



11. “IGWEBUIKE” Theology and the Adaptation of Christianity in Africa

The Greek and Roman worlds played significant parts in shaping the character and influencing the history of Christianity, in the sense that while Greek philosophy and culture shaped early Christian theological formulations, the Roman world, with its rich organizational structures, shaped the organizational and practical dimensions of the life of the Christian church, and its religious impulses from the rich Jewish tradition. However, as Christianity moved to the shores of Africa, its sympathetic, non-derogatory and non-dominant touch declined. There was a smugness toward African Traditional Religion and culture, which generated barrage of names for it. Names like primitive, pagan, heathen, magic, ancestor worship, juju, Fetish, animism, etc., (Kanu 2010 and 2015a).

This smugness may have been partly the result of the developments in the areas of sociology and anthropology, evident in the writings of Linnaeus (1978), Gobineau (1915) and other writers who expressed negative perspectives about Africa. Very interesting is the perspective of the Colonial Governor of Nigeria, Lord Frederick Lugard, in his *The Dual Mandate*, which became a handbook for all British administrators in tropical Africa, and influenced British colonial policies across the continent.

In character and temperament typical African of this race-type is a happy, thriftless, excitable person. Lacking in self-control, discipline, and foresight. Naturally courageous, and naturally courteous and polite, full of personal vanity, with little sense of veracity, fond of music and loving weapons as an oriental loves jewelry. His thoughts are concentrated on the events and feelings of the moment, and he suffers little from the apprehension for the future, or grief for the past (p. 70).

He further compared the African to lower animals:

His mind is far nearer to the animal world than that of the European or Asiatic, and exhibits something of the animal's placidity and want of desire to rise beyond the State he has reached. Through the ages, the African appears to have evolved no organized religious creed, and though some tribes appear to believe in a deity, the religious sense seldom rises above pantheistic animalism and seems more often to take the form of a vague dread of the supernatural (p. 70).

Focusing on the inability of the African to manage his own affairs, he writes:

He lacks the power of organization, and is conspicuously deficient in the

management and control alike of men or business. He loves the display of power, but fails to realize its responsibilityhe will work hard with a less incentive than most races. He has the courage of the fighting animal -an instinct rather than a moral virtue.....In brief, the virtues and defects of this race-type are those of attractive children, whose confidence when it is won is given ungrudgingly as to an older and wiser superior and without envy.....Perhaps the two traits which have impressed me as those most characteristic of the African native are his lack of apprehension and his ability to visualize the future. (p. 70).

These perspectives limited the African personality, and shaped the missionaries' conception of African religion and culture (Kanu 2016 and 2019). The first strategy employed by most colonial authorities and missionaries was that of disassemblage, concealed in the exploitative ideology of benevolent paternalism (Ekwuru 1999). It was first an ideology of condemnation, which identified everything “good to be white” and everything “bad to be black” (Kwame, 1981). Some missionaries made no appraisal of our peculiarities, African languages, parables, modes of thought, poetry, which reveals the profundity of African literary wizardry. The drum was banned from sounding in most churches. African names for baptism were rejected, and European family names like De Santos encouraged (Hastings, 1976 and Kanu 2012).

1. Igwebuike Theological Perspectives on Evangelization

In the face of all these, what theological perspective has *Igwebuike* to offer for a balanced evangelization? It is this concern that has inspired the reflections below.

a. Culture as a preparation for the Gospel

Reality in *Igwebuike* is not disjointed but a *continuum*. Therefore, it makes for the possibility of making a connection between African culture and the gospel message.

Clement of Alexandria wrote the *Stromata* in which he addressed the issue of the relationship between Greek philosophy and Christianity. He criticized those who say that philosophy is worthless or dangerous for Christians. Clement calls them babblers “who in their ignorance are frightened at every noise” (*Strom.* 1, 1). He argues that philosophy was given to the Greeks by God to prepare them for the coming of Christ, just as the Law was given to the Hebrews for the same purpose (Mirus 2015). He writes: “Accordingly, before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it becomes conducive to piety; being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith through demonstration” (*Strom.* 1, 5).

