this position of UNESCO, religious education in Igbo land even at its basic levels in schools are generally carried out using categories and terminologies that are mostly alien to the Igbo children. Although this approach is understandable when one considers a long historical practice that was based on the fear of syncretism which may have necessitated it, the position of the Catholic Church today however, calls for something different and more improved.

⁴⁹⁷ Even the recent publications of various departments of UNESCO have continued to reemphasize this fact that the body has always upheld. Examples can include: Cf. UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO) Languages in Education, What we need to know about multilingual education, in: UNESCO (March 2025), URL: <https://www.unesco.org/en/languages-education/need-know> [accessed: 02.05.2026]; UNESCO International Bureau of Education, Bridging Cultures and Minds: The Transformative Impact of Mother Tongue Integration in Curriculum Design, in: UNESCO (February 2024), URL: <https://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/articles/bridging-cultures-and-minds-transformative-impact-mother-tongue-integration-curriculum-design> [accessed: 02.05.2026].

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO), Education in a Multilingual World, Paris 2003, 14–16 and 31.

5.2 Conclusion

Therefore, in line with the discussions and examples so far in this work, one could conclude that this improved approach of Christian religious education for children of Igbo descent should support the integrating of Igbo traditional values as well as its symbols and rituals into Christian religious education. Because this approach acknowledges learners' cultural identities as assets, enhancing cognitive continuity and cultural affirmation, it can improve the effectiveness of religious education and supports the decolonization of Christian religious education by validating indigenous knowledge and promoting intercultural dialogue. As it has been shown in the course of this research, Igbo religious tradition possesses valuable educational potential for teaching the Christian religion because of some similarities in values that it shares with those of the Christian religion, even if partially. As it is evident in this work, these values can act as cognitive bridges and experiential learning tools, allowing learners to connect with Christian teachings in culturally relevant ways. Although challenges like syncretism and historical biases may exist, one cannot totally deny that such an improved approach based on inculturation theology could not only be capable of integrating the Igbo and Christian religious traditions effectively, but could also enhance Christian religious education amongst the Igbo people by shaping Christian religious understanding and identity that is native to the Igbo context. As already noted, this could effectively help in bridging the gap of religious alienation that could arise in a later year in life whereby a Christian convert of Igbo descent would see his/her faith as something foreign to his/her milieu and worldview. On the contrary, they would be helped to see the Christian faith as something that is not just understandable but also explainable with their traditional categories and concept respectively. In other words, they would be enabled to see Christianity as a religion that also belongs to them.

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Abstract

More than ever before, the attitude of the Catholic Church has changed and continues to improve in recent times with regard to her relationship with other religious traditions. This milestone became very visible in the era of the second Vatican Council and her teachings especially in *Nostra aetate* and *Lumen Gentium*. Hence, from Vatican II upwards, one notices in a more evident manner a paradigm shift from the old mantra of ‘outside the Church there is no salvation’ to the acknowledgment of the possibility of salvation outside the Church. Even though the interpretation given to this acknowledgement may differ based on the varied orientations of various theologians and the magisterial teachings, one thing that is general is the Church’s appreciation of the positive values present in other religious traditions. This singular acknowledgment has affected the Church’s attitude in the exercise of her mission mandate. As such, in the face of other religious traditions, the Church more than before emphasises dialogue as the starting point of evangelisation. This dialogue which above all demands openness from both parties, also involves readiness to learn from one another.

However, as a people who were evangelized long before the Vatican II council and the consequent change of attitude to dialogue in evangelization, the Igbo people were more or less indoctrinated, whereby even the good values of their religious tradition were jettisoned as incompatible with the Christian religion by missionaries who had little or no understanding about these traditional values. The outcome is that this ended up producing many half-baked Christians, who after many years of learning about the Christian faith in the schools as well as in the church still lack full commitment to the Christian teachings and manifest longing towards outright return to the traditional religion. A good example is the popular ‘going back to our root’ mantra amongst many young Igbo folk. With this problem in view and considering the recent Church’s dialogical position with regard to evangelization, this work intends to show that when some good values in Igbo religious tradition are employed in the teaching and learning of the Christian faith for children of Igbo descent, it will not only enhance understanding but could also help produce better and more committed Christians in the future. This makes more meaning when one considers the fact that religion is a major element of culture and tradition.

