# IGWEBUIKE PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: IN SEARCH FOR A RELATIONAL BALANCE

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## Abstract

*Diversity within the parameters of religion has become more obvious in our time than ever. This diversity, however, does not consist of a variety of independent religious and faith systems existing side by side. Rather, it consists of a multiplicity of commitments, which constitutes the matrix of a broad religious pluralism. Within this matrix, different and often conflicting religious commitment struggle for identity as they coexist and strive to find a hermeneutical principle through which to interpret meaningfully the interrelationship of differing beliefs and life patterns. This paper argues that dialogue would pave the way for understanding and dealing with the problems associated with diversity in society. For the purpose of realizing this balance, the Igwebuike method of research would be employed. Since Igwebuike philosophy emphasizes the intersubjectivity, interconnectedness and complementarity of reality, it is envisioned that it will refocus attention on the unity in the midst of the plurality of reality. With dialogue, contemporary religious groups could relate positively with each other toward an ever-unfolding discovery of themselves in a religiously pluralistic society, through building community and celebrating differences, healing pain and building understanding, resolving conflicts and positive actions towards co-existence in a pluralistic society.*

**Keywords:** Igwebuike, Philosophy, Religious Pluralism, Relational, Balance, Christian, Muslim.

## Introduction

Religious diversity is an acknowledged cultural and historical fact today. This diversity, however, consists of a variety of independent religious and faith systems existing side by side. Thus, different and often conflicting religious commitments, struggle for identity, etc., as they coexist have become inevitable[163]. Today, there are a variety of approaches investigating the

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[163]See Alister E. McGrath, The Challenge of Pluralism for the Contemporary Christian Church,' Lournal of the Evangelical theological Society 35 (1992), p.361.

complexity of religious phenomena. Such approaches and strategies range from different sorts of independent religious experiences to suggestions about consensus within the differences. Nevertheless, there is found in all approaches and strategies either an intuitive urge or some recognized need that leads to a form of "interfaith dialogue." The stated purposes of interfaith dialogue vary according to those involved in this dialogue. In the main, however, there are five purposes.

a. First, dialogue provides a way of understanding someone's religious commitment. It allows one to give and receive information, to "get the facts" and thereby to understand.

b. Second, dialogue seeks consensus. With this purpose dialogue attempts to find common ground mutuality, if not agreement in the different religious groups. That common ground could be any number of elements with given religious systems.

c. Third, dialogue invites conversation about differences in integrity of all elements in the religious system that can be established more firmly and the believer's identity established more correctly.

d. Fourth, dialogue affords opportunity for reconciliation among people and groups that have conflicting beliefs, lifestyles, and rituals. This purpose, like the second, may find expression both practically and theoretically in the conjunction of religious symbols and in their cultural expression.

e. Fifth, dialogue assumes that a vital religious pluralism is the matrix in which truth is sought, claimed, and translated into historically and culturally defined beliefs and patterns of life.

In this paper, Igwebuike philosophy is employed as an approach to the phenomenon of religious pluralism. Since Igwebuike philosophy emphasizes the intersubjectivity, interconnectedness and complementarity of reality, it is envisioned that it will refocus attention on the unity in the midst of the plurality of reality. And a fundamental element of Igwebuike philosophy is dialogue. It argues that dialogue paves the way for understanding and dealing with the problems associated with religious exclusivity in contemporary society.

## Religious Experience: The Current Issue

Religious experience is always characterized by asset of beliefs or teachings, rituals for expressing these beliefs in the community of faith, and lifestyle patterns for living out beliefs and rituals in the broader social community. Usually the beliefs are understood to come from the object of one's religious

orientation, a Supreme Being or value, and are described as a revelation. Rituals are the result of human ways of perceiving, organizing, and interpreting revelation, and thereby offer primary anthropological and sociological data for studying and knowing about the religious experience. Thus, the lifestyle pattern would involve an intersection of the religious commitment of one community with the society in general in such a way as to raise the fundamental question of norms for social intercourse broadly conceived. Such patterns would describe the meaning of ethical conduct which I think is the primary principles for authentic living in a pluralistic society.[164]