His interpretation of Greek philosophy is that it was not only necessary for the Greeks as an intellectual enterprise, but very useful in preparing Christians to accept the faith, as well as helping them to understand it better and defend it against error. His idea becomes clearer when it is understood that the early Christian thinkers used Neoplatonism to clarify the Christian message, thus using philosophy as a vehicle for preaching the gospel. In the same sense, *Igwebuike* understands African culture and religion as a gift given to Africans by God in preparation for the gospel.

b. Sympathetic and non-derogatory approach to Culture

Igwebuike does not see the other as an opponent to be avoided or derogated. Its approach is such that the other is related with in a manner that is non-discriminatory, non-derogatory and sympathetic. It does not put condemnation before understanding. This was the approach of Jesus Christ in the gospels. Towards the Jewish cult, His attitude was one of Fidelity and autonomy. In fidelity, Jesus had respect for the traditions of His time. He came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17). He was faithful in observing the offering of sacrifices in the temple (Matthew 21:12), the service of Word in the synagogue (Matthew 6:6), observing the day of the Sabbath, the feasts of Passover, Tabernacle, and Dedication (Matthew 26:17-19). However, His fidelity did not lie in passivity, but represented that of a “critical yes”, a reforming fidelity, that placed a demand of purification to the worship of His time. His autonomy found expression in His challenge to fellow Jews to spiritualize and interiorize the Jewish religion (Kanu 2019).

When Jesus preached the Gospel, He used categories familiar to His audience- He preached through what Okonkwo (2002) referred to as “the media of the people” or “the press of the people” of His time. We hear of absentee Lords and Tenant revolts (Matthew 21:31-45); Small family-run farms (Matthew 21:28-30); debts and debtors (Matthew 18:25-35); day labourers paid merely subsistent wages (Matthew 20:1-6); these graphically reflect the detail of the picture of Palestinian countryside during His time. St Paul writes, “To the Jews I became a Jew, in order to win Jews... I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some” (9:20 & 22). St Paul adopts a pattern of mission that brings the Christian experience into the cultural experience of the local people (Kanu 2019).

c. Culture as the seed of the Word of God

Justine Martyr understood man as composed of: body (σώμα, *soma*), soul (ψυχή, *psyche*), and spirit (πνεύμα, *pneuma*). He used the term ζωτικόν πνεύμα (*zotikon pneuma*), in Latin (*spritus vitalis*) to describe the spiritual dimension of the human person. The

ζωτικόν πνεύμα, is the divine principle in man, the distinguishing feature of his nature, his unique dignity and a participation in the very life of the Logos. He calls it "seed of the word" or "reason in man", in Greek, the σπερματικός λόγος (*spermaticos logos*) and in Latin, the ratio *seminalis*. Through the σπερματικός λόγος, the divine principle in man was able to govern himself and pursued virtue even before the coming of Christianity. This divine principle, has an intimate connection with the Divine Logos, the Word of God. Thus, he avers that Christ was already present in local cultures in an imperfect way even before the Word of God was preached to these cultures.

The *spermaticos logos* in the African context is the Chi, which is the divinity in every human being. Through this, God has not been absent to the African and thus, the African culture.

d. The African Typology Model

An interesting aspect of Biblical studies is the area of typology. Bullinger (1968) defines typology as "a figure or ensample of something future and more or less prophetic, called the 'Antitype'" (p. 768). Muenscher (cited by Terry 1890) understands typology as a study of "the preordained representative relation which certain persons, events, and institutions of the Old Testament bear to corresponding persons, events, and institutions in the New" (Terry 1890, 246).

Examples of types in the scripture include, the Passover, with its spotless lamb (Exodus 12:5). It was a type of the death of Jesus (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7), who was without spot or blemish (1 Peter 1:19). The feast of the first-fruits (Leviticus 23:10), i.e., Pentecost, was a celebration in which the initial produce of the harvest was offered to God as a token of the full crop to follow. This ritual typified: (1) the early influx of the Jews into the church of Christ (Romans 11:16); and, (2) the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as God's pledge of the general resurrection to ultimately come (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23) (Moorehead 1930).