As a matter of fact, culture and tradition are the major constituents of a worldview of a given people, which often differentiates them from other people. Again, the worldview of a people is a kind of a lens with which a group of people see, understand and relate with the

world and children grow up under various religious-cultural environments and worldviews. Thus, using Igbo religious tradition as a case study, this work intends to show therefore, that in the Christian religious education of Igbo children, the interaction between the Igbo traditional values and symbols to which these children belong, which forms their worldview, and the Christian religious values is not just necessary but also important for a fruitful Christian religious education. This is because it can help them both in understanding and assimilation of the Christian faith.

Abstract

Mehr denn je zuvor hat sich die Haltung der katholischen Kirche in Bezug auf ihre Beziehung zu anderen religiösen Traditionen gewandelt. Sie verbessert sich in jüngster Zeit weiter. Dieser Meilenstein wurde in der Zeit des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils und in dessen Lehren, insbesondere in „*Nostra Aetate*“ und „*Lumen Gentium*“, besonders deutlich. So lässt sich seit dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil ein klarer Paradigmenwechsel erkennen, weg vom alten Mantra „Außerhalb der Kirche gibt es kein Heil“ hin zur Anerkennung der Möglichkeit des Heils außerhalb der Kirche. Auch wenn die Auslegung dieser Anerkennung je nach den unterschiedlichen Orientierungen verschiedener Theologen und dem Lehramt variieren mag, ist eines allgemein gültig: die Wertschätzung der Kirche für die positiven Werte, die in anderen religiösen Traditionen vorhanden sind. Diese einzigartige Anerkennung hat die Haltung der Kirche bei der Ausübung ihres Missionsauftrags beeinflusst. So betont die Kirche gegenüber anderen religiösen Traditionen mehr denn je den Dialog als Ausgangspunkt der Evangelisierung. Dieser Dialog, der vor allem Offenheit von beiden Seiten erfordert, beinhaltet auch die Bereitschaft, voneinander zu lernen.

Als ein Volk, das lange vor dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil und der daraus folgenden veränderten Haltung zum Dialog in der Evangelisierung missioniert wurde, erlebten die Igbo jedoch mehr oder weniger eine Indoktrination. Selbst die guten Werte ihrer religiösen Tradition wurden von Missionaren, die wenig oder gar kein Verständnis für diese traditionellen Werte hatten, als unvereinbar mit der christlichen Religion verworfen. Das Ergebnis war, dass dadurch viele unvollkommene Christen hervorgebracht wurden, denen es nach vielen Jahren des Lernens über den christlichen Glauben in den Schulen sowie in der Kirche immer noch an einer vollständigen Hingabe an die christlichen Lehren mangelt. Die Sehnsucht nach einer regelrechten Rückkehr zur traditionellen Religion bleibt aufrecht. Ein gutes Beispiel dafür ist das unter vielen jungen Igbo-Leuten beliebte Mantra „Zurück zu unseren Wurzeln“. Angesichts dieses Problems und unter Berücksichtigung der jüngsten dialogischen Haltung der Kirche in Bezug auf die Evangelisierung soll diese Arbeit aufzeigen, dass die Einbeziehung einiger guter Werte der religiösen Tradition der Igbo in die Vermittlung und das Erlernen des christlichen Glaubens für Kinder igboischer Abstammung nicht nur das Verständnis vertiefen, sondern auch dazu beitragen könnte, in Zukunft im Glauben gestärkte und engagiertere Christen hervorzubringen. Dies gewinnt an Bedeutung,

wenn man bedenkt, dass Religion ein wesentlicher Bestandteil von Kultur und Tradition ist.

Tatsächlich sind Kultur und Tradition die wesentlichen Bestandteile der Weltanschauung eines Volkes, wodurch es sich oft von anderen Völkern unterscheidet. Darüber hinaus ist die Weltanschauung eines Volkes eine Art Linse, durch die eine Gruppe von Menschen die Welt sieht, versteht und mit ihr in Beziehung tritt. Kinder wachsen in verschiedenen religiös-kulturellen Umfeldern und Weltanschauungen auf, die ihr Verständnis und ihre Herangehensweise an die Dinge prägen. Anhand der religiösen Tradition der Igbo als Fallstudie soll diese Arbeit daher aufzeigen, dass in der christlichen Religionserziehung von Igbo-Kindern die Interaktion zwischen traditionellen Werten und Symbolen der Igbo, denen diese Kinder angehören und die ihre Weltanschauung prägen, und den christlichen religiösen Werten nicht nur notwendig, sondern auch wichtig für eine fruchtbare christliche Religionserziehung ist. So wird ihnen sowohl beim Verständnis als auch bei der Aneignung des christlichen Glaubens geholfen.