The inner vitality of any religious experience and the way it is viewed by society in general depends mainly on how its beliefs, rituals, and lifestyles come together to give it character and definition. These three characteristics of religious experience have to be balance in order to affects the community positively and supportively which in turn lays a credible foundation on which the society is build. Now, it is good to note, here, that an imbalance and "unhealthy" religious experience produced distortion and create unprecedented problems for the community and the society. For instance, where belief outweighs attention to ritual and lifestyle, the result is often the "holy war" which is motivated as conviction of superiority and for the sake of dogmatic good. The doctrinal end justifies any ritual or ethical means available. It follows then that the practice of the religious experience is often the cause of its demise in the destruction of individuals and the religious system within the broader society. Thus, any imbalance affects both the religious group itself and its social context.[165]

In a pluralistic society, religious systems inevitably affect each other, especially if they are conversionary in outlook and purpose. In such instances, over attention to beliefs may affect other religious groups adversely. When, for example, convictions about religious particularity or divine election are the primary motivations for conversionary religious groups, there is a high potential for distortion in the lifestyle relationship such groups have with other groups. There is a clear tendency among conversionary groups to teach their beliefs to other people and thus "win them over." That tendency in itself may represent open discussion in a free society and intend no ill effect or unjust treatment of others.

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[164] B. A. Ackermann, *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p.8.

[165] B. A. Ackermann, *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p.10.

But it may also be the source of interpersonal improbity in which any means used to convert another person are justified by the end, namely: "winning others over." More often than not, such tendencies occur in religious groups whose heightened sense of commitment to beliefs overshadows judgments about lifestyle and ritual, producing perceived distortions within the style of the group itself and engenders a "we-they" mentality that can lead to a posture of superiority and its resultant devaluing of the other person's position and right to that position.[166]

Today we observe new activities among the conversionary or transformational groups represented by some fundamentalist and evangelical organizations to "win others over" with apparent disregard for methods used in the process. In the light of this situation, the needed new balance in the pluralistic religious scene is twofold. It involves not only the former need to balance carefully and intentionalize the belief, lifestyle, and ritual within the group's own experience so that belief will not overshadow lifestyle and ritual or vice versa, but also the contemporary need to seek a carefully and intentionally balanced relationship in the intercourse of a plurality of religious groups.

Thus, it is essentially a matter of social influence to make religious groups unsatisfied seeking balance internally but have to seek balance externally by the way they coincide and interact with other groups. This need for new balance, then, emerges as a concern for group ethical conduct in the society. The parameters of that concern are the public domain of beliefs in a pluralistic society and the expression of those beliefs in a lifestyle inevitably touching individuals of different religious commitments.[167]

## Igwebuike and the Search for a New Balance

*Igwebuike* was proposed by the Nigerian Augustinian Professor of African Philosophy and Religion, Anthony Kanu Ikechukwu, a distinguished academicas the unity of the African philosophical experience, which profoundly relates to a perspective driven ideology that epitomizes the manner of being in African ontology. The word *Igwebuike* is an Igbo word. It is a composite word made up of three dimensions. Therefore, it can be employed as a word or used as a sentence:

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[166] Martin E. Marty, 'Fundamentalism as a Social Phenomenon,' in Evangelicalism and Modern America, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p.56-70.

[167] Alister E. McGrath, Understanding and Responding to Moral Pluralism (Illinois: Wheaton College, 1994), p.9.

as a word, it is written as *Igwebuike*, and as a sentence, it is written as, *Igwe bu ike*, with the component words enjoying some independence in terms of space. The three words involved: *Igwe* is a noun which means number or population, usually a huge number or population. *Bu* is a verb, which means *is. Ike* is another verb, which means *strength* or *power*. Thus, put together, it means 'number is strength' or 'number is power', that is, when human beings come together in solidarity and complementarity, they are powerful or can constitute an insurmountable force[168]. However, it is employed within this context as a basis for the search for a balance in the midst of the plurality or diversity of reality.

The Igwebuike method of investigation holds that reality is related- each aspect relates with the whole. It, therefore, understands reality within the context of relationships and experiences of interrelationships and interconnections. It strongly believes that the points of inter-relationships and interconnectedness are only discovered when the burden of differences are lowered and dialogue prevails. Dialogue is a very strong principle of Igwebuike philosophy. It understands dialogue as a very important stage in the search for and discovery of the unity of reality. This method of inquiry, therefore, forms a framework capable of harmonizing our thoughts and actions into active processes that balances reality.