Relating typology to African traditional culture and religion, the base for relationship changes from the Old Testament to the religio-cultural experiences, categories, events or persons in traditional African culture and religion which may find their fulfillment in the New Testament Scripture. This is anchored on the fact that African traditional religion and culture is understood as a gift from God, given in preparation for evangelization. It holds that the events, persons and things in traditional African religion were not so much about the time of their expression but had the capacity for fulfillment in the future with the fullness of revelation in Christ Jesus.

2. Cases Studies

a. *The Igbo kola nut and the Christian Holy Communion*

Table 1: The Igbo Kola nut vis-a-vis the Holy Communion

No	Holy Communion	The Kola Nut
1	The Holy Communion is made of bread, which was a common meal among the Jewish people. There was hardly a home where bread was not found, rich or poor. The use of bread, therefore, appealed to the cognition of those who were at the Last Supper.	The Kola nut among the Igbo is a common meal. Every Igbo home rich or poor had kola nuts kept, even for unexpected visitors. It is a meal that sends a message to the cognitive faculty of the Igbo each time it is seen. It is more than a meal; it is a welcome.
2	The bread during the Mass is held with honour. Generally in a posture that points towards the sky.	When the kola nut is blessed, it is treated with honour. It is held with the fingers, pointing into the sky.
3	The Holy Communion is the Bread of Life. (cf John 25:56).	The Kola nut is a symbol of life. This is why it is said: "He that brings kola brings life".
4	Sharing in the Holy Communion should strengthen unity, respect and love among those who partake of it.	The Kola nut symbolizes mutual respect and community. It welcomes the guest into the home where it is served.
5	Before Jesus broke the bread and gave it to His disciples, He first gave thanks. (cf. Lk 22:19)	Before the breaking and serving of the kola nut, the person saying the prayer gives thanks to <i>Chukwu</i> .
6	Jesus Christ chose from among his followers, only men who would continue to offer this sacrifice.	The kola nut is only blessed by men. It is an abomination for a woman to break the kola in the presence of the male folk.
7	After consecration, the priest breaks the bread as Jesus did and gives the people.	After the kola nut has been blessed, it is broken and shared to those present.
8	During the prayer of consecration, the priest invokes the Saints, asking for their intercession.	During the blessing of the kola nut, the person leading the prayer invokes the presence and benediction of the ancestors.
9	During the consecration of bread, wine is also offered.	During the blessing of the Kola nut, liquor is also offered to <i>Chukwu</i> .

Table1: The Igbo Kola nut and the Christian Holy Communion *continued*

No	Holy Communion	The Kola Nut
10	At the end of the Eucharistic celebration, the participants are blessed.	The people present at the consecration of the Kola nut are blessed as well.
11	The Holy Communion is the Bread of Life. (cf John 25:56).	The people present at the consecration of the Kola nut are blessed as well. The Kola nut acknowledges the archetypal patterns of the gods in <i>illo tempore</i> .
12	The priest presides at the Mass.	The eldest person presides at the blessing of the kola nut. Presbyter, a word used in reference to the priestly mission, comes from the Greek <i>presbyteros</i> , meaning elder.
13	After the consecration, it is only those who are not in the state of sin that are allowed to partake of the Eucharistic meal.	After the prayer and the breaking of the kola nut, those who have evil in their hearts avoid partaking in it because of the consequences.
14	The Eucharist is the centre and summit of the Church's life and prayer.	The Kola nut is the centre and life of Igbo traditional celebrations (cf Obiajulu 2003, p. 11)

This table has outlined the major areas of similarity between the Igbo kola nut and the Holy Communion. This comparative study is not in any way to equate the Kola nut with the Holy Communion, but to show how, though imperfectly, the gospel was already present in African culture in a seed form.

b. Amadioha in Relation to Jesus Christ

Amadioha also known as *Igwe* is the son of *Chineke*, and sometimes referred to as the husband of *Ala*. In some parts of Igboland, it is referred to as *Amadiora* or *Kamalu*. The colour of this deity is red, its symbol is a white ram and its day for worship is the *Afo* market day. This explains why during sacrifices to *Amadioha*, a white ram is always preferable (Kanu 2018). It is also a god of justice, in that it carries out vengeance for the weak; it is also the god of love, peace, unity and the messianic hope of those who are in great need; and also, the god of enterprise that brings personal wealth.

Amadioha stands for the collective will of the people. This is derived from its etymology which means 'man of the people'. Its associate is *Anyawu*, the god of the sun (Kanu 2013 and 2018).

Table2: Amadioha vis-a-vis Jesus Christ

No	Jesus Christ	Amadioha
1	Jesus Christ is the Son of the Father (cf Nicene Creed).	<i>Amadioha</i> , also known as <i>Igwe</i> , is the son of <i>Chineke</i> .
2	Jesus Christ is the Light of the World (cf Jn 8:12).	<i>Amadioha</i> is symbolized with Lightening.
3	Jesus is symbolized in the Lamb. (cf John 1:29)	<i>Amadioha</i> is symbolized in the ram. It is also its choice sacrifice.
4	Jesus is an intermediary between God and His children on earth.	<i>Amadioha</i> is an intermediary between Igbo society and <i>Chukwu</i> .
5	Jesus was sent by the Father and so He did only what the Father wanted of Him. (cf John 8:28)	<i>Amadioha</i> does nothing of its will. Everything it does is dependent upon <i>Chukwu's</i> approval
6	Jesus was fully part of the creation of the world (cf Jn 1:1-4)	<i>Amadioha</i> is also considered to be a creator God.
7	Jesus was not created by the Father, but proceeds from the Father.	<i>Amadioha</i> was not created by <i>Chukwu</i> . It emanated from <i>Chukwu</i> .

The above table has attempted a comparative study of Jesus Christ and *Amadioha*, it, however, does not show that *Amadioha* is the same as Jesus Christ. There are very obvious differences between Jesus Christ and *Amadioha*.



12. Concluding Remarks

The issue that I most sincerely consider major as I end this inaugural lecture hinges on my contribution to the discourse on the operative condition of African philosophy, religion and culture, which has been an area of concern for scholars. This inaugural lecture presents a dominant scenario which broadens the intellectual basis upon which *Igwebuiké* can richly be rationalized to stand as an operative condition for not only African philosophy, but religion and culture.

Igwebuiké emerged through a hermeneutical binocular from the payment of attention to the African operative condition of life and has been articulated as a conceptual basis for analyzing and designating reality. It makes explicit what is implicit in African religion and culture and presents the society as a place where people enter into for their own complementation.

This lecture has presented *Igwebuiké* as a fundamental stretch over philosophy, religion and culture because such an operative condition springs from African cosmology, which is very fundamental to the understanding of African philosophy, religion and culture. It is in this regard that it is understood as the key to understanding African traditional religion and culture, and the underlying principle of African philosophy.

Even though *Igwebuiké* can be interpreted as a response to the need for a strong Igbo structure that would stand the menace of time; it is not limited to the Igbo hemisphere. *Igwebuiké* focuses on the essence of reality in general. It is a particular philosophy only within the context of being clothed with a particular language of a particular ethnic group. *Igwebuiké* is a philosophy with configurable ethos for inclusive and constitutive possibilities and prisms of universal relatedness and appeal.



13. Appreciation

Every human life passage is a true life history of existentialism with the support of co-authors, co-editors, co-sojourners and contributors. My life history cannot be different from this common fate. The Vice Chancellor Sir, I crave your indulgence on this very occasion of my Inaugural Lecture to appreciate the efforts of major actors who have, in various ways, helped me come along this difficult passage.

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Prof. Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, O.S.A



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