The interaction between religious groups fames a dialogical process for finding the new balance and a human potential that is open to mutual understanding and growth. Hence, the claim that dialogue is the answer to problems in

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[168] Kanu, I. A. (2016) "Igwebuike as an Expressive Modality of Being in African ontology." *Journal of Environmental and Construction Management. 6. 3;*Kanu, I. A. (2016). "Igwebuike as the consummate foundation of African bioethical principles." *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities.* 2. 2; Kanu, I. A. (2017). "Igwebuike and the logic of African philosophy." *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities.* 3. 1; Kanu, I. A. (2017). "Igwebuike and the question of superiority in the scientific community of knowledge." *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities.* 3. 1; Kanu, I. A. (2017). "Igwebuike as a Complementary Approach to the Issue of Girl-Child Education." *Nightingale International Journal of Contemporary Education and Research.* Vol. 3. No. 6; Kanu, I. A. (2017). "Igwebuike as an Igbo-African ethic of reciprocity." *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities.* 3. 2; Kanu, I. A. (2017). "Igwebuike as an Igbo-African Philosophy for the Protection of the Environment". *Nightingale International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences.* Vol. 3. No. 4; Kanu, I. A. (2017). "Igwebuike as an Igbo-African wholistic response to the problem of evil and human suffering." *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities.* 3. 2.

interpersonal relations is easily made. What is not so easy is to understand what constitutes dialogue and how dialogue functions to better interpersonal relations.

Dialogue is intended to be a creative process in which open discussion is the arena for mutual understanding, tolerance, forgiveness and growth. Often, the adverse effect results, and interpersonal and religious problems intensify because of personal attitudes that are contrary to the mutuality of dialogical process. Igwebuike proposes a dialogical process that aims at recovering conversations over beliefs in such a way that life style patterns are affected through mutual understanding, tolerance and growth. This process involves the interaction of personal commitments with openness on the part of individuals and groups to learn from each other without relinquishing the structures of meaning within their own commitments.[169]

In the dialogical process, growth takes place in the interaction of beliefs, lifestyle, and rituals within religious systems and across religious lines. An example of this liken dialogical process is found in the faith experience of Franz Rosenzweig, a Jew, and Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, a Christian. They call dialogue "speech king," a process by which truth is revealed through speech that express the intercommunication of one mind with another. It is conversation, speech set against speech that was the method wherein they discovered their respective identities and a common framework. To this, Rosenzweig notes: "in the course of dialogue he who happens to be listening also speaks, but he does not speak merely when he is uttering words, nor even mainly when he is uttering words, but just as much when through his eager attention, through the assent or dissent expressed in his glances, he conjures words to his lips and the lips of the current speaker."[170]

Igwebuike dialogical process holds that the important thing is not what is in the individual speakers in the dialogue but what together they find between them. Individuals discover themselves to each other, meaning emerges through this kind of dialogue.

**Conclusion**

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[169] Maurianne Adams et al., Readings for Diversity and Social Justice 3rd. Ed (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 3311-3.

[170] Glatzer, N.N. Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought (New York: Shocken, 1953), p. 308.

Dialogue is an experience that could lead one to make a religious claim for absolutes instead of making absolute claims historically and culturally in the improbity of social influence among religious groups. Understood this way, dialogue could lead from a description of the contemporary religious scene to a prescriptive response to that scene by framing the question of ethics of social influence in the balance of beliefs, lifestyle and rituals within a religious system and among religious groups. Dialogue between religious groups could continue even with such difference and be fruitful because "a valuable two-way relationship exists between the religious communities and the pluralistic society, which can be extremely productive."[171] Thus, with dialogue, contemporary religious groups could relate positively with each other toward an ever-unfolding discovery of themselves in a religiously pluralistic society, through building community and celebrating differences, healing pain and building understanding, resolving conflicts and positive actions towards co-existence in a pluralistic society.[172]

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[171] Prof. David M. Bossman, Reinhold Niebuhr, Jews, and Evangelization (JCST 6016: Values for a Pluralistic Society, 2016), p.49.

[172] Maurianne Adams et al., op.cit., p.313-4.

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